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Politics As Sport: The Effects Of Partisan Media On Perceptions Of Electoral Integrity

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Abstract
Just as fans of two opposing teams watching the same game reach opposite conclusions about the quality of referees, citizens' assessments of the legitimacy of their democratic institutions depend to a worrying degree upon the outcome, rather than the procedures, of an election. Citizens who voted for the losing side in an election are much less likely to believe that the process was fair than citizens who voted for the winner. However, little attention has been paid to partisan media's potential to exacerbate this phenomenon. I hypothesized that like-minded media amplify the effects of winning and losing on perceptions of electoral integrity. In other words, supporters of a winning candidate or party become even more confident in the legitimacy of the process when exposed to media that favors their side, while supporters of a losing candidate or party become even less confident in the legitimacy of the process when exposed to media that favors their side. At the same time, I hypothesizes that cross-cutting media mute the effects of winning and losing, decreasing the magnitude of changes in perceptions of electoral integrity.

I tested my predictions using nationally representative panel surveys from the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections as well as the 2014 midterm elections. Whereas past research has produced little evidence that perceptions of legitimacy are affected by winning and losing in U.S. congressional levels, supporters of the winning party clearly increased in perceptions of legitimacy and supporters of the losing party clearly decreased in perceptions of legitimacy in response to the 2014 midterm elections. Nonvoters who nonetheless preferred one presidential candidate or the other likewise increased or decreased in perceptions of legitimacy according to whether their preferred candidate won or lost. Finally, like-minded media exacerbated the negative effects of losing in each of these election cycles, indicating that partisan media increase the size of the gap between winners' and losers' perceptions of electoral integrity. The long-term effects of partisan media are to weaken aggregate levels of confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process itself.

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For my parents, Gene and Sheri

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I feel a very uncomfortable obligation to acknowledge Donald Trump for spending three months of the 2016 presidential election openly questioning the fairness of the electoral process in the United States. Just as I entered the home stretch of writing this dissertation, Trump's comments turned the topic I had been working on for several years—citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity—into something seemingly half the country was talking about. If nothing else, Trump has reaffirmed the relevance of the issues I addressed herein.

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ABSTRACT

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Just as fans of two opposing teams watching the same game reach opposite conclusions about the quality of referees, citizens' assessments of the legitimacy of their democratic institutions depend to a worrying degree upon the outcome, rather than the procedures, of an election. Citizens who voted for the losing side in an election are much less likely to believe that the process was fair than citizens who voted for the winner. However, little attention has been paid to partisan media's potential to exacerbate this phenomenon. I hypothesized that like-minded media amplify the effects of winning and losing on perceptions of electoral integrity. In other words, supporters of a winning candidate or party become even more confident in the legitimacy of the process when exposed to media that favors their side, while supporters of a losing candidate or party become even less confident in the legitimacy of the process when exposed to media that favors their side. At the same time, I hypothesizes that cross-cutting media mute the effects of winning and losing, decreasing the magnitude of changes in perceptions of electoral integrity.

I tested my predictions using nationally representative panel surveys from the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections as well as the 2014 midterm elections. Whereas past

research has produced little evidence that perceptions of legitimacy are affected by winning and losing in U.S. congressional levels, supporters of the winning party clearly increased in perceptions of legitimacy and supporters of the losing party clearly decreased in perceptions of legitimacy in response to the 2014 midterm elections. Nonvoters who nonetheless preferred one presidential candidate or the other likewise increased or decreased in perceptions of legitimacy according to whether their preferred candidate won or lost. Finally, like-minded media exacerbated the negative effects of losing in each of these election cycles, indicating that partisan media increase the size of the gap between winners' and losers' perceptions of electoral integrity. The long-term effects of partisan media are to weaken aggregate levels of confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process itself.

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Psychology confirms what many sports fans understand instinctively: two spectators watching the same game, one a supporter of the home team and the other a fan of the visitors, will appear afterwards to have observed two completely different events. Duke University students will cheer the team's great defense to prevent a North Carolina buzzer beater while the entire student body at UNC simultaneously groans as one at the referee's failure to call a seemingly obvious foul on the shooter. A lifelong New Yorker sees the Yankees score the winning run in a close play at the plate whereas a Bostonian is absolutely certain the Red Sox tagged the runner out before he could score. Even the introduction of instant replay by the major sports leagues hasn't eliminated this phenomenon.

Psychologists have understood that fans of opposing teams experience two different versions of the same game since Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) classic case study involving a particularly divisive football game played by Dartmouth College and Princeton University. Players from both sides, including Princeton legend Dick Kazmaier playing in the final game of his career, were forced to leave the game with severe injuries. Princeton and Dartmouth supporters, including alumni as well as students, diverged sharply in their assessments of whether the game was played fairly and, if not, which side was responsible for any unnecessary roughness. These differences led Hastorf and Cantril to conclude, "It seems clear that the 'game' actually was many different games and that each version of the events that transpired was just as 'real' to a particular person as other versions were to other people" (1954, p. 132). A spectator's experience of

a sporting event relies just as much upon the significance they attach to the outcome, driven by an allegiance to a team or to individual players, as it does upon the reality of what occurs on the field.

More recently, political scientists have discovered that for many citizens, Hastorf and Cantril's description of sporting events applies just as well to national elections. Just as sports fans align themselves with one team or another, Americans root for their preferred parties, Team Republican and Team Democrat, complete with mascots (elephants vs. donkeys) and team colors (red vs. blue). The "National Political League" can't compete with the National Football League in the weekly television ratings, but once every few years Americans gather around their televisions to see whether Team Republican or Team Democrat will emerge victorious in the championship game that determines control of the White House.

More importantly, much like Dartmouth and Princeton fans evaluating the referees, citizens decide whether the democratic process is operating fairly and justly— whether the democratic process is legitimate—based in part on how their team performs (Anderson et al., 2005). There are numerous examples of Americans who rooted for the losing team finding fault with the process itself following recent elections. The day after Barack Obama defeated Mitt Romney to win a second term as President of the United States, Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity turned from a discussion of the political left's incivility to a story of alleged voter intimidation:

> All right, every Election Day unfortunately always brings us new
> disturbing examples of voter intimidation. Like four years ago, we saw new
> members of the new Black Panther party showing up outside polling places.

And Jerry Jackson, he was one of them and Fox News caught him on tape outside a polling site in Northern Virginia. Now in 2008, he along with another Black Panther member were charged with voter intimidation. But the charges were eventually dropped by the Eric Holder Justice Department.

But this year, Fox News has confirmed, he was in fact, a designated poll watcher, pretty unbelievable. ("President Obama Reelected," 2012)

Hannity was far from the first Fox host to mention Jackson in 2012 election coverage. This lone Black Panther at a single polling location was among the stars of the Fox network on Election Day. The following week, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* ("November 12, 2012," 2012) reported that Fox had featured Jackson a total of 21 times on Election Day. The racially charged story of voter intimidation in 2012 would seem to be a natural companion to the popular conservative narrative of widespread voter fraud, often linked to the activist organization ACORN, which was alleged to have helped Obama win his first presidential election in 2008 (Dreier & Martin, 2009). In both elections, the underlying message from proponents of these narratives was clear: Barack Obama and his supporters were using illegal methods to undermine the electoral process. If "Team Democrat" won, it could only be because it cheated.

Conservatives are by no means alone in questioning the legitimacy of recent unfavorable election results. In 2004, Democrats shocked by John Kerry's loss to then-President George W. Bush pointed to discrepancies between exit polls and final vote tallies. Stories of irregularities involving electronic voting machines served as further evidence to these partisans that the election had somehow been stolen (Bradley, 2005).

And, of course, the 2000 presidential election's split between the popular vote and the Electoral College and the protracted legal battle over Florida's vote counting procedures were more than enough to raise questions about the legitimacy of the outcome among disappointed Al Gore supporters.

Conceptualizing Democratic Legitimacy

Free and fair elections are a cornerstone of democracy. When an election is conducted fairly, citizens will ideally grant the chosen leaders the legitimacy needed to make and enforce the law. Fair elections also allow peaceful transitions of power from one party to another by ensuring that even the voters who preferred a losing candidate will accept the legitimacy of the outcome (Tyler, 2013). If the process was democratic and just, citizens will acknowledge that even in a fair process, not everyone gets what they want.

Of course, as any sports fan might expect, citizens of democracies are seldom quite so sanguine as theory would hope when they face disappointing election outcomes. Citizens who supported a losing candidate or party in a national election consistently display lower levels of satisfaction with democracy, trust in government, and weaker beliefs that the political system is responsive to citizens than citizens whose preferred side won (e.g. Anderson et al., 2005; Esaiasson, 2011). Fair procedures can help to minimize rejection of an unfavorable outcome, but fair procedures cannot eliminate the distance between winners' and losers' evaluations of the legitimacy of the democratic system sometimes described as the legitimacy gap. The persistence of legitimacy gaps is

troubling. For democracy to remain viable, losers must put aside their negative feelings and consent to be governed by the winners. The alternatives to this "losers' consent" range from an inability to govern effectively to the destabilization of the democratic regime (Nadeau & Blais, 1993; Anderson et al., 2005).

In the United States and other well established democracies, peaceful transfers of power are taken as a given. And yet, diminished perceptions of the political system's legitimacy can produce real effects in otherwise stable democracies, from limiting the latitude leaders have to implement potentially desirable policies, to encouraging citizens to embrace potentially risky changes to the democratic process (Hetherington, 1998; 2005; Bowler & Donovan, 2007; Hetherington & Husser, 2012). Scattered protests may develop following a closely disputed election, such as the 2000 presidential race. The more disruptive protests of the 1960s and 70s were frequently linked to declining trust in government (e.g. Citrin, 1977; see Levi & Stoker, 2000). More recently, the likelihood of citizens engaging in protests against democratic governments has been directly attributed to distrust resulting from unfavorable election results (Anderson & Mendes, 2006) and to distrust of the electoral process in particular (Norris, 2014).

The concept of political legitimacy derives from early studies of deference to authority (e.g. Flacks, 1969; Bickman, 1974). Do citizens accept the authority of the state and obey its designated officials and agents? Or, do they deny the legitimacy of such actors, protesting and otherwise working to subvert the regime? The underlying attitudes towards the regime which promote obedience on the one hand, and resistance on the other, form the core of political legitimacy. Political legitimacy has since grown to encompass such diverse but related concepts as confidence, trust, skepticism, alienation,

and efficacy. The result, unfortunately, is an "unwieldy and complex," "too often muddied" concept which can hold different meanings in different contexts (Weatherford, 1992, p. 149; Norris, 2011, p. 19).

Most modern conceptions of political legitimacy depend upon Easton's (1965) analysis of support for the political system. Political support depends upon the evaluations citizens hold of the regime and its core institutions and officials. Negative evaluations produce low levels of system support while positive evaluations lead to greater support. Moreover, support can apply to multiple levels of the political system. In the classic conception, diffuse support refers to evaluations of the principles, ideals, and general rules of the game that define the political regime. By contrast, specific support refers to evaluations of the current operation of the government, in particular, attitudes towards current office holders and the actions of government institutions (Easton, 1965; 1975).

More recent efforts to examine political legitimacy have presented a continuum of system support ranging from most specific to most diffuse rather than a simple dichotomy. Norris (1999; 2011) identifies five levels to which evaluations of the system might apply. Approval of incumbent officeholders lies at the most specific level. Slightly more diffuse attitudes include evaluations of institutions such as the national legislature or the military, followed by assessments of the regime's performance in policy areas of importance to citizens. Agreement with the regime's core principles such as a commitment to majoritarian rules or to freedom of religion sit at the second-most diffuse level. Finally, at the most diffuse level is a sense of belonging to the national community, often evidenced by pride in the national identity. Numerous factors, including the

perceived fairness of the electoral process, personal feelings of efficacy, the competence

of officials, and the existence of mechanisms for government accountability can influence

attitudes at each of these levels (Weatherford, 1992).

The idea that legitimacy can be affected by election outcomes is closely tied to

theories of procedural fairness (also called procedural justice). Theories of procedural

fairness suggest that people will tend to accept unwanted outcomes if they perceive the

decision-making process that produced those outcomes as fair (Grimes, 2006; Tyler,

2006; Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009). In the case of an election, losers should accept a loss

so long as they perceive the process itself as a just one. Competent and knowledgeable

poll workers, for example, can help to assure voters that their ballots will be counted

accurately, producing confidence in the process and legitimacy for the outcome (Atkeson

& Saunders, 2007; Hall, Monson, & Patterson, 2009). Even so, the desirability of an

outcome can sometimes outweigh considerations of procedural fairness in individuals'

minds (e.g. Arnesen, 2014; Gibson, Caldeira, & Spence, 2005). The importance of

outcomes is particularly apparent in winners' and losers' divergent perceptions of

legitimacy following an election.

This dissertation focuses in particular on perceptions of electoral integrity; in

other words, how citizens view the electoral process itself. Citizens perceive the electoral

process as legitimate to the extent that they perceive elections as both fairly conducted

and effective in promoting government accountability. Importantly, the concept of

electoral integrity is specific enough to depend on citizens' direct experiences of elections

yet diffuse enough that it does not depend on citizens' evaluations of the present

government's particular policy goals. Perceptions of electoral integrity require approval of the basic process of voting without which modern democracy could not succeed.

Media, Spectatorship, and Losers' Consent

For much of the twentieth century the American news environment was dominated by an institutional media committed to the values of objective, professional journalism (Schudson, 1978; Ladd, 2012). The massive expansion in the number of media choices available to consumers, led initially by cable and satellite television and more recently by the internet, has greatly undermined the dominance of traditional news outlets (Prior, 2007; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011).

In the world of sports, the vast increase in the number of media channels available to Americans sometimes gives fans the option to watch two different versions of the same game, with one broadcast favoring the home team and the other the visitors. In the world of politics, expanded media choice similarly allows fans of Team Republican or Team Democrat to choose coverage that favors their side. Fox News Channel and MSNBC generally fill these roles for supporters of the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively. Despite a wealth of recent research examining various effects of partisan media, little to no attention has been paid to the effects of partisan media on perceptions of legitimacy.

I hypothesize that like-minded partisan media amplify the effects of winning and losing on perceptions of electoral integrity. In other words, supporters of a winning candidate or party become more trusting of the process when exposed to media that

favors their own preferred side, while supporters of a losing candidate or party become less trusting of the process when exposed to media that favors their preferred side. On the other hand, I predict cross-cutting media mute the effects of winning and losing, decreasing the magnitudes of both winners' gains and losers' losses.

I expect partisan media to affect perceptions of legitimacy through two potential mechanisms. First, partisan media may affect citizens' pre-election expectations for the outcome of the election, with like-minded media raising one's expectations of victory. Second, partisan media may affect citizens' explanations for the outcome. To the extent that media from the losing side emphasize unfairness, it should amplify the decline in legitimacy among losers. Using long-term panel data comprising multiple election cycles, I test how individual-level exposure to partisan news content affects changes in perceptions of the electoral process.

In partisan media, voices from the favored political party tend to be overrepresented. As a result, audience members may overestimate support for the favored party in the nation at large. At the same time, partisan media may overstate a preferred candidate's chances based on an inaccurate or misleading reading of polling and other public opinion data either out of genuine optimism or in order to strategically maintain optimism among members of the party's base. In both cases, the most likely result is inflated expectations for the preferred side's electoral chances. To the extent those expectations are eventually frustrated, audience members may view the process itself as illegitimate.

Partisan media are also likely to affect perceptions of legitimacy through their effect on audience members' explanations for the outcome. In the middle and late

twentieth century, the relatively monolithic media environment encouraged Americans to accept the consensus explanations for electoral outcomes promoted by established political elites and widely reported by journalists (Hershey, 1992; 1994). Today, MSNBC might cater to liberals' belief in 2004 that Bush relied on faulty voting machines while Fox News Channel might reassure conservatives in 2012 by telling them that Obama won only due to voter fraud and racial intimidation.

Even if partisan news outlets don't actively fan the flames of conspiracy theories, they may tacitly encourage delegitimizing narratives to flourish simply by allowing their audiences to remain unaware of competing explanations for electoral outcomes. Voters who received their public affairs information exclusively from Fox during the 2012 election cycle would presumably have had little reason to believe that any of Barack Obama's policies were beneficial to the country. How, then, could these viewers' fellow citizens have made a legitimate decision to reelect Obama? And why were the election results so contrary to what viewers' trusted experts had predicted?

It is by now well established that citizens' perceptions of legitimacy are affected by the outcome of an election, with winning increasing perceived legitimacy, and losing decreasing it. However, past work on this topic has failed to address the actual process by which most citizens observe the democratic process and render judgments about its legitimacy. The vast majority of citizens in modern democracies experience national elections primarily through media and the act of voting. And yet, the effects of media are almost entirely unexplored in the existing literature on winning and losing. This oversight is particularly troubling in light of the reemergence and increasing prominence of news outlets with distinct partisan agendas in the United States. This dissertation therefore

brings together these two bodies of research, asking how exposure to partisan media conditions winners' and losers' perceptions of legitimacy after an election is decided.

In addition to examining how partisan media conditions the effects of winning and losing, this dissertation presents a second major contribution to the existing literature through its emphasis on citizens who are primarily spectators rather than participants in the electoral process. Democracy depends upon the consent of the large number of citizens who did not actively participate in the process just as much as it depends upon the consent of losers. In the United States, voter turnout in presidential elections tends to hover in the neighborhood of 60 percent of eligible voters, with turnout in off-year congressional and local elections generally even lower (Leighley & Nagler, 2013). Winning politicians would be unable to implement their agendas, let alone maintain a stable and effective system of government, without the implicit consent of citizens who observe the process for the most part only passively.

Nonvoters may not exercise their voices in elections, but spectatorship of the electoral process allows voters and nonvoters alike to make necessary determinations about the process's legitimacy. After all, most sports fans only watch their favorite teams rather than join them on the field, but those fans still have opinions about why their teams won or lost. Moving beyond definitions of winners and losers as those who *voted for* the winning and losing candidates, I predict that a preference for a losing candidate can lead to disappointment with the outcome and produce decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity just as in the case of losers who voted. Likewise, those whose preferred candidate wins should have higher levels of perceived integrity, even if they did not vote. Further, I expect partisan media to condition the effects of this *vicarious winning* and

vicarious losing for nonvoters. Media are necessary for nonvoters to observe and become involved in the political process. Thus partisan media are likely to affect nonvoters' perceptions of legitimacy as well as voters' perceptions of legitimacy.

Plan for the Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical foundation for my predictions. I begin by describing the growing body of work that addresses the gap between electoral winners and losers in perceptions of democratic legitimacy. I explain why the concept of losers' consent is of central importance to the health of a democratic regime and why a trend in the political information environment that has the effect of undermining losers' trust in the process should concern observers of American politics. Next, I explore the reemergence of partisan media in the United States in recent decades. I review the limited evidence to date suggesting that media might play a role in shaping post-election perceptions of legitimacy, pointing to important gaps in this literature. Finally, I argue that past research points to two possible mechanisms through which partisan media might affect changes in perceptions of electoral integrity: shaping citizens' expectations and promoting post-election explanations for the outcome.

Chapter 3 describes the data and methods used throughout the analysis. My analysis drew on a unique set of three panel surveys that followed a large group of voters through two presidential elections and one national midterm election. Together the three panels tracked the same individuals from late 2007 through early 2015. The panel surveys allowed me to measure individual changes in perceptions of electoral integrity. As a

result, I am able to make unusually strong inferences about the effects of winning and losing and exposure to partisan media.

I begin my empirical analysis of the panel data in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. Chapter 4 focuses on changes in perceptions of electoral integrity during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. I start by illustrating the patterns of changing perceptions of electoral integrity among supporters of the winning and losing candidates in both elections. The general pattern in both cases is consistent with the predictions of the existing body of literature on winners and losers, with Barack Obama supporters becoming more positive towards the process after each of Obama's victories and supporters of the Republican candidates becoming more negative from pre- to post-election in both 2008 and 2012. I then presents tests of my predictions that exposure to like-minded partisan media increases the gains in perceptions of legitimacy among winners and increases the magnitude of losses among losers, whereas exposure to cross-cutting media has the reverse effects, decreasing the gains experienced by winners and decreasing the magnitude of losses experienced by losers.

Chapter 5 focuses on changes in perceptions of electoral integrity during the 2014 midterm elections. The 2014 panel allowed me to test my central prediction in the particularly stringent case of a relatively low salience midterm election. While there is some evidence of a legitimacy gap among winners and losers following regional elections in other democracies, there is to date no evidence that Americans' perceptions of legitimacy are significantly affected by the outcome of non-presidential elections. If my theoretical explanation for why partisan media affects perceptions of integrity is correct, I should observe changes in perceptions among winners and losers who are exposed to

high volumes of one-sided partisan media even in an election where the effects of winning and losing are otherwise quite small or even nonexistent. Just as partisan media tend to treat the midterm elections as national rather than local, I identified winners and losers in the midterm election based on the national election results. Winners in a midterm election supported the party that won control of Congress while losers supported the minority party.

Chapter 6 focuses on changing perceptions of electoral integrity among nonvoters. I expected nonvoters to vicariously experience the effects of winning or losing based on their candidate preferences, even though they fail to act on those preferences by voting. For nonvoters, media's role is particularly important since nonvoters do not directly experience the electoral process. I therefore predicted that partisan media will condition the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing among nonvoters. To the extent that nonvoters are less susceptible to the effects of partisan media due to weaker partisan attachments, nonvoters may serve as an important moderating influence on changes in perceptions of legitimacy within the population as a whole.

Chapter 7 examines the two mechanisms through which I expected exposure to partisan media to condition the effects of winning and losing, expectations and explanations. First, I examined the pattern of changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among voters interviewed throughout the post-election period. I then conducted a mediation analysis in order to test whether exposure to partisan media produces an indirect effect on perceptions of electoral integrity through an effect on voters' expectations for the election's outcome.

Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the major findings of the preceding analyses. I also acknowledge potential weaknesses of my methodological approach while highlighting the steps I've taken to address those issues. I conclude by discussing the normative implications of the findings. Does the continued success of partisan news necessarily imply that partisans will distrust the results of every election for the foreseeable future? Or is it possible for partisan news and electoral legitimacy to coexist?

2. EFFECTS OF WINNING AND LOSING IN THE POST-BROADCAST ERA

Why might media play a role in promoting or undermining losers' consent? I begin by reviewing the growing body of recent literature documenting the size and shape of winner-loser gaps in numerous democracies around the world. I devote particular attention to examinations of winner-loser gaps in the United States. Evidence that winners hold greater perceptions of legitimacy than losers has been inconsistent in the United States despite the fact that features of the American election process would seem to favor a sizable legitimacy gap. The United States is therefore ripe for additional study using the type of panel data that is best suited to tracking individual changes in perceptions of legitimacy.

After reviewing the existing literature on the winner-loser phenomenon, I turn my attention to the growth of partisan media in the United States over the past two decades. The vast expansion in media choice available to Americans in the post-broadcast era has included a significant increase in the number of outlets that present news and public affairs information from a distinctly partisan perspective. Further, a significant portion of Americans have begun using these partisan outlets for political information. I argue that the rise of partisan media holds important implications for the winner-loser gap insofar as exposure to like-minded partisan media is likely to amplify the gains in legitimacy experienced by winners as well as the losses experienced by losers. By bringing together these two previously distinct literatures, I hope to shed light on a phenomenon that significantly impacts how Americans view their electoral process.

Winners' and Losers' Perceptions of Legitimacy

There is evidence that in dozens of democracies, including both relatively new and fully consolidated regimes, as well as in states located in every region of the world, winners tend to have higher perceptions of legitimacy than losers following an election. Perceptions of legitimacy are most commonly measured in terms of satisfaction with democracy, derived from a survey item that asks respondents how satisfied they are with the way democracy works in their country (e.g. Anderson et al., 2005; Esaiasson, 2011; Singh, Lago, & Blais, 2011; Curini, Jou, & Memoli, 2012). Unfortunately, this single-item measure is fraught with confusion over what, precisely, it measures (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Linde & Ekman, 2003). The satisfaction with democracy item might appear at first glance to capture fairly diffuse system support, serving as a question about democratic principles. At the same time, it may appear to ask something much more specific: How satisfied are you with the way democracy is working *right now*?

Persistent evidence of winner-loser gaps when other measures of legitimacy are employed is reassuring given a high degree of person-to-person and country-to-country variation in interpretations of the satisfaction with democracy item. It is perhaps unsurprising that at the level of highly specific support individuals who recently voted for a losing candidate would report lower levels of trust in the government officials they voted against (Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Moehler, 2009). Losers are also more likely to doubt that the winners have earned the right to implement a specific disliked policy by virtue of their electoral victory (Nadeau & Blais, 1993; Moehler & Lindberg, 2009).

More troubling is the finding that losers also feel a diminished sense of political efficacy when compared to winners (Clarke & Acock, 1989; Brunell, Clausen, & Buchler, 2012).

The most appropriate indicator of the prevalence of the winner-loser phenomenon may be the low regard in which losers tend to hold the electoral process itself. Contrary to the predictions of theories of procedural fairness and the hopes of democrats that elections might legitimate their own outcomes through widespread participation in which everyone's voice matters, losers have been found to judge the electoral process as less fair than winners and to be less confident that votes were counted accurately (Holbert, 2004; Holbert, LaMarre, & Landreville, 2009). They are also more likely to express doubts about the responsiveness of government officials and institutions (Banducci & Karp, 2003; Craig, Martinez, Gainous, & Kane, 2006; Brunell, 2008), a second component of electoral legitimacy quite closely related to assessments of electoral fairness in Weatherford's (1992) model of political legitimacy.

I treated perceptions of electoral integrity—evaluations of whether elections are fair, whether votes are properly counted, and whether elections are effective in increasing the responsiveness of government to citizens—as the primary outcome of interest in my own exploration of the winner-loser phenomenon. Perceptions of electoral integrity hold particular theoretical interest due to the centrality of elections both in democratic principles and in democratic practice as the primary opportunity for the ordinary citizen to actively participate in democratic governance. Assessments of the electoral process are also directly tied to specific events. By contrast, questions related to other aspects of legitimacy, such as trust in government officials, have a high probability of holding different meanings for respondents immediately following an election as opposed to in

the middle of a president's term. Finally, my focus was consistent with other recent work that emphasizes the importance of public perceptions of the electoral process for the health of the democratic regime (e.g. Norris, 2014).

In the United States, features of the highly professionalized American campaign process such as targeted television advertising and strategically oriented news coverage are believed to undermine citizens' faith in the democratic process (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Additionally, winner-loser gaps are in general particularly pronounced in majoritarian political systems like Great Britain's (Anderson and Guillory, 1997), which would presumably apply to the United States' majoritarian system as well. And yet, evidence of winner-loser gaps in the United States in particular has been surprisingly mixed.

A limited number of American election panel studies make it possible to examine changes in perceptions of legitimacy from pre to post-election. Following the 1972 presidential election, winners increased in system responsiveness, whereas losers declined; in 1984, winners and losers both increased by the same amount (Esaiasson, 2011). In 1996, winners increased in their perceptions of how much of a "say in government" they felt by 10% in the post-election survey, while losers also increased but by a slightly lesser amount. In another study using the same American National Election Studies (ANES) panel data, Anderson and LoTempio (2002) found that voting for the losing presidential candidate in 1972 or 1996 had systematic negative effects on political trust.

Losers became less confident that votes throughout the country were counted fairly after Election Day in 2008 and 2012, whereas winners became more confident in

the national vote count (Sances & Stewart, 2015). However, losers in both election years as well as in 2004 actually became more confident that their own votes were counted fairly after the conclusion of the election, even as they lost trust in the national process.

The results from cross-sectional analyses are similarly mixed. For example, using 1964 through 2004 ANES data, Craig and colleagues (2006) found a post-election winner-loser gap in the predicted direction in 6 out of 11 presidential elections when analyzing political trust and democratic responsiveness, but in only one out of three presidential elections when analyzing satisfaction with democracy. Focusing on the aggregate gap between winners and losers in post-election data is not ideal because it does not tell us which individuals gained or lost in perceived legitimacy relative to before the election outcome was known. Nonetheless, in the U.S. case, scholars have had to make do with limited available data, and less than ideal forms of analysis.

The effects of winning and losing may well depend upon a broader historical context and not merely upon the results of the election in question. Specifically, winning repeatedly appears to be subject to diminishing returns whereas losing repeatedly appears to lead citizens to increasingly doubt that the system is fair and that they have a genuine chance to win (Anderson et al., 2005; Curini et al., 2012). Additional data that is capable of incorporating the broader context of an election should help to clarify the effects of winning and losing in the United States.

In addition to producing mixed results in the US context, past work on winners and losers offers little information regarding how nonvoters react to election outcomes. Thus far, only a small number of studies using the winner-loser framework have incorporated nonvoters, and these studies have tended to treat nonvoters as homogenous

"control" groups (Blais & Gélineau, 2007; Singh, Karakoç, & Blais, 2012). This approach is inconsistent with current work in political theory that emphasizes the actual role of citizens in most modern democracies. Citizens observe and develop appraisals of the democratic process regardless of whether they voice their own personal views. It is customary to understand the democratic citizen as a decision-maker, but in reality most ordinary citizens—particularly in the US where voter turnout is often low—are not political decision-makers so much as spectators who watch and listen to others while monitoring governmental institutions, officials, and processes (Schudson, 1998; Green 2009).

Nonvoters can experience wins and losses vicariously, particularly to the extent that they follow election outcomes through the media. Despite their decision not to participate, nonvoters in the US frequently hold strong preferences for one candidate or another. Further, their perceptions of electoral legitimacy change in response to the election outcome based on these preferences, much like winners and losers who cast a ballot. This dissertation specifically examines the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing on nonvoters. In doing so, it addresses a traditionally understudied yet theoretically important aspect of the winner-loser phenomenon.

The Return of Partisan Media

Americans' media choices began to grow at a seemingly exponential rate towards the end of the twentieth century. Introduced in the 1970s and 1980s and steadily adopted by an increasing number of households, cable and satellite television provide dozens or

even hundreds of television channels. In the 1990s and early 2000s, digital technologies

began to make available a seemingly infinite variety of websites, audio channels, video

channels, and eventually social media platforms via the internet. As a result, Americans

have a much greater choice of news formats than the selection between three nearly

identical network news programs available during the "broadcast era" of news of the

middle-to-late twentieth century; moreover, Americans today can choose between

countless entertainment options in place of news (Prior, 2007; Williams & Delli Carpini,

2011).

Among the varied media choices available today are dozens of political

information sources with a perspective that favors one of the two major political parties.

While overtly partisan newspapers were dominant in the US in the late eighteenth and

early nineteenth centuries (Schudson, 1978; Gentzkow, Glaeser, & Goldin, 2004), the

current prominence of partisan outlets represents a significant change from the model of

objective, centrist journalism that dominated for much of the twentieth century.

Since the repeal of the fairness doctrine in the 1980s, conservative hosts have

come to dominate the genre of talk radio (Holbert, 2004; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Beginning with the founding of the Republican-leaning Fox News Channel in 1996 and

followed by MSNBC's shift to capture liberal audiences during the 2000s, viewers on

both sides of the partisan divide have had the ability to select television channels and

programs that present news and public affairs information from a perspective consistent

with their prior beliefs. And, of course, the internet provides partisan-oriented sites

ranging from the simple text-based blogs that received national notice during the 2004

election campaign to multi-media ventures such as the Glenn Beck-founded TheBlaze,

which offers streaming feeds of its associated television channel and radio network online in addition to frequently updated web-based content.

While less dominant than it once was, television remains a primary source of news and political information for many Americans (Pew Research Center, 2013; 2014a). Even though the audience for the network evening news programs has declined in recent decades, the networks have consistently recorded combined audiences of between twenty and twenty-five million viewers per night since 2008, with slight year-to-year upticks in 2013 and 2014 (Pew, 2015). Over the same period, approximately three million Americans per night have watched the prime time programming of the three major 24-hour cable news channels, Fox, CNN, and MSNBC. Viewership of the news channels tends to increase surrounding major political and news events, including in the lead-up to an election. In 2008, 72 million Americans watched Election Night coverage on television; in 2012, 67 million Americans tuned in to the news on Election Night (Stelter, 2012).

I focus in particular on the effects of partisan television news due to the continued prominence of television among Americans' news options. Partisan news, public affairs, and talk programs on television give individuals the option to consume like-minded (or attitude-congruent) media versus cross-cutting (or counter-attitudinal) media (Mutz, 2006; Goldman & Mutz, 2011). Experimental and survey evidence confirms that many individuals engage in selective exposure to information by seeking out like-minded sources (e.g. Hart et al., 2009; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2011). For example, Republicans in one experiment were significantly more likely to choose news articles labeled as Fox News articles while Democrats were significantly more likely to

choose articles labeled as coming from CNN and NPR even though the actual content of the articles was held constant (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

For my purposes, it is not necessary to evaluate why partisans may or may not engage in selective exposure to like-minded media. However, it is important to establish that Americans are using partisan media sources in addition to the traditional news outlets represented on television by the three broadcast networks. To the extent that some Americans tend to consume like-minded media and some Americans tend to consume cross-cutting media, I was able to test my major predictions.

Recent studies demonstrate that a significant number of Americans are using partisan media sources, and particularly partisan television sources. In 2004, partisanship and ideology significantly predicted the cable news viewing habits of respondents to the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES). Liberal Democrats were significantly more likely to watch MSNBC or CNN while conservative Republicans were significantly more likely to watch Fox News (Stroud, 2008). Additionally, liberal Democrats became more likely to watch MSNBC or CNN as the campaign progressed while conservative Republicans became more likely to watch Fox.

Respondents to the 2008 NAES showed a similar preference for like-minded television programs. 27 percent of programs habitually watched by the average Republican respondent favored the Republican party and 28 percent of programs habitually watched by the average Democratic respondent favored the Democratic party (Dilliplane, 2011). Despite a preference for like-minded programs, many survey respondents did watch at least some cross-cutting programs. 15 percent of programs

watched by the average Republican favored the Democrats while 8 percent of programs watched by the average Democrat favored the Republicans (Dilliplane, 2011).

Notably, the 2008 study identified respondents as viewers of individual television programs rather than as viewers of entire networks. This allows for analyses of television viewing habits that more accurately describe the content a given individual watches. For example, though MSNBC is widely identified as a Democratic-leaning network, its morning news program is hosted by a former four-term Republican member of Congress who espouses many conservative positions.

Despite findings showing that many Americans watch partisan television programs, news viewership overall is certainly lower than it was in past decades. Both experimental and observational evidence suggest that many Americans will tend to choose entertainment over news given the plethora of choices available from media today (Prior, 2007; Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). However, it is clear that a significant number of Americans who do habitually watch news and public affairs programming on television choose partisan programming. In the past, news media in the U.S. tended to present the same basic set of messages and the effects of media on public opinion were believed to depend primarily on the amount of news to which individuals were exposed (e.g. Zaller, 1992; 1996). Today audience members may encounter quite different messages depending on which news sources they prefer. Differing content could potentially lead Americans who get their political information from different sources to quite different conclusions about the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Partisan Media and the Winner-Loser Gap

The renewed focus on partisan news has addressed several substantively important hypothesized effects. For example, partisan polarization has drawn substantial attention due to the ongoing debate over whether the American public has become more polarized in recent years (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2008). Partisan news has been shown to have strong persuasive effects on audience members' issue positions for a variety of current issues as well as an effect on the certainty with which audience members hold issue attitudes, producing polarization when Republicans and Democrats watch different sources of news that present opposite sides to an issue (Stroud, 2010; Feldman, 2011; Feldman, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, & Leiserowitz, 2012; Levendusky, 2013).

Partisan news has also been shown to mobilize voters, with exposure to Fox News increasing voter turnout among like-minded Republicans during the 2000 election and exposure to a variety of like-minded television programs increasing turnout among all partisans in 2008 (Hopkins & Ladd, 2014; Dilliplane, 2011). Some evidence even suggests that exposure to partisan media can induce changes in voting preferences. When several British newspapers defied their traditional conservative allegiances to support the Labour party in 1997, a significant proportion of their readers followed suit (Ladd & Lenz, 2009). Habitual exposure to cross-cutting news also caused a small but significant proportion of Americans to shift their vote preferences away from their normally preferred party in the 2008 presidential election (Dilliplane, 2014).

The potential effects of partisan news on perceptions of legitimacy following an election have not been studied. In only two instances, to the best of my knowledge, has

media exposure been studied in connection with the effects of winning and losing. A cross-national comparison of the effects of winning and losing in the United States' 1996 national elections, Great Britain's 1997 national elections, and New Zealand's 1999 national elections examined whether attention to a variety of media sources affected pre to post-election changes in perceptions of legitimacy (Banducci & Karp, 2003). In the United States, media sources included both local and national television, newspapers, talk radio, and campaign advertisements. The results of this analysis are somewhat mixed. In the United States, attention to local television predicted an increase in trust in government and attention to newspapers predicted an increase in efficacy. Meanwhile, attention to campaign advertisements predicted a decrease in both trust and efficacy. None of the other media variables had significant effects in the United States.

Banducci and Karp (2003) argue that traditional news outlets, including public broadcasters in Britain and New Zealand and newspapers in the United States, were more likely to increase perceptions of legitimacy while outlets that were overly negative towards the political process decreased perceptions of legitimacy. However, this argument only partially explains the findings. This logic suggests that if local television news increased trust in the US, national television news, which is often a primary example of the centrist, objective news style that dominated in the mid-twentieth century, should also have had a positive rather than a non-significant impact. Similarly, it fails to explain why attention to Britain's notoriously partisan and tabloid-style press had a positive effect on legitimacy or why American talk radio, which was both highly partisan and extremely critical of President Clinton's government in the mid-1990s (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008), did not decrease legitimacy.

On one hand, the cross-national comparison of the US, Britain, and New Zealand provides evidence that media can affect changes in perceptions of legitimacy in the context of an election. On the other hand, the results of this analysis tell us little about *what types of media* are most likely to produce *what effects*. Media are likely to affect perceptions of legitimacy through the effects of specific types of content. Partisan media regularly convey messages about both the likely outcome of upcoming elections and the reasons why an election produced a certain result. I expect these types of messages in particular to condition changes in perceptions of electoral integrity.

A second, more recent study incorporating data from 28 European countries produced strong evidence political parallelism in a country's media system—the degree to which individual media outlets are aligned with specific political parties or ideologies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)—is closely associated with a larger gap between winners' and losers' perceptions of legitimacy (Lelkes, 2016). Additionally, the relationship between political parallelism and the legitimacy gap was strongest for survey respondents who reported consuming greater amounts of news. In combination, these findings suggest that partisan news amplifies the effects of winning and losing.

Unfortunately, Lelkes's (2016) study, while a significant contribution to the literature, suffers from two key methodological weaknesses. First, the study relied on cross-sectional survey data. Cross-sectional data allow for comparisons of winners' and losers' attitudes after an election, but do not allow for a direct measure of *changes* in attitudes in response to the election. Secondly, Lelkes was forced to rely on an aggregate estimate of parallelism in a given country's media system combined with individual self-reports of overall media use. Despite his study's several strengths, Lelkes was unable to

directly account for the specific television programs, newspapers, or websites a particular individual consumed. A better test of the hypothesized causal relationship between exposure to partisan media and changes in perceptions of legitimacy, requires individual-level measurement of exposure to different types of media content, as well as panel survey data that measure changes in individual attitudes over time.

I predict that exposure to like-minded media amplifies the effects of winning and losing. In other words, a supporter of Mitt Romney who watched a lot of Fox News in the weeks leading up to the 2012 presidential election would experience a larger decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity than a Romney supporter who did not watch very much like-minded television. I also expect exposure to cross-cutting media to mute the effects of winning and losing. In other words, a Barack Obama supporter who watched the same Fox News coverage in 2012 would experience a smaller increase in perceptions of electoral integrity than they would have otherwise.

Of course, exposure to partisan media could potentially have a spurious correlation with changes in perceptions of integrity insofar as strong partisans might be more likely to consume like-minded media and also experience greater changes in perceptions of integrity based on an election's outcome. To eliminate the possibility that my results were driven by this type of confounding relationship, I was careful to control for strength of partisanship throughout my analysis.

There are two specific mechanisms through which exposure to partisan media is most likely to condition the relationship between winning or losing and perceptions of electoral legitimacy. First, partisan news may contribute to audience members' expectations for the election outcome and, insofar as those expectations are ultimately

frustrated, produce post-election distrust of the process. Individuals who consumed more like-minded partisan media in both the 2004 and 2012 presidential elections were more likely to expect their preferred candidate to win than otherwise similar individuals who consumed more balanced or cross-cutting media (Tsfati, Stroud, & Chotiner, 2014; Hollander, 2015). This effect, which was significant in both elections even after controlling for strength of partisan preferences, is most likely caused by a combination of partisan news consumers encountering fewer opposition voices and therefore having a distorted perception of the national opinion climate, and the habit of partisan outlets overstating the preferred candidate's chances of winning.

In theory, partisan outlets might tend to understate a preferred candidate's chances of winning in order to encourage partisans to turn out to vote. No studies to date have comprehensively analyzed whether partisan outlets are more likely to share horse-race results that are favorable to the preferred candidate or results that are unfavorable to the preferred candidate. Findings that exposure to like-minded media increased expectations for a preferred candidate's chances in the recent 2004 and 2012 elections suggest a tendency towards promoting favorable results and downplaying unfavorable ones. Without a direct assessment of the polling results presented by different outlets, though, it is impossible to say with certainty that exposure to an increased number of favorable poll results produced this effect.

Over a decade's worth of television coverage of presidential approval ratings are similarly suggestive. From 1997 through 2008, Republican-leaning Fox News preferred to report on polling results that were favorable to Republican President George W. Bush and unfavorable to Democratic President Bill Clinton whereas the Democratic-leaning

traditional broadcast networks preferred approval polls that were favorable to Clinton and unfavorable to Bush (Groeling, 2008). Though presidential approval polls are not directly equivalent to candidate preference polls, it seems reasonable to generally expect partisan outlets to exhibit the same preference for favorable results in the context of an election, though strategic considerations may occasionally outweigh this preference.

The second mechanism through which partisan media are likely to influence perceptions of electoral integrity is the impact of media exposure on how citizens explain both favorable and unfavorable election outcomes. News media play a central role in constructing political mandates through the interpretation of electoral results in relatively broad and sweeping terms (Mendelsohn, 1998; Shamir, Shamir, & Sheafer, 2008). In the 1980s, when national news was still centered around the three broadcast networks and major national dailies, media played a significant role alongside political elites in filtering numerous potential explanations for why a candidate won or lost into a small number of accepted narratives that came to dominate mediated conversation within a relatively short period following Election Day (Hershey, 1992; 1994). Today, partisan media associated with each of the two major parties are likely to emphasize quite different explanations to their audiences. There is some evidence that partisan media drive citizens' interpretations of an outcome, as when Rush Limbaugh listeners were less likely to accept substantive explanations for Bill Clinton's 1996 reelection victory (Hall & Cappella, 2002).

These two theoretical mechanisms lead me to predict that exposure to like-minded media amplifies the effects of winning and losing while exposure to cross-cutting media mutes the effects of winning and losing. Like-minded media are most likely to present messages that reinforce the elation of winning or disappointment of losing while cross-

cutting media will present messages that counter these main effects. In Chapter 7, I further test whether evidence for the conditioning effect of partisan media is consistent with each of the two possible mechanisms.

3. DATA AND METHODS

I drew on a unique set of panel studies to test whether partisan media condition the effects of winning and losing. The first of these studies, the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), was a five-wave election survey with interviews for the first wave conducted in late 2007 and interviews for the final, post-election wave conducted between November 2008 and January 2009. I primarily relied upon data from the pre-general election survey and the post- election survey. The 2008 NAES included a much larger number of respondents than most traditional election studies, with n=28,985 respondents participating in at least one wave of the panel and n=10,472 respondents completing all five waves.[1]

The other studies I utilized were the 2012 and 2014 Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics (ISCAP) panels. What makes this set of studies unique is that the 2012 ISCAP study was designed as a direct follow-up to the 2008 NAES study, and the 2014 study was a follow-up to both previous studies. The 2012 ISCAP panel (n=2,471) was a representative subset of panelists who were previously interviewed both pre-election and post-election in 2008. Respondents were asked to participate in an initial

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[1] A full discussion of 2008 NAES response rates is available in Annenberg Public Policy Center (2009). Response rate calculations for the NAES are consistent with the recommendations for probability-based internet panels made by Callegaro and DiSogra (2008). 54.6 percent of Wave 1 cases completed all five waves of interviews while the average cumulative response rate CUMRR1 was 8.92 percent across all five waves.

pre-election survey during the final two weeks of October 2012 and then re-contacted for the second post-election interview.[2]

The 2014 ISCAP study (n=1,493) followed a similar procedure, with the sample selected as a representative subset of panelists who completed both waves of the 2012 study. Respondents were once again invited to participate in a pre-election survey during the final two weeks of October. Participants were then re-contacted for the post-election survey following the November midterm elections.[3] Participants in the 2014 ISCAP study were members of the complete panel for at least six years and in many cases over seven years depending on when they first joined the 2008 panel. The result is an unusually rich source of data on changes in both habitual media exposure and key political attitudes over an extended period of time. Table 3.1 provides the dates during which interviews were conducted as well as the number of participants in each of the pre-election and post-election surveys.

In all three election years, dates of the post-election interviews were randomly assigned such that each respondent was invited to complete the survey during a randomly selected week of the post-election interview period. This allowed me to test whether the effects of winning and losing on perceptions of legitimacy grew stronger, diminished, or

[2] For the 2012 ISCAP study, a stratified sample of 3,621 NAES respondents was selected, and of those, 2,606 participated in the pre-election wave for a cooperation rate of 72.0 percent. 2,471 of the pre-election participants completed the post-election survey for a cooperation rate of 94.8 percent.

[3] A stratified sample of 2,094 ISCAP participants from 2012 were contacted for the 2014 study. 1,693 participated in the pre-election survey for a cooperation rate of 80.9 percent. Of those respondents, 1,493 also completed the post-election survey for a cooperation rate of 88.2 percent.

remained constant as time passed following the election. Interviews for the post-election

survey were randomly divided over the twelve weeks following the election in 2008. In

2012 the post-election interviews were randomly divided over a ten-week period

following the election, and in 2014 they were divided over an eight-week period.

Table 3.1: Interview Dates and Numbers of Participants in Pre-Election and Post-Election Survey Waves

Election Year	Interview Wave	Interview Dates	Number of Participants in Interview Wave	Number of Participants Who Completed Both Interviews
2008	Pre	Aug. 29 - Nov. 4	19,241	16,242
	Post	Nov. 5 - Jan. 31	19,234	
2012	Pre	Oct. 19 - Oct. 29	2,606	2,471
	Post	Nov. 14 - Jan. 29	2,471	
2014	Pre	Oct. 17 - Oct. 31	1,693	1,493
	Post	Nov. 19 - Jan. 14	1,493	

Note: Pre and Post in this table refer to the pre-election and post-election surveys.

Interviews for all three panels were conducted online by GfK, formerly

Knowledge Networks. GfK conducts probability-based online surveys by using a

combination of random digit dialing and address-based sampling methods to recruit

panelists for its very large KnowledgePanel of potential survey respondents. Households

that lack internet access are provided with internet access to ensure representativeness.

The company uses probability sampling to select members of the KnowledgePanel to

participate in individual surveys. While nonprobability internet panels pose distinct

problems for survey researchers interested in generalizing to a larger population (see Baker et al., 2010), online probability panels such as GfK's are not subject to the same issues of unrepresentativeness due to opting in because respondents are selected using random sampling methods (Chang & Krosnick, 2009).

The probability sampling method used for initial recruitment helped to ensure the representativeness of the 2008 sample while the stratified sampling method used to select 2012 and 2014 panelists guarded against differential rates of attrition over the seven-year life of the complete panel. Table 3.2 presents demographic statistics for each of the three panels alongside population estimates from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey for October of each election year. The table demonstrates that each panel was largely representative of the US adult population at the time of the interviews. While some groups are slightly overrepresented, such as whites, and some are slightly underrepresented, notably the least educated, these differences are consistent across all three studies, suggesting that variable attrition is not a significant concern.

The one clear exception appears in the distributions of ages of participants in the 2012 and 2014 ISCAP studies. While the youngest cohort of voters was only somewhat underrepresented in the 2008 NAES, 18-24 year olds have completely disappeared from the sample by 2014. However, the absence of the youngest group of voters in the final panel is a product of the study design rather than a result of variable attrition. Since minors were not included in the original 2008 election study, only respondents who were 18 or older by the time of the 2008 presidential election were eligible to be re-contacted for the subsequent panels.

Aside from the absence of 18-24 year olds in the final panel, the three studies provide representative samples of the adult American population and variable attrition does not appear to be a significant threat to validity. I therefore used the unweighted panel data for the bulk of my analyses to promote ease of interpretation. To assuage any remaining concerns about the representativeness of this unique set of panel studies, I replicated my core regression models using GfK's recommended population weights in Appendix B following the main empirical analysis of the dissertation.

Table 3.2: Demographics of US Adult Population and of Respondents in the Post-Election Waves of the 2008 NAES, 2012 ISCAP, and 2014 ISCAP Panels

	Oct. 2008 US Adults	2008 NAES	Oct. 2012 US Adults	2012 ISCAP	Oct. 2014 US Adults	2014 ISCAP
Gender						
Male	48.3%	43.4%	48.1%	47.0%	48.2%	48.7%
Female	51.7%	56.6%	51.9%	53.0%	51.8%	51.3%
Age						
18-24	12.6%	4.4%	12.8%	1.9%	12.4%	0%
25-34	17.8%	12.6%	17.5%	12.0%	17.6%	8.3%
35-44	18.4%	20.0%	16.8%	25.3%	16.5%	20.0%
45-54	19.6%	23.4%	18.5%	15.5%	17.8%	18.1%
55-64	15.0%	22.0%	16.4%	21.5%	16.7%	22.5%
65+	16.6%	17.6%	18.0%	23.8%	18.9%	31.1%
Race						
White	68.5%	79.1%	66.2%	70.3%	65.2%	73.5%
African American	11.4%	9.7%	11.5%	13.1%	11.7%	11.7%
Hispanic	13.7%	6.3%	15.0%	9.8%	15.3%	9.1%
Other	5.4%	2.5%	6.1%	4.8%	6.4%	3.7%
Two or more races	1.0%	2.4%	1.3%	2.0%	1.3%	2.1%
Education						
No high school diploma	13.2%	4.9%	12.3%	4.1%	11.6%	4.6%
High school diploma or GED	31.3%	22.2%	29.9%	37.6%	29.9%	39.5%
Some college	28.2%	35.7%	28.9%	23.3%	28.9%	22.0%
Bachelor's degree +	27.3%	37.1%	28.8%	35.0%	29.7%	34.0%
Household Income						
$9,999 or less	6.5%	4.0%	6.9%	5.5%	6.7%	4.7%
$10,000 to $24,999	15.3%	13.0%	16.5%	14.5%	15.2%	15.4%
$25,000 to $49,999	26.4%	29.7%	25.9%	26.5%	25.7%	28.1%
$50,000 to $74,999	19.9%	20.7%	19.0%	21.6%	18.6%	19.4%
$75,000 and over	32.0%	31.7%	31.7%	31.9%	33.8%	32.3%

Note: Population figures are from the Current Population Survey (CPS) for the indicated months. Percentages for each demographic variable may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding errors.

Identifying Winners and Losers

The method by which I identified survey respondents as either winners or losers was crucial to my analysis. The first step was to identify individuals as voters or nonvoters. Past work on winners and losers has generally emphasized the importance of casting a ballot for the winning or losing candidate as opposed to simply favoring one candidate over the other (e.g. Anderson et al., 2005).

For all respondents who participated in the 2012 survey, I used verified data from state voter records indicating whether these respondents voted in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Political data and consulting firm Catalist collected this information by coordinating with GfK to identify panel participants and search state records to determine whether these individuals cast ballots in each election.[4] Based on this data, I identified all 2012 respondents as either voters or nonvoters in both presidential elections.

No equivalent data was available for 2008 survey respondents who were not also part of the 2012 study. To code these panel members as voters or nonvoters in 2008, I relied upon self-reports from the 2008 post-election survey. Similarly, I relied upon self-reports from the 2014 post-election survey to code all 2014 respondents as voters or nonvoters in the midterm elections. Self-reports are not ideal given the well-known

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[4] While Catalist and GfK had access to individually identifying information, no individual identifiers were provided to the study investigators. Catalist provided anonymous records of whether each respondent voted using randomly assigned participant identification numbers that were keyed to GfK's similarly anonymized survey response data.

tendency for survey respondents to over-report socially desirable behaviors such as voting (e.g. Holbrook & Krosnick, 2010). However, a comparison of self-reports and verified voter information for the subset of respondents for whom both types of data are available suggested that the tendency to over-report having voted was relatively small among members of these panels. Of all 2012 participants who reported casting a ballot in the 2008 election (n=2,072), 83 percent were verified as voters in that election. Of those who reported casting a ballot in 2012 (n=2,059), 87 percent were also verified as voters.

Among voters, it was possible to identify winners and losers in the presidential elections based on either vote intentions as reported before the election or vote choices as reported after the election. Survey respondents have in some cases shown a tendency to over-report having voted for the winner when asked for their vote choice after an election (e.g. Wright, 1990; Atkeson, 1999). I identified winners and losers based on their pre-election vote intentions to avoid the possibility that post-election reports were tainted by knowledge of the outcome. Voters who reported an intention to vote for Barack Obama in 2008 were classified as winners while voters who reported an intention to vote for John McCain or for a third party candidate were classified as losers. Voters who reported an intention to vote for Obama in 2012 were classified as winners in the second presidential election while voters who reported an intention to vote for Mitt Romney or a third party candidate were classified as losers.

In the 2014 election, I identified winners and losers based on the national election results. Americans increasingly tend to view elections in national rather than local terms (Hopkins, 2014). Observers have described this trend as the 'nationalization' of congressional elections, whereby voters increasingly choose who to vote for in House

and Senate elections based not on the characteristics of the individual candidates, but based on attitudes towards the national political parties and the incumbent president (Jacobson, 2015; Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, congressional election outcomes have come to depend more and more upon party loyalty and evaluations of the sitting president as opposed to local considerations.

The national media also tend to treat midterm elections as national, placing a premium on each party's overall performance in the congressional elections. The Republican Party was generally presented as the winner in 2014, as Republicans won control of the Senate and retained control of the House while gaining seats in each chamber. For example, the front page of *The New York Times* led the paper's coverage on the day after the election by describing the Republican Party as "resurgent" in its victories and the results as a "repudiation of President Obama" (Weisman & Parker, 2014). Since Americans do not vote directly for a party in congressional elections, I used partisan identification to identify winners and losers. Self-identified Republicans who reported voting in the election were categorized as winners and self-identified Democrats who reported voting were categorized as losers.

Although the majority of past research on the winner-loser phenomenon has focused on voters, I tested whether media condition the effects of vicariously winning or vicariously losing in Chapter 6. While nonvoters by definition cannot win or lose by voting for a winning or losing candidate, they can vicariously win or lose through their passive support for a candidate. I expected nonvoters who "root for the home team" in part by consuming like-minded media to be particularly affected by their vicarious experiences of an election.

To classify nonvoters as vicarious winners and losers, I relied on survey respondents' feeling thermometer ratings of the two presidential candidates. 2008 and 2012 survey respondents were asked to rate both major party candidates (Barack Obama and John McCain in 2008; Obama and Mitt Romney in 2012) on scales ranging from zero to one hundred, with higher values indicating more positive ratings. Feeling thermometer items in which survey respondents are asked to rate candidates based on how warmly they feel towards each individual have historically served as excellent predictors of vote choice (see Bartels, 1988). Responses to the feeling thermometer items from the 2008 and 2012 surveys thus served as strong indicators of candidate preferences among nonvoters. I classified nonvoters who rated Obama more positively than McCain as vicarious winners in 2008 and nonvoters who rated Obama more positively than Romney as vicarious winners in 2012. Nonvoters who rated the Republican candidate more positively than Obama in a given election year were classified as vicarious losers.

Measuring Partisan Media Exposure

Measurement of partisan media exposure was made possible by the program list technique, first introduced in the 2008 NAES panel. With this technique, respondents were first asked whether they had heard anything about the election campaign from television news programs or from other types of talk shows and public affairs programs. Any respondent who answered in the affirmative was then shown a series of four screens, each containing a list of approximately 13 television programs, and asked which if any of those programs they watched regularly. Respondents could select as many programs from

each list as they wished, or select a box indicating they watched none of the programs listed on that screen.

The program list technique was designed to decrease the cognitive demands on survey respondents as well as provide researchers with better information about the specific content respondents are exposed to (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2012). Traditional survey items that ask respondents to estimate the amount of time they spent watching, reading, or listening to the news over a recent time period are notoriously poor predictors of current events knowledge (Price & Zaller, 1993). These items also correlate poorly with measures of audience that are not based on survey self-reports, with survey respondents tending to inflate their actual news exposure (Prior, 2009). Recall items can be cognitively taxing and prone to measurement error insofar they require respondents to accurately estimate and report the frequency of a past behavior (e.g. Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000).

The program list technique, on the other hand, requires only that respondents recognize a habitually watched program's name, minimizing the amount of recall or estimation required for an accurate response. The technique has been shown to have a high degree of reliability as well as greater predictive validity in explaining campaign knowledge than other, more traditional self-report approaches to measuring media exposure (Dilliplane et al., 2012; Goldman, Mutz, & Dilliplane, 2013; but cf. Prior, 2013, for a critique of this method). It has since been adopted by the American National Election Studies in addition to being utilized in the 2012 and 2014 ISCAP panels. Panel members were asked to respond to the program lists in the primary election, pre-general

election, and post-election survey waves of the 2008 NAES, in both the pre-election and

post-election waves of the 2012 ISCAP, and in the pre-election wave of the 2014 ISCAP.

Responses to the program list items served as my main source of data regarding

exposure to partisan news and public affairs content. Despite continued concerns over the

shrinking audience for programs such as the evening newscasts of the three major

broadcast networks, television remains a vital source of political news and information

for most Americans (Pew Research Center, 2013; 2014a). In the pre-election wave of the

2008 NAES, 90 percent of respondents reported getting information about the election

campaign from television news programs or talk shows. By comparison, just under two-

thirds of respondents reported getting election information from traditional print sources

and only 43 percent reported getting information online. Four years later nearly as many

respondents to the pre-election wave of the 2012 ISCAP survey, 89 percent, reported

receiving campaign information from television sources.[5]

Programs were selected for inclusion on the initial NAES lists by including the

most watched programs as measured by Nielsen ratings at the time each list was

constructed (Dilliplane et al., 2012).[6] The programs appearing on the lists and the order in

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[5] Only 74 percent of 2014 ISCAP respondents reported getting campaign information
from television news programs or talk shows. However, this decrease is most likely
attributable in significant part to the lower salience of 2014's midterm election campaign.
Only 40 percent of 2014 respondents reported getting campaign news from newspapers
compared to 56 percent in 2012. The declines from 2012 to 2014 were comparable for the
proportions of respondents who reported receiving campaign news from websites and
from radio, as well.
[6] A small number of apolitical entertainment programs, including scripted series and
reality programs, were included so as to retain the attention of survey respondents who

which they appeared were deliberately held constant from one survey to the next wherever possible, with programs that were canceled by the time of later surveys replaced by the highest rated news programs available. This consistency allows for a high degree of comparability across the three panels. Table 3.3 presents the full list of programs from each of the three panels.

Table 3.3: Television Programs Appearing on 2008 NAES, 2012 ISCAP, and 2014 ISCAP Program Lists

2008 NAES

24	*Colbert Report*	*Hannity and Colmes*	*O'Reilly Factor*
20/20	*Countdown*	*Hannity's America*	*Oprah*
60 Minutes	*CSI: Miami*	*Hardball*	*Out in the Open*
ABC World News	*Daily Show*	*Heartland*	*Reliable Sources*
America This Morning	*Dateline*	*Larry King Live*	*Scrubs*
Anderson Cooper 360	*Early Show*	*Late Edition*	*Simpsons*
Beltway Boys	*Ellen DeGeneres Show*	*Late Show*	*Situation Room*
BET News	*Face the Nation*	*Law and Order*	*Special Report*
Big Love	*Family Guy*	*Lou Dobbs*	*Studio B*
Big Story	*Fox and Friends*	*McLaughlin Group*	*The View*
Brothers and Sisters	Fox News	*Meet the Press*	*This Week*
CBS Evening News	*Fox Report*	*MSNBC Live*	*Today Show*
CBS Morning News	*Frontline*	*NBC Nightly News*	*Tonight Show*
CBS Sunday Morning	*Geraldo At Large*	*NewsHour*	*Your World*
CNN Newsroom	*Good Morning America*	*Nightline*	

To evaluate my hypotheses, I required measures of exposure to both like-minded and cross-cutting media. Dilliplane (2011, 2014) coded each of the news programs listed in the 2008 NAES as Democratic-leaning, neutral, or Republican-leaning according to audience members' perceptions of the partisan leanings of programs they watched as

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have less interest in news and political affairs programming (see Dilliplane et al., 2012, p. 239).

measured in a separate 2008 election survey. For programs that were watched by too few

survey respondents to produce a reliable coding of partisanship based on audience

members' perceptions, Dilliplane conducted a Lexis-Nexis search of news coverage to

determine whether a program or its host was generally associated with a particular

partisan orientation (2014, p. 84).

**Table 3.3: Television Programs Appearing on 2008 NAES, 2012 ISCAP, and 2014
ISCAP Program Lists, Continued**

2012 ISCAP

20/20	Chris Matthews Show	Huckabee	Person of Interest
60 Minutes	CNN Newsroom	Jimmy Kimmel Live	Rachel Maddow Show
ABC World News	Colbert Report	Key and Peele	Rock Center
America Live	Daily Show	Late Late Show	Saturday Night Live
America This Morning	Dancing with the Stars	Late Show	Special Report
America's Newsroom	Dateline	Meet the Press	Tavis Smiley
American Idol	Ed Show	Mentalist	The Five
Anderson Cooper 360	Ellen DeGeneres Show	MSNBC Live	The Insider
Any local news program	Face the Nation	NBC Nightly News	The Talk
Big Bang Theory	Fox Report	NCIS	The View
CBS Evening News	Frontline	Nightline	The Voice
CBS Sunday Morning	Good Morning America	O'Reilly Factor	This Week
CBS This Morning	Hannity	On the Record	Today Show

2014 ISCAP

20/20	CBS Sunday Morning	Hardball	Person of Interest
60 Minutes	CBS This Morning	Huckabee	Rachel Maddow Show
ABC World News	CNN Newsroom	Kelly File	Saturday Night Live
All In	Colbert Report	Key and Peele	Shepard Smith Reporting
America This Morning	Daily Show	Late Late Show	Special Report
America's Newsroom	Dancing with the Stars	Late Show	Tavis Smiley
American Idol	Dateline	Meet the Press	The Five
Anderson Cooper 360	Ed Show	MSNBC Live	The Insider
Any local news program	Ellen DeGeneres Show	NBC Nightly News	The Talk
Big Bang Theory	Face the Nation	NCIS	The View
Blue Bloods	Frontline	Nightline	The Voice
Castle	Good Morning America	O'Reilly Factor	This Week
CBS Evening News	Hannity	On the Record	Today Show

Dilliplane subsequently categorized Democratic-leaning programs as like-minded and Republican-leaning programs as cross-cutting or vice versa for each NAES based on the individual respondent's self-reported partisan orientation. Finally, she calculated the proportion of like-minded programs watched to total programs watched as well as the proportion of cross-cutting programs watched to total programs watched for each respondent, resulting in measures of exposure to both like-minded and cross-cutting media.

Unlike human content analyses which rely on the potentially subjective decisions of human coders, Dilliplane's method, previously validated in her own work, has the advantage of being readily replicated by other researchers in analyses of the 2008 NAES data. This method also produces coding for the partisanship of news programs that is highly correlated with both human content analyses of the same programs and other audience-based measures of exposure to partisan media (see Dilliplane, 2011; 2014; Moehler & Allen, 2016). I followed Dilliplane's procedure to construct measures of the proportions of like-minded and cross-cutting programs consumed by respondents in all three panel studies. For the small number of new news programs and talk shows added to the 2012 and 2014 editions of the program lists, I followed Dilliplane in using a Lexis-Nexis search to determine whether each program and host is associated with a specific partisan orientation.

I used measures of the proportion of like-minded programs watched to total programs watched and the proportion of cross-cutting programs watched to total programs watched to test each of my hypotheses related to the effects of partisan media. An alternative method would have be to construct counts of the numbers of each type of

program watched by a given respondent, but this method would fail to account for an individual's overall diet of news and public affairs content. I expect partisan media exposure to condition the effects of winning and losing based on the prevalence of certain types of messages within an individual's overall media diet. In other words, I expect like-minded messages about the election to produce a stronger effect upon a Republican who is exposed only to like-minded messages than upon a Republican who encounters a balance of like-minded, neutral, and cross-cutting messages, even if the latter watches more like-minded programs overall. I therefore used proportions of like-minded and cross-cutting programs watched to total programs watched as my primary independent variables of interest.

My central prediction states that if two otherwise identical electoral losers watch different proportions of like-minded media in the period surrounding an election, the one who consumes more like-minded content relative to neutral or cross-cutting content will experience the larger decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity. This prediction assumes that media habits remain highly stable in the short period of time surrounding the election. In fact, past research involving the 2008 NAES shows that television viewing habits are quite stable from one interview period to the next (Dilliplane, 2011; Dilliplane et al., 2012). I therefore focused on how stable partisan news viewership affects changes in perceptions of electoral integrity, averaging pre- and post-election measures of partisan media exposure in both 2008 and 2012 to obtain more reliable measures of the proportion of like-minded programs watched and the proportion of cross-cutting programs watched.

Pre and post election measures of the proportion of like-minded programs watched and the proportion of cross-cutting programs watched were quite highly correlated in both 2008 (like-minded: r=0.80, cross-cutting: r=0.71) and 2012 (like-minded: r=0.83, cross-cutting: r=0.77). In 2014, respondents were only asked about their television viewership in the pre-election survey, so I used this single measure of programs watched to calculate proportions of like-minded and cross-cutting programs in my analyses of 2014 data.

Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

I measured perceptions of electoral integrity using an index comprised of four items that appeared in the pre and post-election surveys for each of the three elections. These items asked whether elections make government pay attention to the people, whether the best candidates or those with the most money tend to win elections, whether elections in the US are fair, and whether votes are counted fairly. The inclusion of all four items both before and after each election allowed me to measure changes in perceptions of electoral integrity not only during an election campaign but from one election to the next. I combined the four items into a single index of perceptions of electoral integrity by first placing responses to each item on a standardized scale and then taking the mean

value of the four standardized responses for each respondent in each survey wave.[7] This index serves as the key dependent variable throughout my analyses.

All four items explicitly referred to the electoral process, meaning that they have a high degree of face validity for testing my hypotheses regarding perceptions of electoral integrity. Two items explicitly referred to the perceived fairness of the electoral process. The item asking whether elections make government listen to the people effectively captured the idea that elections serve as a key mechanism for accountability (Weatherford, 1992). Finally, the item asking whether the best candidates or those with the most money win incorporated the idea of fairness as well as accountability.

It was important to identify items that could be combined to produce a reliable index. A single-item measure would have been subject to much greater measurement error that could potentially obfuscate the results. For example, the single-item "satisfaction with democracy" indicator often used in studies of winners and losers due to its frequent appearances in comparative surveys is heavily context dependent and subject to a great deal of variability (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001; Linde & Ekman, 2003). The four items I used for my index of perceptions of electoral integrity are reasonably well correlated with one another (Cronbach's α=0.69, 0.74, and 0.66 for the post-election waves of the 2008, 2012, and 2014 studies, respectively). While these reliabilities are lower than is ideal for a multi-item scale, they do fall into the acceptable

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[7] In the 2008 study the legitimacy items were asked of respondents three different times: in the surveys conducted before and during the primary election season as well as in the post-election survey. In all of the following analyses I use the mean value of each item in the two pre-election waves for a given respondent to produce a single, more reliable measure of 2008 pre-election perceptions of integrity.

range. Moreover, removing any one item from the four-item scale would have reduced the overall reliability.

Heise (1969) provides a method for calculating reliability of measures independent of the change or stability of the underlying true scores. Heise's method suggests that the combined index of perceptions of electoral legitimacy is a fairly reliable measure after correcting for changes in actual perceptions over time. Across the 2008 election study, in which perceptions of legitimacy were measured at three different points in time, the true-score reliability of the index is .67. The reliability is higher later in the panel. Over the period comprising the 2012 post-election survey, the 2014 pre-election survey, and the 2014 post-election survey, the true-score reliability of the index is a quite reliable .84.

To situate my findings more firmly within the existing literature on winners and losers, in which system support broadly conceived is frequently the dependent variable of interest, I also created a second index designed to measure more generalized system support using data from the 2012 surveys. A series of four items in the 2012 pre and post-election surveys asked respondents to express their general attitudes towards "our system of government" or "our political system," relatively abstract concepts. The items asked respondents to report whether they would rather live under our system of government than any other; whether our system of government is in need of serious changes; whether our form of government is best for representing the people; and whether they felt very critical of our political system at present.

An index comprised from the means of the four standardized system support items correlates at a weak but statistically significant level with the index of perceptions

of electoral integrity (r=.375, p<.001 in the pre-election survey; r=.412, p<.001 in the post-election survey). This weak but significant correlation suggests that the two indexes are effective in discriminating between the two distinct but related concepts of generalized system support and perceptions of electoral integrity.

Approaches to Studying Winners and Losers

While there is a plethora of evidence that winners and losers differ in their perceptions of legitimacy following an election, most past research has been unable to directly test whether winners increase in legitimacy and losers decrease in legitimacy due to the rarity of panel surveys that interview the same individuals both before and after the election (see also Esaiasson, 2011). Instead, researchers have generally relied upon cross-sectional surveys to estimate the size of winner-loser gaps. Cross-sectional surveys can provide strong evidence of between-group difference, but they are unable to tell us whether the election caused winners to gain in legitimacy, losers to decrease, or changes in both groups. Repeated cross-sectional surveys, which ask the same questions of different samples at multiple points in time in order to measure winners and losers in the same country over different election cycles (e.g. Anderson et al., 2005), shed some light on the causal process but still allow only for relatively weak causal inferences.

An experiment might allow for a strong test of the effects of winning and losing, but only if it were able to effectively simulate the experience of supporting the winner or loser in a national election, a difficult task at best. Results of one randomized experiment provide some support for the prediction that perceptions of the electoral process are

influenced by election results (Vonnahme & Miller, 2012). This study relied on a purely hypothetical election, making it difficult to draw direct inferences about the real experiences of winning and losing. A second randomized experiment also tested the effects of winning and losing on how individuals think about electoral reforms (Bowler & Donovan, 2007). However, participants in this latter experiment were not randomly assigned to conditions that represented winning or losing. Instead, they were asked to identify themselves as winners or losers based on recent elections and then randomly assigned to conditions that presented electoral reforms in terms of either potential costs or potential benefits.

The strongest evidence for the effects of winning and losing come from panel studies. Panels tracking the same individuals over time allow for stronger causal inferences than cross-sectional surveys. Panel surveys also allow for stronger tests of the effects of individual characteristics that might enhance or diminish the effects of winning and losing. Whereas a cross-sectional survey might show, for example, that Fox News viewers held lower perceptions of electoral integrity than viewers of the traditional broadcast news programs after the 2008 election, it would not allow us to rule out the possibilities of reverse causation (i.e., some aspect of Fox News's post-election coverage appealed to people who already doubted the fairness of the process) or a spurious relationship driven by some unmeasured third variable. Panel data analyzed with appropriate statistical techniques can offer better evidence of an over-time relationship between two variables as well as the ability to control for all stable individual variables whether measured or unmeasured.

Almost all studies of the effects of winning and losing that have incorporated panel data to date have modeled individual changes in legitimacy using multiple regression with a lagged dependent variable as a predictor (e.g. Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais & Gélineau, 2007; Singh, Karakoç, & Blais, 2012). These models predict post-election perceptions of legitimacy using a conventional regression model that controls for pre-election perceptions of legitimacy as one of many independent variables. While lagged dependent variable models are quite prevalent in the political science and communication literatures, they possess several disadvantages when used to estimate individual change over time using panel data.

Lagged dependent variables rely on between-person variation rather than within-person variation to estimate effects, as do conventional models used to analyze cross-sectional data (Allison, 1990; 2009). Lagged models are therefore subject to the same potential for omitted variable bias as conventional analyses of cross-sectional survey data. Any variable that affects individual perceptions of legitimacy must be included in these models or else the estimated effects of the independent variables of interest will be biased. The appropriateness of the lagged variable model is undermined to the extent that a potentially confounding variable may have been omitted from a lagged regression model (Allison, 1990). This includes variables that may not have been measured.

The inclusion of a lagged dependent variable in a regression model can often improve the overall fit of the model, but at the cost of suppressing the estimated effects of substantively important variables (Achen, 2000). The resulting estimates can lead researchers to incorrect conclusions. In essence, the lagged variable "pick[s] up some of the effect of unmeasured variables" (Achen, 2000, p. 7). In extreme cases, it can also pick

up the effect of measured variables, decreasing the magnitude of the coefficients associated with other predictors and rendering them statistically insignificant.

My hypotheses focused on individual changes in perceptions of electoral integrity, necessitating an approach that was designed to assess within-person change as opposed to between-person differences. I therefore used fixed effects regression in each of my major statistical tests. Fixed effects regression uses each individual as their own control, sacrificing statistical efficiency in favor of eliminating the bias that results from omitted or unmeasured variables (Allison, 2009). As a result, fixed effects regression using panel data allows for much stronger causal inferences than other approaches to observational data. While fixed effects models have traditionally been used sparingly in political communication, they have appeared quite prominently in other recent analyses of the NAES and ISCAP panels (Dilliplane, 2011; 2014; Goldman & Mutz, 2014).

In fixed effects regression, it is unnecessary to control for any stable individual characteristic because both measured and unmeasured time-invariant characteristics are automatically controlled for. Characteristics such as gender or race cannot, by themselves, produce individual changes over time insofar as those characteristics remain constant for a particular individual. In fact, stable individual characteristics cannot be directly included in a fixed effects regression model; these variables simply drop out of a model where individuals already serve as their own controls. The lack of potential for omitted variable bias represents a significant improvement over lagged dependent variable models.

Even though stable variables drop out of a fixed effects model, it is possible to estimate the effects of these variables when their effects are expected to change over

time. Conceptually, simply holding a preference in an election cannot produce *changes* in perceptions of electoral legitimacy any more than being male can produce changes in perceptions. It is the *experience of winning (or losing)*, a time-dependent event represented by the interaction between time and winner status, that produces the effect. Including an interaction between time and status in the fixed effects models produces a test of the prediction that winners and losers changed differentially on average in response to the election results. I therefore included this interaction as a key independent variable of interest in my analyses.

The possibility of including interactions between time and stable variables of interest in a fixed effects model means that it was also possible to include interactions between time and stable control variables in my regression models. However, it remained unnecessary to do so barring a specific theory-driven reason to believe that a particular variable produced differential changes in the dependent variable over time. Moreover, it would only have been worth doing if this differential change might have produced a spurious relationship between the independent variable of interest and the dependent variable. In the case of gender, for example, there was no reason to predict that men and women would have experienced differential changes in legitimacy in relation to their media use in response to any of the elections I studied. There was therefore no theory-driven or statistics-driven reason to include gender in my fixed effects models.

Even though fixed effects regression eliminates the constant effects of stable characteristics, the impact of individual characteristics could vary over time. I present models that include interactions between time and a variety of time-invariant demographic variables in Appendix C. In particular, I incorporated interactions between

time and age, time and gender, time and race, and time and educational attainment. Doing

so allowed me to account for the possibility that the varying effects of these

characteristics over time might have altered the strength or pattern of the effects I was

primarily interested in. However, the regression models presented in Appendix C do not

differ in any substantively meaningful way from the main results presented throughout

the dissertation.

**4. AMPLIFYING THE EFFECTS OF WINNING AND LOSING: PARTISAN
MEDIA'S EFFECTS ON PERCEIVED ELECTORAL INTEGRITY IN THE 2008
AND 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

In this chapter I examine whether media conditioned the effects of winning and

losing in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. I consider the effects of three types of

media: *like-minded media*, *cross-cutting media*, and *neutral media*. Like-minded media

favor an individual's preferred political party by promoting arguments consistent with the

preferred party's issue positions and featuring hosts who tend to adopt favorable attitudes

towards that party on the air. Cross-cutting media tend to favor the opposing party.

Finally, neutral media present a relatively balanced take on news and public affairs,

typically by following the traditional model of objective journalism and giving

approximately equal time and emphasis to guests and arguments from both sides of the

political spectrum.

Consistent with other studies of winners and losers, voters who supported the

winning candidate significantly increased in their perceptions of electoral integrity from

pre to post-election in both 2008 and 2012, whereas supporters of losing candidates

significantly decreased in their perceptions of electoral integrity. Figure 4.1 illustrates

these gains and losses for participants in the 2008 and 2012 panels.

Figure 4.1: Effects of Presidential Election Outcomes on Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
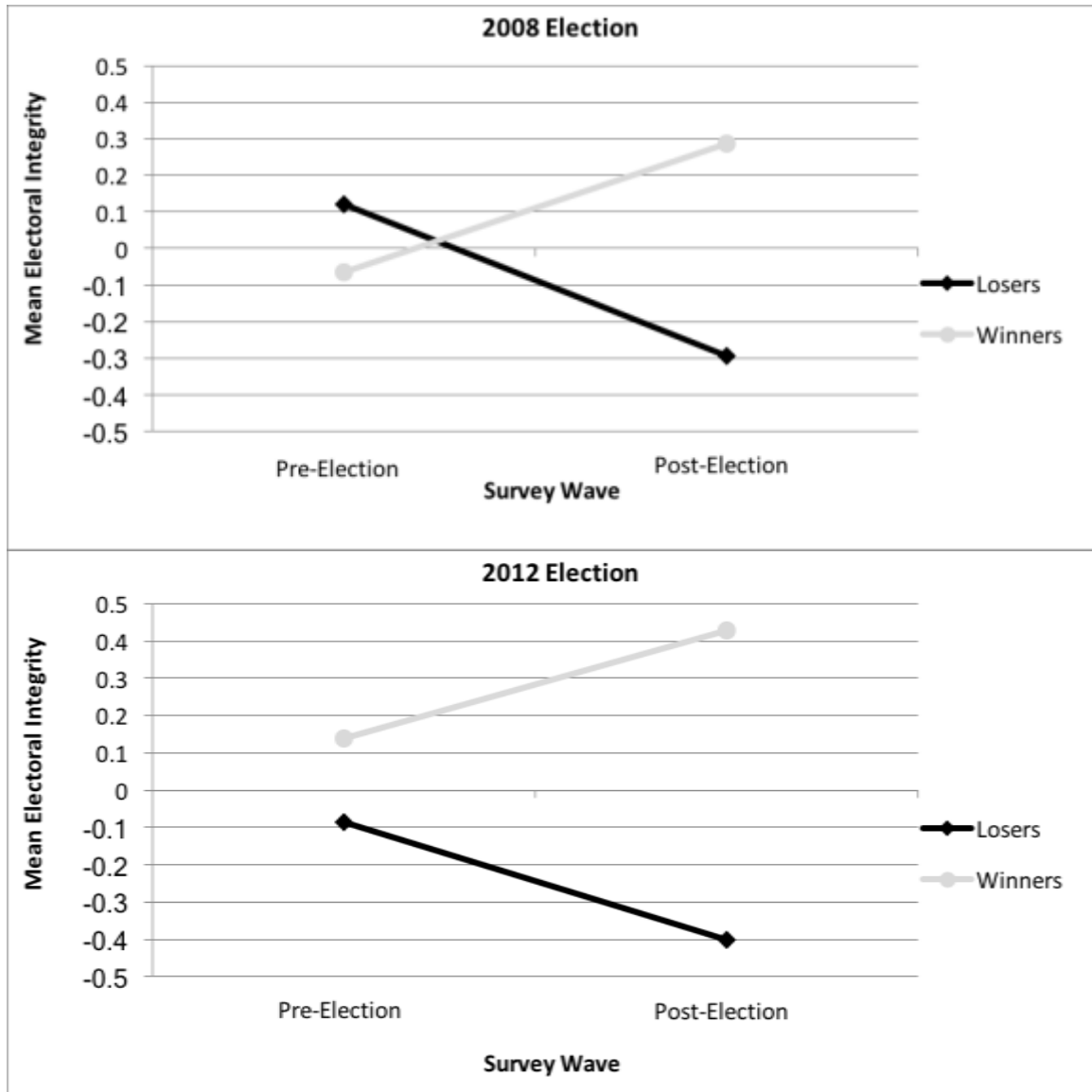
Note: 4,650 voters who reported preferring John McCain in October 2008 are classified as Losers and 4,452 voters who reported preferring Barack Obama in October 2008 are classified as Winners in the top panel of this figure. 779 voters who reported preferring Mitt Romney in October 2012 are classified as Losers and 847 voters who reported preferring Barack Obama in October 2012 are classified as Winners in the bottom panel of this figure.

Electoral integrity is measured using an index calculated as the mean of four standardized survey items. Fixed effects regression confirms that the changes in perceptions of integrity shown here were significant among both winners and losers in each election year ($p<.001$).

I expected media to condition the effects of winning and losing on *perceptions of electoral integrity* through two possible mechanisms. First, media may shape expectations for an election's outcome. Partisan media are likely to distort audience members' expectations by selectively sharing polling and public opinion data as well as expert predictions that favor the preferred candidate. To the extent that audience members' expectations are subsequently unmet, they may believe the outcome was the result of irregularities.

Secondly, media may shape explanations for an election's outcome. Following a victory for the preferred party, partisan media are more likely than other news sources to argue that the election results are legitimate and evidence that the party's message resonated with voters. Following a loss, partisan media are more likely than other sources to argue that the outcome is somehow illegitimate, perhaps because voters were misled by a flashy campaign or wealthy interest groups. To the extent that audience members accept these explanations, their perceptions of the integrity of the electoral process will be affected.

Hypotheses

I hypothesized that exposure to like-minded partisan media produces even greater gains among winners and even greater losses among losers in comparison to exposure to traditional, neutral media. For winners, like-minded media's emphasis on the positive reasons why the preferred candidate won will increase these winners' confidence in the electoral process. Like-minded media is likely to argue that the winning candidate's

policy proposals and obvious leadership qualities resonated with voters and congratulate the voters on making a wise decision. In other words, like-minded media will assure audience members that the electoral process worked precisely as it was supposed to.

Media aligned with the losing party are likely to take a very different approach. Losers who consume like-minded media in the days leading up to the election may hold expectations for a doomed candidate and their preferred media outlets will be more likely to tell losers that something went wrong with the process itself. Whether there are allegations that the results were somehow illegitimate or simply claims that the decision made by the majority of voters was irrational and inexplicable, like-minded media may assure losers that the process, as opposed to the favored party's platform or candidate, was flawed.

H4.1: Exposure to like-minded partisan media amplifies the positive effects of winning and the negative effects of losing in a presidential election.

I further hypothesized that exposure to cross-cutting partisan media mute the effects of winning and losing, decreasing the magnitude of gains among winners and decreasing the magnitude of losses among losers relative to the effects of neutral media. A winner who consumes cross-cutting media should encounter messages and arguments that detract from electoral integrity while a loser who consumes cross-cutting media should encounter messages and arguments that promote electoral integrity.

For example, a loser who consumes cross-cutting media might be more likely to encounter arguments explaining why the winning candidate's economic proposals were so popular among middle-class Americans. Even though this individual loser continues to oppose the policies in question, he might accept that the voters made an understandable

decision. By contrast, even though a winner voted for the winning candidate, cross-cutting media might inform her of allegations of voter fraud in a key swing state. Even though this individual winner is happy with the outcome, she might begin to doubt that the outcome was fair. In both cases, media would counter the main effects of winning and losing. My second hypothesis therefore predicted that exposure to cross-cutting media will result in decreased effects from winning and losing:

H4.2: Exposure to cross-cutting partisan media mutes the positive effects of winning and negative effects of losing in a presidential election.

Data & Methods

I tested the effects of both like-minded and cross-cutting media exposure on *perceptions of electoral integrity* using fixed effects regression models that incorporated three key independent variables: *loser status*, *proportion like-minded*, and *proportion cross-cutting*, as well as a dummy variable representing *survey wave* (pre-election vs. post-election) and the control variable *strength of preference*. *Loser status* indicates whether a survey respondent voted for the winning (0) or losing (1) candidate in the presidential election. *Proportion like-minded* is a proportion calculated as the number of like-minded programs a given participant reported watching divided by the total number of programs that participant reported watching. Similarly, *proportion cross-cutting* indicates the proportion of cross-cutting programs watched to total programs watched for a given respondent.

While it would be possible to test whether changes in partisan news exposure from pre to post-election produced changes in perceptions of electoral integrity using the separate pre and post-election measures of program exposure, past research involving the 2008 NAES shows that television viewing habits are highly stable from one interview period to the next (Dilliplane et al., 2012). I therefore focused on how stable partisan news viewership affects changes in perceptions of electoral integrity, averaging the pre- and post-election measures to obtain more reliable measures of *proportion like-minded* and *proportion cross-cutting*.

Because fixed effects regression models require an interaction between time and any variable that remains stable over time in order to test the effect of the stable variable, the interpretation of these models is slightly more complex than standard linear regression models. Each fixed effects regression model included a constant term in addition to *wave*; an interaction between *wave* and *loser status*; an interaction between *wave* and *strength of preference*; a three-way interaction between *wave*, *strength of preference*, and *loser status*; an interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded*; a three-way interaction between *wave*, *loser status*, and *proportion like-minded*; an interaction between *wave* and *proportion cross-cutting*; and a three-way interaction between *wave*, *loser status*, and *proportion cross-cutting*.

The three-way interactions were necessary given that I expected *proportion like-minded*, *proportion cross-cutting*, and *strength of preference* to have differential effects on losers versus winners. In interpreting the following results, it is important to note that *wave* is dummy-coded such that 0 indicates the pre-election wave and 1 indicates the post-election wave, while *loser status* is dummy-coded such that 0 indicates an electoral

winner and 1 indicates an electoral loser. From there, interpretation of a given fixed effects regression model becomes quite similar to a more common linear regression. Predicted *perceptions of electoral integrity* for any given winner or loser are estimated as a linear combination of the value of each variable for the individual multiplied by the coefficient estimated by the regression model for that variable. All the coefficients for terms that include an interaction with *wave* take a value of zero when calculating an individual's predicted level of electoral integrity in the pre-election wave, and all coefficients for terms that include an interaction with *loser status* take a value of zero when considering the effect of any other variable on changes in perceptions of integrity for a given winner.

In each regression model, the coefficient associated with the main effect of *survey wave* indicates the main effect of time (moving from pre to post-election) on *perceptions of electoral integrity*. An interaction between *wave* and *loser status* indicates the differential effect of losing on changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity*. The coding of *loser status* means that this interaction should be expected to produce a negative coefficient in each of the main regression models. A negative coefficient for the *wave x loser status* term would indicate that, consistent with the existing literature describing the effects of winning and losing, losers decreased disproportionally in perceptions of electoral integrity because of the election.

A statistically significant coefficient for the two-way interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded* would indicate that the proportion of like-minded media consumed had a significant effect on changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among all respondents, even after controlling for the main effects of losing and of strength of

preference. If this coefficient is both statistically significant and positive, like-minded media amplified the effects of winning, since the effects of like-minded media on winners are exclusively estimated with this coefficient and since the main effect of winning predicts an increase in perceptions of electoral integrity.

If exposure to like-minded media decreases trust among losers, we would observe a coefficient on the three-way interaction term that is not only statistically significant, but also negative and larger in magnitude than the coefficient for the two-way interaction (assuming the two-way interaction had a significant effect). Calculating the estimated effect of *proportion like-minded* on electoral losers requires adding the terms for the two-way and three-way interaction. If I obtained a statistically significant and negative coefficient for the three-way interaction that was smaller in magnitude than the positive coefficient for the two-way interaction, it would indicate that exposure to like-minded media's total effect for losers was to increase rather than decrease perceptions of electoral integrity.

Results

I began by looking at the effects of partisan media exposure on voters in the 2008 presidential election. To test the effects of like-minded and cross-cutting media in 2008, I regressed changes in perceptions of electoral integrity on *proportion like-minded*, *proportion cross-cutting*, *loser status*, and *survey wave*. Table 4.1 presents the results of this analysis.

As expected, the experience of voting for a losing candidate in 2008 produced a significant and negative effect on perceptions of electoral integrity. The coefficient for the two-way interaction between *wave* and *loser status* is statistically significant and negative, indicating that losers in 2008 experienced a decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity from before the election to after the election.

Table 4.1: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, 2008

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.003
	(0.034)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.36***
	(0.043)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.003
	(0.064)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.13†
	(0.077)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0055***
	(0.00036)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.012***
	(0.00052)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.15***
	(0.031)
Wave	0.74**
	(0.023)
Constant	0.032***
	(0.0044)
N	8,982

†p<.10   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

Did exposure to like-minded media condition the relationship between winning or losing and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity? The answer is a qualified yes.

Contrary to my first hypothesis, exposure to like-minded media does not appear to have conditioned the relationship between winning and perceptions of electoral integrity. This is demonstrated by the coefficient for the two-way interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded*, which is not statistically distinguishable from zero. However, consistent with my first hypothesis, exposure to like-minded media did have a significant effect on electoral losers. The three-way interaction between *wave*, *proportion like-minded*, and *loser status* is both statistically significant and negative. Exposure to like-minded media therefore exacerbated the negative effect of losing.

My second hypothesis predicted that exposure to cross-cutting media would mute the effects of winning and losing. If exposure to cross-cutting media muted winners' positive reactions to winning, we would see a negatively-signed and statistically significant two-way interaction between *wave* and *proportion cross-cutting*. Cross-cutting media did not have this hypothesized effect according to the results of the fixed effects regression shown in Table 4.1. The effects of winning in 2008 do not appear to have been conditioned by either like-minded or cross-cutting media exposure.

Exposure to like-minded media affected losers' perceptions of electoral integrity but not winners'. Does the same apply to exposure to cross-cutting media? Possibly, but the results are less clear-cut in this case. The coefficient for the three-way interaction between *wave*, *loser status*, and *proportion cross-cutting* is positive, consistent with the prediction that cross-cutting media mutes the otherwise negative effects of losing. However, this interaction is only statistically significant at the marginally-accepted $p < .10$ level. As a result, there is some evidence that exposure to cross-cutting media can have a muting effect, but this evidence is not fully convincing by itself.

Is it possible that the apparent conditioning effects of partisan media on losers were actually the result of a confounding variable? One of the major advantages of fixed effects regression is that by focusing on individual-level change and using each individual as their own control, it eliminates the need for extensive control variables. However, it may still be necessary to control for a stable variable in fixed effects regression if this stable variable could plausibly explain the observed effects of the independent variables of interest.

In this case, strength of candidate preference could plausibly produce a spurious relationship between exposure to partisan media, losing, and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity. We should reasonably expect a loser with a stronger preference for their chosen candidate to experience a larger decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity than a loser with a weaker preference (Daniller, 2016). If like-minded media is simply a proxy for stronger candidate preferences or exposure to cross-cutting media is simply a proxy for weaker preferences, I would be incorrect to attribute the observed effects to partisan media.

Somewhat surprisingly, *strength of preference* was not very highly correlated with partisan media exposure among 2008 losers. The positive correlation between strength of preference and proportion like-minded (r=0.11) and the negative correlation between strength of preference and proportion cross-cutting (r=-0.034) were both relatively weak. Nonetheless, the inclusion of *strength of preference* in the regression model helped to confirm that the relationship between partisan media exposure and changes in perceptions of integrity was not spurious.

Although *strength of preference* had a significant effect on changes in electoral

losers' *perceptions of electoral integrity*, with stronger preferences leading to larger

declines in perceived integrity, the inclusion of the control variable did not affect the

substantive findings shown in Table 4.1. The interaction between *wave, proportion like-

minded*, and *loser status* had a significant negative effect on changes in *perceptions of

electoral integrity*, while the interaction between *wave*, *proportion cross-cutting*, and

loser status had a marginally significant positive effect. Thus this potentially confounding

variable cannot account for the observed effects of partisan media on losers.

To illustrate the estimated effects of partisan media exposure on an individual

loser, Figure 4.2 plots the predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity from pre

to post-election for a hypothetical loser given different proportions of like-minded

programs consumed. These estimates were calculated for an individual who had a

strength of candidate preference equal to the mean for all voters who supported a losing

candidate in 2008 ($\bar{x}$=46) and who watched only like-minded or neutral programs.

A 2008 electoral loser who, like 38.5 percent of 2008 losers surveyed, reported

watching zero like-minded programs is expected to have experienced a relatively

moderate decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity. If three out of every ten programs

watched by this same loser were like-minded, equivalent to the mean *proportion like-

minded* for 2008 losers, the magnitude of the decrease would have been larger by one-

third. At the extreme end of the scale, a loser who watched exclusively like-minded

programs (as did 8.5 percent of those surveyed) is expected to have reported a decrease in

perceptions of electoral integrity twice as large as the decrease experienced by losers who

avoided like-minded content entirely. Importantly, these results are valid even while

controlling for strength of candidate preference, which was held constant at the

population mean in this analysis.

Figure 4.2: Predicted Effects of Exposure to Like-Minded Media on Losers' Pre to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2008
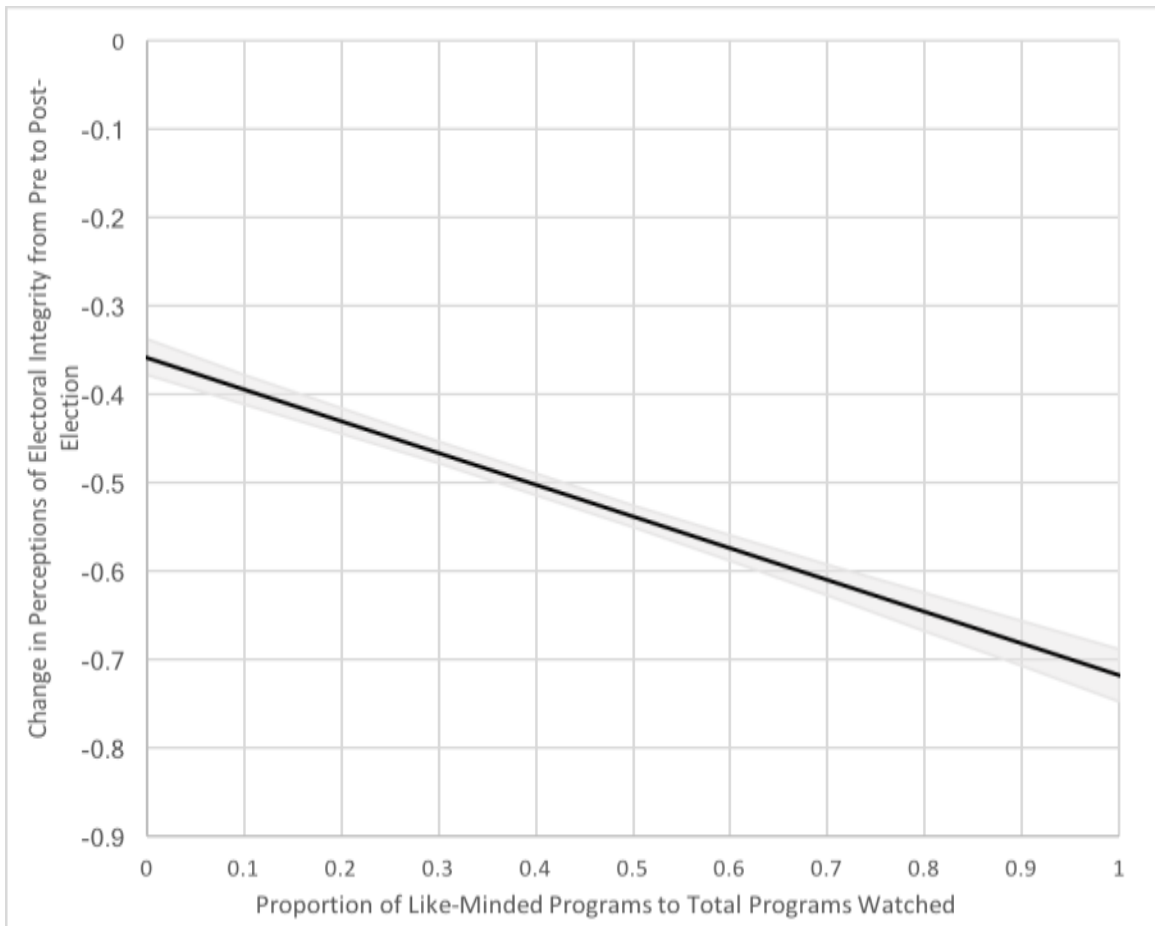
Note: This figure represents predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity based on the fixed effects regression reported in Table 4.1. Proportion cross-cutting is held constant at zero while strength of preference is held equal to the population mean, x̄=46. Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 4.3: Predicted Effects of Exposure to Cross-Cutting Media on Losers' Pre to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2008
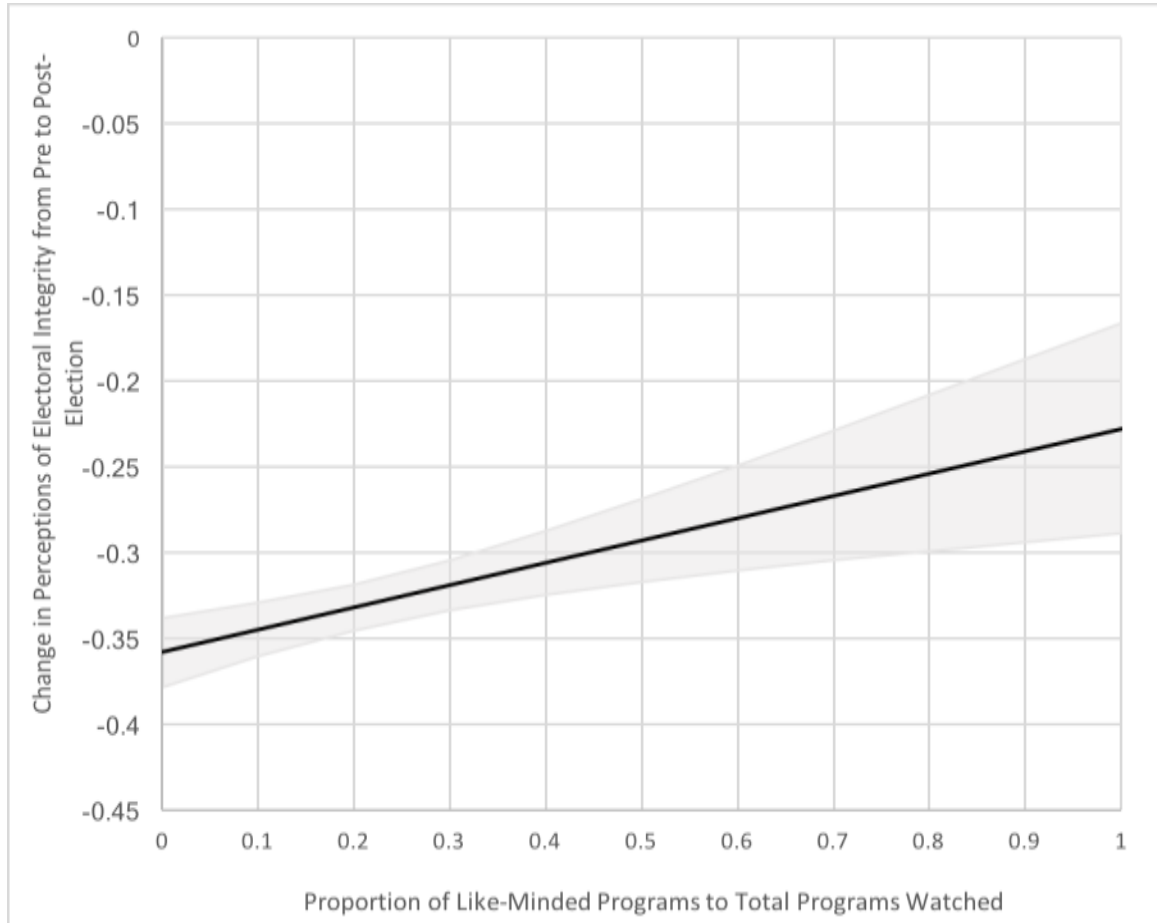
Note: This figure represents predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity based on the fixed effects regression reported in Table 4.1. Proportion like-minded is held constant at zero while strength of preference is held equal to the population mean, x̄=46. Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 4.3 plots predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity for a hypothetical loser given different proportions of cross-cutting programs consumed. *Strength of preference* was once again held equal to the sample mean, and *proportion like-minded* was held constant at zero to estimate the marginal effects of cross-cutting media exposure absent like-minded media. Exposure to increasing amounts of cross-

cutting media moderated the negative effects of losing, although this effect was not as dramatic as the effect of like-minded media exposure. A loser who consumed exclusively cross-cutting media in 2008 is predicted to have experienced a decrease in perceptions of integrity of approximately 64 percent the size of the decrease experienced by an otherwise similar loser who did not consume any partisan media whatsoever. Of course, it was relatively rare for individuals to consume this much cross-cutting media. The mean value for proportion cross-cutting was just 0.17, and only 2 percent of losers watched exclusively cross-cutting programs.

Like-minded media amplified the effects of losing and cross-cutting media may have muted losers' reactions to losses in 2008. Did these results also hold for the 2012 presidential election? To find out, I regressed changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity* on *proportion like-minded*, *proportion cross-cutting*, *loser status*, and *survey wave* for 2012 voters. Table 4.2 presents the results.

As in 2008, the experience of losing in 2012 resulted in a significant negative effect on perceptions of electoral integrity. Additionally, exposure to like-minded media once again had a significant conditioning effect, as represented by the significant three-way interaction between *proportion like-minded*, *loser status*, and *wave*. However, unlike in 2008, cross-cutting media do not appear to have conditioned either winners' or losers' changes in perceptions of integrity.

Table 4.2: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, 2012

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.076
	(0.072)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.28**
	(0.10)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.19
	(0.44)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.044
	(0.46)
Wave * Strength of Preference	
	0.0033***
	(0.00081)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-
	0.0081***
	(0.0012)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.079
	(0.074)
Wave	0.066
	(0.053)
Constant	0.031**
	(0.010)
N	1,593

**p<.01   ***p<.01

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

What do these results mean for an individual electoral loser in 2012? Figure 4.4 illustrates the estimated effects of different levels of like-minded media exposure for a hypothetical individual loser. I estimated these effects for an individual whose *strength of preference* was equal to the population mean ($\bar{x}=57$) and whose proportion of cross-cutting media consumed was held constant at zero.

Figure 4.4: Predicted Effects of Exposure to Like-Minded Media on Losers' Pre to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2012
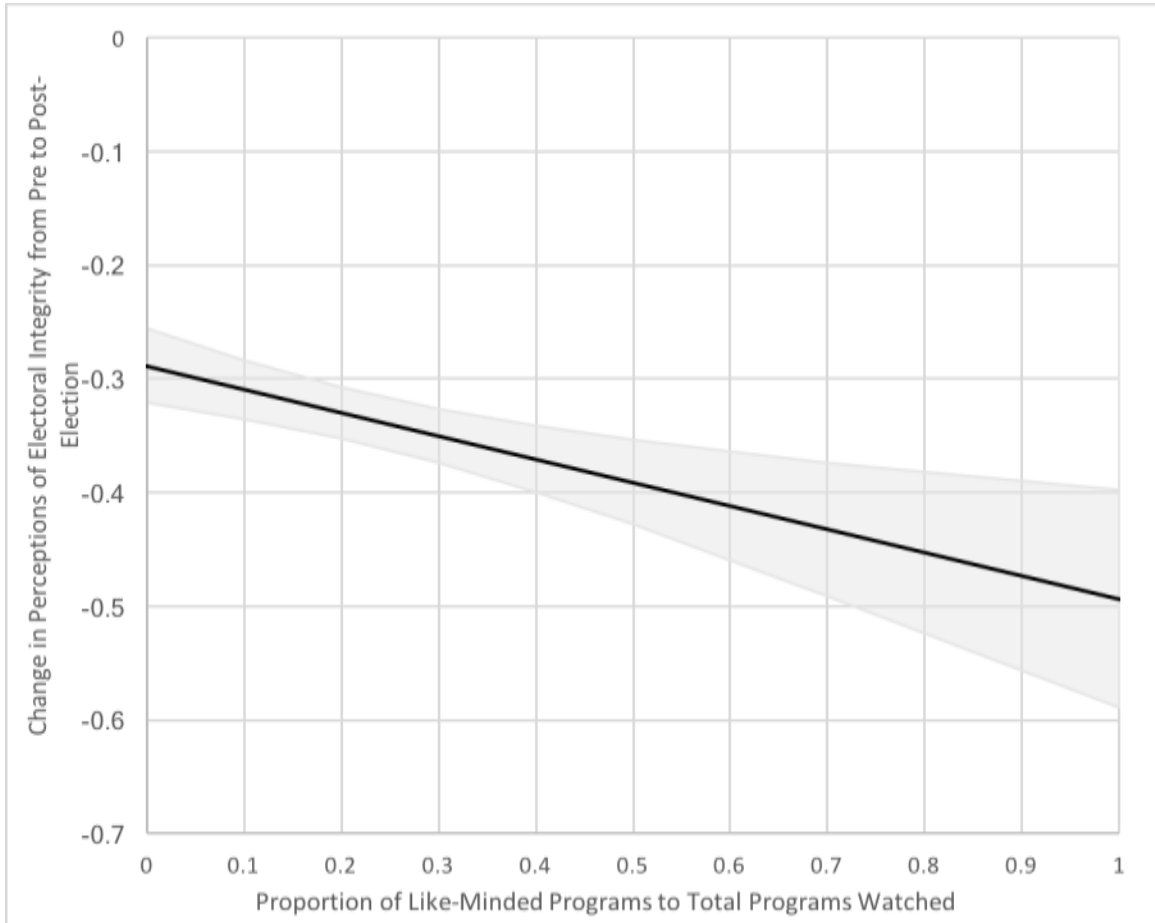
Note: This figure represents predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity based on the fixed effects regression reported in Table 4.2. Proportion cross-cutting is held constant at zero while strength of preference is held equal to the population mean, $\bar{x}$=57. Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals.

The amplifying effect of like-minded media was not as pronounced in 2012 as it was four years earlier, yet it was still apparent. An electoral loser who watched the mean proportion of like-minded programs (20 percent among 2012 losers) is predicted to have experienced a decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity approximately 115 percent the size of the decrease experienced by a loser who watched zero like-minded programs.

Watching exclusively like-minded programs would have led to a decrease 70 percent larger than watching zero like-minded programs. The size of the amplifying effect of like-minded media may have varied somewhat from one election to the next, but the amplifying effect was clearly present in both presidential elections.

Summary

Partisan media conditioned the relationship between losing and perceptions of electoral integrity in both presidential elections. As predicted, exposure to higher proportions of like-minded media amplified the effects of losing in both election cycles. This finding demonstrates that exposure to partisan media exacerbates the negative opinions typically expressed by losers following an election. Exposure to cross-cutting media could potentially balance this negative effect, as consuming higher proportions of cross-cutting media had a marginal muting effect on losing in 2008. However, the failure to observe a similar muting effect in 2012 implies that we should not put too much stock in the marginal evidence from 2008. On balance, partisan media likely do more to undermine than encourage losers' consent.

While partisan media conditioned the relationship between losing and changes in perceptions of integrity, neither like-minded media nor cross-cutting media conditioned the effects of winning in either presidential election year. I therefore found only partial support for my hypotheses: exposure to partisan media conditions the effects of losing, but not of winning. The estimated effects of partisan media exposure among losers

suggest that the resurgence of partisan news outlets in the United States has important implications for aggregate perceptions of electoral integrity.

Exposure to like-minded media had significant effects upon losers in both presidential elections examined here. In the following chapter I use an additional test of my theory to address two remaining questions. First, does exposure to like-minded media similarly amplify losers' decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity in a non-presidential election? Second, given that Republicans were the losers in both 2008 and 2012, might the phenomenon I identified be a function of Republican-leaning media in particular rather than partisan media in general? To answer these questions, I examined changing perceptions of electoral integrity in response to the 2014 midterm election. The 2014 congressional elections allowed me to test my key hypotheses using data from an election cycle in which no presidential candidates were on the ballot and in which Democrats emerged the losers.

5. WINNERS AND LOSERS IN A LOW SALIENCE ELECTION: PARTISAN MEDIA'S EFFECTS ON PERCEIVED ELECTORAL INTEGRITY IN THE 2014 MIDTERM ELECTION

I previously tested whether exposure to partisan media conditions the effects of winning and losing in presidential elections. Presidential elections are by far the biggest contests in American politics. As late night comics are fond of noting, news media begin reporting on an upcoming presidential election almost as soon as the previous election concludes. If winning and losing produce changes in perceptions of electoral integrity, they are most likely to do so in the context of a presidential election when Americans are generally most invested in the electoral results.

By contrast, midterm elections are quite low in salience for the majority of citizens. Whereas 62 percent of eligible Americans voted in the 2008 presidential election and 58 percent voted for president four years later, only 36 percent of eligible voters— just one out of every three—voted in the 2014 midterm elections (Alter, 2014). Because interest surrounding midterm elections is so low, we might not expect media to condition the experiences of winning and losing in these elections. A great deal of media influence would be necessary to observe a significant effect in this context. Testing whether media condition the effects of winning and losing in a midterm election therefore represents a particularly stringent test of my core prediction.

Past research on winners and losers in congressional elections is quite limited, and the research that exists provides little evidence that winning and losing at the congressional level differentially affect measures of diffuse system support such as trust

in the electoral process. Although there is evidence that winning in a recent regional election increased Germans' satisfaction with democracy (Singh, Karakoç, & Blais, 2012), this effect has not been replicated in studies of American congressional elections to date. Cross-sectional data from the American National Election Studies show that voting for the winning candidate in an individual's own congressional district is, as should be expected, a strong predictor of approval of the representative (Brunell, 2008). More interestingly, voting for the winning candidate in one's own district also predicts trust in Congress as a whole. However, Brunell (2008) did not test whether voting for a winning congressional candidate predicts the types of broad support for democratic institutions and procedures most commonly examined in studies of winning and losing.

In the 1972 and 1996 American elections, when presidential and congressional candidates were both on the ballot, winning versus losing at the congressional level had no discernable effect on changes in political trust, perhaps because the experience of winning or losing at the congressional level was overwhelmed by the more salient experience of winning or losing at the presidential level (Anderson & LoTempio, 2002). In the more recent 2006 and 2010 presidential elections, cross-sectional data similarly provided no evidence of a significant effect from winning or losing (Sances & Stewart, 2015). I improved on these past studies, however, by using panel survey data in which the same respondents were interviewed before and after a midterm election. These data allowed me to track changing perceptions of electoral integrity among the same individuals in a year when no highly salient presidential contest would have distracted citizens from the competition for control of Congress.

What does it mean for a voter to win or lose in a congressional election? In the United States, voters vote for individual candidates for the House and Senate as opposed to voting for a party. Winning versus losing could therefore depend upon voting for a winning candidate to represent one's district in the House or one's state in the Senate. Of course, only a relatively small proportion of House races are truly competitive in any given election (e.g. Abramowitz, Alexander, & Gunning, 2006), meaning that by this definition winning or losing at the House level is all but a foregone conclusion for most American voters. While Senate races are more likely to be competitive than House races, a combination of incumbency advantage and the strong partisan leanings of many states' electorates render many Senate races uncompetitive in any given election cycle, as well (Jacobson & Carson, 2016).

The lack of competition in many individual races may mean that voters are unlikely to experience substantial effects from winning or losing. On the other hand, winning and losing may depend upon national results rather than the results of an individual race. Even though voters vote for candidates rather than parties, the current era of American politics features parties sharply divided by ideology at the elite level. Citizens tend to have much stronger affective attachments to one party or the other than in the middle and late twentieth century (Levendusky, 2009; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). Voting in recent congressional elections has been especially dependent upon voters' evaluations of the incumbent president, to an even greater extent than was already true of American politics (Jacobson, 2015). Recent elections have also seen a marked increase in party-line voting, contributing to the sense that congressional elections have become nationalized with voters choosing between the

national political parties rather than the two candidates whose names are on the ballot (Hopkins, 2014; Jacobson, 2015; Abramowitz & Webster, 2016) Winning versus losing in congressional election may therefore be a function of which party wins control of Congress.

Republicans gained seats in both houses of Congress in 2014, retaking control of the Senate and expanding their majority in the House. Whereas some congressional election cycles produce divided outcomes, at the national level Republicans were clearly the winners in 2014. I identified voters as winners or losers in the 2014 midterm elections using partisan identification rather than preference for a local candidate. The high degree of party-line voting in recent congressional elections suggests that most Americans are voting for parties, not candidates, and that their feelings of winning or losing should depend primarily on their preferences for one party versus the other. The Republican Party's straightforward victory at the national level in 2014 means that this definition avoids the need to defining some voters as winners in the House and losers in the Senate or vice versa, as well as the need to treat voters who did not have the opportunity to vote for a Senate candidate in 2014 differently from those who did. Focusing on winners and losers at the national level also makes sense for my predictions regarding partisan media due to the tendency of partisan media in the United States, such as the 24-hour cable news networks, to cover elections at the national rather than the local level.

Hypotheses

No studies to date have uncovered evidence that winning or losing in U.S. midterm elections affects perceptions of legitimacy. In presidential election years, winning and losing at the congressional level do not appear to influence political trust. This could be attributable to the fact that congressional elections simply are not important enough to most Americans to significantly impact their underlying beliefs about democratic processes and institutions. Alternatively, it is possible that winning and losing at the congressional level produce changes in perceptions of legitimacy, but that changes in perceptions are primarily driven by the results of the most salient race. In this case, winning and losing at the congressional level may produce measurable effects in a midterm year but not in a year when the White House is also up for grabs.

The psychological processes that cause citizens to gain trust in the process following a victory and to lose trust in the process following a defeat should apply at the congressional level just as they do at the presidential level. While a presidential election may dominate voters' attention in presidential election years, in midterm years the fight for control of Congress should drive changes in perceptions of legitimacy. Many citizens may not be tuned in to the election campaign in a midterm year, but those who go to the polls and cast a ballot should be subject to feeling like winners and losers and their perceptions of the process should be affected accordingly. I therefore hypothesized that winning in a midterm election increases perceptions of electoral integrity while losing decreases perceptions of integrity.

H5.1: Winning in a midterm election increases perceptions of electoral integrity.

H5.2 Losing in a midterm election decreases perceptions of electoral integrity.

As in my analysis of the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, I expected exposure to like-minded media to amplify the effects of winning and losing relative to exposure to neutral media or cross-cutting media. I also expected exposure to cross-cutting media to mute the effects of winning and losing relative to exposure to neutral or like-minded media. Even if there was no main effect of winning and losing due to the low salience of the midterm election, my theory implies that individuals exposed to high volumes of partisan media should experience effects from winning or losing. A loser who consumes a great deal of like-minded media will be exposed to numerous messages that inflate pre-election expectations as well as partisan explanations for a midterm outcome despite the otherwise subdued nature of midterm elections. This loser should therefore experience a larger decrease in perceptions of legitimacy relative to a loser who consumed a higher proportion of neutral or cross-cutting media. The resulting effect would be observed as a significant interaction between like-minded media exposure, status as a loser, and survey wave.

H5.3: Exposure to like-minded partisan media amplifies the positive effects of winning and the negative effects of losing in a midterm election.

H5.4: Exposure to cross-cutting partisan media mutes the positive effects of winning and the negative effects of losing in a midterm election.

Data and Methods

I classified individuals as winners and losers based on self-reported partisan preferences. Because Republicans won control of both houses of Congress in 2014, I

classified self-identified Republicans and Republican-leaners as winners and self-identified Democrats and Democratic-leaners as losers. Respondents who did not report voting in the 2014 election (n=401) as well as the small number of respondents who did not indicate a preference for either major party in the 2014 pre-election survey (n=68) were omitted from this analysis. Since I was interested in winners and losers in terms of control of Congress, partisan preference served as the best available measure of which party an individual respondent preferred to hold the majority in the legislature.

An obvious drawback of this approach is that *loser status* is confounded with partisanship. Identifying a respondent as a winner or loser based on self-reported partisanship means that any effects I observed could, in theory, be effects related to being a Democrat or a Republican rather than effects of winning or losing. However, for this to be the case, some event other than the election would have had to occur between October 2014 (when interviews for the pre-election survey were conducted) and January 2015 (when post-election interviewing concluded) that produced differential changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among Democrats versus Republicans. No events occurring in late 2014 aside from the election itself seem particularly likely to have produced such an effect.

A secondary problem with the use of partisan identification to code winners and losers stems from the fact that some self-identified Republicans in the sample may have voted for Democratic candidates in 2014 and some Democrats may have voted for Republicans. If so, I would have incorrectly coded some winners as losers and vice versa. If this were the case, the most likely implication is that I underestimated the effects of winning and losing. If, for example, a survey respondent who decreased in perceptions of

electoral integrity in response to the outcome were a self-identified Republican who for any number of reasons typically votes with the Democrats and did so in 2014, I would have incorrectly coded this individual as a winner rather than a loser. This respondent's decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity would have therefore lowered the estimate of the gain in perceptions of electoral integrity experienced by all winners, making it more likely that I would have failed to detect a significant effect of winning on perceptions of electoral integrity.

As in my analysis of the 2008 and 2012 elections, I tested the effects of partisan media exposure on perceptions of electoral integrity using fixed effects regression models that incorporated three key independent variables: *loser status*, *proportion like-minded*, and *proportion cross-cutting*, as well as a dummy variable representing *survey wave* (pre-election vs. post-election) and the control variable *strength of preference*. *Loser status* indicates whether a survey respondent preferred the winning (0, the Republicans) or losing (1, the Democrats) party. *Proportion like-minded* is a proportion calculated as the number of like-minded programs a given participant reported watching divided by the total number of programs that participant reported watching. Similarly, *proportion cross-cutting* is the proportion of cross-cutting programs watched to total programs watched for a given respondent. Unlike in the presidential election panels, exposure to television programs was only measured in the pre-election wave of the 2014 survey. I therefore used pre-election exposure alone to calculate *proportion like-minded* and *proportion cross-cutting* rather than taking an average of pre and post-election exposure to partisan media.

In my analysis of the presidential elections, I calculated the absolute value of the difference between an individual respondent's feeling thermometer ratings of the two presidential candidates as a measure of *strength of preference*. No directly equivalent measure existed in the 2014 panel study. Instead, I used a standard seven-point party identification scale to construct a measure of the strength of a respondent's preference for one party over the other. I collapsed the scale such that 0 indicates an independent, 1 indicates a respondent who leans towards either the Democratic or Republican Party, 2 indicates a self-reported Democrat or Republican who characterizes their party affiliation as not very strong, and 3 indicates a self-reported strong Democrat or strong Republican.

Results

My first two hypotheses predicted that supporters of the winning party increase in *perceptions of electoral integrity* in response to the outcome of the midterm election whereas supporters of the losing party decrease in *perceptions of electoral integrity*. Was this the case in 2014? The panel data provided strong support for these predictions.

Figure 5.1 illustrates changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity* from pre to post-election among winners and losers who completed both waves of the 2014 study. Because Republicans won control of the Senate and maintained control of the House while gaining seats in both chambers, Republicans were coded as winners and Democrats as losers in this analysis. Figure 5.1 provides initial evidence that the predicted effects of winning and losing occurred among 2014 panelists. Republican voters in 2014 increased in *perceptions of electoral integrity* while Democratic voters decreased. The sizes of the

aggregate changes were not as large as those that occurred in response to the 2008 and

2012 presidential elections, but the changes were nonetheless in the predicted directions.

On average, losers decreased by 0.11 and winners increased by 0.15 on the standardized

scale measuring perceptions of electoral integrity in response to the 2014 midterm results.

Losers decreased by 0.41 and 0.31 on average in 2008 and 2012, respectively, while the

average increases for winners in the two presidential years were 0.35 and 0.29 (see Figure

4.1).

Figure 5.1: Effects of the 2014 Midterm Election Outcome on Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
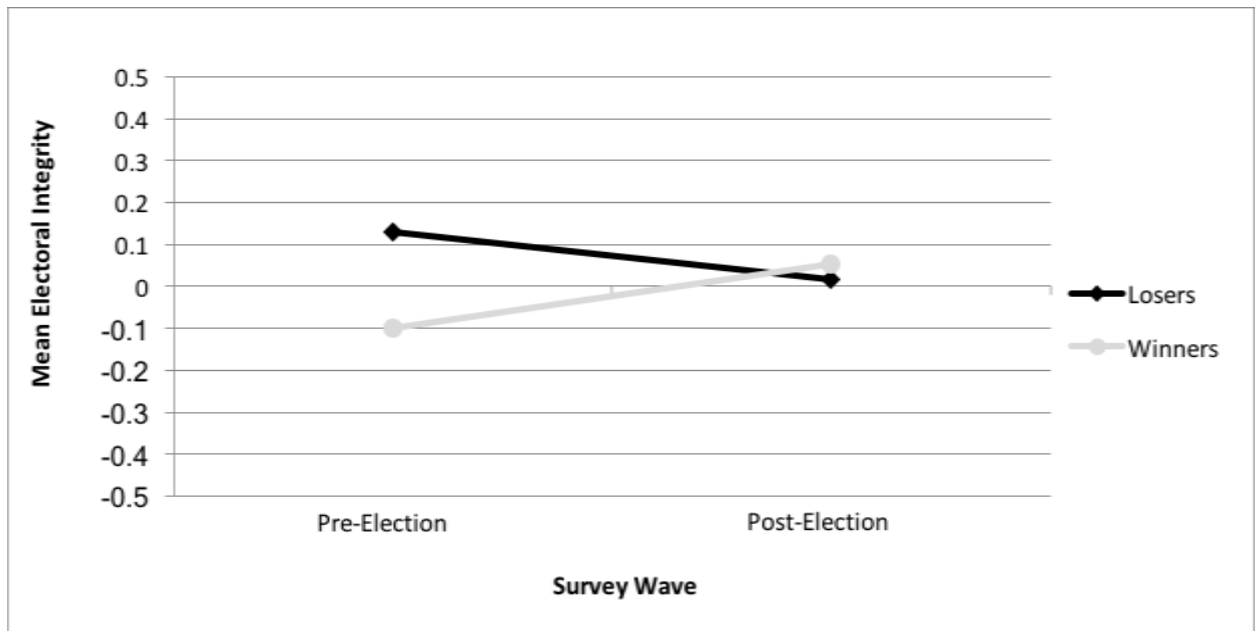
Note: 541 voters who identified as Democrats or Democratic-leaners in the 2014 pre-election survey are classified as Losers and 519 voters who identified as Republicans or Republican-leaners are classified as Winners in this figure.
Electoral integrity is measured using an index calculated as the mean of four standardized survey items.
The results of fixed effects regressions of *loser status* on *perceptions of electoral integrity* showed that the effects of both winning and losing were each statistically significant (see Table 5.1).

The results from the figure are suggestive, but were winners' gains and losers' declines statistically significant when considered at the individual level? To answer this question, I regressed *perceptions of electoral integrity* on *survey wave* and *loser status* using fixed effects regression. Because *wave* is dummy-coded with the pre-election wave taking a value of zero, and because *loser status* is dummy-coded with winners taking a value of zero, the predicted change in perceptions among winners from pre-election to post-election is equivalent to the coefficient associated with the *wave* variable. Therefore, if winners significantly increased in *perceptions of electoral integrity*, we should observe a statistically significant and positive coefficient for the effect of *wave*. The change from pre to post-election among losers is represented by a linear combination of the coefficient associated with *wave* and the coefficient for the interaction between *wave* and *loser status*. If losers significantly decreased in perceptions, we should observe a statistically significant and negative coefficient for the interaction term. In addition, the coefficient for this interaction term should be greater in magnitude than the coefficient associated with the simple *wave* variable. Table 5.1 presents the results of the fixed effects regression.

The results of this analysis represent strong evidence in favor of my first two hypotheses. Winners significantly gained while losers significantly decreased in response to the election outcome. Contrary to past studies that have been unable to detect winner-loser effects in congressional elections using either cross-sectional data or panel data from a presidential election year, I found clear evidence of the predicted winner-loser effects using panel data from the 2014 midterm election. The experiences of winning and

losing even in a relatively low salience election have the potential to alter voters'

confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Table 5.1: Effects of Winning and Losing on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, 2014

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.27***
	(0.034)
Wave	0.15***
	(0.024)
Constant	0.018
	(0.012)
N	1,060

***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

Winning and losing in a midterm election affect perceptions of electoral integrity. Does exposure to partisan media condition this relationship? I tested my next set of hypotheses, which predicted that like-minded media exposure would amplify the positive effects of winning and the negative effects of losing and that cross-cutting media exposure would mute these effects, using a fixed effects regression model that incorporated the *proportion like-minded* and *proportion cross-cutting* independent variables as well as the control variable for *strength of preference*. As in the presidential election models, the coefficient associated with the main effect of *survey wave* indicates the main effect of time on *perceptions of electoral integrity* while an interaction between *wave* and *loser status* indicates the differential effect of losing on changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity*. The crucial tests of the conditioning effects of partisan media on

winners appear in the pair of two-way interactions between each type of partisan media and *wave*. The tests of the conditioning effects of partisan media on losers appear in the pair of three-way interactions of each type of partisan media with *loser status*, and *wave.*

Table 5.2 presents the results of the regression model testing my predictions related to the conditioning effects of partisan media in the midterm election. I first hypothesized that partisan media amplifies the effects of winning and losing. There is no evidence that partisan media amplified the effects of winning in 2014. The two-way interaction between time and *proportion like-minded* is not statistically significant. However, there is clear evidence of a conditioning effect of like-minded media exposure on the effects of losing. The coefficient associated with the three-way interaction is both statistically significant and negative, indicating that Democrats who watched like-minded television programs experienced significantly larger decreases in *perceptions of electoral integrity* than Democrats who watched neutral or cross-cutting programs. This effect persists even though I controlled for the strength of individual Democratic voters' partisan identification.

Like-minded media exposure had a conditioning effect on losers but not winners, just as in the presidential election years. Did exposure to cross-cutting media mute the effects of winning or losing in 2014? Table 5.2 indicates that there was no significant effect of cross-cutting media exposure among either winners or losers. The coefficients for both the two-way and three-way interaction terms are not statistically significant. Although there was marginal evidence of a possible muting effect of cross-cutting media exposure on electoral losers in 2008, I observed no further evidence of this hypothesized effect in either the 2012 presidential election or the 2014 midterm election.

Table 5.2: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, 2014

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.12
	(0.074)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.33**
	(0.12)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.037
	(0.14)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.25
	(0.49)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.023
	(0.089)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.083*
	(0.040)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.022
	(0.091)
Wave	0.080
	(0.065)
Constant	0.018
	(0.012)
N	1,060

*p<.05   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

What, precisely, was the impact of like-minded media exposure on midterm election losers? To help answer this question, Figure 5.2 illustrates the predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity for a hypothetical electoral loser at different values of *proportion like-minded*. The estimates are for a hypothetical individual who watched no cross-cutting media and whose strength of preference was at the mean for all Democratic voters in 2014 ($\bar{x}=2.0$).

Figure 5.2: Predicted Effects of Exposure to Like-Minded Media on Losers' Pre to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2014
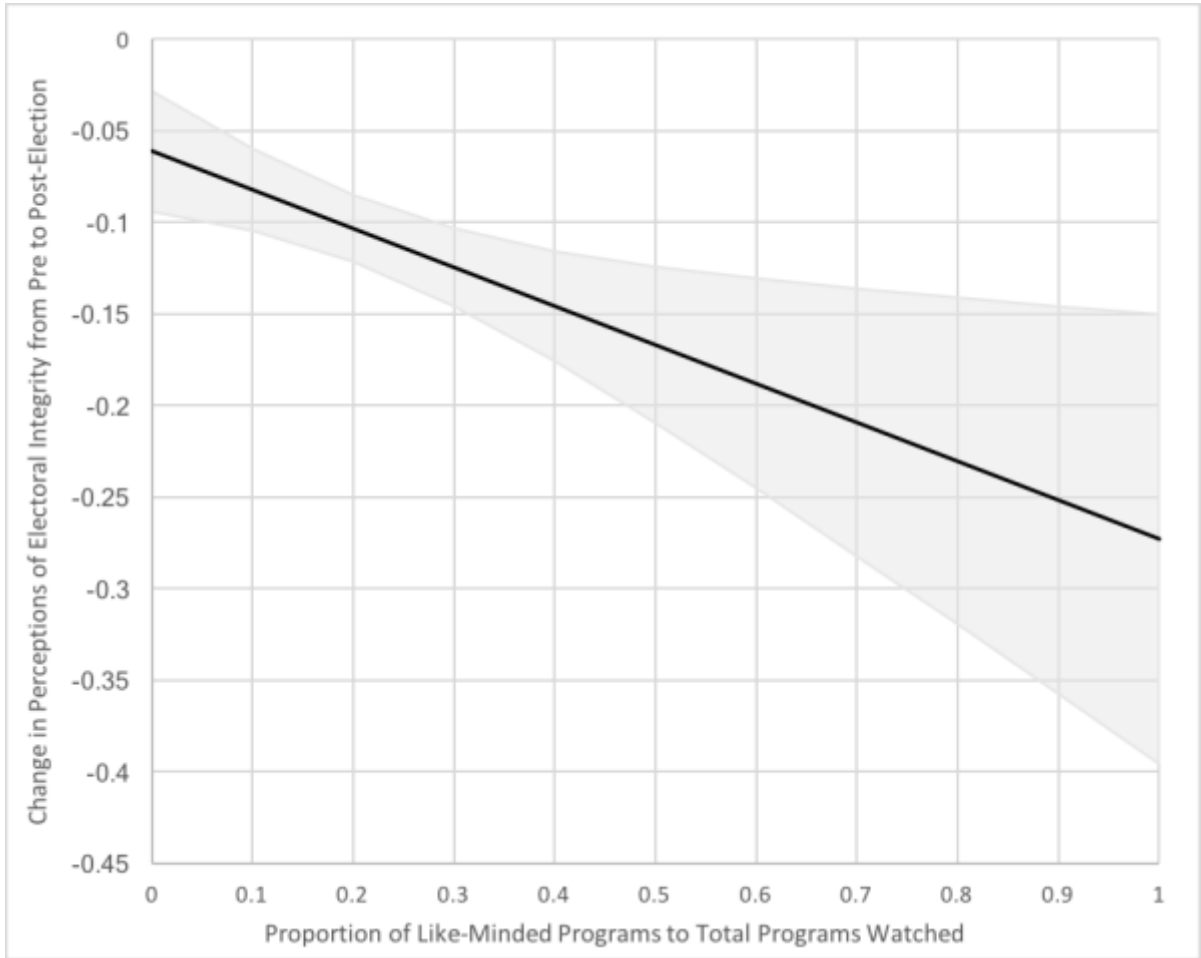
Note: This figure represents predicted changes in perceptions of electoral integrity based on the fixed effects regression reported in Table 5.2. Proportion cross-cutting is held constant at zero while strength of preference is held equal to the population mean, $\bar{x}=2.0$. Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals.

The overall effect of losing was smaller in the 2014 midterms than in either of the presidential elections, but the conditioning effect of like-minded media on the relationship between losing and changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity* was proportionally larger. 22 percent of programs watched by the average electoral loser in

2014 were like-minded. The predicted decrease in *perceptions of electoral integrity* for a loser who consumed this much like-minded media was approximately two-thirds larger than the predicted decrease for an electoral loser who watched only neutral or cross-cutting programs. By comparison, the predicted decrease in perceptions for electoral losers who watched the mean proportion of like-minded programs in 2008 was only one-third larger than the predicted decrease for electoral losers who watched no like-minded programs. In 2012, the decrease among losers at the mean value was only about 15 percent larger than the decrease among those who watched no like-minded programs.

The size of the conditioning effect in 2014 was even larger at the extreme end of the scale. A Democratic voter who watched exclusively like-minded programs in 2014 would have experienced a decline in perceptions of integrity 4.5 times the size of the decline experienced by a Democratic voter who watched zero like-minded programs. Only 18 out of 541 Democratic voters (3.3 percent) reported watching exclusively like-minded programs in 2014, meaning that the predicted change for losers who watched exclusively like-minded programs is fairly noisy. Nonetheless, the evidence clearly indicates that exposure to like-minded media played a substantively important role in conditioning the relationship between losing and changes in perceptions of integrity in the midterm election.

Summary

The 2014 panel study provided clear evidence that the experience of winning in the midterm election produced a small but significant increase in perceptions of electoral

integrity whereas the experience of losing produced a small but significant decrease. This represents a significant contribution to our understanding of how voters experience elections. Though existing theory predicted that winning and losing at the congressional level should influence perceptions of legitimacy, the scarcity of panel studies of U.S. midterm elections has forced scholars examining this question in the past to rely on either cross-sectional studies or panel studies conducted during presidential election years, when most citizens' attention was presumably focused on the presidential race. The results presented here confirm that winner/loser effects are not limited to presidential elections in the United States.

These results also confirm that the pattern of trusting winners and distrusting losers does not require Republicans to be on the losing side and Democrats to be on the winning side of an election. In theory, the lowered trust experienced by Republicans in 2008 and 2012 could have been attributable to ideological differences, with the Republican preference for a smaller federal government being reflected in a distrust of the national election results. Or, this effect might have been attributable to current policy positions, with Republican leaders' arguments in favor of laws designed to prevent in-person voter fraud producing distrust in election results among their party's voters. The fact that Democrats experienced a decrease in perceptions of electoral integrity when their party lost a national election, and Republicans experienced a simultaneous increase in perceptions, runs contrary to these alternative explanations for the previously observed winner/loser effects.

My use of partisan identification to code respondents as winners or losers in 2014 makes it possible that I could have misattributed the effects I observed in the panel data.

Because Americans vote for district and state-level representatives as opposed to a preferred party in congressional elections, and because I lacked a survey question that specifically asked respondents which party they preferred to control Congress, I was forced to rely on a less than ideal definition of winners and losers. Strictly speaking, my results show only that self-identified Democrats who voted decreased in trust from pre to post-election and that self-identified Republicans increased, not that citizens who voted for the losing party decreased and citizens who voted for the winning party increased. By far the most likely explanation for this finding, however, is that self-identified Democratic voters experienced the 2014 elections as a loss for their party and Republicans experienced it as a victory.

Given that repeated losses by the same party at the presidential level have been shown to produce decreasing levels of legitimacy with each consecutive defeat, the general tendency for the president's party to lose seats in Congress during midterm elections (e.g. Erikson, 1988; Bafumi, Erikson, & Wlezien, 2010) may provide an important boost to perceptions of legitimacy among supporters of the out-party. The positive effect of the Republicans' midterm win in 2014 on the party's supporters was smaller than the negative effect of the Republicans' presidential loss in 2012. The 2014 election results nonetheless helped reassure Republicans that the electoral process gave their candidates a fair chance. Insofar as voters choose divided government by voting against the president's party in midterm years, this choice may have the unintended but beneficial consequence of preventing presidential losers from becoming overly convinced that the process is rigged against them.

The midterm election panel data also clarify the role of partisan media in conditioning the effects of winning and losing. Previously, I found strong evidence that exposure to like-minded media exacerbated the negative effects of losing in both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. The finding that exposure to like-minded media also exacerbated the effects of losing in the 2014 midterm election confirms the existence of a consistent pattern. The pattern persists even when controlling for the effect of strength of candidate or party preference, demonstrating that like-minded media exposure did not merely serve as a proxy for strength of preference in my analysis.

On the other hand, exposure to neither like-minded nor cross-cutting media conditioned the effects of winning in any of these three elections. The marginal evidence suggesting that exposure to cross-cutting media may have conditioned the effect of losing in 2008 should most likely be discounted because no similar conditioning effect was apparent in 2012 or 2014. Why does exposure to like-minded media produce larger decreases in losers' perceptions of electoral integrity if exposure to partisan media has no impact on winners' perceptions? One possibility lies in the fact that most citizens generally expect to be on the winning side in an upcoming election (Granberg & Brent, 1983; Krizan, Miller, & Johar, 2010; Delavande & Manski, 2012). A combination of wishful thinking and the belief that most other people hold opinions similar to one's own, sometimes referred to as either a false consensus or a looking-glass effect (Fields & Schuman, 1976; Mutz, 1998; Nickerson, 1999), may lead losers to be consistently surprised by unfavorable election results.

The negative effects of a loss are amplified by like-minded media insofar as losers are more in need of explanations for an unexpected outcome than winners. Just as

participants in classic "forced compliance" experiments changed their attitudes towards a tedious task in order to justify their decision to complete the task (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959), cognitive dissonance theory predicts that losers must engage in some level of self-justification after discovering a candidate they voted for lost (Anderson et al., 2005; Sances & Stewart, 2015). A voter who expected to lose before casting her ballot would presumably experience little change in perceptions of legitimacy as a result of the anticipated outcome, but an unanticipated outcome would require a reconsideration of relevant attitudes in the post-election period. Attitudes that might change include opinions of the candidates, beliefs about the electorate, and perceptions of the legitimacy of the process. Like-minded partisan media may provide surprised losers with additional evidence that the electoral process itself is to blame for the surprising loss.

Like-minded media exposure conditioned the effect of losing in two elections in which Republicans were on the losing side and one election in which Republicans were the victors. The conditioning effect therefore cannot be a product of some characteristic unique to the way in which Republican-leaning or Democratic-leaning outlets discuss election results. Based solely on my results from the 2008 and 2012 elections, it would have been reasonable to hypothesize that Republican-leaning media was undermining Republican voters' legitimacy due to some feature of conservative media or of the Republican Party's current platform. For example, a Democrat might argue that the Republican Party's recent messaging related to laws requiring voter identification at polling places, amplified by Republican-leaning media, convinced many Republicans who consume like-minded media that elections in this country are unfair.

It may be true that Republican-leaning media in the Obama era were unusually prone to delegitimizing narratives about the electoral process, but if Republican-leaning outlets were alone in undermining legitimacy, I would not have found clear evidence that Democrats who consumed Democratic-leaning media in 2014 became less confident in the integrity of the process. Instead of being a function of Republican-leaning media, the conditioning effect of like-minded media appears is attributable to the way in which partisan television programs on both sides have presented losses to their viewers in recent years.

6. PARTICIPATING BY SPECTATING: PARTISAN MEDIA'S EFFECT ON PERCEIVED ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AMONG NONVOTERS

Nonvoters have typically been omitted from past studies of winners and losers. Following recent work in political theory that emphasizes the value of a citizen's role as a spectator to politics and a monitor of the political process (Green, 2009; Schudson, 1998), I've argued that nonvoters' perceptions of electoral integrity are of as much interest as voters' perceptions. The consent of the governed, after all, does not refer only to voters. All citizens are among the governed, and the consent of the governed requires even non-participants to believe that the process itself is legitimate.

Consuming political media allows citizens, even nonvoters, to monitor their elected officials and democratic institutions. Participants in the electoral process are only active decision makers once every few years. Observation and spectatorship—most frequently through news media—are the primary ways that most citizens engage with democratic governance most of the time (Green, 2009). Beyond the democratic function of monitoring government, I argue that individuals who watch like-minded partisan news do so in part as a means of "rooting for the home team." Their vicarious involvement in politics is conceptually similar to the vicarious involvement of a football or basketball fan who watches their team from the comfort of their own living room.

While some nonvoters lack preferences for one of the political parties over the other or for either candidate in a given election, many other nonvoters hold distinct preferences but fail to go to the polls (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999; King & Hale, 2016). Some express doubts that they are informed enough to cast ballots, unaware that they are

at least as knowledgeable as many voters. Others prefer one candidate or party, but not so strongly that they believe the individual act of voting is worth the time or effort. Still others express sincere intentions to vote prior to an election but fail to properly register in time to cast a ballot. And, of course, some Americans who would like to vote are unable to do so due to the complexities of the registration process, inflexible schedules on Election Day, or laws that make it more difficult for certain groups to vote.

What do nonvoters' preferences look like in comparison to voters' preferences? One way of answering this question is by using feeling thermometer ratings of the candidates in a presidential election, historically one of the strongest predictors of vote choice among voters (Bartles, 1988). I calculated voters' and nonvoters' strengths of preference in both the 2008 and 2012 elections by taking the absolute value of the difference between survey respondents' ratings of the two presidential candidates in each year. The results are shown in Figure 6.1.

Nonvoters had weaker preferences than voters in each election, but large numbers of nonvoters nonetheless expressed preferences for one candidate or the other. In fact, strength of preference among nonvoters in 2012 was statistically indistinguishable from strength of preference among voters in 2008. The fact that many nonvoters hold preferences in elections implies that their perceptions of legitimacy may depend upon outcomes in the same way that voters' perceptions depend upon outcomes. Even though nonvoters cannot properly be labeled winners and losers because they never cast ballots, they can vicariously experience the effects of winning and losing.

Figure 6.1: Voters' and Nonvoters' Strengths of Preference in the 2008 and 2012 Presidential Elections
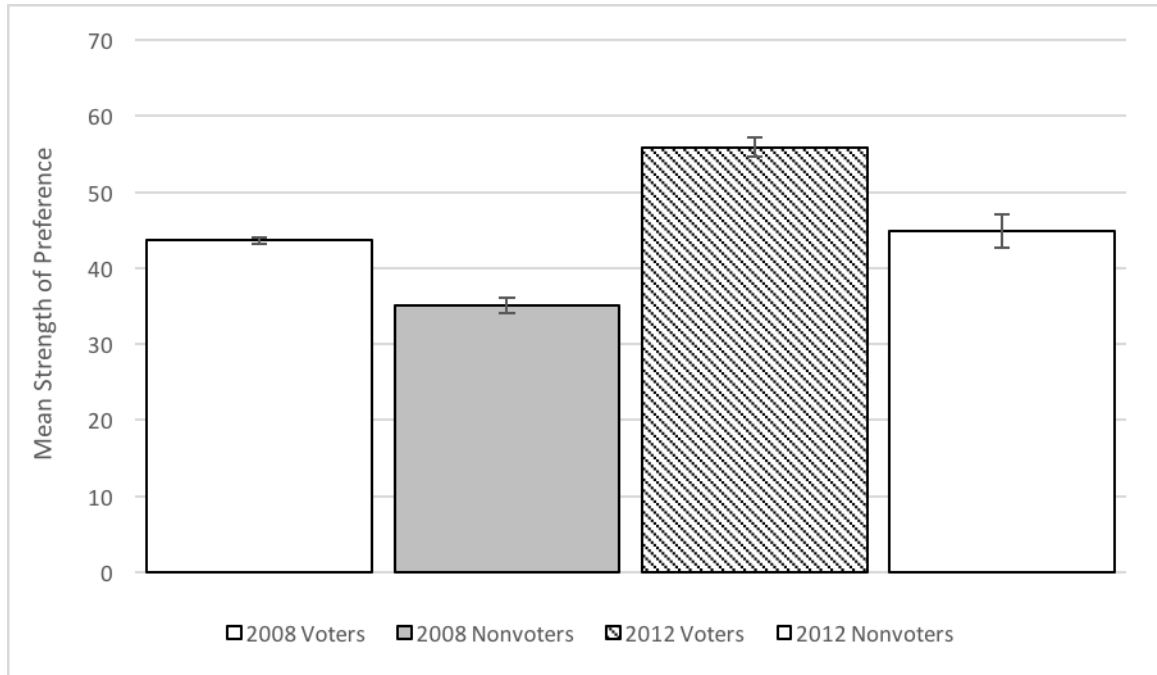
Note: Strength of preference is calculated as the absolute value of the difference between a respondent's ratings of the major party presidential nominees, averaged across the pre and post-election surveys.
15,952 voters and 2,649 nonvoters who participated in the 2008 study are represented in this figure while 1,778 voters and 636 nonvoters who participated in the 2012 study are represented.
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Columns with the same pattern indicate means that are not statistically distinguishable at the p<.05 level.

Is it true that even nonvoters engage in spectatorship of democracy through attention to the news media? If so, do they engage in consumption of partisan media that accords with the rooting interests predicted by their (potentially weak) partisan ties? The effects of different types of media exposure on voter turnout among all citizens has received significant attention from political communication scholars. Prior (2007), for example, demonstrated that the long-term decline in network television news viewership

has produced a decline in turnout among marginally-interested citizens. However, there are essentially no detailed comparisons of media exposure among voters versus exposure among nonvoters using representative national samples in the existing literature. I therefore conducted an analysis of how much political media voters and nonvoters in the 2008 and 2012 studies consumed. The results of this analysis help to inform my key hypotheses related to the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing and the effects of partisan media exposure on nonvoters.

Despite their lower levels of political interest and involvement, nonvoters' consumption of news and public affairs-related television programs in 2008 and 2012 was fairly similar to voters' consumption of these programs. Figure 6.2 illustrates the mean number of news and public affairs programs voters and nonvoters reported watching in each election study. In 2008, voters reported watching two more politically-oriented programs than non-voters on average. However, the average nonvoter still reported regularly watching more than four such programs, a number that is hardly consistent with the caricature of the completely tuned-out nonvoter. In fact, the mean number of news and public affairs programs watched by the average nonvoter in 2008 was not statistically distinguishable from the mean number of news and public affairs programs watched by the average voter in 2012. Nonvoters may be less interested in political information than voters, but they still encounter their fair share of politically-oriented media.

Figure 6.2: Mean Number of News and Public Affairs Programs Watched by Voters and Nonvoters

Note: 13,549 voters and 2,291 nonvoters who participated in the 2008 study are represented in this figure while 1,758 voters and 640 nonvoters who participated in the 2012 study are represented.
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Columns with the same pattern indicate means that are not statistically distinguishable at the p<.05 level.

Nonvoters may encounter news and public affairs on television with some regularity, but do they consume partisan media? If nonvoters have weaker partisan attachments than voters, we might reasonably expect them to exhibit a stronger preference for neutral media. Figure 6.3 provides only partial support for this expectation. In 2008, the proportion of like-minded programs watched to total programs watched by the average nonvoter (23%) was notably lower than the proportion of like-minded programs watched by the average voter (32%). The proportion of like-minded media

watched by voters in 2012, on the other hand, was statistically indistinguishable from the proportion watched by nonvoters in both election years.

Figure 6.3: Mean Proportion of Like-Minded Programs Watched to Total News and Public Affairs Programs Watched by Voters and Nonvoters
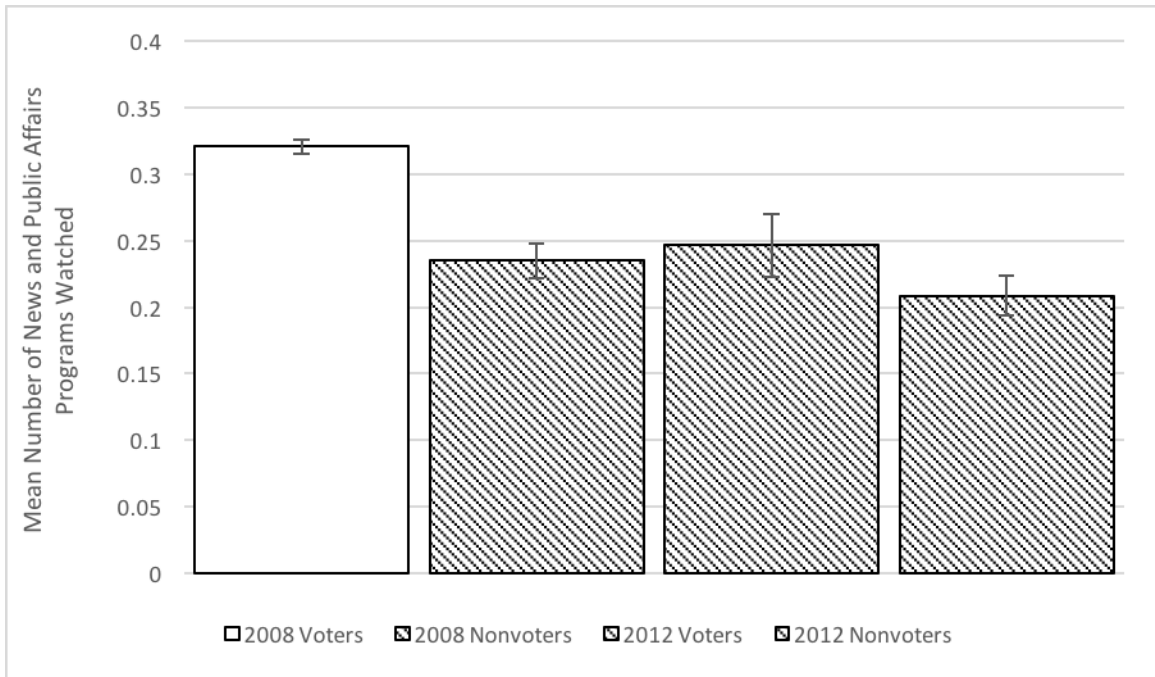
Note: 13,175 voters and 1,967 nonvoters who participated in the 2008 study are represented in this figure while 1,638 voters and 569 nonvoters who participated in the 2012 study are represented.
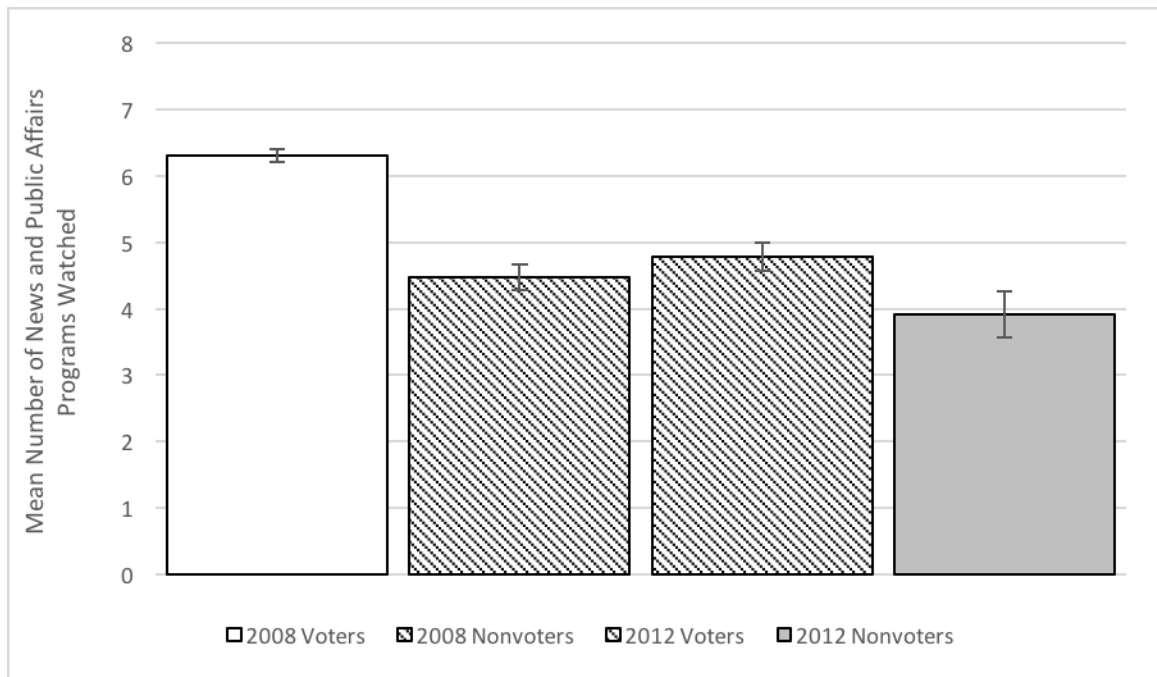Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Columns with the same pattern indicate means that are not statistically distinguishable at the $p<.05$ level.

What about cross-cutting media? Figure 6.4 shows that in each election year, the proportions of cross-cutting programs watched by voters versus nonvoters were statistically indistinguishable. For the most part, then, the proportions of partisan media watched by nonvoters were not much different from the proportions watched by voters. Although their preferences may have been weaker than voters', nonvoters held candidate

preferences and watched partisan media in accordance with those preferences, preferring

like-minded media to cross-cutting media.

Figure 6.4: Mean Proportion of Cross-Cutting Programs Watched to Total News and Public Affairs Programs Watched by Voters and Nonvoters
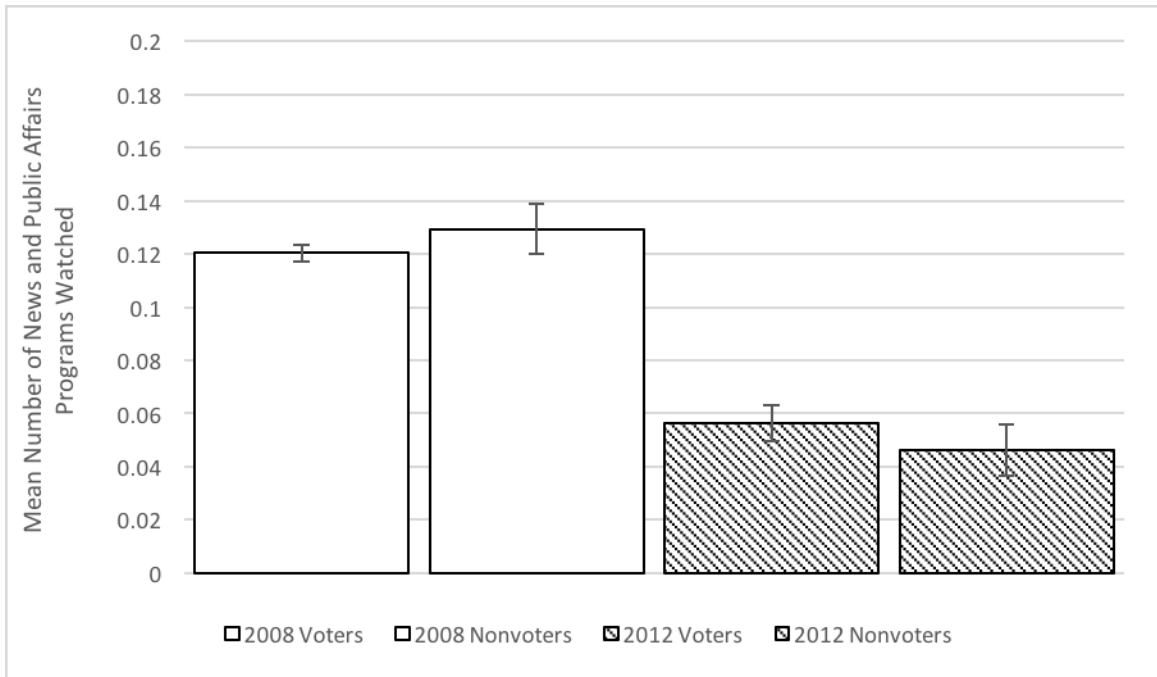
Note: 13,175 voters and 1,967 nonvoters who participated in the 2008 study are represented in this figure while 1,638 voters and 569 nonvoters who participated in the 2012 study are represented.
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Columns with the same pattern indicate means that are not statistically distinguishable at the p<.05 level.

Hypotheses

Past studies of winning and losing have not considered the possibility of vicarious

effects among nonvoters. On one hand, scholars examining the positive effects of

winning and negative effects of losing have tended to argue that the behavior of casting a

ballot for a candidate who proceeds to lose is what produces dissonance that is then

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resolved by a decrease in perceptions of legitimacy (e.g. Anderson et al., 2005). If the act of casting a ballot is the main source of observed winner/loser effects, we should not expect to see effects from vicarious winning or losing among nonvoters. However, nonvoters can commit to a candidate in a meaningful way without casting a vote. A citizen who planned to vote for the eventual loser on Election Day but failed to get to the polls in time still held an acknowledged preference for one candidate over the other. They also may have engaged in activities ranging from taking a side in the election in a conversation with a friend or relative, to liking a candidate on social media, to donating money to the preferred candidate.

A nonvoters' mere preference for one candidate or the other should be enough to give them a feeling of investment in the outcome. Despite experiencing the election vicariously, they should react positively to a victory for the preferred candidate and negatively to a loss much as voters do. This expectation formed the basis of my first two hypotheses regarding the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing on nonvoters.

H5.1: Vicarious winning increases nonvoters' perceptions of electoral integrity.

H5.2: Vicarious losing decreases nonvoters' perceptions of electoral integrity.

I further predicted that exposure to partisan media conditions the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing in the same manner as I expected partisan media to condition the effects of winning and losing among voters. Specifically, I expected like-minded media exposure to amplify the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing and cross-cutting media to mute the effects. Because the experiences of winning and losing are vicarious for nonvoters, nonvoters may rely on media to an even greater extent than voters to make sense of an electoral outcome. If this is the case, we might observe a

conditioning effect of like-minded or cross-cutting media on nonvoters even if there is no evidence of a main effect from vicarious winning and vicarious losing. In other words, vicarious winning and vicarious losing might not produce changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among the majority of nonvoters, but a combination of vicarious winning (or losing) and exposure to high proportions of like-minded (or cross-cutting) partisan media might nonetheless produce a significant change in perceptions.

H6.3: Exposure to like-minded partisan media amplifies the positive effects of vicarious winning and the negative effects of vicarious losing.

H6.4: Exposure to cross-cutting partisan media mutes the positive effects of vicarious winning and the negative effects of vicarious losing.

Data & Methods

I began by categorizing nonvoters as vicarious winners or vicarious losers. I identified 2012 nonvoters, and 2008 nonvoters who participated in both studies, using verified voter data collected by Catalist. For 2008 respondents who did not participate in 2012, I identified nonvoters based on voting self-reports from the 2008 post-election survey. Nonvoters did not report a voting decision after the election and relatively few reported an overt candidate preference in the pre-election survey, with 31% of nonvoters in 2008 declining to report a preference for a major-party candidate, compared to only 12% of voters. I therefore used feeling thermometer ratings of the two major party presidential nominees to determine which candidate a nonvoter preferred and classified nonvoters as vicarious winners or losers accordingly.

I followed the same procedures to test my hypotheses regarding nonvoters as in my analyses of the effects of winning and losing and of the conditioning effects of partisan media upon voters. I examined whether partisan media exposure conditioned the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing on perceptions of electoral integrity using fixed effects regression models. To test whether vicarious winning increased and vicarious losing decreased perceptions of electoral integrity, I regressed perceptions of electoral integrity on *wave* and the interaction between *vicarious loser status* and *wave*. *Wave* was once again a dummy variable coded with 0 for pre-election and 1 for post-election. *Vicarious loser status* was coded 0 to indicate a nonvoter who preferred Barack Obama, the winner of both elections, and 1 to indicate a nonvoter who preferred his Republican rival in the relevant year. If vicarious winning produced increases in *perceptions of electoral integrity*, we should observe a statistically significant and positive effect from *wave*. If vicarious losing produced decreases in perceptions, we should observe a statistically significant and negative effect from the interaction between *wave* and *vicarious loser status.* Because total effects on losers are calculated as a linear combination of the *wave* term and the interaction term, the coefficient for *wave * vicarious loser status* should also be larger in magnitude than the coefficient for *wave* alone.

To test the conditioning effects of partisan media exposure, I looked at the effects of the independent variables *vicarious loser status*, *proportion like-minded*, and *proportion cross-cutting*, as well as the dummy variable representing *survey wave* (pre-election vs. post-election) and the control variable *strength of preference*. If *proportion like-minded* amplified the positive effects of vicarious winning, we should observe

significant positive interactions between *proportion like-minded* and *wave* in each election year. If proportion like-minded amplified the negative effects of vicarious losing, we should observe significant negative three-way interactions between *wave*, *proportion like-minded*, and *loser status*. If *proportion cross-cutting* muted the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing, the two-way interaction between *wave* and *proportion cross-cutting* would be significant and negative whereas the three-way interaction including *loser status* would be positive.

The purpose of including the *strength of preference* variable in my analyses was once again to strengthen the validity of the causal inferences I wished to draw. In theory, exposure to partisan media could be confounded with stable levels of strength of partisanship or strength of candidate preference. In other words, a nonvoter with a strong preference for Barack Obama may have watched more Democratic-leaning television programs as a result of that strong preference. He may have subsequently experienced a large increase in *perceptions of electoral integrity* when Barack Obama won. Was this effect driven by messages contained in Democratic-leaning media, or by the fact that this hypothetical nonvoter was particularly pleased with the electoral process when the candidate he strongly preferred won? Controlling for an interaction between *wave* and *strength of preference* (and a three-way interaction between *wave*, *strength of preference*, and *vicarious loser status*) ensured that this potentially-confounding relationship did not lead me to misattribute any observed effects to differing levels of partisan media exposure when they were actually the product of differing strengths of preference.

Results

My first two hypotheses predicted that vicarious winners increase in *perceptions of electoral integrity* and vicarious losers decrease. Did nonvoters' *perceptions of electoral integrity* change from pre to post-election in 2008 and 2012 based on whether they were vicarious winners or vicarious losers? Figure 6.5 shows the aggregate increases and aggregate decreases in perceptions among vicarious winners and vicarious losers, respectively.

Vicarious winning produced increases in perceptions of electoral integrity and vicarious losing produced decreases in perceptions of integrity in both election years. Fixed effects regressions of *perceptions of electoral integrity* on *wave* and *vicarious loser status* confirm that the increases and decreases were statistically significant in both 2008 and 2012, as shown in Table 6.1. Similar to my analysis of winners and losers in 2014, a positive and statistically significant coefficient on the term for *wave* indicates that vicarious winners gained in perceptions of integrity from pre to post-election. A statistically significant and negative coefficient on the term for *wave* interacted with *vicarious loser status* that is larger in absolute value than the positive coefficient associated with *wave* alone indicates that vicarious losers decreased from pre to post-election.

Figure 6.5: Effects of Presidential Election Outcomes on Nonvoters' Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
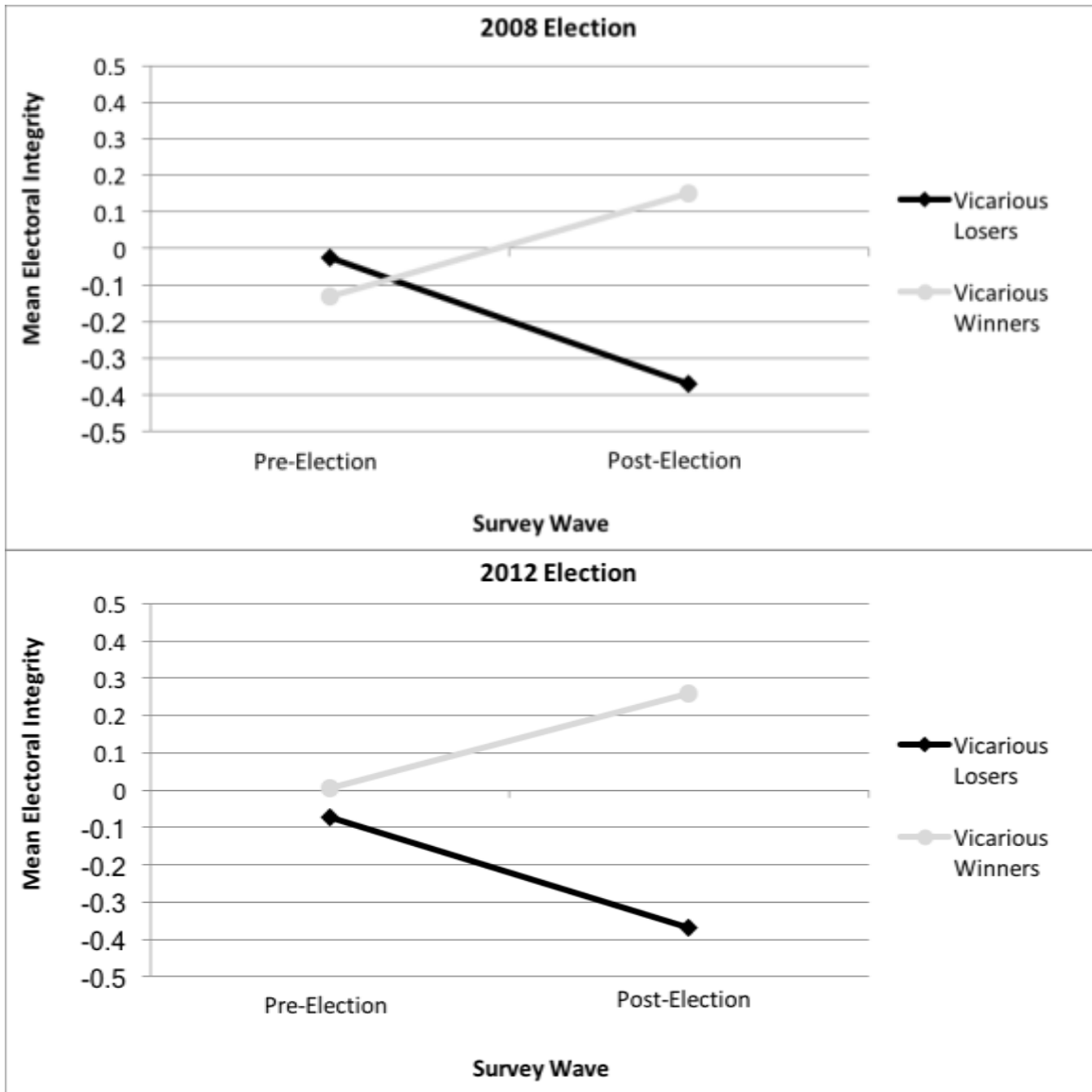
Note: 760 nonvoters who rated John McCain more positively than Barack Obama are classified as Vicarious Losers and 807 nonvoters who rated Obama more positively than McCain are classified as Vicarious Winners in the top panel of this figure. 226 nonvoters who rated Mitt Romney more positively than Barack Obama are classified as Vicarious Losers and 321 nonvoters who rated Obama more positively than Romney are classified as Vicarious Winners in the bottom panel of this figure.

Electoral integrity is measured using an index calculated as the mean of four standardized survey items. The results of fixed effects regressions of *vicarious loser status* on *perceptions of electoral integrity* show that the effects of both winning and losing were statistically significant in each election (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Effects of Vicarious Winning and Vicarious Losing on Nonvoters' Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

	2008 Nonvoters	2012 Nonvoters
	Coeff.	Coeff.
	(S.E.)	(S.E.)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status	-0.62***	-0.55***
	(0.033)	(0.054)
Wave	0.28***	0.25***
	(0.023)	(0.034)
Constant	-0.086**	-0.027
	(0.012)	(0.019)
N	1,530	547

**p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

I next tested whether exposure to like-minded media amplified the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing in 2008. In the 2008 election, exposure to like-minded media amplified the negative effect of losing for voters but not the positive effect of winning. Exposure to like-minded media amplified the effects of losing in 2012 and 2014, as well. Did exposure to like-minded media similarly amplify the negative effect of vicarious losing on nonvoters? When it comes to nonvoters in 2008, the answer was clearly no. The first column of Table 6.2 displays the results of the fixed effects regression of *perceptions of electoral integrity* on *proportion like-minded*, *proportion cross-cutting*, *strength of preference*, and *vicarious loser status* for 2008 nonvoters. The three-way interaction between *wave*, *proportion like-minded*, and *vicarious loser status* was not statistically significant. Nor was the two-way interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded*. Like-minded media did not amplify the positive effects of vicarious winning or the negative effects of vicarious losing in 2008. As in my analysis of

voters, I also found no evidence that exposure to cross-cutting media muted the effects of

vicarious winning or vicarious losing. Neither of the interactions incorporating

proportion cross-cutting were statistically significant in the analysis of 2008 nonvoters.

Table 6.2: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Nonvoters' Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

	2008 Nonvoters	2012 Nonvoters
	Coeff. (S.E.)	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.071 (0.082)	-0.044 (0.12)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.15 (0.11)	-0.012 (0.19)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.056 (0.11)	-0.34 (0.49)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.00057 (0.15)	0.72 (0.56)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0073*** (0.00089)	0.0059*** (0.0014)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.015*** (0.0013)	-0.012*** (0.0021)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status	0.0049 (0.072)	-0.0063 (0.12)
Wave	-0.025 (0.053)	-0.031 (0.079)
Constant	-0.078*** (0.011)	-0.018** (0.019)
N	1,494	530

†p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

Data from the 2012 election panel show that exposure to partisan media had no

measured effects on vicarious winners or vicarious losers in the latter presidential

election. The second column of Table 6.2 presents the results of the fixed effects

regression of *perceptions of electoral integrity* on *proportion like-minded*, *proportion cross-cutting*, *strength of preference*, and *vicarious loser status* for 2012 nonvoters. Once again, none of the interactions including the partisan media variables were statistically significant. I therefore found no evidence in support of hypotheses 6.3 or 6.4, which predicted that exposure to like-minded media would amplify the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing whereas exposure to cross-cutting media would mute the effects of vicarious winning and vicarious losing.

Summary

Nonvoters experience elections vicariously, as demonstrated by their changing perceptions of electoral integrity in response to electoral outcomes. Vicarious winners in both 2008 and 2012 became more confident in the fairness of the electoral process from pre to post-election whereas vicarious losers became less confident. This suggests a level of investment in the outcome of elections not typically associated with nonvoters. Additionally, it argues against the belief that winner/loser effects depend upon the act of casting a ballot. Simply holding a preference for one candidate over the other appears to have triggered increases in nonvoters' perceptions of electoral integrity when the preferred candidate won and decreases when the preferred candidate lost.

Nonvoters do not cast ballots, and so they have no direct experience of the competence of election judges at their local polling place or of whether the voting machines used in their county are easy to interact with. Nonvoters must experience elections vicariously through friends, family members, co-workers, and, of course, media.

I expected nonvoters' assessments of legitimacy to depend on whether they were pleased with the outcome, but I also expected this relationship to be conditioned by exposure to partisan media. I found no evidence supporting the latter prediction.

Studying nonvoters presents methodological challenges insofar as it can be difficult to reach habitual nonvoters in national surveys of political attitudes and behavior. Even though the panel data I used produced samples that were highly representative of the American adult population in general, the types of people most likely to have been nonvoters may have been somewhat underrepresented in the 2008 and 2012 panels. Notably, the two major demographic groups that were consistently underrepresented in the panel studies were young adults and citizens who lacked a high school degree, groups that are also known to contain relatively high proportions of nonvoters (see Table 3.3). Additionally, although voter participation in presidential elections is typically in the 50-60% range, 73% of 2012 panelists were voters, with this percentage confirmed by Catalist's voter verification data.

The nonvoters I included in my analysis may not be perfectly representative of nonvoters in the general population due to the underrepresentation of certain demographic groups as well as panelists' tendency to vote at higher rates than the general population. However, these differences between nonvoter panelists and nonvoters in the general population could only explain my null findings regarding the conditioning effects of partisan media if there were some theoretically-driven reason to believe that the types of nonvoters underrepresented in the panels were also more likely to be affected by partisan media exposure than the nonvoters I observed. If anything, the opposite is likely true: young nonvoters and nonvoters without a high school diploma are presumably less

likely to watch, and therefore less likely to be affected by, partisan television programs than other types of nonvoters.

In Appendix B, I present replications of each of my major analyses using GfK's recommended population weights. Using the weighted data resulted in evidence of a statistically significant conditioning effect of like-minded media on nonvoting vicarious losers in 2008 ($p<.05$) and of a statistically significant conditioning effect of cross-cutting media on nonvoting vicarious losers in 2012 ($p<.05$). Though these results alone are insufficient to claim that exposure to partisan media influenced changes in losers' perceptions of electoral integrity, they do suggest that issues of representativeness among nonvoters might have affected my previous findings.

Issues of representativeness may have impacted my results for nonvoters, but they don't suggest an obvious compelling explanation for why those results diverged from my hypotheses. Nonetheless, there are significant obstacles to designing a survey project that samples large numbers of nonvoters, many of whom are precisely the types of people survey researchers have the most difficulty reaching (see, for example, Pew Research Center, 2014b). Research that is better able to help us understand influences on nonvoters' perceptions of legitimacy would be quite valuable in the future.

Assuming my null findings were not the product of methodological weaknesses, why should voters who directly participate in elections be affected by like-minded media when nonvoters who rely exclusively on others for information about the process are not? The most likely answers lie in the specific mechanisms that produce the conditioning effect of exposure to like-minded media on losing. I expected like-minded media to undermine losers' consent in part because losers are looking for explanations for a

surprising and disappointing outcome, and like-minded media can provide excuses for a loss that blame allegedly unfair features of the process and therefore do not require a reevaluation of issue preferences or beliefs about a candidate's qualities. Nonvoters may also be disappointed by a preferred candidate's loss but have a lesser need for explanations for the disappointing outcome. Perhaps lower levels of political interest leave many nonvoters uninterested in exploring the reasons for a loss. Relatedly, nonvoters may not seek out detailed explanations for a loss because even though they preferred a losing candidate they don't have to retroactively justify having voted for her.

Like voters, nonvoters react to a preferred candidate's loss with decreased confidence in the fairness of the electoral process. Unlike voters, nonvoters do not react more negatively to a loss when they consume higher proportions of like-minded media. Understanding why like-minded media amplifies the effects of losing on voters would shed light on the reasons why like-minded media exposure does not have a similar effect on nonvoters.

7. WHY DOES EXPOSURE TO LIKE-MINDED MEDIA CONDITION THE EFFECTS OF LOSING ON PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTORAL INTEGRITY?

Losers who consumed more like-minded media relative to neutral or cross-cutting media experienced larger decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity than losers who consumed lower proportions of like-minded media. This effect occurred in response to both presidential elections as well as the 2014 midterm elections, and it was apparent even after I controlled for strength of preference.

Why should exposure to like-minded media amplify the negative effects of losing? I previously identified two specific mechanisms through which exposure to partisan media might condition the effects of winning and losing. First, media may play an important role in setting voters' expectations for an election's outcome. Viewers of like-minded media content were more likely to expect their preferred candidate to win in the 2004 and 2012 elections than viewers of neutral or cross-cutting content (Tsfati et al., 2014; Hollander, 2015). This effect is potentially attributable to two characteristics of partisan media, their coverage of polling results and their use of exemplars.

News media in the United States tend to focus their coverage of election campaigns on strategic matters, with news outlets devoting attention to the current state of the horse-race in particular (e.g. Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). Do partisan media outlets tend to promote poll results that favor the preferred party and candidates? They may do so in the interest of giving their viewers good news and keeping spirits high among the party faithful. An alternative hypothesis is that partisan outlets may strategically understate a preferred

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candidate's chances to emphasize the importance of viewers turning out to vote. Over a decade-long period, each of the major American television networks preferred to report on public opinion polls that contained positive results for the party favored by a given network (Groeling, 2008). More evidence is needed to determine whether partisan outlets consistently emphasize favorable results during an election as opposed to in non-election years, but to the extent this phenomenon occurs, viewers of like-minded content will presumably have greater expectations for their preferred candidates.

A second characteristic of partisan media that may inflate expectations for a preferred candidate is an outlet's choice of exemplars, or the people used to represent public opinion. People often form beliefs about others' opinions from the views expressed by influential individuals, and exposure to media reports highlighted by the opinions of certain (perhaps unrepresentative) exemplars produces skewed assessments of overall public sentiments (Bar-Hillel, 1980; Brosius & Bathelt, 1994; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000; Zillmann, 2006; Tsfati et al., 2014). Partisan television programs typically devote the most time to expert commentators, program hosts, and everyday citizens who express congruent partisan opinions. Those consuming primarily like-minded programs may therefore form electoral expectations based on how individuals appearing on these shows say they personally will vote or how these individuals expect the public at large to vote (Tsfati et al., 2014).

If individuals are surprised by an election's outcome, they may be more likely to doubt whether the process was fair. Suppose hypothetically in the months leading up to an election nearly all the polls encountered by a habitual viewer of Republican-leaning media predicted that the Republican candidate would win by a healthy margin. Come

Election Day, however, the Democratic candidate claimed more votes. Might that imply that the election was somehow stolen, or at the very least, that there was a flaw in the vote-counting process? By inflating expectations for a preferred candidate, like-minded media may make it more likely that losers will question the legitimacy of the process when their inflated expectations go unmet.

Like-minded media may also condition the effect of losing through explanations for the outcome. Media have long been known to offer explanations for electoral outcomes, with traditional news media filtering a variety of possible narratives about the election into a relatively small set of reasons why one candidate defeated the other (Hershey, 1992, 1994). In the late-twentieth century, a striking feature of this process was the level of consensus that members of the national press reached regarding a handful of agreed-upon reasons for the outcome within just a few weeks following an election (Hershey, 1992). In an era of partisan news, it is likely that outlets with different partisan leanings will offer different and potentially contradictory explanations for an electoral outcome rather than converging on the same explanations, even well into the post-election period.

Why might partisan media's explanations for a result produce lowered perceptions of electoral integrity? The phenomenon of trusting winners and distrusting losers has itself been hypothesized to have its roots in cognitive dissonance (Anderson et al., 2005; Sances & Stewart, 2015). A supporter of the losing side must find some justification for their decision to support a party or candidate that was rejected by most citizens. Within the framework of cognitive dissonance theory, a belief that democratic

processes and institutions are unfair or illegitimate serves to excuse a vote for a losing candidate without requiring a reevaluation of the decision.

Like-minded media should offer specific explanations for an unwanted outcome that don't require a voter to change his or her belief that they made the correct choice at the ballot box. An explanation such as the outsized influence of wealthy interests or alleged voter fraud would not require a reevaluation of the preferred candidate's strengths and weaknesses since the better candidate never had a fair chance in the first place. Like-minded viewers will, in theory, accept these alternative explanations as a means of reducing dissonance. To the extent the proffered explanations suggest that the outcome was illegitimate, perceptions of electoral integrity may be harmed.

Partisan media had no significant effect on changes in winners' perceptions of electoral integrity, and the muting effect of cross-cutting media on losers' perceptions did not reach statistical significance in two of the three elections I examined. I therefore considered only the negative effect of like-minded media on losers in testing whether each proposed mechanism serves as a plausible explanation for the observed effects of partisan media.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

I expected like-minded media to condition the relationship between losing and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity through the effects of like-minded media on both expectations and explanations. An ideal test of this prediction would incorporate a detailed analysis of both the pre-election polling results and the explanations for the

outcome presented by various partisan media outlets in addition to individual-level measures of partisan media exposure and perceptions of electoral integrity. Unfortunately, such a far-reaching content analysis falls outside the scope of this dissertation. However, I conducted an exploratory analysis of the viability of the two proposed mechanisms by leveraging two features of the panel studies that served as my main source of data.

First, interview dates in the post-election survey period of the 2008 panel were randomly assigned. The two proposed mechanisms suggest different likely patterns of changes in perceptions of electoral integrity during the post-election period. If like-minded media influence perceptions of integrity through the expectations mechanism, there should be evidence of a significant negative effect of exposure to like-minded media among losers who are interviewed immediately after an election. This would indicate that losers whose expectations for the election are not met respond to the surprising election results with immediate distrust.

On the other hand, if like-minded media influence perceptions of integrity through the explanations mechanism, the magnitude of the negative effect of like-minded media exposure on losers should increase as more time passes between Election Day and the date of the post-election interview. This would indicate that as time passes partisan news sources settle on preferred explanations for the outcome and viewers begin to adopt those explanations. Finally, if both expectations and explanations contribute to like-minded media's effect, there should be evidence of a significant effect of like-minded media among losers interviewed immediately following an election, and the effect of like-minded media should also increase in magnitude as time passes following the election.

RQ7.1: Is the effect of exposure to like-minded media on changes in losers' perceptions of electoral integrity apparent when considering losers interviewed immediately following an election?

RQ7.2: Does the effect of exposure to like-minded media on changes in losers' perceptions of electoral integrity grow larger as time passes following the election?

Secondly, respondents to the 2012 pre-election survey were asked to answer a pair of questions about their expectations for the outcome, allowing me to conduct a formal test of whether expectations mediated the relationship between exposure to like-minded media and changing perceptions of electoral integrity in the 2012 presidential election. Respondents were asked to predict which candidate, Democratic incumbent Barack Obama or Republican challenger Mitt Romney, would win the presidential election prior to the 2012 election. They were then asked whether the chosen candidate would win by a lot or by a little. I combined these two survey items to test the hypothesis that the effect of like-minded media exposure on perceptions of electoral integrity operates through an effect on expectations.

H7.1: Partisan media influence perceptions of electoral legitimacy through an effect on pre-election expectations for the outcome.

Data and Methods

My research questions asked whether changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among respondents interviewed at different points in time following the election were consistent with the patterns predicted by the expectations and explanations mechanisms.

The large size of the 2008 NAES panel produced an average of 1,602 interviews in each of the twelve weeks in which post-election interviews were conducted, making it possible to draw meaningful inferences regarding changes in the relationship between partisan media exposure and perceptions of electoral integrity as time passed following the election.

As noted earlier, the two proposed mechanisms of media influence suggest different patterns in the post-election relationship between partisan media exposure and perceptions of electoral integrity. If exposure to like-minded media influences expectations, with inflated and subsequently unmet expectations producing distrust, the conditioning effect of partisan media on the experience of losing should be immediately apparent after the results of an election become known. Assuming like-minded media operate solely or primarily through expectations, the observed effects should remain constant or possibly wane as the immediate disappointment of the election fades into the past.

Alternatively, if like-minded media primarily influence post-election explanations for the outcome, it should take time for delegitimizing explanations to filter through news sources and become accepted by citizens. In this case, we would observe an initially small amplifying effect of like-minded media that increases in magnitude as time passes following the election. Finally, my prediction that both mechanisms contribute to the effect of like-minded media suggests a pattern in which the amplifying effect of like-minded media is immediately apparent after an election but becomes larger as time passes and explanations for the outcome filter out from the media.

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Which description is consistent with the actual effects of like-minded media? I conducted a series of parallel fixed effects regression analyses in which *perceptions of electoral integrity* were regressed on *wave* and interactions between *wave* and *proportion like-minded*, *wave* and *proportion cross-cutting*, and *wave* and *strength of preference* for groups of 2008 losers interviewed during different time periods following the election. Like-minded media conditioned the effect of losing but not the effect of winning, so I included only electoral losers in these regression models. This eliminated the need for an interaction between *wave* and *loser status*, as well as the need for any three-way interactions incorporating *loser status*. In these regression models, the coefficient associated with the *wave* variable represents the main effect of losing in 2008, controlling for the differential effects of different levels of exposure to partisan media and of strength of candidate preference over time. The two-way interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded* represents the differential effects of exposure to varying proportions of like-minded programs watched on changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity*, controlling for the main effect of losing, the effect of *proportion cross-cutting*, and the effect of *strength of preference*.

To test the hypothesis that expectations mediate the relationship between like-minded media and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity, I recoded responses to the two expectations questions from the 2012 pre-election survey to create a five-point scale of *expectations*. In this scale, 1 indicates an expectation that Obama would win the 2012 presidential election by a lot; 2 indicates an expectation that Obama would win by a little; 3 indicates a response of "Don't Know"; 4 indicates an expectation that Romney would win by a little; and 5 indicates an expectation that Romney would win by a lot.

Because I was only interested in losers in this analysis, I coded this scale such that higher values indicated greater expectations for eventual loser Romney's performance. A positive effect of like-minded media exposure on *expectations* among 2012 losers would therefore indicate that like-minded media promoted favorable expectations for an electoral loser's preferred candidate.

A classic test of a mediation hypothesis involves four steps (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, it is necessary to demonstrate that the independent variable, in this case *proportion like-minded*, influences the dependent variable, in this case *perceptions of electoral integrity*. The next step is to show that the independent variable influences the proposed mediator, in this case *expectations*. Third, the mediator must also influence the dependent variable. Finally, the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable must account for at least part of the previously observed effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Because *expectations* were measured at a single point in time, I tested the relationship between *proportion like-minded* and *expectations* using ordinary least squares regression. I then conducted fixed effects regressions of *perceptions of electoral integrity* first on *proportion like-minded* and then on *proportion like-minded* and *expectations*.

The classic approach to testing a mediation hypothesis has been criticized for a lack of statistical power and for an incorrect approach to estimating the sampling distribution of an indirect effect (e.g. MacKinnon et al., 2002; Hayes, 2009). The lack of power means this approach is conservative in its estimation of mediation effects and can fail to detect mediation that does occur. There is no single widely accepted approach to overcoming this problems when testing for mediation using panel data in which the

dependent variable is measured at multiple times. However, I conducted an additional test for the hypothesized mediation effect by using a slightly adapted approach to Preacher and Hayes's (2004) bootstrapping technique for estimating the size of an indirect effect. To apply this technique to my dataset, I converted the pre and post-election measures of *perceptions of electoral integrity* into change scores, subtracting the earlier measure of perceptions from the later measure. I then used the bootstrapping technique to estimate a confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect of *proportion like-minded* on changes in perceptions as mediated by *expectations*, using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). Because I used change scores as the dependent variable, I used heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in the bootstrapping procedure to fit an appropriate model.

Results

Which theorized pattern better describes changes in perceptions of electoral integrity in the post-election period? I divided the full sample of 2008 losers into three separate groups. The first group included respondents interviewed during the first four weeks following the election, the second included those interviewed during weeks five through eight following the election, and the third included those interviewed during weeks nine through twelve following the election. I then conducted three separate, parallel fixed effects regressions, one for each post-election period. Figure 7.1 presents the estimated coefficients for the interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded*

for the electoral losers interviewed in each of the three post-election periods. The mean

number of losers included in the regression analysis for each period was n=1,526.

Figure 7.1: The Effect of Like-Minded Media On 2008 Losers by Time of Post-Election Interview
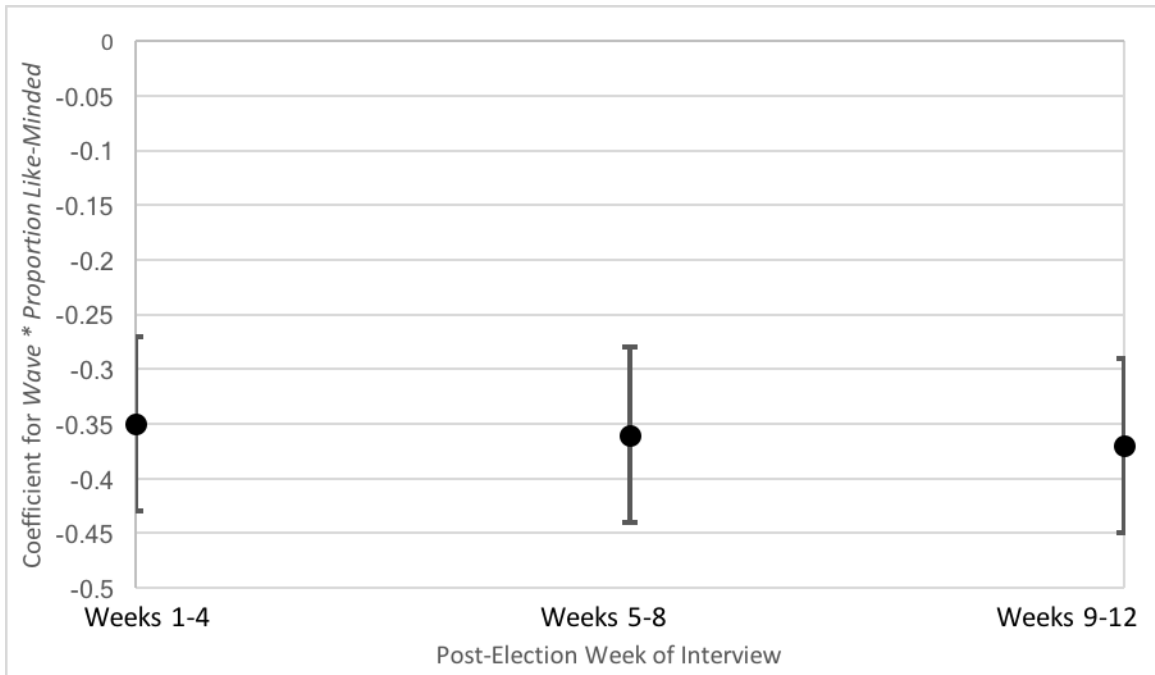
Note: y-values are the coefficients for the interaction between *wave* and *proportion like-minded* from a series of fixed effects regression models where *perceptions of electoral integrity* is the dependent variable and an interaction between *wave* and *proportion cross-cutting*, an interaction between *wave* and *strength of preference*, and *wave* are included as additional independent variables.
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

The effect of like-minded media was statistically significant (p<.001) when

considering only those voters interviewed in the four-week period immediately following

the election, consistent with the *expectations* hypothesis which predicted an immediate

effect from frustrated expectations. However, the magnitude of the effect of exposure to

like-minded media did not significantly increase as time passed. Although the size of the estimated coefficient for the interaction term grew slightly larger from the first interview period to the second and again from the second to the third, there is substantial overlap in the 95 percent confidence intervals for all three interview periods. The available evidence is therefore consistent with the predicted influence of like-minded media on expectations but not with the predicted influence of like-minded media on explanations.

These results would have been substantively the same had I divided respondents into larger or smaller groups. Similar analyses using two six-week interview periods, six two-week periods, and twelve one-week periods all produced evidence of a significant effect that appeared immediately following the election and remained relatively constant in magnitude throughout the post-election interviews. There was therefore no indication that my initial finding depended upon the decision to use three four-week interview periods to divide respondents.

These results are suggestive, but far from conclusive. A better test of the mechanisms by which like-minded media exposure might influence changes in losers' perceptions of electoral integrity would include an analysis of whether expectations and explanations mediate the relationship between the key independent and dependent variables. I therefore tested the hypothesis that exposure to like-minded media conditions the effect of losing through an effect on loser's expectations. Once again, I considered only losers in my analysis due to my finding that exposure to partisan media conditions the effects of losing but not the effects of winning.

The first step in a classic test of a mediation hypothesis is to establish that the independent variable predicts the dependent variable. Exposure to different proportions

of like-minded media produced differential changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among electoral losers in 2012, as demonstrated previously. The first column of Table 7.1 shows the effect of the interaction between *proportion like-minded* and *wave* among 2012 losers when controlling for the effects of the interactions between *proportion cross-cutting* and *wave* and between *strength of preference* and *wave* as well as for the main effect of losing, which is represented by the *wave* term in the regression model. The omission of winners from the fixed effects regression simplifies the interpretation of this model by eliminating the need for interactions with *loser status*, but the results are substantively the same as in my analysis of all 2012 voters.

Table 7.1: **Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media and Expectations on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Among 2012 Losers**

	Coeff. (S.E.)	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Expectations	——	-0.11***
		(0.023)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.20**	-0.16*
	(0.071)	(0.071)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.14	0.11
	(0.11)	(0.11)
Wave * Strength of Preference	-0.0048***	-0.0036***
	(0.00083)	(0.00086)
Wave	-0.013	0.32***
	(0.052)	(0.086)
Constant	-0.086***	-0.086***
	(0.015)	(0.015)
N	764	764

*p < .05   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity.

The next question to be answered in a classic mediation analysis is whether the independent variable predicts the mediator variable. Did exposure to like-minded media influence *expectations* in 2012? The data indicate that it did, with Romney supporters who consumed Republican-leaning media becoming more positive about their candidate's chances than those who did not.

Some degree of wishful thinking influences electoral expectations, with Democrats being consistently more likely to expect the Democrat to win and Republicans being consistently more likely to predict a Republican victory (e.g. Granberg & Brent, 1983; Krizan, Miller, & Johar, 2010; Delavande & Manski, 2012). Was this true in 2012? Figure 7.2 shows that Mitt Romney's supporters generally expected their candidate to win whereas most Barack Obama supporters predicted a Barack Obama victory. If, however, exposure to like-minded media was strongly correlated with predicting a victory for the preferred candidate in 2012 even after controlling for candidate preference and for the strength of that preference as measured with feeling thermometer ratings of the two candidates, it is reasonable to infer that like-minded media promoted the belief that the preferred candidate would win the election.

Because *expectations* were measured only once, in the pre-election survey, and because post-election media exposure cannot plausibly have influenced expectations that were reported prior to the election, I used ordinary least squares regression to estimate the effect of like-minded media exposure on *expectations*. The use of cross-sectional data rather than panel data in this analysis meant that stable individual characteristics were no longer automatically controlled for as in fixed effects regression models. I therefore incorporated a standard series of demographic control variables, including *age*, *gender*,

educational attainment, and *race*, in addition to a control for *strength of preference*.

Since I only considered losers in this analysis, it was again unnecessary to control for

loser status.

Figure 7.2: Pre-Election Expectations for the Outcome of the 2012 Presidential Election by Candidate Preference
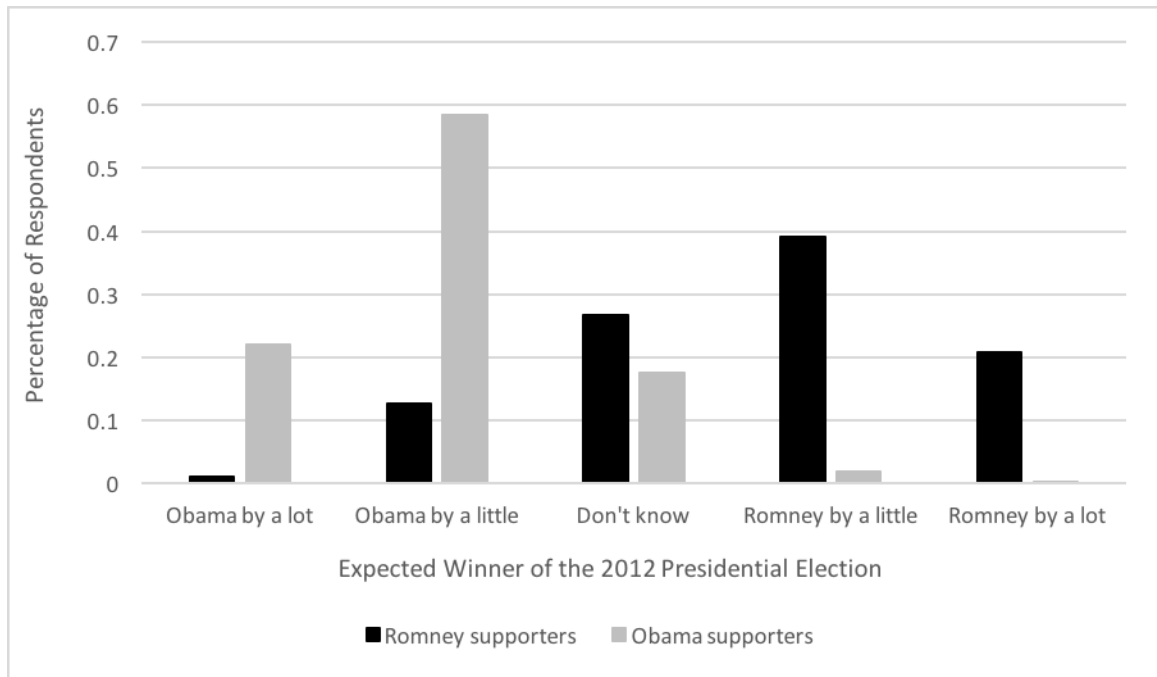
Table 7.2 presents the results of the regression of *expectations* on *proportion like-minded*. The results show that the proportion of like-minded programs watched had a

significant and positive effect on electoral expectations, with a 2012 loser who watched

more like-minded media relative to cross-cutting or neutral media having been more

likely to expect their preferred candidate to win prior to the election. The inclusion of the

control variable *strength of preference* means that this finding cannot be explained by

more committed partisans having watched more like-minded media and spuriously

having had more confidence in their candidate.

Table 7.2: **Effects of Exposure to Like-Minded and Cross-Cutting Media on Pre-Election Expectations of a Mitt Romney Victory in the 2012 Presidential Election**

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Proportion Like-Minded	0.38** (0.11)
Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.31† (0.18)
Strength of Preference	0.011*** (0.0013)
Age	-0.00027 (0.0027)
Gender: Female	-0.0097 (0.066)
Race: Non-white	-0.15 (0.098)
Education: Less than a high school degree	0.23 (0.19)
Education: High school degree or equivalent	0.030 (0.097)
Education: Some college	0.072 (0.092)
Constant	2.97*** (0.14)
N	764
R^2	0.16

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from an ordinary least squares regression. The dependent variable is Expectations, coded such that 1 indicates a belief that Mitt Romney would lose by a lot; 2 indicates a belief that Mitt Romney would lose by a little; 3 indicates that the respondent answered "Don't know" when asked who would win; 4 indicates a belief that Mitt Romney would win by a little; and 5 indicates a belief that Mitt Romney would win by a lot.
The reference category for Education is Bachelor's degree or higher.

Exposure to like-minded media influenced both *expectations* and changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity*. For *expectations* to have mediated the relationship between like-minded media exposure and changes in perceptions, *expectations* must also have influenced *perceptions of electoral integrity*. The second column of Table 7.1 presents the results of a fixed effects regression of *perceptions of electoral integrity* on *expectations*, *proportion like-minded*, *proportion cross-cutting*, and *wave*. The results clearly indicate that losers with different pre-election expectations for their preferred candidate changed differentially in response to the election's outcome. The coefficient associated with the interaction between *wave* and *expectations* is statistically significant and negative, indicating that a loser who was more positive about Romney's chances of victory experienced a larger decrease in *perceptions of electoral integrity* than a loser whose hopes were not as high.

Finally, the inclusion of the mediating variable must account for at least some of the originally observed effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. A comparison of the two columns of Table 7.1 suggests that *expectations* partially mediated the effects of *proportion like-minded* on changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity*. Regardless of whether expectations were included in or omitted from the regression model, the proportion of like-minded programs to total programs watched had a significant and negative effect on changes in losers' *perceptions of electoral integrity*. However, this effect was smaller in magnitude (-0.16 versus -0.20) when *expectations* were included as an explanatory variable. Expectations therefore explain some of the negative effect of like-minded media exposure on losers' changing perceptions of electoral integrity, but only a small portion, approximately 20 percent, of the total effect.

Figure 7.3 illustrates the direct and indirect effects of *proportion like-minded* on changes

in *perceptions of electoral integrity*.

Figure 7.3: Direct and Indirect Effects of Like-Minded Media On Changes in 2012 Losers' Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
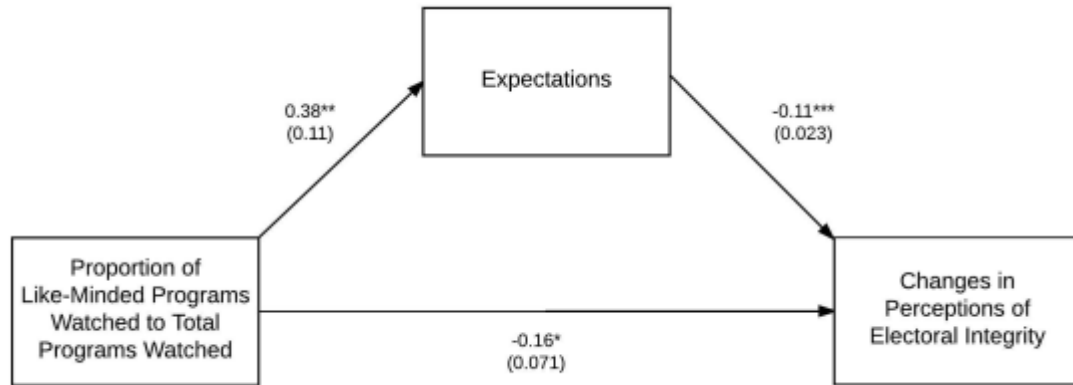
Note: Figure presents coefficients from the fixed effects regression of Perceptions of Electoral Integrity on Expectations and Proportion Like-Minded and from the ordinary least squares regression of Expectations on Proportion Like-Minded, with standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .05   **p<.01   ***p<.001

These results are suggestive of a mediating relationship. However, modern

approaches to mediation analysis tend to incorporate bootstrapping to estimate the size of

the indirect effect. I therefore conducted an additional test of my mediation hypothesis by

applying this technique to my dataset. The bootstrapping procedure estimated a 95

percent confidence interval ranging from -0.079 to -0.017 for the size of the indirect

effect of *proportion like-minded* on changes in *perceptions of electoral integrity*. This

confidence interval indicates that the portion of the total effect mediated by *expectations*

was small but significantly different from zero, and of a similar magnitude to that

estimated using the classic approach to mediation analysis. The two methods combined

provide clear evidence that like-minded media's influence on expectations explains part of the effect of like-minded media on changes in perceptions of legitimacy among losers. A large proportion of the effect of like-minded media remains unaccounted for, though.

Summary

Analysis of the effect of exposure to like-minded media on changes in perceptions of electoral integrity among losers who were interviewed at different points in time following the 2008 election showed that the negative impact of like-minded media was present among respondents interviewed within the first week following Election Day. The magnitude of the observed effect was no larger among respondents interviewed later in the post-election period. This pattern of results is consistent with that predicted by the expectations mechanism but not with the pattern predicted by the explanations mechanism.

Additional support for the expectations mechanism comes from two different methods of testing whether exposure to like-minded media indirectly influenced changes in perceptions of electoral integrity through an effect on losers' pre-election expectations for the outcome. Both the classic approach to mediation analysis and a slightly modified version of the Preacher and Hayes (2004) bootstrapping technique provided evidence of an indirect effect on perceptions through expectations. Like-minded media appear to promote the idea that a preferred candidate is likely to win an upcoming election. Should supporters be disappointed by an outcome that goes against their expectations, they may subsequently have less confidence in the fairness of the electoral process.

While expectations explain part of like-minded media's negative influence on losers' perceptions of electoral integrity, the mediation analysis failed to account for most of the overall effect. This implies two possible conclusions. First, exposure to like-minded media may condition the relationship between losing and perceptions of electoral integrity through some third mechanism I have failed to consider. Additional theorizing may be necessary to fully explain why exposure to like-minded media has the observed effect on perceptions. Secondly, additional research incorporating an analysis of the content of partisan media is required to fully explore the hypothesized influence of partisan media on explanations for the outcome.

Even though the pattern of results in 2008 was inconsistent with the pattern predicted by the explanations mechanism, the explanations mechanism cannot be ruled out entirely. Following the 1984 election, it took only one week for the national press to winnow over 80 possible explanations for the results into half as many explanations (Hershey, 1992). Within another week, daily newspapers were citing fewer than twenty different possible explanations for the results. CNN was still in its infancy in 1984 and political news websites did not yet exist. The modern news cycle, driven by 24-hour cable news channels and the internet, might produce an even faster winnowing process than the one observed by Hershey (1992). Additionally, partisan media outlets may present excuses for an anticipated disappointing outcome even before the election occurs. In the 2016 campaign, Republican nominee Donald Trump regularly spoke of a rigged process in the months leading up to Election Day. His allegations of voter fraud and related issues were presumably repeated and amplified by outlets friendly to his candidacy. It is quite possible, and perhaps even likely, that exposure to like-minded

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media influenced perceptions of electoral integrity in 2008 through an effect on explanations, but that this effect had already occurred before the conclusion of the first week of post-election interviews.

Further testing of the mechanisms that might explain the conditioning effect of exposure to like-minded media on the relationship between losing and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity should include a description of the specific messages presented by media outlets that favored the losing side in an election. A systematic content analysis of the explanations for an electoral outcome presented by partisan media outlets would make it possible to track the frequency with which various explanations were offered over different time periods both before and after the election. Combining this data with survey data showing how individual supporters of the losing candidate explained the election results would allow for an analysis of whether media's explanations influence individuals' explanations and of whether some explanations are associated with more negative perceptions of electoral integrity.

8. THE IMPLICATIONS OF PARTISAN MEDIA FOR PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

Facing an uphill battle in the polls, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump spent much of the summer and fall of 2016 warning his supporters that Democrats, the media, and the country's elites were working hard to rig the election in favor of his opponent Hillary Clinton (Weigel, 2016; Parker, 2016). Some Republican elected officials, including Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, issued statements disputing Trump's claims (Martin & Burns, 2016). However, Trump and his surrogates continued to advance a variety of conspiracy theories about the electoral process that were amplified by allies in Republican-leaning media such as Fox News hosts Sean Hannity and Steve Doocy (e.g. Kaplan, 2016; Brennan, 2016).

Trump went so far as to refuse to say whether he would concede defeat when directly asked during the third general election debate, promising to keep the country "in suspense" if he lost (Tumulty & Rucker, 2016). Trump's surprising victory on November 8 allowed the country to avoid a potential crisis of legitimacy, at least for the time being. Democratic nominee Clinton promptly conceded the race and outgoing President Barack Obama, one of Clinton's most vocal supporters during the campaign, quickly pledged his full support to the new president-elect so as to ensure a successful transition of power to the new administration (Nakamura & Eilperin, 2016).

The United States has recent experience with a disputed election. In 2000, George W. Bush claimed victory over Al Gore only after an extended recount in Florida that was ultimately settled by the Supreme Court. However, Trump's willingness to deny the

legitimacy of the voting process before the voting was even finished remains unprecedented. In 2000, Al Gore and his supporters fought for a full accounting of all votes that had been cast in Florida, but quickly conceded the election to Bush as soon as the Supreme Court ruled that it was time for the vote counting to stop. If Trump had clearly lost the election yet refused to concede even after exhausting the recount options provided by the law, how would his supporters have reacted? Could Clinton have effectively governed the country if the other side refused to acknowledge her as the legitimate president? Might more violence have followed the election?

At a theoretical level, free and fair elections are the cornerstones of representative democracy (e.g. Dahl, 1989). If large numbers of citizens believe that their country's elections are consistently unfair, manipulated, or an invalid means of selecting the best leaders, there is little reason for those citizens to believe that the democratic regime itself is legitimate. Citizens who perceive the electoral process as unfair will also have low levels of trust in elected leaders and government institutions.

At a practical level, low perceptions of legitimacy can be harmful to the everyday functioning of democratic institutions. Winning officials will have difficulty implementing the policies they campaigned upon when the opposition denies that the winners' claim to power is legitimate (Nadeau & Blais, 1993). At the most extreme, losers' distrust of the electoral process may produce disruptive forms of protest or even political violence. Typically, losers are more likely to protest unwanted results in countries whose democratic institutions are relatively new (Anderson & Mendes, 2006). However, an extreme lack of confidence in the legitimacy of an outcome may encourage an unusual level of political instability even in a long-established democracy such as the

United States. Dissatisfaction with the electoral process can drive not merely peaceful protest, but boycotts and political strikes (Norris, 2014). As Anderson and colleagues argue, "Particularly unhappy losers have diminished incentives to play by the rules" (2005, p. 188).

Could the lack of legitimacy attributed to Donald Trump's election by citizens who voted against him be driving the wave of protests, including calls for general strikes, of early 2017? There are numerous reasons for citizens to oppose Trump's policies, and yet perceptions of legitimacy (or the lack thereof) are undoubtedly playing an important role in the response to his administration. Though evidence is largely anecdotal at this stage, protest signs and chants have frequently referenced Trump's substantial loss in the popular vote and the FBI's alleged role in helping to tilt the Electoral College to the Republicans.

The United States is in the midst of a political era when election outcomes are playing an especially prominent role in undermining losers' consent. Electoral outcomes have important implications for citizens' perceptions of legitimacy even in the context of relatively low salience midterm elections. Nonvoters who preferred a losing candidate to the winning candidate likewise experience significant decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity, despite their lack of direct participation in the electoral process. Perhaps most worryingly given the prominent role of partisan outlets in today's media environment, exposure to like-minded media consistently exacerbates the negative effects of losing on perceptions of electoral integrity. After reviewing the implications of each of my key findings in turn, I discuss some of the potential limitations of the research I

conducted. I then return to the core question posed by this dissertation: Is the resurgence of partisan media in the United States a threat to perceptions of electoral legitimacy?

The Psychological Power of Winning or Losing

A wealth of data confirms that winners generally have higher perceptions of legitimacy than losers following an election. However, past studies of winners and losers, particularly those relying on data from the United States, have produced mixed conclusions regarding the precise nature of the effects of winning and losing on perceptions of legitimacy. Some evidence suggests that winners increase in legitimacy while losers generally hold constant, or vice versa. In the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, the effects of winning and losing were quite clear. Losers in both years decreased in perceptions of electoral integrity in response to the electoral outcome. Winners in both years increased in perceptions in response to the outcome. These changes were measured at the individual level and therefore represent unusually strong confirmation that winning produces increases in perceptions and losing produces decreases.

The experiences of winning and losing were also surprisingly powerful among citizens who voted in the 2014 midterm elections. Past studies of winning and losing in American congressional elections failed to produce evidence that winning or losing at the congressional level influenced perceptions of legitimacy. By contrast, in 2014 supporters of the winning Republican Party clearly increased in perceptions of electoral integrity in response to the election results and supporters of the losing Democratic Party clearly

decreased in perceptions of integrity. The phenomenon of satisfied winners and disappointed losers does not require that the White House be at stake. Less salient contests are capable of producing significant winner/loser effects on perceptions of legitimacy.

Nonvoters also experienced changes in perceptions of legitimacy according to whether they preferred the winner or the loser in each presidential election year. This result contradicts the notion that nonvoters are generally tuned out of politics. Many nonvoters actually hold electoral preferences, and those preferences are strong enough to drive partisan media consumption as well as vicarious winner and vicarious loser effects. Neither Americans' general lack of interest in midterm elections nor nonvoters' individual failures to participate prevent citizens from experiencing elections through the lenses of winning and losing.

Taken together, these extensions of past findings related to winners and losers are quite suggestive. They demonstrate the power of the psychological processes that prompt citizens to reevaluate electoral legitimacy in light of favorable or unfavorable outcomes. One of the most common explanations for the negative effect of losing comes from cognitive dissonance theory. Electoral winners can be satisfied that the process worked the way it should have because the best candidate won. Electoral losers, on the other hand, must retroactively justify their support for a losing candidate. A newfound (or strengthened) belief that the process itself was unfair fulfills this cognitive need. There may even be a physiological component to the negative effects of losing that goes beyond the compelling psychological need for cognitive consistency. Recent research has linked the experience of learning that a favored candidate lost a presidential election to a drop in

men's testosterone levels similar to the drop that might occur after losing an interpersonal competition (Stanton, Beehner, Saini, Kuhn, & LaBar, 2009).

Past research may have understated the power of winning and losing, but the powerful nature of these effects does not necessarily have negative implications for American democracy. The mere fact that winners consistently gain in legitimacy and losers consistently decrease may not be a problem insofar as the two effects are relatively symmetrical over time and insofar as members of the two dominant political parties regularly alternate in the roles of winners and losers. These two conditions could ensure that aggregate levels of perceptions of legitimacy in society remain relatively constant over time, with no single set of partisans becoming excessively dismissive of the process. While there is a strong historical record showing that the two major parties regularly alternate control of the White House in the post-World War II era of American politics, additional study of the effects of winning and losing would help to clarify whether these effects are relatively balanced over time or not.

In addition to a regular alternation of power in presidential elections, there is a long track record of divided government in the United States. The presidential out-party has a historical tendency to gain seats in Congress during midterm elections. Partisans who support a losing presidential candidate should typically have the opportunity to regain confidence in the fairness of the electoral process following a victory for the preferred party in the next midterm election just two years later, helping to counter the negative effects of having lost at the presidential level.

Finally, these results speak to the need for a renewed effort to understand nonvoters' perceptions of democratic legitimacy. Ignoring changes in nonvoters'

perceptions of legitimacy means ignoring how a sizable proportion of citizens—typically

more than 40% in any given presidential election—feel about their democratic

government. Even though nonvoters by definition don't vote, their belief that democratic

processes and institutions are fundamentally legitimate is vital to the stability and long-

term health of the regime. Losers' consent alone can't maintain a modern democracy.

Nonvoters' consent is also necessary.

Like-Minded Media Embitters Losers

Exposure to like-minded media exacerbated the negative effects of losing in both

the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Exposure to like-minded media also

exacerbated the negative effects of losing in the 2014 congressional elections. The

conditioning effect from like-minded media occurred in two presidential elections and

one midterm election, as well as in two elections when Republicans emerged as losers

and one election when Democrats emerged as losers. Attitude-congruent partisan media

clearly reinforce citizens' propensity to blame the electoral process itself when an

unfavorable electoral result occurs.

On the other hand, like-minded media exposure did not condition the effects of

winning in any of the elections studied. Nor did cross-cutting media exposure condition

the effects of winning or losing. The negative effect of like-minded media on losers'

perceptions of electoral integrity is both highly consistent across different contexts and

unique among the possible effects of partisan media I tested.

Past studies of the negative effects of partisan media have largely focused on echo-chamber effects, the idea that partisan news exposure leads many citizens to encounter only one side of an argument. As a result, citizens may become more polarized both in terms of issue opinions and in terms of affect toward members of the opposition (e.g. Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Levendusky, 2013). I identified a qualitatively distinct type of negative effect associated with partisan media. Exposure to like-minded media conditions the negative effects of losing, further lowering electoral losers' perceptions of legitimacy beyond the decrease associated with losing alone. The result is not lowered affect for the opposition party or greater certainty about an issue position, but decreased legitimacy in the most fundamental institution of democracy.

Because I only found an effect from losers' exposure to like-minded media, and not from losers' exposure to cross-cutting media or winners' exposure to either type of partisan media, there is no obvious counterbalance to the negative effect observed here. In the present media environment, losers who consume large proportions of like-minded media will come to view the electoral process as illegitimate. No comparable media effect serves to counter the influence of like-minded media content on these individuals. Nor will winners increase in perceptions of electoral integrity to the same degree. The most likely result will be more individual losers with dangerously low perceptions of legitimacy combined with an aggregate decrease in perceptions of legitimacy among all voters. Insofar as legitimacy is required both for winners to govern effectively and for society to avoid having citizens who refuse to play by the democratic rules, this is a highly troubling outcome.

Mechanisms of Influence

I identified two possible mechanisms through which like-minded media might condition the effects of losing, an effect on expectations for the outcome and an effect on explanations for the outcome. Exposure to like-minded media made Mitt Romney supporters more likely to believe that Romney would win, and by a larger margin, in 2012. Romney supporters who expected their preferred candidate to win subsequently experienced larger decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity following the election than Romney supporters who expected their candidate to lose. Expectations therefore partially mediated the relationship between exposure to like-minded media, losing, and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity in 2012.

Although exposure to like-minded media increased expectations for a preferred candidate in 2012, this may not always occur. The available evidence suggests that partisan media tend to exaggerate a favored candidate's chances, but additional analysis of the content of partisan media would be useful in verifying this pattern. Exposure to like-minded media appears to inflate expectations, and frustrated expectations produce larger decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity. If this description of the mechanism by which like-minded media affects losers' perceptions of legitimacy is correct, the conditioning effect of like-minded media may become more severe in future elections. The massive proliferation of publicly available polls of varying quality has made it easier and easier for partisan news outlets to cherry-pick "good news" for their like-minded viewers.

Expectations only explained a small portion, about one-fifth, of the total conditioning effect of like-minded media on 2012 losers. What might explain the remainder of the effect? There was no clear evidence of an indirect effect of like-minded media exposure on perceptions through explanations, the other proposed mechanism of influence. However, my test of the explanations mechanism was only exploratory in nature. Future research should focus on analyzing the expectations mechanism more thoroughly to determine whether this mechanism accounts for the remaining effect of like-minded media exposure.

In 2016, like-minded media anecdotally appear to have provided delegitimizing excuses for partisans even before the results of the election are known. Led by the Republican Party's nominee for president, Republican-leaning media responded to unfavorable polls by promoting allegations of voter fraud that would effectively steal the election. My analysis may have failed to uncover evidence of an effect on explanations in part because partisan media influence explanations for the outcome in the pre-election period and not exclusively in the post-election period. A systematic content analysis of the explanations for election results provided by a variety of media outlets both before and after an election would better account for how partisan media outlets explain election outcomes. Combining this analysis with survey data that shows how individuals themselves explain election results could potentially provide a direct link between explanations provided by media, explanations provided by individuals, and changes in perceptions of electoral integrity.

Of course, some third mechanism I failed to identify could potentially account for a portion of the observed conditioning effect of exposure to like-minded media.

Additional theorizing about other possible mechanisms of influence may be necessary in addition to future research examining the explanations mechanism in greater depth.

Limitations

In any observational study, it is necessary to rule out spurious explanations for the observed results. Throughout my analysis, I measured individual-level changes in perceptions of electoral integrity from pre to post-election through interviews of the same individuals at different points in time. Fixed effects regression's use of individuals as their own controls eliminated the need to control for an extensive series of stable individual characteristics. Assuming I accounted for any variables that may have plausibly produced differential changes in winners' and losers' perceptions of electoral integrity over time and that may have confounded the relationship between my variables of interest, there is no reason to believe that the relationships I observed were spurious.

The only stable variable that plausibly could have produced differential changes in perceptions of electoral integrity over time and also could have confounded the relationship between media exposure and changes is strength of preference. If strength of preference influenced both exposure to partisan media and the magnitude of the effects of winning and losing on perceptions of legitimacy, as we might reasonably expect, an observed relationship between partisan media exposure and perceptions of legitimacy could potentially be explained by this third variable. I therefore controlled for an interaction between survey wave and strength of candidate or party preference in each of my tests of whether partisan media exposure conditioned the effects of winning or losing.

By controlling for strength of preference, I ensured any relationships between partisan media exposure and perceptions of legitimacy that persisted would be attributable to the conditioning effect of partisan media exposure on changes in perceptions.

It is unnecessary to control for stable characteristics in fixed effects regression barring a specific theoretical reason to believe that the effect of the stable characteristic in question may have varied over time. However, spurious relationships may still arise from individual characteristics that change over time. The variable representing survey wave in each of my regression models accounted for the aggregate effects of all time-variant factors that may have occurred in between the pre and post-election surveys in any given election. Given the control for the effect of time, a time-variant factor could only have produced a spurious relationship between my key variables of interest if this factor also caused winners and losers to diverge in their perceptions of electoral integrity. No variable that I failed to account for could plausibly have had this effect.

Observational studies must also account for the possibility of reverse causation. In this case, reverse causation cannot explain the observed effects of winning and losing on perceptions of electoral integrity. For reverse causation to have occurred, survey respondents would have needed to anticipate their own changes in perceptions of electoral integrity and then chosen to support the winning or losing candidate accordingly. Such a causal relationship is highly implausible.

Because all three panel studies employed random stratified sampling techniques to obtain nationally representative samples, and because I did not consider differing effects of partisan media exposure across different demographic subgroups, all of my key findings are applicable to the U.S. adult population. My estimates of specific effect sizes

may have been influenced by the underrepresentation of certain subgroups among panelists. However, the results for models using recommended population weights, presented in the appendix, show that my substantive findings were largely unchanged by the incorporation of statistical weighting.

I obtained substantively similar results in three different elections, so my findings were not dependent upon the unique circumstances of any one of those election cycles. My results most likely cannot be generalized beyond the current U.S. media environment, though. The recent resurgence of partisan media only reached its current state, especially in the realm of television, with MSNBC's shift toward an overtly Democratic-leaning primetime line-up in the middle of the last decade. My results are unlikely to apply to elections that occurred prior to 2004, and I can only speculate as to how well they will apply in the future given potential changes in the structure and content of news and public affairs media.

Relatedly, perhaps the most significant threat to the validity of this study results from my exclusive focus on television media. The Pew Research Center (2016) continues to report in its annual updates that more Americans get their news from television than from any other source. The gap between television and internet-based sources closes with each passing year, however. To highlight one example of why this might matter, one of the biggest post-election narratives about media's role in the 2016 presidential election has been about the prevalence of fake news online. My analysis makes no effort to account for the effects of partisan-oriented stories that circulate online, many of which may relate either directly or indirectly to the integrity of the electoral process. Future research that seeks to expand upon my findings ought to include partisan news that

appears and is shared online in order to determine whether the effects of online news are similar to the effects of partisan television news.

Implications for American Democracy in 2016 and Beyond

Despite strong public reactions to some of Trump's most inflammatory claims that the process was rigged, Hillary Clinton and her most visible supporters engaged in their own version of questioning the integrity of American elections during the 2016 campaign. For example, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman (2016) had no problem suggesting that media bias could unfairly cost Clinton the election. And less than three weeks after the election, Clinton agreed to join a Green Party-led recount effort in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. The potential effect of this decision is an indication to Clinton's supporters that the previously reported results should not be trusted, despite the fact that the proposed recounts have virtually no chance of producing a new result.

Additionally, Clinton was widely expected to win throughout much of the campaign. As I have demonstrated, losers surprised by the results tend to be less trusting than those who were uncertain of the outcome or anticipated a loss. Meanwhile, favorability ratings for both major party nominees in 2016 were at historical extremes, with Clinton's supporters generally despising Trump and vice versa (e.g. Enten, 2016; Bump, 2016). Regardless of who won, the sizable gap between evaluations of the two candidates meant that voters on the losing side were sure to be particularly dissatisfied with the outcome.

Clinton supporters who consumed large proportions of like-minded media relative to neutral or cross-cutting media in the weeks surrounding the election are particularly likely to have experienced large decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity upon discovering that a figure they truly despised won an election he was supposed to have lost. Despite promises from Democratic elites to work with a legitimately elected president from the other party, Trump's election has been met with a number of protests from citizens who oppose him. Democrats won the popular vote for president but lost in the Electoral College for the second time in five presidential elections, a factor that will surely contribute to claims that Trump's presidency is illegitimate. Trump opponents who wish to cast doubt on the electoral process will not have to reach very far to argue that the process produced an unfair outcome.

In the latest bizarre development in one of the most extraordinary elections in recent memory, Donald Trump—the winner of the election—is now advancing claims that millions of votes were illegally cast for his (losing) opponent. Combined with a steady stream of pre-election delegitimizing talk, including claims that Trump's opponent ought to be in jail, this latest narrative suggests that many Trump supporters may not have experienced increased perceptions of electoral integrity as would normally be expected of winners. Trump supporters who were most tuned in to the various conspiracy theories surrounding the election via right-wing partisan media could quite plausibly have decreased in perceptions of electoral integrity from pre to post-election despite having voted for the winning candidate.

Exposure to like-minded media produced greater decreases in perceptions of electoral integrity among losers. These exacerbated decreases were not balanced at the

individual level by positive effects from cross-cutting media or at the aggregate level by positive effects of like-minded media on winners. Previously-distrusting Republicans' gains in perceptions of electoral integrity, if they even occurred in 2016, may well be outweighed in the aggregate by previously-trusting Democrats' more severe decreases. If this trend holds over the long-term, the result would be a populace with slowly but steadily eroding confidence in the legitimacy of elections.

Donald Trump's victory prevented the country from having to wait and see whether the loser of the 2016 election would concede. And yet, he may have set a dangerous precedent. Political campaign professionals have historically looked for concise explanations for why past campaigns succeeded or failed and have been quick to adopt tactics used by successful campaigns in the recent past (Issenberg, 2012). Will Trump's victory in the 2016 race lead more candidates to base their campaigns around claims that the democratic process is fundamentally unfair in 2020 and subsequent elections? Will partisan media outlets embrace these arguments in an effort to keep devoted partisans in a state of frenzy much like the ones that produced violence at several Trump campaign rallies? Unfortunately, these outcomes are quite plausible if by no means guaranteed.

Many partisans experience elections in much the same way that sports fans experience a contest involving their favorite team. By no means should this metaphor imply that politics is just a game without serious consequences. As Chicago Cubs fans who cried following their team's victory in the 2016 World Series can attest, sports produce powerful feelings of despair and of joy. And, as witnesses to soccer riots in any number of European countries (and fans from other cities who have ever attended a

sporting event in Philadelphia) know, sports can spark significantly more dangerous outcomes, as well.

Partisan media have served to undermine losers' consent in three recent American elections. American democracy has lasted through periods when media outlets were closely aligned with political parties in the past. However, Donald Trump's successful campaign for the presidency in which he embraced doubts about the electoral process presents a strong counterweight to efforts to place the effects of like-minded media in a rosy context. Candidates who seek to undermine the legitimacy of the electoral process have a powerful megaphone in the form of partisan media outlets. Barring major changes in the American media environment, like-minded media appear likely to continue to embitter electoral losers in coming elections. If partisan outlets embrace the types of messages that produce this effect, losers will become even less confident that the electoral process—the cornerstone of representative democracy—is fair and just.

APPENDIX A: QUESTION WORDING

Partisan identification
Asked in the pre and post-election surveys in 2008 as well as the pre-election survey in 2012

1. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a ...
Republican
Democrat
Independent
Another party, please specify
No preference

2. [If thinks of self as a Republican:] Would you call yourself a ...
Strong Republican
Not very strong Republican

3. [If thinks of self as a Democrat:] Would you call yourself a ...
Strong Democrat
Not very strong Democrat

4. [If thinks of self as an Independent or of another political party, or has no party preference:] Do you think of yourself as closer to the ...
Republican Party
Democratic Party

Pre-election candidate preferences
2008

1. If the presidential election was held today and John McCain and Sarah Palin, the Republicans, were running against Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the Democrats, who would you vote for?
John McCain and Sarah Palin, the Republicans
Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the Democrats
Ralph Nader and Matt Gonzalez, the Independents
Bob Barr and Wayne Allyn Root, the Libertarians
Cynthia McKinney and Rosa Clemente, the Green Party candidates
Other, specify
Don't know

2012

1. [Randomized to show either Romney and Ryan first and Obama and Biden second or Obama and Biden first and Romney and Ryan second:] If the presidential election were

held today between Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, the Republicans, against Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the Democrats, who would you vote for?
[Rotated to match order in question text:]
Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, the Republicans
Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the Democrats
Other [specify]
Don't know

Voting Self-Reports
Asked in the post-election surveys for all three elections

1. This question is about the [2008/2012/2014] November election. In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or they just didn't have time. Which of the following statements best describes you?
I did not vote in the November election.
I thought about voting in that election but didn't.
I usually vote but didn't in that election.
I am sure I voted in the November election.

Media exposure
In the pre-election surveys for all three elections and the post-election surveys in 2008 and 2012, respondents were first asked:

1. From which of the following sources have you heard anything about the presidential campaign?
Television news programs (morning or evening)
Newspapers, either online or print versions
Television talk shows, public affairs or news analysis programs
Internet sites, chat rooms or blogs
Radio news or radio talk shows
News magazines
Have not heard anything about the presidential campaign

Respondents who selected "Television news programs" and/or "Television talk shows, public affairs or news analysis programs" were then shown a series of four screens divided among the remainder of the survey, with each screen listing approximately 13 different television programs as well as a none of the above option following this text:
2. Which of the following programs do you watch regularly on television? Please check any that you watch at least once a month.

Perceptions of Electoral Legitimacy
Asked in the pre and post-election surveys for all three elections

1. How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think: a good deal, some, or not much?
A good deal
Some
Not much

2. In general, do you think the best candidates win the elections, or is it just the candidates who raise the most money that get elected, or something in between?
Best candidates win
Candidates who raise the most money win
Something in between

3. In some countries, people believe their elections are conducted fairly. In other countries, people believe that their elections are conducted unfairly. Do you believe presidential elections in the United States are generally …
Very fair
Somewhat fair
Neither fair nor unfair
Somewhat unfair
Very unfair

4. How confident are you that the votes across the country are accurately counted on Election Day?
Very confident
Somewhat confident
Not too confident
Not at all confident

System Support
Asked in the pre and post-election waves in 2012

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
[Respondents shown Strongly agree/Somewhat agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Somewhat disagree/Strongly disagree scale for each]

1. I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of.

2. Our system of government is in need of some serious changes.
3. Whatever its faults may be, our form of government is best for representing the interests of the country's citizens.

4. At present I feel very critical of our political system.

Expectations
Asked in the pre-election wave in 2012

1. Regardless of who you might vote for, who do you think is most likely to win the election for president this November? [Randomized to show either Romney first and Obama second or Obama first and Romney second:] Barack Obama, the Democrat, or Mitt Romney, the Republican?
[Rotated to match order in question text:]
Barack Obama
Mitt Romney
Don't know

[If the first question was skipped, respondents were shown the following prompt:]
Please just give us your best guess. Who do you think is most likely to win the election for president?
Barack Obama
Mitt Romney
Don't know

2. Do you think [choice from first question] will beat [other candidate] by a lot or by just a little?
By a lot
By just a little

APPENDIX B: REPLICATIONS USING WEIGHTED DATA

Table B.1: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2008 Using Weighted Data

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.008
	(0.057)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.38***
	(0.073)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.081
	(0.090)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.15
	(0.12)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0053***
	(0.00064)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.012***
	(0.00092)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.096†
	(0.052)
Wave	0.084*
	(0.036)
Constant	0.032***
	(0.0052)
N	8,982

†p<.10   *p<.05   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

Table B.2: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2012 Using Weighted Data

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.041
	(0.088)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.24†
	(0.13)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.55
	(0.52)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.45
	(0.53)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0035***
	(0.0010)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.0083***
	(0.0016)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.050
	(0.088)
Wave	0.041
	(0.061)
Constant	0.033***
	(0.0092)
N	1,593

†p<.10   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

Table B.3: Effects of Winning and Losing on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2014 Using Weighted Data

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.26***
	(0.040)
Wave	0.15***
	(0.027)
Constant	0.0084
	(0.010)
N	1,060

***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

Table B.4: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2014 Using Weighted Data

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.11
	(0.081)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.36**
	(0.13)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.042
	(0.16)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.61
	(0.41)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0072
	(0.033)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.052
	(0.048)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.088
	(0.11)
Wave	0.12
	(0.074)
Constant	0.0084
	(0.0099)
N	1,060

**p<.01

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

Table B.5: Effects of Vicarious Winning and Vicarious Losing on Nonvoters' Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2008 and 2012 Using Weighted Data

	2008 Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)	**2012** Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status	-0.54***	-0.52***
	(0.059)	(0.061)
Wave	0.21***	0.25***
	(0.042)	(0.037)
Constant	-0.079***	-0.0094
	(0.015)	(0.015)
N	1,530	547

***$p<.001$

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

Table B.6: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Nonvoters' Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Using Weighted Data

	2008 Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)	2012 Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.17 (0.12)	-0.054 (0.14)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.37* (0.18)	0.052 (0.22)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.048 (0.25)	-0.82 (0.51)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.094 (0.32)	1.44* (0.63)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0081*** (0.0017)	0.0054*** (0.0014)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.017*** (0.0029)	-0.011*** (0.0024)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status	0.21† (0.12)	-0.053 (0.14)
Wave	-0.20* (0.087)	0.0063 (0.078)
Constant	-0.072*** (0.015)	-0.00013 (0.014)
N	1,494	1,529

†$p<.10$ *$p<.05$ **$p<.01$

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

APPENDIX C: REPLICATIONS INCORPORATING DEMOGRAPHIC CONTROLS

Table C.1: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2008 Controlling for Demographic Variables

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.0026
	(0.034)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.35***
	(0.043)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.032
	(0.065)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.16*
	(0.078)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0052***
	(0.00037)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.011***
	(0.00052)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.15***
	(0.031)
Wave * Age	-0.0018***
	(0.00044)
Wave * Gender: Female	0.021
	(0.013)
Wave * Race: Non-white	0.071***
	(0.017)
Wave * Education: Less than a high school degree	-0.017
	(0.034)
Wave * Education: High school degree or equivalent	0.033†
	(0.017)
Wave * Education: Some college	0.010
	(0.015)
Wave	0.15***
	(0.034)
Constant	0.032***
	(0.0044)
N	8,982

†p<.10   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. The reference category for Education is Bachelor's degree or higher.

Table C.2: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2012 Controlling for Demographic Variables

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.079
	(0.072)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.28**
	(0.10)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.13
	(0.44)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.0040
	(0.46)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0031***
	(0.00082)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.0079***
	(0.0012)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.080
	(0.074)
Wave * Age	-0.00090
	(0.0012
Wave * Gender: Female	-0.0045
	(0.029)
Wave * Race: Non-white	0.036***
	(0.037)
Wave * Education: Less than a high school degree	-0.012
	(0.087)
Wave * Education: High school degree or equivalent	0.037
	(0.042)
Wave * Education: Some college	0.064†
	(0.039)
Wave	0.82
	(0.075)
Constant	0.031**
	(0.010)
N	1,593

†p<.10   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. The reference category for Education is Bachelor's degree or higher.

Table C.3: Effects of Winning and Losing on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2014 Controlling for Demographic Variables

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.26***
	(0.035)
Wave * Age	-0.00067
	(0.0014)
Wave * Gender: Female	-0.048
	(0.034)
Wave * Race: Non-white	-0.061
	(0.043)
Wave * Education: Less than a high school degree	-0.096
	(0.099)
Wave * Education: High school degree or equivalent	-0.051
	(0.049)
Wave * Education: Some college	-0.050
	(0.047)
Wave	0.26***
	(0.073)
Constant	0.018
	(0.012)
N	1,060

†p<.10   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. The reference category for Education is Bachelor's degree or higher.

Table C.4: Effects of Partisan Media Exposure on Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2014 Controlling for Demographic Variables

	Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	0.14†
	(0.076)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.34**
	(0.12)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.059
	(0.14)
Wave * Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.28
	(0.49)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.023
	(0.029)
Wave * Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.075†
	(0.041)
Wave * Loser Status	-0.032
	(0.092)
Wave * Age	-0.0011
	(0.0014)
Wave * Gender: Female	-0.034
	(0.034)
Wave * Race: Non-white	-0.037
	(0.044)
Wave * Education: Less than a high school degree	-0.017
	(0.034)
Wave * Education: High school degree or equivalent	-0.046
	(0.049)
Wave * Education: Some college	-0.090
	(0.099)
Wave	0.20***
	(0.093)
Constant	0.032*
	(0.0044)
N	1,060

†p<.10   *p<.05   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. The reference category for Education is Bachelor's degree or higher.

Table C.5: Effects of Vicarious Winning and Vicarious Losing on Nonvoters' Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 2008 and 2012 Controlling for Demographic Variables

	2008 Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)	**2012 Nonvoters** Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status	-0.60***	-0.55***
	(0.035)	(0.056)
Wave * Age	-0.00092	0.0037†
	(0.0012)	(0.0021)
Wave * Gender: Female	0.081*	-0.021
	(0.034)	(0.054)
Wave * Race: Non-white	0.071	0.020
	(0.042)	(0.064)
Wave * Education: Less than a high school degree	-0.12†	0.073
	(0.064)	(0.13)
Wave * Education: High school degree or equivalent	-0.019	-0.00052
	(0.045)	(0.073)
Wave * Education: Some college	-0.038	0.097
	(0.043)	(0.074)
Wave	0.28***	0.052
	(0.067)	(0.11)
Constant	-0.086***	-0.027
	(0.011)	(0.019)
N	1,530	547

†p<.10   *p<.05   ***p<.001

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

Table C.6: Effects of Exposure to Partisan Media on Nonvoters' Pre-Election to Post-Election Changes in Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Controlling for Demographic Variables

	2008 Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)	2012 Nonvoters Coeff. (S.E.)
Wave * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.087	-0.028
	(0.083)	(0.12)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Proportion Like-Minded	-0.12	-0.074
	(0.11)	(0.20)
Wave * Proportion Cross-Cutting	-0.061	-0.59
	(0.11)	(0.50)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Proportion Cross-Cutting	0.014	0.97†
	(0.15)	(0.56)
Wave * Strength of Preference	0.0073***	0.00758***
	(0.00090)	(0.0014)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status * Strength of Preference	-0.015***	-0.012***
	(0.0013)	(0.0021)
Wave * Vicarious Loser Status	0.0048	-0.0068
	(0.72)	(0.12)
Wave * Age	-0.0011	0.0046*
	(0.0011)	(0.0021)
Wave * Gender: Female	0.073*	-0.0081
	(0.033)	(0.054)
Wave * Race: Non-white	0.029	-0.018
	(0.041)	(0.064)
Wave * Education: Less than a high school degree	-0.11†	0.11
	(0.063)	(0.13)
Wave * Education: High school degree or equivalent	-0.0040	0.0039
	(0.044)	(0.075)
Wave * Education: Some college	-0.016	0.13†
	(0.042)	(0.074)
Wave	-0.20*	-0.28*
	(0.087)	(0.13)
Constant	-0.072***	-0.018
	(0.015)	(0.018)
N	1,494	530

†p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01

Note: Table entries are unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from linear fixed effects regression models. The dependent variable is Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. GfK's recommended sampling weights for each respondent have been applied in this analysis.

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