

Political Knowledge of the 21st Century

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Abstract

Political knowledge is a vital part of democracy. People need to be politically knowledgeable so that they can better participate in every aspect of democracy. People become more politically knowledgeable if they have the ability, the opportunity, and the motivation to do so. It has been shown that there are demographic gaps of the “haves” and “have-nots” of the political world due to a lack of ability, opportunity, or motivation. It has also been suggested that more exposure to media will increase a person’s political knowledge. The following paper will first explore the relationship between media usage and political knowledge to see if media is actually a driving factor in political knowledge or does the increase come from demographics. Initial findings suggest media usage is a driving factor in political knowledge but when demographics are held constant only Internet news usage remains as a relevant factor. I then explored whether usage of certain types of media will increase or decrease the demographic gaps of political knowledge. These results were mixed though it does appear certain types of media usage will either increase or decrease the knowledge gaps depending on the specific demographic. I then conclude with the importance of my findings as well as potential future expansions of this work.

Political Knowledge of the 21st Century

There is an old expression that knowledge is power and in the case of political knowledge there is definitely power that comes with it. Those who are politically knowledgeable tend to be more politically active whether that be through protesting, contributing funds to candidates that they prefer, or simply by voting. By being knowledgeable and therefore active these highly politically knowledgeable people are influencing how the government is run and potentially the outcome of their country's future. Being politically educated can also help people with a sense of identity; understand their personal interest, and interests of their small groups (Galston, 2004).

The Greeks are often considered the founders of democracy and to them being politically knowledgeable was not just a right but was a democratic duty. The Greeks used a form of democracy called Athenian Democracy where the citizens, granted if they were male and owned property, were in charge of running the government and also speaking at the assembly where laws and regulations would be created. Often citizens were selected in a lottery system to become members of government or part of the court systems. This meant that it was important for all citizens of Greece to stay politically knowledgeable or risk the possibility of being an uneducated member of government. Since the Greek Era there have been multiple changes to democracy and also a change in the importance put on all members of a society to be politically knowledgeable. In the modern world the average human being does not have to stay up to date with political information because there is no risk of becoming a member of an important government agency or high court. The problem with this is often politically uneducated voters are voting not based on opinions of an issue, or which candidate best fits their political opinions. In a study done on the 1997 British General Election Study, Larcinese (2007) showed that the

amount of political knowledge one has had a “sizeable influence” in determining the likelihood of whether or not a person was likely to vote. He goes on to say that in an ideal democracy the public decisions are based off the opinions of all the members of that society. By having a group of that population that is politically unknowledgeable, and therefore less likely to participate in democracy, you get an unrepresentative picture of a population’s needs and instead focus solely on the needs of the politically knowledgeable. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996: page 1) describe the need of citizens to have political power by saying:

“Factual knowledge on such topics as the institutions and processes of government, current economic and social conditions, the major issues of the day, and the stands of political leaders on those issues assist citizens in discerning their individual and group interests, in connecting their interests to broader notions of the public good, and in effectively expressing these views through political participation”

If political knowledge is so important to a society then why does a modern well developed nation, such as the United States, not see its citizens invest the time into politics? Is it because we simply do not care about political issues or do some people feel as if their opinion does not matter and therefore they could better invest their time doing something they feel as more rational? One explanation deals with the lack of resources by certain groups and the limiting ability that puts on them. For example it has been suggested by Hillygus (2005) that higher levels of income, and level of education completed are correlated with political knowledge and therefore also their likelihood to participate in politics. In the following paper I will look at this explanation of the difference in political knowledge between the “haves” and “have-nots” of the political world. Within every demographic there are groups that have higher levels of political knowledge, the “haves”, than other groups within the demographic, the “have-

nots”. I will explore this gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” of certain demographics by first showing that it does exist by using previous author’s works about the subject. I will then take it a step further and explore whether the technology of the twenty-first century, such as gathering and using information from the Internet, and news from cable television will close the gaps between the “haves” and “have-nots” or whether the new media will become just another source of information for the haves to further their gap in knowledge from the have-nots. I will conclude my paper with a discussion about my findings and suggest potential future expansions of this paper.

Literature Review

Because the focus of this paper deals with a person’s political knowledge, I will start my review of previous author’s works by looking at what has been understood about that issue. Political knowledge tests what respondents know about different aspects within the political world. Factual political knowledge can be divided into different sub-categories that can measure what people know about certain topics. These sub-categories include governmental mechanics, also known as textbook or factual knowledge, such as how many senators are elected from each state? The second category is current events, also known surveillance knowledge, and tests whether people are able to correctly identify topics that are currently affecting today’s world or the actors of the modern government. An example of a current event political knowledge question would be, who is the U.S Secretary of State, or what is the name of the country the United States is currently “intervening” in North Africa? The frequent change in politics, whether it be new actors, or new political events makes surveillance political knowledge require

more effort to continuously update as compared to the textbook knowledge. Once you have obtained the textbook knowledge there is no need to update any facts, but who holds a certain office or what war we are currently in changes periodically and effort must be put in to obtain that knowledge. The last type of political knowledge question that may be asked is designed to understand a person's knowledge of historical political events. Historical political knowledge questions often are not included in knowledge surveys but can be very helpful in separating the low and elites in political knowledge. An example of a historical political knowledge question would be, what was the name of the man who shot President Kennedy, or what was the name of the Supreme Court decision that established judicial review (Jennings, 1996)?

On almost every day Americans are exposed to extremely large amounts of information whether it be from the television, from a newspaper, overhearing a conversation, or learning a new task at school or work. This leads to what is known as an information overload, causing people to only retain information that they find relevant or important to their daily lives. This limits the amount of knowledge a person will obtain due to exposure of information whether that be political knowledge, popular culture knowledge, knowledge of non-political facts, or other various forms of knowledge. Delli Karpini and Keeter (1996) have shown that Americans are much less likely to be knowledgeable about political facts as compared to other forms of information gathering. For example, they show that in the 1992 Presidential Election the names of the two presidential candidates were known by practically everyone asked. However, when asked where the candidates stood compared to each other on certain issues only 61 percent accurately placed the candidates correctly on the issue of abortion, and only 54 percent placed them correctly on governmental spending. In comparison 91 percent of respondents could correctly identify the amount of inches in a yard and 93 percent could identify actor/comedian

Bill Cosby. They find that the reason why political knowledge varies from question to question deals with the amount of exposure that is given towards that issue. Exposure to more coverage of an issue can provide more opportunity, and potentially motivation for a person to retain knowledge on that issue. For example 74 percent of people asked were able to correctly identify who is the Vice President while only 30 percent could identify both of their state's US Senators, and only 29 percent could identify their House of Representatives member. Delli Karpini and Keeter argue this is because the increase in attention the media spends on the Vice President as compared to individual Senators and House members. The amount of knowledge a person has on any topic, including political knowledge, is relative to the amount of opportunity that person has to learn that knowledge, as well as their motivation and ability. In comparison to other countries, the amount of knowledge Americans have on political issues is significantly less than other comparable democracies though there is no evidence for a lack of ability or opportunity for Americans to obtain that knowledge (see Schudson, 2000 for an example). Simply put, as a whole Americans do not have the motivation to care as much about political issues as individuals in other Western countries.

Political knowledge can vary from issue to issue but it also varies over time. One type of political knowledge that varies quite significantly over time is historical political knowledge. For example Schuman and Scott (1989) have shown that people tend to put more emphasis on political and social events that happened during the adolescent and young adult parts of their lives. These events tend to shape their political thinking and often can be what historical memories are best remembered. For example, a person growing up during the Vietnam War or World War II is much more likely to remember historical political knowledge of that time as compared to someone who grew up during the Great Depression. Jennings (1996) found results

that back Schuman and Scott's predictions by looking at political knowledge of high school students and their parents over time. He found that when asking "what was the political party of FDR?", the parents were able to correctly answer Democrat 94 percent of the time while the high school students, who did not grow up in FDR's time, answered the question correctly only 70 percent of the time. He also found, by looking at the high school students, that textbook political knowledge drops off after completion of a person's education. In 1965, the year of graduation for the high school students in his survey, they were able to correctly answer the length of a U.S. Senators term at a 51 percent rate. In 1973 the percentage had dropped to just 43 percent, an average of one percentage point for each year after graduation. He explains this drop off by saying high school students are tested so often on textbook knowledge that there would naturally be an increase in that type of political knowledge during the high school years. As time goes on the level of knowledge on textbook issues decreases as the importance in knowing these facts become less and less important for people to remember. Though the high school students had a drop off in textbook information, it was shown that with age comes an increase in current event or surveillance knowledge. As you become older and start to pay more attention to current events in the news, especially for those who went to college, which leads to surveillance knowledge increases. "Just as the removal of stimuli led to a decrease in textbook knowledge, so too the increase in knowledge about these two aspects of foreign affairs seems to have been driven by more exposure to them as the youth made their way through the post-high school years" (Jennings, 1996 pg 10).

Over a person's lifetime the amount of political knowledge will fluctuate and knowledge within certain areas will either increase or decrease; but what about the American society as a whole, does political knowledge fluctuate from decade to decade? Fifty years ago were people

more knowledgeable or has knowledge grown with time? The simple answer to this question is neither; political knowledge of the society has remained fairly stable over time. “ We find that in spite of numerous changes in their social, political, economic, and technological environments, Americans are essentially neither more nor less informed about politics than they were fifty years ago”(Delli Karpini and Keeter, 1996 pg. 105). Over time the environment for knowledge should grow due to increases in opportunity, ability and motivation. Delli Karpini and Keeter argue that after World War II the ability for Americans to learn greatly increased but the amount of political knowledge did not increase with the ability. They argue that the ability for people to learn has increased due to a higher amount of money put into public and private education by the government. There also is an increase in the opportunity for people to become knowledgeable on facts about certain issues that can easily be found in public libraries, or by gathering information from the media. Also, with the workforce moving towards a more modern workplace the opportunity for people to gather political knowledge increases as people often have “water cooler” conversations over topics that often include political events. The last factor that could potentially increase the society’s political knowledge over time is their motivation to learn. Theoretically people should become more motivated to learn about politics as issues seem to become more and more important every day. However, the opposite might be true and could be the reason why people today are no more inclined to be politically knowledgeable as compared to forty or fifty years ago. As issues become more and more complex the desire and sense of need to become politically knowledgeable decreases. Though the environment is ripe for the picking for political knowledge people have to want to become more politically knowledgeable and sadly it seems as though that is just not the case in American society. No matter how rich the environment is for political knowledge, that is opportunity and ability wise, the increase or

decrease in knowledge from year to year fluctuates minimally, often less than one percentage point (Delli Karpini and Keeter 1996).

Demographics

With political knowledge being power in politics it would be wise for all groups of people to invest their time in acquiring knowledge so that their group's beliefs can be properly represented in government. If this were the case we would expect to see very similar averages in political knowledge for all races, all income levels, all levels of education, equality in knowledge between men and women, and a similar level of political knowledge no matter a person's age. In American politics this is not the case. As I mentioned in my introduction to this paper, there is a difference between the "haves" and "have-nots" of the political world. Sex, Race, Education, Income, and age are all examples of demographics that are made up of the "haves" and "have-nots" of political knowledge. For those groups who are in the outside looking in as far as political knowledge, representation of their beliefs in government might not be as strong as they could potentially be. For a democracy this could greatly limit the ability for the country to change because the "haves" are likely to keep the status quo and worry only on issues that they find important, not issues that are important for the people as a whole. If the "have-nots" were to have a higher political knowledge and therefore more participation in politics, a more equal representation of the whole population's ideas would be presented. To create a better understanding of this phenomenon I will provide analysis backed by previous author's works of some of the previously mentioned demographics and show who are the "haves" and who are the "have-nots" of today's political world.

Of all demographics that show a significant difference in political knowledge between the “haves” and “have-nots” the best indicator for knowledge of politics is without question level of education completed. In practically any article that discusses political knowledge and demographics there will most likely be a part that discusses the strong positive correlation between political knowledge and levels of education. Delli Karpini and Keeter (1996) show that of demographics that were measured education had the strongest correlation to political knowledge. Hillygus (2005) attempts to understand the correlation between political knowledge and education by proposing three hypothesis on the subject. First is the civic education hypothesis that argues well educated people obtain the abilities to understand the complex political arena, and the ability to follow, watch, and evaluate candidates and elections. Second is the social network hypothesis that argues higher education does not necessarily create better qualified citizens to participate in politics but through networking selects those that are able to participate in politics. “Those with higher levels of education are substantially more likely to be found closer to the center of politically important social net-works, while those with less education are much more likely to be found at the periphery”. Last is the political meritocracy hypothesis, which argues political knowledge is not caused by higher levels of education but instead those who obtain a higher level of education are naturally going to be more likely to be politically active and knowledgeable. The higher levels of education do not cause a higher political knowledge but instead separates those with a higher level of intelligence from those with a lower level of intelligence. The theory states that intelligence is the cause of both higher levels of education and political knowledge, not something in the education that causes people to be more politically knowledgeable. Hillygus finds that of the three proposed hypothesis the one that holds the most water is the civic education theory by showing that verbal skills have a strong

influence on the likelihood of future political involvement, and that the verbal skills are reinforced throughout a person's education. If Hillygus is correct it would explain the strong positive correlation between those who have higher levels of education, and their ability to perform well when given a political knowledge test.

A second demographic that gets a lot of attention from scholars is the difference in political knowledge amongst men and women. With the increase of female education over time, one might expect that females would be more politically knowledgeable as compared to males. The truth however is that males on average have a higher level of political knowledge. Delli Karpini and Keeter (1996) conducted two surveys, one in 1988 and one in 1999 that both concluded males on average scored better in mean percentage correct on political knowledge questions. Both years men averaged just over fifty percent in political knowledge scales while women averaged just less than forty percentage points. However women were more knowledgeable than men on local politics that directly affect the family. In a 1991 survey done in Richmond, Virginia women were able to correctly name the school board's superintendent 18 percent of the time while males were able to identify them 11 percent of the time. As Sanbonmatsu (2003) points out, due to a lack of political knowledge, it is no wonder why women are disproportionately underrepresented in government. She argues that because women are less likely to be politically knowledgeable women are also less likely to be aware of the fact that women are underrepresented in government. Because women don't know they are underrepresented the issue is not important to them and they do not increase their involvement in politics to counteract the problem. This begs the question, if women are underrepresented in politics why is there not a push to inform women on this issue and raise their political knowledge.

Verba, Burns, and Schlozman (1997) answer the question by saying “women are less politically interested, informed, and efficacious than men and that this gender gap in political engagement has consequences for political participation.” Due to fundamental differences in males and females’ personalities, being interested in politics is the key reason why there is a gender gap in political knowledge. They go on to say that men naturally are going to be drawn to political engagement more than women due to males’ aggressive behaviors and tendency to be drawn to conflict. Women on the other hand avoid this aggression and due to gender roles and society norms that causes them to avoid the competitive atmosphere of politics. With a lack of interest in politics that may be shaped by social norms and family responsibilities it is no shock that women tend to have lower political knowledge scores than males. Delli Karpini and Keeter explain the gender gap in political knowledge by saying there is a fundamental difference in how men and women are raised and socialized. This leads to more opportunity for males to participate in politics and though women today have the right to vote some were raised in a very traditionalist household where it is thought to be improper for a woman to invest her time in politics. To put it simply until society norms change, and it looks as if that is slowly but surely happening, women on average are going to avoid politics and investing in political knowledge more than men and spend their time elsewhere.

Not only does the sex of a person matter, or the amount of education they have, but many other demographics come into play in determining who is more politically informed and therefore likely to have political power. Race, age, and income level are also important demographics to consider when looking into the affects of political knowledge. When looking at race and political knowledge Whites have a distinct advantage over Blacks, Hispanics, and other minority groups. In Delli Karpini and Keeter’s 1988 and 1989 surveys that calculate mean

percentage of a groups correct responds on a political knowledge, Whites averaged right around 50 percent correct answers and Blacks averaged only 38 percent. They attribute the gap in knowledge between whites and minorities to a lack of opportunity. When looking at education whites are more likely to attend schools that are resource rich as compared to minorities that often attend inner city schools with outdate information and a general lack of resources to help generate knowledge. As shown earlier students either directly out of high school or in high school should have higher levels of textbook knowledge. When controlled for other factors blacks fall short of whites in textbook knowledge suggesting that the quality of education is a factor in the race gap of political knowledge.

Because of contradictory influences that would seem to either raise or lower a person's political knowledge age has a relatively low correlation with political information. Delli Karpini and Keeter (1996) say that because the quality of education continues to grow in the United States, due to more funding and research, this should lead to a lower political knowledge as a person gets older as compared to the younger generations. This is not the case due to life experiences. By simply being alive and exposed to more political knowledge, the repetition in information can cause people to remember political facts. Interest, and therefore knowledge, will increase in a person's lifespan as issues such as social security, interest rates, and education of their children becomes important. The gain from life experiences outweighs the lack in education quality and leads to a weak positive correlation between age and overall political knowledge (.06 in the 1986 NES Survey) (Delli Karpini and Keeter 1996). Over time the gap between the young and old continues to grow, though the correlation is small, as people seem to be less interested in politics early in their life. In surveys done by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Pres, youth of the 1940s 1950s and 1960s were equally knowledgeable as the elderly in questions

regarding political issues and political actors (Times Mirror, 1990). Starting in the 1970s attention to the news amongst the youth dropped and knowledge levels of political information also began to fall. As long as there is a continued lack of interest in American youth in politics the gap between the old and young and their political knowledge will continue to grow.

The last demographic that will be discussed as having a significant correlation to a person's political knowledge is income level. As compared to all other demographics, other than education, a person's income level is the best predictor of their political knowledge. In the 1988 and 1989 surveys done by Delli Karpini and Keeter people with the highest level of income (more than 50,000 dollars per year) averaged a knowledge score of just under 60 percent, those with a middle level of income (49,999 to 20,000 dollars per year) averaged a knowledge score of just under 50 percent, and people with the lowest level of income (19,999 dollars or less) averaged just below 40 percent. Not surprisingly those with the highest amount of money, and therefore the highest amount of resources are able to obtain and use their political knowledge. In the 1988 NES Survey the gap between the medians of the highest and lowest levels of income was over 40 percentage points. This shows a lack of opportunity and ability to mobilize politically for the lowest levels of income. This is significant problem because those who could arguably need the most help politically aren't likely to receive that help due to a lack of knowledge and participation.

With such a strong disparity between the "haves" and "have-nots" of political knowledge the amount of representation in politics are greatly skewed to those that have the power. Those that have the power have the motivation to keep it and are likely to invest more time and resources in gathering knowledge. The politically elite (rich, white, highly educated males) are

going to have the resources and motivation to gain political knowledge whether that be from more education, or by more exposure to the media.

Media and Political Knowledge

As mentioned earlier the amount of political knowledge a person can obtain depends on the person's motivation, opportunity, and ability. With the ever expanding role of the media a person's motivation and opportunity are greatly influenced with the amount of information that is available. With technology becoming more of a role in almost every American household, the potential for political knowledge should be at an all time high. According to Joanne Ostrow of the Denver Post more Americans are getting their news from cable TV and the Internet than any time before. Cable TV allows for more news coverage whether it is the local political information gathered on local networks, or national and international news found on cable channels such as Fox News, CNN, or MSNBC. The Internet allows people to explore different websites to search for more information on nearly any political topic they find interesting. There are also newspapers and radio talk shows that provide yet another opportunity for people to gain political knowledge. The problem with this idea is that though there is an ever expanding opportunity for people to obtain political knowledge there is a general lack of motivation to do so.

One explanation for the reason why there is an increase in the amount of information present through the expanded role of the media but a lack of increase in political knowledge is the idea of choice. Prior (2005) questioned whether the increase in available options in what to

watch on television would increase or decrease the knowledge a person would have. He hypothesized that those who want political information will seek that information by watching television news or searching for political stories on the Internet, while those looking for entertainment, whether that be sports, comedy, drama, reality television etc., would use the media for that purpose and avoid news and politics. He conducted a survey that asked both a person's preference in what they watched on television and their political knowledge. People ordered one to ten a list of programs they preferred from items such as news, talk shows, sports, and game shows. He used this information to create a "Relative Entertainment Preference" variable that measured how much a person likes a particular type of television show. He found a negative linear relationship between a person's preference to avoid news and their political knowledge. This suggest that though there is an increase in the opportunity for a person to obtain political knowledge due to an increase in Internet usage and cable television as well as print and radio, some people won't increase their political knowledge due to a lack of motivation and preference for news and a preference for education. To put it in other terms TiVo, Facebook, Dancing with the Stars, Twitter, and House are slowly but surely lowering the country's average political knowledge.

Some scholars who are interested in media and political knowledge look to understand whether demographic characteristics will lead to better reception of information from the media, and therefore an increase in political knowledge. Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen (2006) looked to understand whether people with different levels of education were more likely to better receive political information, and therefore political knowledge, from one form of media or another. They found that when looking at newspaper coverage, an increase in political coverage lead to a greater increase in knowledge for the most educated as compared to a smaller increase in

knowledge with increasing newspaper coverage for the less educated. The reason why this happens is because the educated are trained to be able to read and comprehend the information better than those that are less educated. Television delivers a different form of information, one that is viewed and heard as compared to read. Though the overall increase from low levels of political coverage to high levels of political coverage increases one's political knowledge it does not do so at the rate that print media does. For low educated people the increase in political knowledge from an increase in television coverage is very similar to that of the most educated. This means that as far as education the type of media that is being viewed will be a factor in the increase or decrease in the political knowledge gap.

With demographics being a very important part of political knowledge, as shown above, as well as the role media plays in providing information and raising one's political knowledge the question begs how well is the new forms of media (television and Internet news) providing information to both the "haves" and "have-nots" of the political world. As shown above print news benefits the more educated at a higher rate than the less educated in increasing their political knowledge, while television benefits both groups equally. What about the other demographics? Does a person's age, race, sex, or even income level affect how they will receive and accept information from the new forms of media? I will attempt to answer these questions in the following paper.

Hypothesis and Theory

Technology is quickly changing the political arena. Those with the opportunity, ability, and motivation are going to be more politically knowledgeable than those who lack at least one of those criteria. The ability to get news and information from the media is one way a person can

increase their opportunity to learn more political information. Access to more education through more media sources leads to people having a better chance of viewing and retaining political information. Holbrok (2002) shows that as media coverage of a certain issue grows, knowledge gaps of those issues also grow. My first hypothesis will test Holbrok's theory pertaining to political knowledge.

Hypothesis 1: An increase to media exposure, no matter what the source, will lead to an increase in a person's political knowledge.

This hypothesis is based purely off the idea that the more opportunity a person has to receive information, the more likely they will be able to absorb and recall that information. Political knowledge should be no different than any other type of knowledge so as a person is exposed to more media, whether that be radio, print news, television news, or Internet news their political knowledge should increase. I expect there to be a strong positive correlation for total amount of media exposure as well as each individual type of media with political knowledge. However I do expect to find some differences in the increases of political knowledge depending on the type of media outlet used. I expect to find that though each type of media exposure will have a positive correlation, radio would be the weakest followed by television, Internet news, and finally print news. As shown earlier in Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen's (2006) article television is simply viewed and listened to which could lead to people either tuning out, or not comprehending the information that is presented. The same could be true about radio, and simply because of the fact that most people listen to the radio in their car, the information that is presented to the drivers might not be received as well as a person relaxing and watching TV because drivers *should* be focusing on their driving. In the case of print media news and Internet

news the person has to be actively engaged in what they are reading. The active reader should be more focused on what the story is covering and should be able to retain the information better than a person who is watching television. The content also plays a factor in determining the quality of information gathered from a particular source. Stories on television news seem to have a weaker content, whether that be the type of stories or depth of stories as compared to print and Internet news. Also the amount of exposure to news stories seems to be more frequent when reading stories online or in the news paper as compared to TV and radio. TV and radio do talk about multiple subjects but because the listener or viewer can't force them to change the subject they are talking about, only one story can be viewed at a time. With the case of print media and online news, a person can begin to read part of a story, or even just the headlines, obtain that knowledge, but then quickly move on to a different topic. For example if a person were to log onto CNN.com today (April 1st 2011) just by viewing the front page they could see headlines such as "camera to seek Japan radiation leak" "can Palin be controlled?" and "Libya official dismisses cease-fire offer"; three pieces of political information within a minute. Now if that same person were to turn on Fox News (on April 1st 2011 at 10 P.M.) they would be exposed to only one story, whether or not female soldiers should be forced to wear face veils while in Afghanistan, for over five minutes. Those who have the ability to pick and choose their information will have more exposure to more political information and will therefore be more likely to become more politically knowledgeable. I expect that the difference between the gains in political knowledge from exposure to Internet news as compared to print news will be minimal, though the advantage will be in the favor of print news readers. The reason why I expect this is due to the options for Internet news readers to both read the stories and listen to

videos attached. There will be a slight loss in information for Internet news readers due to the occasional watching of videos of news instead of reading the print.

My second hypothesis will focus on the information gaps shown above between the “haves” and “have-nots” of political knowledge and how they relate to usages of certain media.

Hypothesis 2: From what media source a person gets their political information will affect the distance in political knowledge gaps between the “haves” and “have-nots” of sex and race.

As suggested above education is an example of a demographic of the “haves” versus “have-nots” of the political world and how exposure to different forms of the media will either expand or shorten the gap between the two groups. I will expand on Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen’s (2006) work by looking at the difference in media usage between races, and sexes, and see whether or not their gaps in political knowledge expands, decreases, or stays the same from one form of media to the next. In this hypothesis I will focus on the two forms of media that I see being the most relevant in the 21st century, cable TV and Internet news.

Looking at the difference between whites, and minorities there is a fairly large race gap in political knowledge. In the 2008-2009 ANES the average political knowledge level for Whites was 76.18% and Minorities had an average political knowledge of 69.41%. Due to an increase of education of whites as compared to minorities (see Chapter 4 of the Department of Education’s Report of Trends in the Education of Racial and Education Groups for examples), I would expect that the political knowledge gap between the two groups would strongly increase with the amount of exposure to Internet media. I believe the ability for whites, due to an increased education, will cause them to retain the complex information presented to them by the internet.

Also, in today's society those who graduate high school and attend college are becoming more adapt to using and quickly exploring the Internet for information due to the online research, emailing professors and fellow students, online forums, and a general movement towards the Internet and education. Cable TV news takes less ability for people to retain as compared to Internet news the information due to way in which the information is communicated. Also the lack of engagement a person has when interacting with TV should limit the gain in political knowledge due to ability, motivation, or opportunity that Whites would have over minorities. Though I expect to see an increase in the racial gap in political knowledge as exposure to Cable TV news increases, the impact should be less than that Internet news plays. The ability to quickly explore the Internet and retain information due to higher education will lead the political knowledge gap between minorities and whites to be larger with an increase in Internet news as compared to the increase of the racial knowledge gap with exposure to Cable TV news.

In the case of sex I expect to see a decrease in the gender gap due to exposure of one particular form of media in the 21st century. When looking at men vs. women and their political knowledge males have been shown to have higher averages of political knowledge as compared to women. The 2008-2009 ANES survey shows that males have an average political knowledge level 78.16% while females had an average political knowledge level of 72.65%. Women today are more educated as compared to previous generations as more women are going to college. Because women are more frequently going to college one should expect that those that are more educated should also be more politically knowledgeable. I expect to find that when exposed to higher levels of Internet news, the gender political knowledge gap should decrease. The reason I expect to see this is those female who are more educated, and therefore more likely to be politically knowledgeable, are also going to be the same women who have "broken out" of

gender roles and could have an interest in politics. Their higher level of education and potential interest in politics will give them the ability and motivation to learn about politics and retain information from Internet news. Those women who are still less educated are also those to be more susceptible to the “gender role” and lack interest in political knowledge. I would expect those to be the females who get their information from cable TV as they are less likely to actively search for political information. Women will get more political knowledge as they increase the amount of cable TV viewed but the gap between men and women should not decrease with cable TV and might increase. Because of the role of education, I expect that an increase in Internet news exposure will decrease the gender gap while an increase in cable TV exposure will either increase the gender gap slightly or keep the gap the same.

Methods

The primary source of my data that will be used to test my two hypotheses will be the 2008-2009 ANES panel survey. Originally the data set was going to be from the 2008 time series study but there was a lack of usable questions in which to identify a person’s political knowledge. It did have a question that asked what the interviewee thought of the respondent’s political knowledge but that leads to potential biases. The questions that the 2008 time series study did ask about political knowledge were often open ended that allowed for potential partial correct answers. Korsnick, Lupia, and DeBell (2008) explain that often questions can be answered either partially correctly, or correct but not what the coders would consider incorrect. For example one could ask in 2008 “who is Nancy Pelosi?”, and a respondent answer by saying “a U.S. Representative from California”. Technically that is a correct answer but it would be

labeled as incorrect because they did not respond by saying “The Speaker of the House”. It was for this reason that I selected to use the 2008-2009 ANES panel survey. The survey was given to a same panel of respondents starting in January of 2008 and continued through September of 2009. The survey was broken down into eleven waves each given to different samples of the total sample population. This leads to a drop in potential respondents that were given the waves needed to have data on both my independent and dependent variables. Roughly 2,750 total respondents had answered questions to my dependent and independent variables changing slightly due to occasional “don’t knows”, or no responses on specific questions. The program that I will be using to help calculate the statistics in the paper is SPSS 17.

The dependent variable that is going to be studied in each of my two hypotheses is political knowledge. Each person from the survey was asked a set of questions that test their political knowledge. The questions that I selected that I felt would test a person’s political knowledge are as follows: How many times can one be elected U.S. President?, For how many years is a US Senator elected?, How many Senators are there from each state?, For how many years is a US Representative elected?, Who is after VP in Presidential Succession?, Veto override percentage needed in the Senate and House?, What state does John McCain represent in congress?, What state doe Barack Obama represent in Congress?, What is John McCain’s religion?, What is Barack Obama’s religion?, Where did Barack Obama work before elected to congress?, Where did John McCain work before elected to congress?, and How many times can one be elected US President? Not every person was asked every question, though some were, so in order to have a variable that would show a person’s political knowledge I created a variable that looked at the percentage of questions a person answered correctly as compared to questions they were asked. This allows me to have a continuous variable and allows for every person to

have a specific “score” or percentage of political knowledge questions correctly answered. The scores range anywhere from 0%, or getting zero answers correct of question asked, to 1, or getting every question asked correct.

The first independent variables that I created were those examining the amount of time a person spends with different forms of media. For the variables that looked at the amount of days a person reported watching news on television, getting news from the radio, getting news from print sources, and getting news from Internet there were two questions each that could have been asked to respondents. Each of the two questions could have been answered anywhere from zero days a week, to seven days a week. For example question W1h1 asks, “How many days in a week does R (respondent) watch TV news”, and question W19f1 asks, “How many in typical week does R watch TV news”. It is possible that respondents were asked either questions from the “H” wave or the “F” wave or potentially both waves. In order to give a respondent a value for days they received news from a particular source of media I took the mean of both potential questions. If the respondents had only responded to one, the program did not take a mean of both questions but instead used only the single response. It was possible for people to answer the questions differently in the first wave and the second wave which caused people to potentially have “half” days of using a particular media source. For example if a person answered in the first wave five days and four days in the second wave their mean would come out to be 4.5 days. In this case I will round all half days up to the next full day of media use. I did this for each type of media (print news, radio, TV news, and Internet news) and a new variable was created for each. The new variables allow for a larger sample size which will lower my error rate once these variables are used in correlations. I also created a variable called “media use” that looked to see how much media a person uses all together. To do this I simply averaged the means of the four

types of media use to create a variable to see how much media a person used in a particular week. Again because of the fact that it was a mean respondents often had an average that included half or quarter days of media use. I again rounded those numbers up to the nearest whole number. This variable will allow me to have an idea on how media usage as a whole will affect political knowledge.

Finally I created variables to help understand the demographic makeup of the respondents. Respondents were asked multiple questions about their demographics including gender, age, race, income level, education level, and political interest. Gender was easily categorized into either male or female, and no extra variables were needed to further break down the groupings. In order to have a more manageable set of data for age I decided to create an ordinal variable. I broke down the age variable into four sub categories each having a similar number of respondents. Those categories were young adult (18-39), forty's (40-49), fifty's (50-59) and elderly (60-90). Each age category was also given its own variable to separate the specific category from all others. A similar process was done for race with the categories being White, Black, Hispanic or other. Education was divided into three categories low (high school diploma or less), moderate (some college with no degree), or high (bachelor's degree or higher) and again each category was given its own variable to separate it from the other two categories. Income level was divided into four categories, low (29,999 dollars or less), lower middle (30,000-59,999 dollars), upper middle (60,000-124,999) and upper (125,000+ dollars). Again each category was given its own independent variable that can be used during regression.

To test both hypotheses I will start by doing simple bivariat models that will look at the relation between my dependent variable, political knowledge, and many of my independent variables relating to media use and demographic characteristics. I will later use regression to help

hold all potential dependent variables constant to understand what the driving forces behind political knowledge are.

Results

To test my first hypothesis, that is that an increase in media exposure, no matter what the particular source might be, will lead to an increase in a person's overall political knowledge I will start by looking at simple correlations. To test whether or not this hypothesis suggests there is a relation between media exposure and knowledge I will first use a bivariat correlation model to see how political knowledge increases or decreases with exposure to each of the media types (print news, radio, TV news, and Internet news), as well as general media use (a mean of the four media types). These correlations will help suggest whether or not there is a statistically relevant relation between media use and political knowledge. The table below will show each of the four media types and an overall media use variable and how they react with political knowledge.

Table 1 Political Knowledge by Media Use

	Print News	Radio	TV News	Internet News	Media Use
Political Knowledge	.148***	.126***	.068**	.172***	.216***
N	2596	2595	2597	2596	2597

**= Correlation is significant at a 0.01 level (2-tailed).

***= Correlation is significant at a 0.00 level (2-tailed).

As you can see in the table above, one could suggest that each form of media has a positive correlation with political knowledge though some forms of media have a stronger relation. The weakest of the correlations is exposure to TV. The correlation between TV News is a very weak .068 though it is significant at a .01 level. As suggested above the reason why TV news is the weakest correlation is due to both opportunity and ability to retain information. Those watching TV are not actively participating in absorbing the information that is presented and are instead are watching and listening to information presented. They are also limited to one story per channel, and these stories are often drawn out for long periods of time as hosts debate the topics with experts or panels.

The next lowest correlation between media sources and political knowledge is that of radio use. The correlation between radio and political knowledge is slightly better than the correlation between TV news and political knowledge. Radio has a correlation of .126 with political knowledge at the .00 significance level. This begs the question why is it radio, as compared to TV news has a stronger correlation to political knowledge though both are arguably absorbed in a similar fashion, listening to information, as well as having the option of only one story per channel. Pezdek, Lehrer, and Simon (1984) credit the difference between television and radio retention of information to the cognitive process of memory. They say that comprehension to material presented in radio is more similar to that of comprehension of information in text as compared to information that is presented by television. This would help explain why we see a large gap between political knowledge of radio and television, but a much smaller gap between radio and print news.

Of the remaining two correlations print news has the next strongest correlation at .148 and is significant at the .00 level. Not surprisingly print news has a stronger correlation than both

radio and television due to the way the information is comprehended and remembered. Print news is read as compared to watched or heard which leads to the reader being more active with the story and therefore more likely to retain the information. There is also the factor of reader selection of stories they find relevant as well as the ability to get more stories in a shorter amount of time. When opening a news paper a person can read the headlines that can give them exposure to large amounts of political information. They then chose the stories they have the most interest in and this interest can lead to a motivation to obtain more political knowledge.

The media source that has the strongest correlation to political knowledge is also the newest, Internet news. Internet news had a correlation of .172 with significance at the .00 level. The reason why Internet news has the strongest correlation of all media sources, though it is relatively moderate, is due to similar reasons why print news is correlated. When someone gets online to search for Internet news they first have the option to choose what website they will go to. The websites, like newspapers, will have headlines that people can read and get information from and then move on to stories that they find the most interesting. The difference between Internet and print is both the amount of information that is possible as well as the ability for someone to click on links. A newspaper is limited due to size on the total amount of stories they can fit in them each day. This is not the case with a website that has potentially an infinite amount of space where information can be stored and access. There is also the option for Internet users to use links, an option unique to the web. If a person is interested in a sub-topic in a particular article they can click that link and get more information on that topic. The infinite amount of space that is available on the Internet as well as the ability for a reader to use links to further explore certain topics are the reasons I credit an increase in correlation of political knowledge as compared to print media.

The final variable that I tested was a person's overall media consumption and that relation to their political knowledge. The variable created was an average of the days using the four types of media. The media use variable had a stronger correlation than any of the other tested media variables. The correlation of .216 suggests that there is a relationship between getting news from any media source and translating that into political knowledge. These findings would suggest that previous author's similar works were correct that media usage translates into more political knowledge but just because there is a correlation does not mean there is causation. An argument against the idea that media usage causes a person to have higher levels of political knowledge is that media is a tool for those with more opportunity to use while those that do not have the resources will be in the outside looking in. To test this, I will use a regression model that includes both demographics, as well as forms of media to see what the driving factors behind political knowledge really are. The first model will simply be a correlation between the types of media usage and political knowledge. Next I will use age and sexes to see if there is a drop in correlation between the media uses and political knowledge once those demographics are held constant. I will then do a final model of regression where I add the demographics that have been suggested as the strongest correlates with political knowledge, education, income level, and race to see what forms of media or demographics show the strongest causal relationship with political knowledge. The table on the following page will show each model, the variables, their B and beta coefficients, as well as each variable's significance.

Table 2
Regression of Political Knowledge and Media Use

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	beta	Sig	B	Beta	Sig	B	Beta	Sig
Watch TV	.000	.005	.812	-.004	-.047	.024	.000	.005	.788
Listen Radio	.006	.076	.000	.005	.065	.001	.002	.026	.163
Internet News	.012	.153	.000	.012	.164	.000	.008	.102	.000
Print News	.009	.130	.000	.005	.076	.000	.002	.034	.085
Age young adult				-.094	-.202	.000	-.090	-.193	.000
Age forty's				-.056	-.118	.000	-.064	-.137	.000
Age fifty's				-.040	-.089	.000	-.046	-.102	.000
Gender				-.040	-.100	.000	-.027	-.068	.000
Black							-.046	-.066	.000
Hispanic							-.073	-.082	.000
Other Race							-.022	-.022	.218
Education							.063	.246	.000
Income Level							.029	.152	.000
F	38.023			32.967			52.230		
R-Squared	.055			.093			.210		
N	2595			2595			2571		

The first model shows similar results to the previous table. When each of the other forms of media use was held constant TV news was insignificant, listening to radio had a B-coefficient of .006, print news was next highest with a B of .009, and Internet news had the strongest correlation at .012. Each of these was found to be significant except TV that appeared to have no

relation. The next model introduced two demographic factors that traditionally have the least amount of impact on a person's political knowledge, age and gender. Age was broken down into four categories to show how different generations effect political knowledge. Gender was kept constant due to only having two options. These two demographics, that otherwise are considered two of the weakest predictors of political knowledge, slightly impacted the significance of media on political knowledge. TV that was first considered a non-factor, actually turned negative with a B of $-.004$ with a significance of $.024$. Both radio and print news lowered their coefficient down to $.005$ with significance of $.000$. Surprisingly, one source of media, Internet news actually stayed at its original B-coefficient of $.012$. This suggests that there is something about Internet news that allows it to still be a significant factor even when allowing age and gender as variables to be held constant. The last model is where the traditionally strongest correlated demographics to political knowledge were implemented to show the significance of demographics on political knowledge. Race, education, and income level were added to gender and sex to show test the idea that though political knowledge and media usage has a positive correlation, the increase in knowledge actually comes from demographics. TV was originally shown to be insignificant, then actually a negative impact on knowledge, but when all demographics were held constant it had a coefficient of $.000$ and a significance of $.788$. Again radio and print news had a similar B-coefficient of $.002$, a drop from $.005$ from model two. Internet news once again stayed the most relevant with a B-coefficient of $.008$ that was significant at the $.000$ level. The third model is very interesting because it suggests that demographics are the driving force behind political knowledge though Internet news usage is still relevant with all other factors held constant. The drop off in TV, though it was never really a relevant factor, print news and radio suggest that gain in political knowledge by users of these media forms was driven from their political

knowledge. However, the gain in political knowledge from those who use Internet news seems to be less demographically driven but the way the information is obtained. The argument that political knowledge is not driven by media usage but instead opportunity caused by demographics seems to be correct, though the newest form of media, the Internet, seems to be a tool to increase a person's political knowledge no matter what their demographic makeup might be.

In order to test my second hypothesis, that is that depending on what media source a person gets their political information from, the gaps between the "haves" and "have-nots" should either increase or decrease, I will first look at the means of the demographic groups. In order to do this I have created binary variables for usage of both Internet news and TV news. Those who had responded to watching zero through three days of a particular source were considered to have "low usage" while those with four to seven days a week of the source were considered to have "high usage". I then looked at the average political knowledge score for the different demographics of low users of the media as well as the high users of the media. I then created a "jump" variable that shows what the gain in political knowledge for a certain demographic is as they increase the amount of a particular form of media. I will also include a difference in jump between the different demographics. The charts below will show the means of men vs. women and Whites vs. minorities for their usage of Internet news as well as TV news. The reason why I chose to use Whites vs. minorities instead of just a particular minority such as blacks was to better represent society as a whole.

Table 3 Demographics and Media Use

Sex and Internet News Usage

	Low Internet	High Internet	Jump in Knowledge
Men	74	81	+7
Women	70	74	+4
Difference in Jump			Males +3

Sex and Television News Usage

	Low Television	High Television	Jump in Knowledge
Men	75	78	+3
Women	71	73	+2
Difference in Jump			Males +1

Race and Internet News Usage

	Low Internet	High Internet	Jump in Knowledge
Whites	73	79	+6
Minorities	64	72	+8
Difference in jump			Minorities +2

Race and Television News Usage

	Low Television	High Television	Jump in Knowledge
Whites	74	76	+2
Minorities	64	69	+5
Difference in Jump			Minorities +3

The first two charts show the gains for both men and women in political knowledge when they go from a lower level of exposure to a media form to a higher level of exposure to a particular media form. The first chart shows this relationship with Internet news usage. Men with a low level of Internet usage averaged a political knowledge score of 74 while those that a

exposure to a high level of television had an average score of 81 for an increase of +7 percent in political knowledge from low Internet news users to high Internet news users. Women with a low level of Internet news exposure had a starting political knowledge score less than men at 70, and when exposed to a higher level of Internet news a score of only 74. The gain from going from low levels of Internet news to higher levels of Internet news only gained women an average of +4 percent in political knowledge. When comparing the gains in political knowledge between males (+7) and females (+4) from an increase in exposure to Internet news males have a difference in gain of +3.

The second chart looked at the relationship between TV news usage and political knowledge for both men and women. Men with low levels of TV news usage averaged a political knowledge score of 75 percent while those that had high exposure to TV news had an average political knowledge score of 78 percent, for an increase of +3 percent. Once again women had a lower, as compared to men, starting political knowledge score of just 71 percent for low TV news users, while women that had a high level of TV news exposure had an average political knowledge score of 73 percent. The increase from low levels of TV news to high levels of TV news exposure for women was only +2 percent. Comparing the gain in TV news exposure for men (+3) and women (+2) men had a higher difference in gain but only by one percent. Both the first and second charts suggest that males are getting more political knowledge from media usage as compared to women. The gap between men and women increases slightly with TV news, by one percent, and slightly more with Internet news exposure, three percent. This supports my hypothesis that depending on the form of media a group of people are exposed to, the gap between demographics will fluctuate. I had incorrectly predicted that due to an increase in education women that when exposed to higher levels of Internet news the gap between men

and women should decrease. The opposite was actually suggested that an increase in Internet news helps males on average more than it does females. I also predicted that due to the ways the information on TV was absorbed and translated into thoughts that the political knowledge gap between men and women should either stay the same or slightly increase. This prediction was correct as males only increased their average knowledge one point higher than females with a greater increase in TV news.

The last two charts above showed the relationship between race and political knowledge with different exposures to both Internet news and TV news. On average whites have a much higher political knowledge level than do minorities but will an increase in exposure to either more Internet news or TV news lower that gap? The third chart explores the relationship between race, political knowledge, and the usage of Internet news. For Whites, those with a low amount of exposure to Internet news averaged a political knowledge level of 73 percent. When Whites are exposed to higher levels of Internet news the political knowledge score increases six percent up to 79 percent. Minorities start with almost a ten percent difference from Whites as minorities with low levels of Internet news exposure have a political knowledge score of only 64 percent. When exposed to a higher level of Internet news exposure minorities have a jump in political knowledge up to 72 percent, or a gain of +8 percentage points. Opposite from sex, we see that the knowledge gap in race is actually slightly decreased with more exposure to Internet news. Whites gained 6 percent with more exposure to Internet news while minorities had a gain of 8 percent for a gain of 2 percent more than whites.

The final chart looked at the relationship of race and political knowledge but this time with more exposure to TV news. When exposed to a low amount of TV news the average political knowledge level for whites was right at 74 percent. With the increase in TV news

exposure the average knowledge level for Whites increased very slightly to 76 percent for a gain of +2 percent. Minorities have an average political knowledge score of only 63 percent when exposed to low amounts of television news. When the amount TV news increases to a higher level the average political knowledge score for minorities raises to 69 percent, for a gain of +5 percent. Again the differences between the gains for Whites as compared to minorities with more exposure to TV news were stronger for the minorities by +3 percent.

Both findings regarding race and political knowledge are very interesting though my initial hypothesis seemed to be incorrect. I had predicted that because the racial gap in political knowledge seemed to be driven by education, exposure to more information should benefit Whites and expand the gap due to the ability to understand and retain information that is presented. However the opposite seems to be true with the relationship between Whites and minorities. Though it is true that minorities have lower levels of political knowledge than Whites, even when exposed to high levels of media, the racial gap seems to be shrinking with more exposure to both more TV news and Internet news. The racial gap in political knowledge shrank by three percentage points with an increase in TV news, and with an increase in Internet news the racial gap shrank by two percentage points. It appears that with an increase in exposure to both TV news and Internet news, the demographic gaps in political knowledge could either increase or decrease depending on the specific demographic. In order to see if these initial findings are correct I will create a regression table to see what the effect of media usage has on initial impacts of demographics. I again will do a multi-model regression but this time will use four models. The first simply being the relationship between political knowledge, sex, and race. Race will be shown by the impact on minorities. The second model will then use all demographics to see if other demographics are the driving factors. Finally I will do my third and

fourth models inputting television news and Internet news respectively. For the third model I will only have TV news to see its impact on sex and race, and the fourth will only use Internet news to get a better understanding of what media form would have a potential impact.

Table 4
Regression of Political Knowledge and Demographics

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	beta	Sig	B	beta	sig	B	beta	sig	B	beta	sig
Gender	-.051	-.129	.000	-.032	-.081	.000	-.032	-.081	.000	-.028	-.072	.000
Minorities	-.063	-.122	.000	-.038	-.075	.000	-.047	-.092	.000	-.049	.095	.000
Income				.032	.169	.000	.032	.166	.000	.029	.153	.000
Education				.065	.251	.000	.069	.268	.000	.065	.252	.000
Age				.028	.167	.000	.030	.173	.000	.032	.189	.000
Television							.002	.027	.156	N/A		
Internet							N/A			.008	.108	.000
F	49.571			120.275			103.773			110.563		
R-Squared	.034			.177			.195			.206		
N	2853			2801			2572			2571		

To my surprise the regression chart showed very different results from my initial means charts. The means charts suggested that males expand the gap in political knowledge over

females when exposed to both television (by one percent) and Internet news (by three percent). The regression chart slightly suggests the opposite. After controlling for other demographic influences such as education and age, the B-coefficient for sex was $-.032$. The negative indicates that the difference from being male to female will lower a person's political knowledge score by a certain percentage. If the negative number were to get larger than that would suggest that a different variable would be expanding the gap between males and females while if the number were to get smaller the gap between males and females would be decreasing. When the regression model is allowed to hold all demographics constant as well as use Television for a variable the B-coefficient for sex neither increases nor decreases but stays right at $-.032$. This finding is similar to what the means chart shows as there was practically no increase in the political knowledge gap. This also supports my hypothesis that an increase in television exposure will either expand the gender knowledge gap very little or stay constant.

In the means chart above it was suggested that an increase in Internet exposure will actually increase the gender knowledge gap by three percent. In the regression model the B coefficient for sex started at $-.032$ after other demographics were held constant. When Internet usage was allowed to be held as a variable the B coefficient dropped from $-.032$ down to $-.028$. This suggests the opposite from what the mean charts did as there appeared to be a closing in the gender political knowledge gap. The findings from the regression chart would support my initial hypothesis that as females are exposed to larger amounts of Internet news the knowledge gap should decrease due to the education of females that would be Internet news users.

The other demographic that was explored both in my means charts and my regression table was race. The means charts above suggested that with more exposure to TV news as well as Internet news the racial political knowledge gap decreases; three percent for TV usage and two

percent for Internet usage. The regression chart once again suggested something that was different from what the mean charts. The initial B coefficient for race after all demographic variables were held constant was $-.038$. Again because the coefficient is negative a decrease in the number would suggest that the racial gap is getting smaller while an increase in the number would suggest that the gap is actually expanding. The B coefficient changed very quickly when the variables for media usage were added. When TV news usage was added as a variable to the regression table the B coefficient for race jumped from $-.038$ up to $-.047$. This jump in coefficient suggests that an increase in TV news usage will actually expand the racial gap, opposite of what the mean charts suggested. The findings of the regression table support my hypothesis that because of the ability and motivation to retain information from TV news, the gap between Whites and minorities should increase as there is more exposure to TV news.

The final relationship that is explored through the regression chart is that between Internet news usage and race. The initial findings from the means charts suggested that Internet usage will decrease the political knowledge gap between Whites and Minorities by two percent. As show above the starting B coefficient for race after all other demographics were held constant was $-.038$. When Internet news usage was added as a variable to be held constant, the B coefficient for minorities rose from $-.038$ to $-.049$, which is the strongest jump of all four relationships between media usage and demographics. Again, this jump suggests the opposite from what the means charts showed. According to the regression chart the addition of Internet news usage will expand the gap between Whites and minorities. This also supports my initial hypothesis that because of higher levels of education, and therefore more ability to use the Internet, that the racial gap between Whites and minorities should increase with more exposure to Internet news.

Discussion and Conclusion

A politically knowledgeable group of citizens is very important for any democratic society to succeed. Without knowledge of politics people are less likely to be interested in issues that could potentially influence their lives on a daily basis. People make up different demographic groups whether that is people of similar ages, races, sex, income level, education, or any other group that people have strong connections too. Often in the political world people do not necessarily make decisions that are best for them but instead best for groups they feel they have a strong connection to. In the United States political knowledge is not even amongst these groups but instead tends to be held by the dominate elites, or the “haves” of each specific demographic. Those without the political knowledge are often on the outside looking in of politics and can often have a misrepresentation of their ideas, beliefs, and values within government. This leads to political knowledge gaps in demographics that can be a problem for those that are the “have-nots” of the specific demographic. This paper looked at the role media had on these knowledge gaps to see if specific types of media would either expand or decrease the gaps.

It was important to first understand the media’s role on political knowledge and test my hypothesis that an increase to media exposure, no matter what the source, will lead to an increase in a person’s political knowledge. The findings initially showed a positive correlation between media use and political knowledge for all different types of media as well as media use in general. One argument that was not explored in this paper but may be useful to explore in future research is that media choice is not the driving factor in political knowledge but instead it is

driven by political interest. Another argument that was explored in this paper against the findings that media usage leads to higher political knowledge is that differences in media usage is a product of certain demographic factors and those demographics are the causal factors in determining political knowledge. After holding demographics constant in a regression I found that one form of media, Internet news usage still had a positive and relevant influence on a person's political knowledge. This finding is significant because it suggests that as a new way for people to gather information, the Internet might become a valuable tool for a society to use to help raise their political knowledge. As the Internet becomes a more popular tool for people to get their information, one should expect that the increase in exposure will lead to people becoming more politically knowledgeable. It is unclear to me what is different from the Internet as compared to other forms of media that makes it such a valuable tool for political knowledge. A lot of this uncertainty of why the Internet is such a valuable tool for political knowledge stems from a lack of exploration by other scholars on the subject. Because much of the information we do have today stems from research done in the 90's it is hard to give much credibility to those findings due to the fact that the majority of Internet users at that time were the wealthy. Availability to the Internet is quickly rising and is starting to include a broader portion of the U.S. population (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). This should lead to more scholarly analysis between the relationship between Internet use and political knowledge. One hypothesis that has been proposed to why the Internet is a significant predictor of political knowledge is due to the way in which the information is presented. The Internet allows for a unique combination of visual aids through videos and text which allows the reader to have stimulation from both forms of presenting information. Tolbert and McNeal say that the Internet "facilitates communication flexibility allowing individuals to choose what information to access and when to access (it)".

With the Internet becoming a tool that everyone is having more access to, will people from all demographics be able to interpret and understand this information and turn that into political knowledge?

The second hypothesis I explored was whether or not from what media source a person gets their political information will affect the distance in political knowledge gaps between the “haves” and “have-nots” of sex and race. This hypothesis was much harder to create clear cut conclusions about what the data suggested. I ran a simple means test to understand the relationship between sex and media use as well as race and media use. My initial findings somewhat contradicted my original hypotheses and showed mix results. These results were different from what conventional wisdom and trends in prior research would otherwise have shown. For example, my means tests suggested that minorities actually get more out of an increase in Internet exposure as compared to Whites, and the racial political knowledge gap actually shrunk. This is contrary to conventional wisdom in that Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen (2006) showed that those with a higher education should have a higher political knowledge level than those with a lower education when exposed to Internet news. Whites, therefore, should have a greater ability to use Internet news to gain political knowledge as compared to minorities due to an average higher education.

These contradictory findings led me to create a second experiment where I used a multivariate regression chart to see how Internet and television news usage affected the strength of correlation between sex and political knowledge, and race and political knowledge. What I found from the regression charts was very similar to what my original hypothesis suggested. The gender gap between males’ and females’ political knowledge did not increase when TV news was accounted for, and decreased slightly when Internet news was used as a variable held

constant. I accounted this to more females breaking out of gender roles, getting an education, and being able to use the Internet as a tool to lower the difference between political knowledge of the sexes. When the regression chart was used to explore the relationship between race and political knowledge the results were once again similar to my original hypothesis. The knowledge gap between Whites and minorities seemed to increase with exposure to higher levels of both TV news as well as Internet news.

The findings in the regression model would back up initial findings made by Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen (2006) that depending on the specific demographic an increase in usage of one form of media or the other will either increase or decrease a that demographics political knowledge. This is important to understand because as the Internet continues to grow in the 21st century, the ability to get information about politics will continue to grow. Technology is rapidly growing and people today are being able to get more information from different sources as they are created. Social networking sites, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs are allowing people to access information from their computers at anytime, and with an increase in smart phone usage this information can be gathered almost all across the United States at anytime. Of all forms of media in which people can get information I have shown that the Internet has the strongest correlation with political knowledge. The ability for certain demographics to be able to keep up with today's technology, more specifically the ability to explore the Internet and retain information, will be the deciding factor in determining whether or not the knowledge gaps in politics will increase or decrease. Other works that could build off of my initial findings would be to explore other demographics such as age or income level and see whether or not usage of specific forms of media increases or decrease the knowledge gaps for those demographics. Other work that I would like to see be done on the subject would be to understand what about the Internet makes it

a stronger predictor of a person's political knowledge as compared to other forms of media. By understanding what groups of demographics are lagging behind others in the ability to retain and use information from the Internet to gain political knowledge could be important in keeping the ideas, values, and beliefs of all potential voters in American politics. Without a politically knowledgeable group of citizens a country will quickly become less and less democratic and focused solely around the ideas of the most politically powerful.

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