

**Blaming the Messenger? Television and Civic Malaise**

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**Abstract:**

Recent years have experienced a new wave of anxiety about civic disengagement and political malaise. Among a host of potential culprits, the mass media has commonly been singled out for blame, especially the growth of 'tabloid' television news. Yet interpretations of the evidence in previous studies often remains problematic.

Based on data in forty nations from the World Values Study 1995-7, and a more focused comparison using panel surveys in the United States and Britain, the results of this analysis will demonstrate that general television viewing is associated with some indicators of civic malaise. Nevertheless, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the direct effects of watching television *news* are either neutral or else serve to encourage political interest, efficacy and knowledge. The most plausible explanation is that people with these characteristics are more likely to turn on TV news, but that exposure further reinforces these tendencies, in a virtuous circle. Far from causing public cynicism, television news thereby functions to strengthen civic virtue

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## Blaming the Messenger? Television and Civic Engagement

The twentieth century has experienced periodic cycles of hope and fear about prospects for democracy. The turbulent politics of the sixties and early seventies renewed concern about democratic stability, following violent protests in the United States over civil rights and Vietnam, student radicalism and the whiff of tear-gas in the streets of Paris and Bonn, and industrial strife shutting factory gates in Western Europe. Reflecting these developments, the Trilateral Commission's Report *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975), produced by Michel J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joni Watanuki, expressed concern that the demands on democratic government were growing while the capacity of the state to meet these demands appeared to be stagnating. The Report attributed this situation to three developments. *Cultural trends* challenged established sources of authority due to the rise of a more critical and autonomous media, the growth of post-materialist values among the younger generation, and the development of an adversarial intellectual class. *Contextual challenges* included the global interdependence of markets, creating worldwide reverberations from economic shockwaves like the OPEC oil crisis. Lastly, the Report identified *intrinsic threats* arising from growing public demands on the state. Government overload was regarded as potentially the most serious problem, as if democracy contained the seeds of its own destruction.

The last decade has seen a new cycle of anxiety about democracy, this time focused on perceived problems of civic malaise. The most recent review of evidence about public attitudes towards democratic government worldwide concluded that popular accounts of a 'crisis' were greatly exaggerated (Norris 1999). *Critical Citizens* argued that the concept of political support needed to be disaggregated into its component parts. By the mid-1990s the book found that most citizens worldwide shared widespread aspirations to the ideals and principles of democracy, as the best form of government. The end of the Cold War has seen the triumph of democratic values. At the same time, there remains a marked gap between evaluations of the ideal and the practice of democracy. The public in many newer democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Latin America, proved extremely critical of the performance of their governing regimes. Most citizens in post-Communist countries do not desire a return to the past but many remain fairly negative, often for good reason, about how well their current political system is working (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). Equally strikingly, *Critical Citizens* documents a systematic and pervasive pattern of declining trust in representative institutions connecting citizens and the state. During the eighties many established democracies saw a decline in public confidence in governments, parliaments, the civil service, the legal system, and political parties. Moreover, institutional support seems remarkably fragile in many newer democracies.

In the light of these developments, the core question this paper will explore is how far television is responsible for civic malaise. Commentators commonly blame the media for the ills of the body politic and recently the trickle of accusations has become a deluge. For Postman (1985) television is responsible for '*amusing ourselves to death*'. For Patterson (1993), journalism is '*out of order*'. For Fallows (1996), the media is '*undermining American democracy*'. The conventional wisdom has been reinforced by a series of books (see, for example, Jamieson 1992; Sabato 1991; Hart 1994; Schudson 1995). This has produced widespread hand-wringing within the profession and

many column inches devoted to 'what is to be done' (see Hachten 1998). The media industry perennially debates the virtues of a range of panaceas, including civic journalism (Jay Rosen), free television time for candidates (Paul Taylor) and revised codes of professional practice for journalists (Tom Rosensteel). Some seem to want nothing but a steady diet of *C-SPAN* on all channels, like political cod liver oil, to educate the public in their democratic duties. But before we turn all the air-waves over to Brian Lamb, are the complaints justified?

The first section of this paper will review this videomalaise literature and argue that interpretation of the evidence supporting the videomalaise case often remains problematic. Most studies have focussed on changes in media coverage, but have not gone on to establish the impact of such changes on public opinion. Moreover, critics often fail to distinguish between the effects of watching television, and the effects of watching television news, which can be expected to differ. Lastly, the direct influence of media use on civic malaise has usually been studied within the United States, but we cannot necessarily generalize from this context to others with different media structures, political systems and cultural values. In this regard we need to explore the conditionality of media effects through comparative research strategies.

The second section goes on to analyze whether exposure to television -- and to TV news in particular -- encourages civic malaise, as critics assume, in a wide range of countries. The study draws on two sources of data: a global comparison of forty nations based on the 1995-7 World Values Survey and then a more detailed comparison of the United States and Britain using election panel surveys in 1996-7. The analysis will demonstrate that watching television in general is often modestly associated with some indicators of civic malaise in many advanced industrialized societies. Nevertheless, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the direct effects of exposure and attention to television *news* during election campaigns in Britain and the United States are usually either neutral or else serves to encourage civic engagement with public affairs. Compared with the average citizen, in both countries regular viewers of TV news have greater political interest, efficacy, and knowledge, and there are no differences in levels of political trust. The most plausible explanation is that people with these characteristics are more likely to turn on TV news, but that exposure further reinforces these tendencies, in a virtuous circle. Far from causing public cynicism, television news thereby functions to strengthen civic virtue. The conclusion will consider the implications of these findings for the media's power to involve the public in the democratic process.

### **Videomalaise and Mobilization Theories**

Our first task is to outline the debate between videomalaise and mobilization theories, to assess the methodology and evidence used in previous studies, and to consider the problems of interpretation this raises. *Videomalaise* theories differ in many regards but they share an emphasis on the corrosive effects of the mass media upon the democratic process (for a discussion see Newton 1997). In this view the mass media present a highly selective and inaccurate portrayal of policy problems and political leaders, systematically biased by structural news values, which contributes towards the public's civic malaise. In the United States there are two familiar complaints, echoed in a series of recent books. First, on the major networks, in an attempt to staunch the hemorrhage of viewers, it is argued that serious political coverage of national and world affairs has been driven out by entertainment-

oriented, crime, celebrity and consumer-obsessed, tabloid television. The result is endless coverage of Di, Lewinsky, and Viagra rather than the problems of health care, Indonesia and Kashmir. Second, it is argued that when politics is covered, it is covered badly, due to an excessive focus on the poll-driven horse-race ('who's ahead, who's behind'), on conflictual and negative news (bad news), and on strategic game frames (the insider scoop about what's behind proposals). 'Tabloidization' has produced the relentless pursuit of sensational, superficial, and populist political reporting on network news, in the attempt to maintain ratings before surfers click to other channels. All this breathless flim-flam, it is argued, comes at the expense of detailed and informed debate about policy issues and 'hard' (real) news (see, for example, Postman 1985; Jamieson 1992; Sabato 1991; Patterson 1993; Hart 1994; Fallows 1996; Schudson 1995). Local television news, -- the main source of news for most Americans -- is accused of allowing trivial 'infotainment', crime coverage ('if it bleeds, it leads'), and feature journalism ('the Heath Beat') to drive out coverage of public affairs (Klite, Bardwell, and Salzman 1997). Critics sometimes focus their attacks on particular news outlets. More often the mass media is lumped together indiscriminately in the dock, from the *New York Times* and NPR's *Morning Edition* to *Dateline NBC*, the *Teletubbies* and *Jerry Springer*, as if all guilty by association.

Tabloid television is by no means confined to America. Similar concerns have been aired in Europe. Cultural theorists suggest that growing fragmentation of channels and audiences, commercialization, and concentration of ownership has reduced the quality and diversity of European television. The multiplication of media outlets, chasing the audience with low-cost, low-quality scheduling, is believed to have reduced the choice of program types. This development is thought to have undermined the audience's ability to make sense of public affairs and, echoing Habermas, there is widespread concern that the displacement of public service television by commercial channels has impoverished the public sphere (Dahlgren 1995; Langer 1998; Weymouth and Lamizet 1996). Since the rise of the penny press there has always been 'yellow journalism' highlighting the moral peccadilloes and sexual proclivities of the rich and famous. Think of Teapot Dome, Watergate, and Iran-Contra. But today routine and daily front-page news about government scandals seems greater than in previous decades - whether sleaze in Britain, Tagentopoli in Italy, Recruit and Sagawa in Japan, or Zippergate in America. Compare, for example, contemporary news reporting of the personal lives of FDR, Kennedy and Clinton. This coverage may corrode the forms of trust which underpin social relations and political authority (Garment 1991; Markovits and Silverstein 1988; Lull and Hinerman 1997; della Porta and Meny 1997). In a different vein, the Trilateral Report claimed that a more autonomous media, particularly the power of television news, was partly to blame for a 'democratic distemper' by undermining established authority while emphasizing social tensions in West Europe and the United States (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975:34-5,98-9).

In contrast the *mobilization* perspective, more popular in Europe than in the United States, suggests that the modern mass media have a largely positive impact which functions to sustain and promote democratic attitudes and civic participation (see, for example, the discussion in Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Inglehart 1990; Inglehart 1997; Dalton 1996). In Western Europe, public service broadcasting was established to provide a popular and homogeneous source of shared information and news about public affairs. Mobilization theory emphasizes that '*societal modernisation*' has gradually increased the availability of a diverse range of specialized news media -

newspapers, magazines, radio, television and now the internet - catering to different markets and providing a rich and dense information environment for citizens in advanced industrialized societies. For those interested, the costs of finding out about current affairs - whether events concerning the Asian financial crisis, the Balanced Budget Amendment, or Lewinsky v Starr, have been greatly reduced by this context. Moreover, mobilization theorists suggest that these developments have been accompanied by '*individual modernisation*' producing higher levels of literacy, education and the cognitive skills necessary for citizens to make use of this environment. This view emphasizes that in many advanced industrial societies these developments have produced an electorate - particularly among the well-educated - better equipped to participate and more sophisticated about public affairs than ever before, if perhaps more skeptical and critical towards established authorities.

### **Evidence For and Against the Videomalaise Thesis**

What evidence shows that television and TV news can influence either civic mobilization or malaise? This research raises extremely complex theoretical and methodological challenges (Bryant and Zillmann 1994). Sweeping claims about the ill effects of television, - whether about the impact of violence on children, the commercialization of popular culture, or public disaffection with government, - are often cast at such a high level of generality that they are untestable. Let us compare the pros and cons of previous empirical studies which have commonly utilized four alternative types of research designs:

- ⚡ Macro-level studies compare trends in news contents and public opinion.
- ⚡ Cross-sectional surveys monitor the association between media use and individual attitudes.
- ⚡ Experiments measure the effects of media messages on changes in political attitudes.
- ⚡ Comparative research analyses public opinion within different media and political environments.

### **Macro-level Time-Series Studies**

The most common research strategy has been to analyze changes over time in the contents of news coverage and to relate this, more or less systematically, to changes over time in public opinion at macro-level. These studies assume that the media has a diffuse, long-term and cumulative influence on the political culture. It's the steady drumbeat of messages, not individual exposure, which is believed to entrench mainstream orientations for most viewers. Content analysis provides a systematic description of the media landscape. This strategy draws broadly on the theoretical tradition of cultivation analysis of George Gerbner (1994), where television coverage is thought to gradually shape our views of social reality. Using this approach, in an influential study, Patterson (1993: 23) documented that growing negative coverage of electoral candidates in news magazines from 1960-1992 mirrored trends in declining political trust in American public opinion during the same years. Similar studies in Germany and Sweden have shown increased coverage of scandals and negative news which has paralleled falling confidence in political leaders (Westerstahl and Johansson 1986; Kepplinger 1996; Friedrichsen 1996).

Nevertheless, if we accept the evidence for the growth of tabloid TV news, especially in the most competitive commercial sectors, we still face large and heroic inferential leaps before we can establish the impact of

such coverage on public opinion. The evidence in the macro-level time-series studies is open to alternative interpretations. The parallel trends over time may be independent, or the association may be spurious, as the result of other causal factors (for example, an increase in the incidents of government corruption may produce both more negative media coverage and more public cynicism about politicians). Equally plausibly, the direction of causality might be reversed: if political news has become cynical this might be the result, rather than the cause, of the wider political culture. Lastly, such accounts fail to explain apparent major anomalies, for example how the onslaught of 'scandal' coverage in the media frenzy which has afflicted the Clinton presidency has, to date, apparently failed to damage his long-term public popularity (Zaller 1998). As Zaller argues, we need to understand the conditionality of such media effects, both when coverage of scandal matters for public opinion, and when it does not.

### **Cross-sectional Surveys**

A second stream of research has looked more directly at the evidence for individual-level media effects using cross-sectional surveys, usually within one nation. The behavioral approach has focussed on understanding the conditions which are thought to produce certain effects, including variations in the source, content, channel, receivers and destination (McQuail 1996). Most commonly studies have compared the attitudes and behaviour of regular users of different types of media, such as newspapers and television news, or viewers of television debates and campaign ads. The Trilateral Report, for example, relied upon work by Michael Robinson, itself the origin of the term 'videomalaise', which used American survey data from the sixties to show that those who relied on television news had lower political efficacy, greater social distrust and cynicism, and weaker party loyalties than those who relied upon newspapers, radio or magazines for their political news (Robinson 1976). Another early study, by Miller et al., linked content analysis of newspapers, particularly critical political coverage, with feelings of political disaffection experienced by their readers, based on the 1974 NES (Miller, Goldenberg, and Lutz 1979).

Most recently, Putnam (1995) analyzed the U.S. General Social Survey to demonstrate that the heaviest users of television were least socially trusting and least willing to join community groups. Putnam related these findings to broader trends in civic engagement. He argued that as television saturated American homes in the 1950s this produced a post-civic generation. This helped to explain the cohort patterns of political mobilization and why citizens raised in this cultural environment were less likely than their parents to trust others, to join voluntary associations, and to vote. Three hypotheses are offered: time spent on television may displace other leisure activities and community involvement outside the home; watching primetime entertainment television with its emphasis on violence and crime may produce a 'mean world' syndrome (Gerbner et al. 1994); and, lastly, TV may have a particularly strong effect on childhood aggression. Television is thereby indicted for the dramatic erosion of civic engagement and social capital in America. To explore this pattern further, another study analyzed the American Citizen Participation survey and confirmed that heavy television viewers were least involved in a wide range of political activities, such as voting, campaigning and organizational membership. Yet this was not a problem of the medium per se: newspaper readership and regular viewing of television *news* had the opposite effect (Norris 1996).

Other research in Western Europe and Japan has challenged the pernicious effects of television and TV news. In Britain regular viewers of television news, like regular readers of broadsheet papers, have been found to be more likely than average to be informed, interested and engaged in political life. Watching a lot of British television

is also associated with some modest levels of mobilization (Newton 1997, 1998; Norris 1997). Similar results have been confirmed in Japan (Flanagan 1996; Pharr and Krauss 1996; Pharr 1997) and Germany (Holtz-Bacha 1990), where the media is associated with greater civic mobilization.

Yet the problem remains that these studies, while more persuasive, still cannot establish the classic chicken-and-egg direction of causality. Does political interest cause us to turn on 'Nightline' or 'Panorama', or does watching these programs make us more politically interested? Does watching television produce less social trust and community involvement? Or do people who don't trust others and are not engaged in their community prefer, as a matter of personal choice, to stay home and watch TV? We cannot tell. The 'uses and gratifications' approach argues that we select the programs to watch which are most in tune with our prior predispositions and tastes (Blumler and Katz 1974). Hence Conservative critics of President Clinton are more likely to tune into yet another late night 'investigative special' about Whitewater. This process thereby reinforces, but does not change, our political attitudes. There are other difficulties of interpretation. Patterns of media use are closely related to many other factors, like education and class, which are usually associated with civic engagement. Moreover, our claims often make generalizations about 'television' as though there is a single experience of this medium. (Would we ever make similar claims about the effects of, for example, reading 'a book'? Of course not.) Ideally we need to compare the effects of variance in the media messages, so that we can see whether people who consistently use one source (such as crime-focussed local TV news) differ from those who use others (like right-wing chat radio). Unfortunately in practice with survey research it is often difficult to disentangle television sources: our measures of media habits are often diffuse and imprecise; there is little variance in the contents of mainstream sources like television news on different channels; and lastly we usually have multiple and overlapping uses of different media (readers of tabloid newspapers, for example, often watch much popular entertainment on television).

### **Experimental Studies**

To unravel this knot research designs have used experiments to monitor the process of short-term individual-level opinion change in response to specific media messages. Experiments have the potential to provided some of the most convincing evidence for and against the videomalaise perspective. In one of the most influential recent studies, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) demonstrated that watching negative or 'attack' television advertising discouraged voter turnout and decreased political efficacy in the U.S. (see, however, the review of other studies in Lan and Sigelman 1998). Other experiments have found American network news guilty of sensationalizing and over-simplifying complex issues like health care, producing a 'spiral of cynicism' among the public (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Yet in contrast experiments carried out during the 1997 British election campaign found that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, negative news failed to damage, while positive news served to boost, levels of party support (Sanders and Norris 1998). This pattern continued to prove significant despite a wide range of controls. It is not clear therefore how far we can generalize more broadly from these experimental studies, for example whether television ads and news might influence viewers in different ways, and how far these effects are conditional upon the particular media, political, and cultural context in the United States and Britain.

## **Comparative Studies**

Lastly, comparative studies allow us to examine media effects within different environments. The most important variations in national media systems includes the *government-media relationship* due to regulation, subsidy and censorship; *television diversity* including the structure of competition between public service and commercial channels, and the availability and penetration of cable, satellite and new communication technology; *press diversity* due to the concentration of ownership, the structure of competition, the number of local and national newspapers and their circulation figures; and differences in *journalistic cultures* concerning values like 'objectivity' and 'partisanship' (Humphreys 1996; Swanson and Mancini 1996; Weymouth and Lamizet 1996).

Newer comparative research on patterns of political coverage is emerging. For example, content analysis and participation observation studies monitoring election coverage in Germany, Britain and the United States has found differing journalistic norms of political 'balance' within each country (Semetko 1996). A five-nation survey of journalists has documented differences in news cultures (Patterson 1998). Yet before we can understand the effects of these patterns, the challenge facing comparative research is to relate systematic variations in the structure, culture and contents of the media to public opinion within each country, so that we have multi-level and cross-national research designs. Work along these lines is starting to emerge. The 1992 Cross-National Election Project (CNEP) integrated content analysis of media coverage (Dalton et al. 1998) with the national elections surveys in Britain, Germany, Spain, Japan and the United States. This demonstrated that heavy users of TV news and newspapers in these countries were more likely than average to be politically engaged, in terms of political interest and discussion, party identification, organizational activism, and voting turnout (Curtice, Schmitt-Beck, and Schrott 1998).

The previous literature which is available therefore strongly suggests two major grounds for caution: firstly about extrapolating from the effects of television as a medium to the effects of television *news* per se (or *vica versa*), and secondly about generalizing from studies about media effects in one country to other contexts. While the videomalaise theory is often popular, the literature remains divided about whether the news media has the capacity to encourage or discourage civic engagement.

### **Comparing Television Use Worldwide**

To extend the comparative approach further we can start by exploring the association between patterns of television use and indicators of civic malaise in forty nations, based on the World Values Study 1995-7 <sup>(1)</sup>. This source allows us to compare television habits, in terms of how much time, if any, people say that they usually spend watching television on an average weekday, measured using a four-point scale (see Appendix A). For subsequent comparison this item is recoded into two groups: low-users (who do not watch TV or who watch one to two hours per day) and high users (who watch two to three or more hours of general television per day).

The World Values study has the advantage of allowing us to compare countries with widely differing media environments. These contrasts can be illustrated most clearly by the level of television penetration. As shown in Table 1, in many countries television watching was an almost universal activity. Yet in the least-affluent societies many said they did not watch TV, including a third or more of the population in Bangladesh, South Africa, Mexico, India, and just under half the population in Nigeria. The level of GNP per capita was related to whether people

watched television at all ( $r=.10$   $p>.01$ ), although television viewing was pervasive throughout Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. Moreover, the level of economic development was not a good predictor of how *much* television people watched in different countries. Since watching television was such a ubiquitous activity in most societies, the usual social indicators such as education, age, gender and class also proved very poor predictors of how much TV people watched. Accordingly the preliminary analysis presented in this paper was run separately for each country and then for developing and for industrialized societies, without any controls for social background, although it is intended to introduce these in subsequent models.

[Table 1 about here]

### **Social Trust**

We can start by testing the Putnam thesis about the causes of the decline in social capital. If this thesis is correct we would expect to find, as our first hypothesis (H#1) *that watching television would reduce trust between people*. The standard question was used to gauge social trust:

*“Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”*

The results in Table 2 confirm a modest but significant association between social trust and television use in twenty-five of the forty nations under comparison. As Putnam found in the United States, in these countries, the more television people watched, the less likely they were to trust others. This pattern was strongest in Scandinavia, as well as in Germany, Switzerland, Mexico and Japan. Only one country (Moldova) proved an outlier where the relationship was reversed, and in the remaining fourteen nations the difference proved statistically insignificant. The association tended to be stronger in industrialized than in developing societies. This may have been due, at least in part, to a 'floor' effect since there was almost no social trust expressed in countries like the Philippines, Peru and Brazil (where trust was even lower than, for example, in Serbia and Croatia). Yet the direction of this relationship remains to be determined. This association does not tell us whether the experience of watching a television world dominated by crime, violence and conflict gradually encourages us to mistrust each other, or whether people who tend not to trust others choose to stay home and watch TV.

[Table 2 about here]

### **Organizational Activism and Social Capital**

If television also influences civic engagement and social capital, as Putnam argues, then we would expect as our second hypothesis that *exposure to TV would depress activism in voluntary organizations*. Engagement was gauged by the following items which were summed into a scale measure:

*"Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member (2), an inactive member (1), or not a member of that type of organization? (0)..."*

*☒☒ Church or religious organization*

*☒☒ Art, music or educational organization*

⌘⌘ *Labor union*

⌘⌘ *Political party*

⌘⌘ *Environmental organization*

⌘⌘ *Professional Association*

⌘⌘ *Charitable organization*

⌘⌘ *Any other voluntary organization?"*

In industrialized societies, the results in Table 3 show a significant although modest relationship between the use of television and activism in voluntary organizations, again confirming the Putnam thesis in this broader range of nations. In these countries people who watched more television were less likely to be active in voluntary associations like sports clubs, political parties, professional associations and labor unions, charities and churches. Again this relationship proved particularly strong in Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Mexico, as well as the U.S. Yet this pattern was less clear in developing nations, where formal associational membership tended to be slightly lower, perhaps because civil society was less dense. And in a few countries, notably Nigeria and South Africa, the association between use of TV and organizational membership proved to be reversed. It is worth emphasizing, in parenthesis, that despite the heightened concern about the decline of social capital in the United States, by the mid-1990s activism in civil society remained relatively high in American when compared with nearly every other country.

[Table 3 about here]

### **Political Support**

One of the most important claims of the American videomalaise literature is that, in established democracies with a free press, watching television is predicted to erode political support (H#3): *reducing confidence in governing institutions, support for the political system, and ultimately undermining democratic values*. Cynical coverage of politics on TV - with its focus on exposing government scandals and corruption, revealing insider-strategy and dramatizing political conflict - is expected to encourage viewers to become cynical and disenchanted with their elected leaders and governmental institutions. Yet the comparative pattern is more complicated, and in nations like Serbia, where the government has more influence over broadcasting, we might expect that the media could serve a propaganda function which actually increases support for the regime. To measure political support the following items were used.

Support for Democratic Values:

*"I'm going to read off some things people sometimes say about a democratic system. Could you please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly, after I read each one of them..."*

*VI60. "In democracy, the economic system runs badly."*

*VI61. "Democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling."*

*VI62 "Democracies aren't good at maintaining order"*

#### Evaluations of the Performance of the Regime

*"People have different views about the system of governing this country. Here is a scale for rating how well things are going. 1 means very bad and 10 means very good. VI52. Where on this scale would you put the political system as it is today?"*

#### Confidence in Political Institutions

*"I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?"*

*\*The government in YOUR CAPITAL*

*\*Political Parties*

*\*Parliament*

*\*The Civil Service*

*\*The Legal System"*

Principle component factor analysis rotated by varimax confirmed that the above items measuring support for the political system fell into these three distinct dimensions, explaining in total 60 percent of variance.

The results suggest a complex pattern. In industrialized societies use of TV was generally associated with slightly lower levels of regime support, (see Table 4) and this relationship was particularly pronounced in Germany, Switzerland and Sweden. The analysis also found that high TV users were slightly less likely to adhere strongly to democratic values, but there was no difference in levels of confidence in governmental institutions like parliaments and parties (the results are summarized in Table 7). This suggests that television use may be associated, at least weakly, with certain types of political support but broadcasting cannot necessarily be blamed for the decline of institutional confidence which has been so marked a feature of established democracies. In contrast, high TV users were significantly more supportive of the regime in certain countries such as Mexico, India and Serbia (although, interestingly, not in Nigeria, where restrictions on broadcasting and the government's propaganda efforts might have been expected to boost regime support). Although further exploration is necessary the most plausible hypothesis is that this pattern probably relates to the type of political coverage in these countries and how far broadcasters feel free to use the airwaves to criticize the government.

[Table 4 about here]

#### **Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation**

The videomalaise thesis argues that television coverage alienates viewers with public affairs, influencing their behaviour as well as their attitudes. If so, we would expect to find lower levels of conventional political participation among viewers, hence (H#4) *exposure to TV should reduce political interest and discussion*. This

hypothesis was tested using the following two items:

*“How interested would you say you are in politics? Very, somewhat, not very, not at all.”*

*“When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?”*

Moreover, if television fuels political disaffection, we would also expect that (H#5) *exposure should encourage more protest activity*, such as greater willingness to demonstrate, strike and occupy buildings. The standard measure of protest potential was used for comparison (Barnes and Kaase 1979).

*“Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never, under any circumstances, do it?”*

*\*Signing a petition*

*\*Joining in boycotts*

*\*Attending lawful demonstrations*

*\*Joining unofficial strikes*

*\*Occupying buildings or factories.”*

These items probably provide a more reliable indicator of willingness to engage in these forms of activism, rather than actual behaviour (Jennings and van Deth 1990; Topf 1995). Nevertheless this measure has been widely used in comparative research.

In industrialized societies the results in Table 5 confirm that high TV users were slightly less likely to engage in political discussions with friends and to display interest in public affairs, as indicators of conventional participation. Most strikingly, Table 6 shows that in industrialized societies people who watch a lot of TV are also significantly less willing to engage in 'unconventional' or 'protest' forms of political activity, such as strikes, demonstrations or boycotts. As in previous tables, this pattern seems most marked in Germany, as well as being relatively strong in the United States, Norway, Sweden, Japan and Mexico. Notably, out of all our comparisons, this indicator showed the most marked differences between viewers and non-viewers. Contrary to expectations, this suggests that TV viewers are more likely to be apathetic couch potatoes, tuning out from all forms and varieties of political engagement, rather than deeply alienated and angry citizens. In contrast, there seems to be a stronger association between television watching and mobilization in a few societies such as Georgia, Nigeria and South Africa.

[Tables 5 and 6 about here]

### **Summary of the Global Comparison**

Therefore based on this comparison we can conclude that television viewing in industrialized societies is associated with some indicators of mild civic malaise: viewers tend to be less socially trusting and engaged in public

life, as well as slightly more disenchanted with politics. We can summarize the overall picture by comparing difference in civic mobilization and malaise across all eight indicators in Table 7. The first major finding from this study is that in industrialized societies there was a modest but steady, consistent and significant association across seven out of eight indicators of civic attitudes and behaviour: *the more time spent watching television, the slightly greater the signs of malaise*. The clearest contrasts were between those who did not watch TV and those who habitually viewed three or more hours of broadcasting per day.

[Table 7 about here]

In developing societies, however, the results present a mixed picture. There was either no significant difference between high TV viewers and non-viewers, or the association pointed in inconsistent directions. The second major finding from this analysis is therefore that *if television is associated with civic malaise, this relationship is only clearly evident in modernized societies*. At this stage we can only speculate about the explanation for this pattern but there could be many reasons, including differences between developing and industrialized societies in terms of media systems (including the level of TV penetration), political systems (such as the degree of government regulation of broadcasting) and social systems (such as the density and strength of civil society).

Nevertheless we need to make some important observations about interpreting these preliminary findings and suggest the most promising avenues for further work. First, the individual attitudinal differences associated with television exposure which we have documented remain very modest in terms of absolute size. In many ways this is to be expected, after all even light viewers who watch just a little TV per night can still be expected to be influenced by this process, as well as by any systemic effects of coverage on the broader political culture. The dependent variables (such as the measure of social trust) allows limited variance. Our findings are also in line with previous research, such as studies focused on knowledge gains from debates and ads, which have usually found only very modest learning from the news (Bryant and Zillman 1994:139). The most important question is whether the pattern in our findings is robust and systematic. Further analysis including a range of social controls can help to answer this question.

Second, the relationship between watching television and civic malaise was found to be far stronger in some established democracies (like Germany) than in others (like Australia). This suggests that future research needs to compare structural differences in media systems and systematic patterns of political coverage in far more detail before we can hope to understand the mechanisms at work here. Thirdly, the major findings we have established concern differences in civic attitudes and behaviour based on how much television we regularly watch. Using the WVS so far we have been unable to determine whether this relationship is the result of viewing TV entertainment in general (if there is a 'mean world' effect from fictional images of violence, crime and conflict), or whether this is the result of watching political coverage in news and current affairs in particular, as many videomalaise theorists suggest.

Most importantly, in this section we have only been able to explore the pattern of association between TV viewing and civic malaise. None of the evidence so far allows us to draw any conclusions about the *causal effects* of

watching television. Early research saw the audience as largely passive subjects who were influenced by media stimuli. More modern research based on 'constructionist' theories understands the audience as bringing much attitudinal baggage and ideological baggage to their viewing habits and choices, so that different groups decode and interpret the messages in multiple ways (for a discussion see McQuail 1997). The 'uses and gratification' approach (Blumler and Katz 1974) suggests that we are selective in our viewing habits and we choose to watch the programs which are most in tune with our prior dispositions. In the same way, whether we choose to watch TV at all, or we prefer to spend our time on charitable works, parent-teacher association meetings, or organizing environmental recycling projects, is a matter of personal priorities. Which leads to which cannot be inferred from cross-sectional studies carried out at one point in time. What we need to monitor are changes in media habits (which are infrequent) or the process of opinion formation.

### **Comparing Media Effects in the United States and Britain**

To make progress we can turn to a more focussed comparison using pre-election and post-election panel surveys in the United States (NES 1996) and Britain (BES 1997) <sup>(2)</sup>. These campaigns provide a suitable context to evaluate the videomalaise thesis since content analysis shows that both the 1996 American election and the 1997 British general election were characterised by highly negative campaigns. The Presidential race did not plumb the depths of 1988, nevertheless the tone of campaign coverage of Clinton and Dole by network news was predominately critical of both candidates (Lichter and Smith 1996; Just 1997). Labour was given a relatively easy ride by the press in 1997 but the issue of Conservative sleaze (sexual and financial) dominated the early stages of the campaign, while headlines over Tory splits and internal dissension over Europe eclipsed other news in the final weeks. In total the Conservatives received twice as much negative coverage as positive during the campaign, while reporting of Labour and the Liberal Democrats was far more evenly balanced or neutral (Norris 1998). If political reporting in newspapers and television influences civic attitudes, encouraging widespread political disaffection and cynicism, as the videomalaise thesis suggests, we would therefore expect these campaigns to provide suitable case-studies to test this thesis.

A further advantage of this design is that it allows us to compare the effects of campaign coverage in two contrasting media environments. Obvious differences include media structures such as the predominance of a national, party-committed press in Britain, divided sharply between tabloids and broad-sheets, compared with the regional/local and more politically-dealigned and middle-of-the-road American press. Prior to digital, British television news remains dominated by the four major terrestrial channels, notably the public service BBC, with relatively little competition from cable and satellite coverage, compared with the fragmentation of commercial channels and specialized audiences in the US. The legal regulation of election coverage on television are also widely different, such as the proliferation of paid commercials in the US compared with free five-minute party political broadcasts in Britain. Most importantly, the public service culture, influencing British broadcasting on all channels, provides saturation coverage during the six-week official campaign, strictly regulated by consideration of party balance, compared with far more limited political coverage during the equivalent period in the United States. These structural differences have had a major impact on the news culture in these countries (see, for example,

comparisons in Semetko 1996; Patterson 1998). Therefore if we can establish that patterns of media use in both countries are associated with similar patterns of civic mobilization or malaise, this helps us to rule in or out certain structural explanations. For example, if American voters who pay attention to the news learn little about the policy positions of candidates then it can be claimed, as many do, that this is because of the limited and superficial issue coverage on network news. If we find that there are similar patterns of learning from the campaign in Britain, despite extensive issue coverage on television news, then clearly we must search elsewhere for the reasons.

Certain qualifications about this comparison should be noted. We are mainly interested in whether we can establish differences in political attitudes between users of different media *within* Britain and *within* the United States, rather than comparing the responses *between* nations. The reason is that we often lack identical items in the British and American surveys, for example questions on political trust and efficacy. The best we can do is to compare concepts and measures which are functionally equivalent (with details listed under each table). Moreover, we are often unable to utilize fully the ‘pre-post’ research design to monitor changes in political attitudes during the election campaigns in both countries. Nevertheless these surveys allow us to compare different types of media users in terms of their political interest, efficacy and knowledge, social trust and political trust. Media users are classified according to how far respondents said they were regular users of television news and newspaper, and how far they were attentive to political news in these sources (see fn. Table 7 for the definitions used). The results of the analysis show two major findings which are deeply damaging to the conventional wisdom about videomalaise.

[Tables 7-11 here]

First, if we compare media users within each column in subsequent tables there is a persistent pattern: *exposure and attention to television news in Britain and America was consistently and significantly associated with higher than average levels of political interest, efficacy, knowledge, and social trust* (see Tables 7-10). On political trust, there was no difference between media users. The overall pattern among viewers of TV news was very similar, if a bit flatter, to the pattern of exposure and attention to newspapers. This association cannot, in itself, reveal the causal mechanism at work here and all the complex chicken and eggs stuff. The most plausible interpretation, we would argue, is that people who are more politically engaged are more likely to turn on the evening news and to read a newspaper. But at the same time, there is an interactive process, so that in the long-term those who watch the network news and read the paper are more likely to become interested, efficacious and knowledgeable about public affairs. In other words, contrary to all the popular criticisms, the association points towards a virtuous circle between use of the news media and civic mobilization.

Secondly, we have some evidence about the short-term effects of changes in civic attitudes during the campaign. We might expect that public opinion shifts during the election campaign, for example if feelings of political efficacy grow as voters feel that they can, at last, throw the rascals out, should they so desire. Knowledge about politicians and policy issues can also be expected to increase, as people start to pay attention to the choices before them. The key question here is whether political interest, efficacy, trust and knowledge increases more than average during the campaign for those who are most exposed and attentive to the media. The panels surveys were taken at slightly different points in time, nevertheless they allow a limited comparison of the effects of the long and short campaign in Britain (with BES panel waves in May 1996, then during April 1997, and after the election in

May 1997) and in the official campaign in United States (with NES pre- and post-election waves). If we compare the rows where we have pre- and post-election data, the results show that the *very modest short-term changes in the indicators of civic mobilization and malaise are not significantly associated with patterns of media use, in a positive or negative direction* (see Tables 7-11). For example, by this indicator knowledge about where the parties stood on a range of policy issues did not increase during the long British campaign, despite the wall-to-wall coverage on the media, and all the efforts by politicians to publicize their manifesto commitments. And it certainly did not increase more than average for regular users of the news media. Political efficacy did increase as polling day drew near, but again this was a uniform effect, irrespective of patterns of media use (for more details see Norris et al. 1999). In the United States we find a similar pattern in terms of the political interest generated by the campaign, where there was no difference by those who tuned in, and those who tuned out, of the campaign news.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

What are the implications of this study? Popular criticism of the media has been common in the past, but in recent years the trickle of complaint has become a flood, particularly in the United States, and the public seems to share many of these concerns (Kohut and Toth 1998). Popular commentators frequently blame television, and TV news in particular, for political coverage that produces a more cynical and disenchanted public and a half-empty ballot box. The growth of tabloid television has therefore commonly been singled out as a major problem for the health of modern democracy.

The comparison of general television use in the first section of this paper did find that the amount of time devoted to watching the box was modestly but consistently associated with indicators of civic malaise in a wide range of advanced industrialized societies. In these nations the more time spent watching TV, the slightly lower the level of social trust, organizational activism, political support for the regime, and political participation. Yet this pattern was not evident in developing societies. Moreover using this evidence we could not establish whether this pattern was the effect, or the cause, of watching television. After all, if we don't trust other people, if we don't enjoy community meetings, if we're bored by politics, it makes sense that we might well decide that we prefer to spend the evening in the company of Frasier, Oprah and Seinfeld.

What the more focussed and detailed comparison of Britain and America suggests is that the short-term effects of the media on civic malaise, for better or worse, have been greatly exaggerated, and the long-term effects of exposure and attention to television news are probably largely beneficial for civic engagement. People who regularly watched television news in both countries had greater than average political interest, efficacy and knowledge. Far be it for me to defend the quality of British and American journalism, and the tabloid tendencies in television news in particular. The quality of much TV is, in my view, less than it could and should be. But irrespective of our personal views about the contents, the evidence in this paper, while far from conclusive, strongly suggests that we need to look elsewhere for the ills of the body politic and stop blaming the messenger.

**Table 1: Use of Television**

<b>Nation</b>	<b>Does not watch TV</b>	<b>One to two hours per day</b>	<b>Two to three hours per day</b>	<b>More than three hours per day</b>
Armenia	1	15	25	58
Azerbaijan	1	14	33	52
Russia	5	29	31	35
Belarus	1	32	33	34
Taiwan	4	21	45	31
Uruguay	6	34	30	30
Australia	2	41	27	30
Brazil	6	47	17	30
Venezuela	9	37	25	29
Puerto Rico	7	41	24	28
Lithuania	1	42	30	27
Finland	4	20	34	26
USA	3	43	27	26
Columbia	9	43	22	26
Estonia	1	42	32	25
Japan	2	40	35	24
Croatia	8	39	31	23
Chile	5	45	27	23
Latvia	2	44	33	21
E. Germany	7	41	33	20
Poland	7	46	27	20
Peru	10	46	24	20
Spain	5	44	32	19
Argentina	7	49	25	19
S. Africa	37	30	17	16
Ukraine	2	52	31	15
DominicanRep	12	53	20	15
China	14	48	25	14
Philippines	13	58	16	14
Norway	3	58	26	13
Mexico	37	34	16	13
Sweden	2	36	43	12
West Germany	10	54	24	12
Nigeria	49	28	13	11
Slovenia	11	61	18	9
Switzerland	6	69	18	7
Serbia	8	40	25	6
Bangladesh	29	54	14	4
India	43	47	9	1
<b>Mean</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>

**Note:** Q.228: “Do you ever watch television? IF YES: How much time do you usually spend watching television on an average weekday? (NOT WEEKENDS)” **Source:** World Values Survey 1995-97 N.64,975

**Table 2: Social Trust by Use of Television**

Nation	Percentage trusting response		Percentage Difference
	None or Low TV use	High TV use	
West Germany	50	28	<b>-22</b>
Switzerland	44	31	<b>-13</b>
Sweden	68	56	<b>-12</b>
E. Germany	31	20	<b>-11</b>
Norway	69	59	<b>-10</b>
Finland	56	46	<b>-10</b>
Mexico	25	17	<b>-8</b>
Japan	50	43	<b>-7</b>
Armenia	31	24	<b>-7</b>
Australia	44	37	<b>-6</b>
Croatia	27	21	<b>-6</b>
Poland	20	15	<b>-5</b>
India	40	35	<b>-5</b>
Estonia	24	19	<b>-5</b>
Uruguay	26	21	<b>-5</b>
USA	38	34	<b>-4</b>
China	54	50	<b>-4</b>
Russia	27	23	<b>-4</b>
Serbia	32	28	<b>-4</b>
Argentina	19	16	<b>-3</b>
S.Africa	19	17	<b>-2</b>
Puerto Rico	7	5	<b>-2</b>
Nigeria	18	16	<b>-2</b>
Ukraine	32	30	<b>-2</b>
Bangladesh	21	19	<b>-2</b>
Brazil	3	2	-1
Chile	22	21	-1
Taiwan	38	37	-1
Philippines	6	5	-1
Columbia	11	10	-1
Spain	30	30	0
Belarus	24	24	0
Slovenia	16	16	0
Latvia	25	25	0
Peru	5	5	0
Azerbaijan	20	20	0
DominicanRep	27	27	0
Lithuania	22	23	+1
Venezuela	13	14	+1
Moldova	19	26	<b>+7</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>-4</b>

**Note:** *None or Low TV use* is defined as none or one to two hours per day. *High TV use* is defined as two to three or more hours per day. Q. 27: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The figures are the percentage responding ‘most people can be trusted’. The ‘Difference’ figures in **bold** in the last column are those that are statistically significant at the .01 level, using Anova tests for differences between groups. **Source:** World Values Survey 1995-97 N.64, 975

**Table 3: Active in Voluntary Organizations by Use of Television**

Nation	Activism Scale		Difference
	None or Low TV use	High TV use	
Spain	8.2	7.2	<b>-1.0</b>
West Germany	8.8	8.1	<b>-0.7</b>
Switzerland	8.6	7.9	<b>-0.7</b>
Mexico	9.4	8.7	<b>-0.7</b>
USA	10.5	9.8	<b>-0.7</b>
E.Germany	7.8	7.3	<b>-0.5</b>
Norway	8.5	8.0	<b>-0.5</b>
Sweden	8.7	8.3	<b>-0.4</b>
Australia	9.5	9.1	<b>-0.4</b>
Finland	8.5	8.2	<b>-0.3</b>
Puerto Rico	9.4	9.0	<b>-0.3</b>
Brazil	8.6	8.3	<b>-0.3</b>
Estonia	6.7	6.5	<b>-0.2</b>
Argentina	7.4	7.2	-0.2
Taiwan	7.4	7.2	-0.2
Philippines	7.3	7.1	<b>-0.2</b>
Slovenia	7.2	7.0	<b>-0.2</b>
Peru	8.4	8.2	-0.2
Venezuela	8.2	8.0	-0.2
Croatia	7.5	7.4	-0.1
Latvia	6.6	6.5	-0.1
Azerbaijan	6.4	6.3	-0.1
Lithuania	6.4	6.3	-0.1
Japan	6.9	6.9	0
Armenia	12.1	12.1	0
Uruguay	7.4	7.4	0
Russia	6.3	6.3	0
Serbia	6.6	6.6	0
Ukraine	6.3	6.3	0
Bangladesh	8.0	8.0	0
Belarus	6.3	6.3	0
DominicanRep	9.5	9.5	0
Moldova	6.8	6.8	0
Chile	8.5	8.6	+0.1
India	7.3	7.6	+0.2
China	5.6	5.8	<b>+0.2</b>
Columbia	6.9	7.1	+0.2
S.Africa	9.0	9.7	<b>+0.7</b>
Nigeria	8.7	9.4	<b>+0.7</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>-0.2</b>

**Note:** *None or Low TV use* is defined as none or one to two hours per day. *High TV use* is defined as two to three or more hours per day. Q. 28-36: “Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations: for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?” The figures are the summary activism scale from nine types of organizations such as labor unions, church, sports or recreational, political parties, and charitable organizations. The ‘Difference’ figures in bold in the last column are those that are statistically significant at the .01 level, using Anova tests for differences between groups. **Source:** World Values Survey 1995-97 N.64, 975

**Table 4: Support for the Political Regime by Use of Television**

Nation	10 Point Support Scale		Difference
	None or Low TV use	High TV use	
Nigeria	3.3	2.8	<b>-0.5</b>
W. Germany	5.1	4.7	<b>-0.4</b>
Sweden	4.7	4.4	<b>-0.3</b>
Switzerland	5.3	5.0	<b>-0.3</b>
Taiwan	5.7	5.4	-0.3
Philippines	5.3	5.0	-0.3
E. Germany	5.0	4.8	-0.2
Latvia	4.2	4.0	-0.2
Spain	4.7	4.6	-0.1
Japan	4.1	4.0	-0.1
Poland	4.8	4.7	-0.1
Lithuania	4.3	4.2	-0.1
Estonia	4.7	4.6	-0.1
Georgia	4.1	4.0	-0.1
Australia	4.4	4.4	0
Norway	6.3	6.3	0
Argentina	4.6	4.6	0
Puerto Rica	5.1	5.1	0
Brazil	4.2	4.2	0
Chile	5.3	5.3	0
Croatia	5.5	5.5	0
USA	4.7	4.8	0.1
S. Africa	5.8	5.9	0.1
Finland	4.7	4.8	0.1
Belarus	3.5	3.6	0.1
Russia	2.7	2.8	0.1
Azerbaijan	6.6	6.7	0.1
Slovenia	4.5	4.7	0.2
Ukraine	3.3	3.5	<b>0.2</b>
Venezuela	2.2	2.4	0.2
Serbia	3.7	3.9	<b>0.2</b>
Peru	5.6	5.9	<b>0.3</b>
Uruguay	3.7	4.0	<b>0.3</b>
Moldova	3.4	3.7	<b>0.3</b>
Armenia	3.6	3.9	<b>0.3</b>
India	4.5	4.9	<b>0.4</b>
DominicanRep	3.6	4.1	<b>0.5</b>
Mexico	3.7	4.4	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>0</b>

**Note:** *None or Low TV use* is defined as none or one to two hours per day. *High TV use* is defined as two to three or more hours per day. Q. 152: “People have different views about the system for governing this country. Here is a scale for rating how well things are going: 1 means very bad and 10 means very good. Where on this scale would you put the political system as it is today?” The ‘Difference’ figures in **bold** in the last column are those that are statistically significant at the .05 level, using Anova tests for differences between groups. **Source:** World Values Survey 1995-97 N.64, 975

**Table 5: Protest Potential by Use of Television**

Nation	10 Point Support Scale		Difference
	None or Low TV use	High TV use	
W. Germany	4.5	3.5	<b>-1.0</b>
USA	4.1	3.3	<b>-0.8</b>
E. Germany	4.0	3.1	<b>-0.7</b>
Spain	2.4	1.9	<b>-0.5</b>
Mexico	2.8	2.3	<b>-0.5</b>
Norway	4.2	3.7	<b>-0.5</b>
Japan	3.1	2.7	<b>-0.4</b>
Sweden	4.7	4.3	<b>-0.4</b>
Switzerland	3.0	2.6	<b>-0.4</b>
Uruguay	2.3	1.9	<b>-0.4</b>
Australia	4.2	3.9	<b>-0.3</b>
Finland	3.2	2.9	<b>-0.3</b>
Belarus	1.8	1.5	<b>-0.3</b>
Estonia	2.3	2.0	<b>-0.3</b>
Argentina	2.1	1.9	-0.2
Puerto Rica	2.3	2.2	-0.1
Chile	1.9	1.8	-0.1
Latvia	2.6	2.5	-0.1
Venezuela	1.7	1.6	-0.1
Slovenia	2.7	2.7	0
Ukraine	1.6	1.6	0
Russia	1.7	1.7	0
DominicanRep	2.7	2.7	0
Columbia	1.9	1.9	0
Serbia	2.0	2.0	0
Poland	1.9	2.0	0.1
Brazil	3.0	3.1	0.1
Peru	1.8	1.9	0.1
Armenia	2.5	2.6	0.1
Azerbaijan	1.4	1.5	0.1
Croatia	2.7	2.8	0.1
India	1.8	2.0	0.2
Taiwan	1.4	1.6	0.2
Philippines	1.2	1.4	0.2
Bangladesh	5.2	5.4	0.2
Lithuania	2.2	2.5	<b>0.3</b>
Moldova	1.4	1.7	<b>0.3</b>
S. Africa	2.0	2.4	<b>0.4</b>
Nigeria	1.4	2.0	<b>0.6</b>
Georgia	1.5	2.8	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>-0.1</b>

**Note:** *None or Low TV use* is defined as none or one to two hours per day. *High TV use* is defined as two to three or more hours per day. Q.118-122: “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it, or would never, under any circumstances, do it.” The figures are the mean scale for five types of activity (see Appendix A for details). The ‘Difference’ figures in bold in the last column are those that are statistically significant at the .01 level, using Anova tests for differences between groups. **Source:** World Values Survey 1995-97 N.64, 975.

**Table 6: Summary Indicators of Civic Malaise and Use of Television**

	<b>Does not watch TV (i)</b>	<b>One to two hours per day</b>	<b>Two to three hours per day</b>	<b>More than three hours per day (ii)</b>	<b>Diff. (i)-(ii).</b>
<b>Industrialized Societies</b>					
Social Trust	.52	.48	.42	.34	<b>-0.18</b>
Organizational Membership	8.7	8.5	8.1	7.9	<b>-0.8</b>
Support for Democratic Values	7.5	7.3	7.2	7.1	<b>-0.4</b>
Evaluations of Regime	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.7	<b>-0.3</b>
Confidence in Institutions	6.3	6.5	6.4	6.2	<b>-0.1</b>
Political Discussion	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.8	<b>-0.2</b>
Political Interest	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.5	<b>-0.2</b>
Protest Potential	4.3	3.8	3.4	3.0	<b>-1.3</b>
<b>Developing Societies</b>					
Social Trust	.22	.21	.21	.19	-0.3
Organizational Membership	7.5	7.6	7.5	7.8	+0.3
Support for Democratic Values	7.1	7.1	7.1	7.0	-0.1
Evaluations of Regime	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.5	+0.2
Confidence in Institutions	6.4	6.0	5.9	5.8	-0.6
Political Discussion	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8	+0.1
Political Interest	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.2	0.0
Protest Potential	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.2	+0.2

**Note:** See Appendix A for questions and scale items. Developing societies are defined as those with per capita GNP of less than \$7000. The figures represent mean scores. *Social Trust*: one question was used to gauge interpersonal trust. *Membership of Voluntary Organizations*: how active people were in eight types of associations such as charitable organizations, political parties and labor unions. *Adherence to Democratic Values*: a three-item Likert-type value scale tapped agreement with statements about democracy. *Evaluations of Regime Performance*: one 10-point scale was used to rate the current political system. *Confidence in Political Institutions*: a five-item scale was used measuring confidence in governments, parliaments, parties, the civil service, and the legal system. *Political Discussion*: one item tapping the frequency of talking about politics with friends. *Political Interest*: one item measuring interest in politics. *Protest Potential*: the standard five-item battery of questions developed by Barnes and Kaase (1979) was used to measure protest potential.

**Source:** World Values Survey 1995-97 N.64, 975

**Table 7: Political Interest by Media Use in Britain and America**

	Britain	US		
	Pre-election	Pre-election	Post-election	Change
<b>ALL</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>+0.1</b>
<b>USE OF TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Regular use	2.9	2.2	2.3	+0.1
Not regular use	2.5	1.8	1.9	+0.1
<b>ATTENTION TO TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Attentive	3.5	2.5	2.6	+0.1
Not attentive	2.4	1.8	1.9	+0.1
<b>USE OF NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Regular reader	2.7	2.2	2.3	+0.1
Not regular reader	2.5	1.9	2.0	+0.1
<b>ATTENTION TO NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Attentive	4.0	2.6	2.6	0.0
Not attentive	2.5	1.9	2.1	+0.1
<b>USE OF TV ENTERTAINMENT</b>				
High use	N/a	2.1	2.2	+0.1
Low use	N/a	2.0	2.2	+0.1

**Notes:** Only respondents in pre and post waves are included.

**Britain:**

*TV News Regular user:* Respondent reported watching a TV news broadcast in each of the waves A,B and C.

*Attentive to TV news:* Respondent claimed in Wave B to pay ‘quite a bit’ or ‘a great deal’ of attention to stories about politics in the TV news yesterday.

*Regular Newspaper reader:* Respondent reported reading a newspaper yesterday in each of the waves A,B and C.

*Attentive to Newspaper news:* Respondent claimed in Wave B to pay ‘quite a bit’ or ‘a great deal’ of attention to stories about politics in the newspaper yesterday.

*Political interest:* “How much interest do you have in politics? A great deal (5), Quite a lot (4), Some (3), Not very much (2), or None at all (1).”

**U.S.**

*TV News Regular user:* Respondent reported watching TV network news for three or more days in the previous week.

*Attentive to TV news:* Respondent claimed to pay ‘quite a bit’ or ‘a great deal’ of attention to stories about the campaign in TV network news.

*Regular Newspaper reader:* Respondent reported reading a newspaper for three or more days in the previous week.

*Attentive to Newspaper news:* Respondent claimed to pay ‘quite a bit’ or ‘a great deal’ of attention to stories about the campaign in newspapers.

*Political interest:* “How interested are you in the political campaign? Very much interested (3), somewhat interested (2) or not much interested (1).”

*Use of TV Entertainment:* Scale based on how often respondent claimed to watch six different TV shows such as ER, Frasier and Friends.

**Sources:** British Election Campaign Panel Survey 1997. N.1422. American National Election Study 1996. N.1714.

**Table 8: Political Trust by Media Use in Britain and America**

	Britain	US		
	Pre-election	Pre-election	Post-election	Change
<b>ALL</b>	2.6	2.3	2.3	0.0
<b>USE OF TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Regular use	2.5	2.3	2.4	+0.1
Not regular use	2.6	2.3	2.3	0.0
<b>ATTENTION TO TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Attentive	2.7	2.3	2.4	0.0
Not attentive	2.6	2.3	2.3	0.0
<b>USE OF NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Regular reader	2.6	2.3	2.4	+0.1
Not regular reader	2.6	2.3	2.3	0.0
<b>ATTENTION TO NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Attentive	2.6	2.3	2.4	0.1
Not attentive	2.6	2.3	2.3	0.0
<b>USE OF TV ENTERTAINMENT</b>				
High use	N/a	2.3	2.3	0.0
Low use	N/a	2.3	2.3	0.0

Notes: Only respondents in pre and post waves are included. See Table 7 for definition of media users.

**Britain:** Responses to how often respondents said that they trusted “British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party..Just about always (4), most of the time (3), only some of the time (2) or almost never (1).”

**U.S.** V960566 Responses to how often respondent said they trusted government, whether ‘Just about always’ (4), ‘Most of the time’ (3), ‘Only some of the time’ (2) or ‘None of the time’ (1).

**Sources:** British Election Campaign Panel Survey 1997. N.1422. American National Election Study 1996. N.1714.

**Table 9: Political Efficacy by Media Use in Britain and America**

	Britain			U.S.
	Pre-election	Post-election	Change	Post-election
<b>ALL</b>	6.8	8.2	1.4	8.1
<b>USE OF TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Regular use	6.8	8.4	1.6	8.1
Not regular use	6.8	8.1	1.3	7.9
<b>ATTENTION TO TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Attentive	7.5	9.2	1.7	8.4
Not attentive	6.6	7.9	1.3	7.8
<b>USE OF NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Regular reader	6.8	8.2	1.4	8.3
Not regular reader	6.8	8.2	1.4	7.8
<b>ATTENTION TO NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Attentive	7.8	9.2	1.4	9.0
Not attentive	6.7	8.1	1.4	7.8
<b>USE OF TV ENTERTAINMENT</b>				
High use	N/a	N/a		8.0
Low use	N/a	N/a		8.1

**Notes:** Only respondents in pre and post waves are included. See Table 7 for definition of media users.

**Britain:** Five-point agree/disagree responses to the following items:

“Generally speaking those we elect as MPs lose touch with people pretty quickly.”

“Parties are only interested in people’s votes, not in their opinions.”

“It doesn’t really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same.”

(Fifteen-point political efficacy scale).

**U.S.** Four-point agree/disagree responses to the following items:

“People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.”

“Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.”

“People like me don't have any say about what the government does.”

(Twelve-point political efficacy scale.)

**Sources:** British Election Campaign Panel Survey 1997. N.1422. American National Election Study 1996. N.1714.

**Table 10: Social Trust by Media Use in America**

	US		
	Pre-election	Post-election	Change
<b>ALL</b>	.39	.51	+11
<b>USE OF TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>			
Regular use	.40	.51	+11
Not regular use	.37	.51	+13
<b>ATTENTION TO TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>			
Attentive	.42	.53	+12
Not attentive	.37	.49	+12
<b>USE OF NEWSPAPERS</b>			
Regular reader	.45	.57	+12
Not regular reader	.32	.44	+12
<b>ATTENTION TO NEWSPAPERS</b>			
Attentive	.49	.61	+12
Not attentive	.37	.49	+12
<b>USE OF TV ENTERTAINMENT</b>			
High use	.42	.54	+12
Low use	.38	.49	+11

**Notes:** Only respondents in pre and post waves are included. See Table 7 for definition of media users.

**U.S.**

*Social Trust: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted (1) or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (0)"*

**Sources:** American National Election Study 1996. N.1714

**Table 11: Political Knowledge by Media Use in Britain and America**

	Britain			U.S.
	Pre-election	Post-election	Change	Post-election
<b>ALL</b>	3.3	3.3	0.0	2.6
<b>USE OF TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Regular use	3.8	3.8	0.0	2.8
Not regular use	3.1	3.1	0.0	2.4
<b>ATTENTION TO TV NATIONAL NEWS</b>				
Attentive	4.1	4.1	0.0	3.1
Not attentive	3.1	3.2	+0.1	2.4
<b>USE OF NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Regular reader	3.8	3.7	-0.1	3.0
Not regular reader	3.1	3.2	+0.1	2.2
<b>ATTENTION TO NEWSPAPERS</b>				
Attentive	4.4	4.3	-0.1	3.3
Not attentive	3.2	3.2	0.0	2.5
<b>USE OF TV ENTERTAINMENT</b>				
High use	N/a	N/a	N/a	2.9
Low use	N/a	N/a	N/a	3.0

**Notes:** Only respondents in pre and post waves are included. See Table 7 for definitions of media use. Cell entries are mean scale scores.

**Britain:** Correct answers in Wave A and C to the following:

“Which party would you say is most in favour of...  
 Changing the voting system to a form of proportional representation?  
 Reducing government spending in order to cut taxes?  
 Schools being under local authority control?  
 Independence for Scotland?  
 Letting private industry run the railways?  
 Setting a minimum wage, below which no-one can be paid?”  
 The British knowledge scale ranges from 1 to 6.

**U.S.:** Correct in the Post-election Wave answers to the following questions:

“What office does Al Gore hold?”  
 “What office does William Rehnquist hold?”  
 “What office does Boris Yeltsin hold?”  
 “What office does Newt Gingrich hold?”  
 Plus the correct identification of the names of up to three candidates in the respondent’s district.  
 The US knowledge score ranges from 0 to 6.

**Sources:** British Election Campaign Panel Survey 1997. N.1422. American National Election Study 1996. N.1714.

### Notes:

(1) I am most grateful to Ronald Inglehart for advanced information about the WVS. It should be noted that the material from the WVS included in this paper is strictly *not* for quotation, reference or citation until data is released at a later date for public analysis. Any queries about use of this material should be directed to the author.

(2) The British Election Campaign Panel Survey 1997 was directed by Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell, John Curtice and Pippa Norris as part of the British Election Study. I am most grateful to all my colleagues for use of this material and especially to John Curtice with whom I have worked on a related paper (Norris and Curtice 1998). Further technical details about all the components of the BES can be found at:<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/people/pnorris>

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## **Appendix A: Measures and Coding in the World Values Study 1995-7**

### **Television Use**

V228 "Do you ever watch television? IF YES: How much time do you usually spend watching television on an average weekday? (NOT WEEKENDS)" The responses were coded:

- 1 'Do not watch TV or do not have access to TV',
- 2 'One to two hours per day',
- 3 'Two to three hours per day',
- 4 'More than 3 hours per day'.

### **Social Trust:**

"Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"

### **Support for Democratic Values:**

"I'm going to read off some things people sometimes say about a democratic system. Could you please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly, after I read each one of them..."

- V160. "In democracy, the economic system runs badly."  
V161. "Democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling."  
V162 "Democracies aren't good at maintaining order"

### **Evaluations of the Performance of the Political System**

"People have different views about the system of governing this country. Here is a scale for rating how well things are going. 1 means very bad and 10 means very good.

V152. Where on this scale would you put the political system as it is today?"

### **Regime institutions**

"I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?"

- \*The government in YOUR CAPITAL
- \*Political Parties
- \*Parliament
- \*The Civil Service
- \*The Legal System"

It should be noted that principle component factor analysis rotated by varimax confirmed that the above attitudinal items measuring support for the political system fell into these four distinct dimensions, explaining in total 60 percent of variance (see Table A1).

### **Membership of Voluntary Organizations**

"Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member (3), an inactive member (2), or not a member of that type of organization? (1)..."

- \*Church or religious organization
- \*Art, music or educational organization
- \*Labor union
- \*Political party
- \*Environmental organization
- \*Professional Association
- \*Charitable organization
- \*Any other voluntary organization?"

### **Protest Potential**

"Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never, under any circumstances, do it?"

- \*Signing a petition
- \*Joining in boycotts
- \*Attending lawful demonstrations

\*Joining unofficial strikes  
\*Occupying buildings or factories."

**Political Interest**

"How interested would you say you are in politics? Very, somewhat, not very, not at all."

**Political Discussion**

"When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?"

June 15, 1998/ Bellagio2.doc/ [12,900 words]