

Political Satire and Student Perceptions of Politics

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out whether college students' exposure to political satire via The Daily Show and the Colbert Report is associated with perceived credibility of politicians, perceptions of congressional effectiveness, and strength of identification with reported political party affiliation. Research by Podlas (2010) found that viewers of the Colbert Report and The Daily Show felt that their political ideologies were represented positively within these shows, whereas, Oh, Park, and Wanta (2012) found that viewers of televised media (including both the aforementioned programs along with traditional news outlets) believe that their political party is represented negatively. These findings indicate that there is still much to learn about how political satire is associated with attitudes pertaining to various political beliefs and leanings such as congressional effectiveness, and one's political party affiliation.

Students were recruited via Facebook and researcher contacts and asked to complete an online survey measuring frequency of exposure to two political satire programs, and their perceptions of politicians, government effectiveness, and politician party identification.

Literature Review

- Cuddon (1991) defines political satire as, "a form that holds up human vices and follies to ridicule and scorn. It is an attack on or criticism of any stupidity or vice in the form of scathing humor, and it is also a critique of what an author sees as dangerous, religious, political, normal, or social standards".
- Viewers of The Colbert Report and The Daily Show felt that their political ideologies were represented positively within these shows (Podlas, 2010).
- Viewers of televised media (including both the aforementioned programs along with traditional news outlets) believe that their political party is represented negatively (Oh, Park, and Wanta, 2012)
- Research found on this topic shows there is still much more to learn about how political satire is associated with attitudes pertaining to various political topics. Previous research findings show results of similar studies do not have a conclusive agreement as to the effects of viewing political satire.
- Cultivation theory states that the way people view the world is shaped by what the view on television, meaning that televised political satire could be contributing to skewed view of politics (Morgan & Shanahan, 2001).

Methods

Participants

- 381 participants: Adults aged 18-30 located primarily in the Midwest
- 63% Democrat, 21% Republican, 16% Independent
- 27% Male, 73% Female

Procedure

- Web survey through Qualtrics
- Convenience sampling through social media invitation

Measures

- Political Party Identification: Adapted version of Cheney's (1983) Organizational Identification Questionnaire. *Sample question: I am very proud to be a member of my political party: SA-SD* ($\alpha = .70$, Mean = 18.37, S.D. = 3.17).
- Politician Credibility: Adapted version of Berlo's (1970) Source Credibility Scale. *Sample question: Politicians are trustworthy: SA-SD* ($\alpha = .65$, Mean = 13.49, S.D. = 2.76)
- Congressional Effectiveness: measured the reliability of the adapted Berlo (1970) *Sample question: Members of congress are fairly compensated for their work: SA-SD* Credibility scale ($\alpha = .65$, Mean = 13.49, S.D. = 2.76)

Results

RQ1: Is exposure to televised political satire associated with perceptions of politician credibility?

- There is not a significant correlation between watching *The Colbert Report* or *The Daily Show* and perception of politician credibility.

RQ2: Is exposure to televised political satire associated with perceptions of congressional effectiveness?

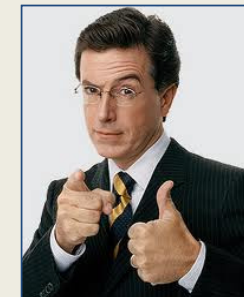
- Results show that there is a significant correlation between perception of congressional effectiveness and frequency of watching *The Colbert Report* $r = .22, p < .001$ and frequency of watching *The Daily Show* $r = .22, p < .001$.

RQ3: Is exposure to televised political satire associated with perceptions of political party identification?

- There is not a significant correlation between watching *The Colbert Report* or *The Daily Show* and strength of party identification.

Additional Findings

- Overall television exposure was significantly correlated with perceptions of politician credibility and political party identification ($p < .043$).



Discussion & Implications

- This study was an exploratory study to look at the ways which college aged students are affected by televised political satire. Our results show that viewing televised political satire does not shape a person's perception of politician credibility and strength of party identification, but that viewing televised political satire does have an effect on perception of congressional effectiveness.
- Television exposure in general appears to be more influential on a person's perception of politician credibility, congressional effectiveness, and strength of identification with their political party.
- Research on the ways political satire shapes student perspectives on politics could guide to more successful, targeted campaigning for future political campaigns.
- 63% of our sample identified as Democratic which could have skewed our results.

A special thank you to the UW-Eau Claire Center of Excellence for Faculty and Undergraduate Student Research Collaboration, the UW-Eau Claire Differential Tuition and Intramural funding sources, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, BITS, and our faculty advisor, Martha Fay.