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Some News Leaves People Knowing Less

According to the latest results from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind Poll, some news sources make us less likely to know what's going on in the world. In the most recent study, the poll asked New Jerseyans about current events at home and abroad, and from what sources – if any – they get their information. The conclusion: Sunday morning news shows do the most to help people learn about current events, while some outlets, especially *Fox News*, lead people to be even less informed than those who say they don't watch any news at all.

Among other topics, New Jerseyans were asked about the outcome of the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East this past year. While 53% of New Jerseyans know that Egyptians were successful in overthrowing the government of Hosni Mubarak, 21% say that the uprisings were unsuccessful, and 26% admit they don't know. Also, 48% know that the Syrian uprising has thus far been unsuccessful, while 36% say they don't know, and 16% say the Syrians have already toppled their government.

But the real finding is that the results depend on what media sources people turn to for their news. For example, people who watch *Fox News*, the most popular of the 24-hour cable news networks, are 18-points less likely to know that Egyptians overthrew their government than those who watch no news at all (after controlling for other news sources, partisanship, education and other demographic factors). *Fox News* watchers are also 6-points less likely to know that Syrians have not yet overthrown their government than those who watch no news.

"Because of the controls for partisanship, we know these results are not just driven by Republicans or other groups being more likely to watch *Fox News*," said Dan Cassino, a professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson and an analyst for the PublicMind Poll. "Rather, the results show us that there is something about watching *Fox News* that leads people to do worse on these questions than those who don't watch any news at all."

By contrast, some media sources have a positive effect on political knowledge. For example, people who report reading a national newspaper like *The New York Times* or *USA Today* are 12-points more likely to know that Egyptians have overthrown their government than those who have not looked at any news source. And those who listen to the non-profit *NPR* radio network are 11-points more likely to know the outcome of the revolt against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. However, the best informed respondents are those that watched Sunday morning news programs: leading to a 16-point increase in the likelihood of knowing what happened in Egypt and an 8-point increase in the likelihood of knowing what happened in Syria.

"Sunday morning news shows tend to spend a lot more time on a single issue than other news broadcasts, and they are less likely to degenerate into people shouting at each other," said Cassino. "Viewers pick up more information from this sort of calm discussion than from other formats. Unfortunately, these shows have a much smaller audience than the shouters."

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New Jerseyans are not necessarily more likely to be knowledgeable about domestic politics than international events. Just 47% are able to identify the Occupy Wall Street protesters as predominantly Democratic: 11 % think they are Republicans. Viewers of cable news on *MSNBC* are the most likely to think the protestors are Republicans. Watching the left-leaning *MSNBC* news channel is associated with a 10-point increase in the likelihood of misidentifying the protesters.

Exposure to Sunday morning news shows helps respondents on this question: seeing these programs leads to an 11-point increase in the likelihood of getting the answer right. Listening to *NPR* also helps, but the biggest aid to answering correctly is *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, which leads to a 6-point decrease in identifying the protestors as Republicans, and a 12-point increase in the likelihood of giving the correct answer.

"Jon Stewart has not spent a lot of time on some of these issues," said Cassino. "But the results show that when he does talk about something, his viewers pick up a lot more information than they would from other news sources."

Only 55% of New Jerseyans are able to name correctly either Mitt Romney or Herman Cain as the Republican candidates most recently leading in the polls, with 37 % saying that Romney is ahead, and 18% saying that Cain is. Watching *Fox News* didn't help or hurt respondents on this question. *MSNBC*, however, helped: Watching *MSNBC* was associated with a 10-point increase in identifying Romney as the leader, and a 5-point drop in the likelihood of identifying Cain compared to those who got no exposure to news at all.

"Given the amount of time and effort the media spent covering these candidates, the fact that only about half of the public can name one of the front-runners is embarrassing," said Cassino. "The fact that *Fox News*, the preferred media outlet for many of the candidates, doesn't do better in informing viewers is very surprising."

Those who listen to talk radio are the most likely to answer the question correctly. People who tune in to that generally conservative format are 17-points more likely to say that Herman Cain is at the top, and 15-points more likely to be able to name either of the leaders.

"The amount of time spent on an issue, and the depth to which it's discussed, makes a difference," said Cassino. "Whatever its flaws may be, talk radio has spent a lot of time talking about the nomination, and the basic facts seem to have gotten through."

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 612 adults statewide was underwritten by *WFDU-FM* Radio and conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from Oct. 17 through Oct. 23, 2011, and has a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actualities at 201.692.2846 For more information, please call 201.692.7032

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was sponsored by WFDU Radio and conducted by telephone from Oct. 17, 2011, through Oct. 23, 2011, using a randomly selected sample of 612 resident adults statewide. The margin of error for a sample of 612 randomly selected respondents is +/- 3.5 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone-only-households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

K1: Americans now have more ways than ever before to get their news about politics and world affairs. I'm going to read you a list of news sources. As I read the list, just say "yes" if you got news from that source any time in the past week.

News Sources	Yes	No
A Local Newspaper	74	26
A Local TV News Broadcast	67	33
CNN	65	35
Fox News	64	36
A National News Broadcast	62	38
MSNBC	51	49
A National Newspaper like the <i>New York Times</i> or <i>USA Today</i>	42	58
A Talk Radio Show	41	59
A Political Blog or News Website	30	70
A Sunday Morning Political News Show	27	73
NPR	21	79
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	18	82

K2: These days, there is more going on in politics and the world than anyone can keep track of. We'd like to ask about a few things that have been in the news recently, to see how well the news media has been doing its job. To the best of your knowledge, have the opposition groups protesting in Egypt been successful in bringing down the regime there?

News Source	Yes	No	Don't Know
NPR	68%	18%	14%
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	68%	20%	13%
A Sunday Morning Political News Show	65%	19%	16%
A National Newspaper like the <i>New York Times</i> or <i>USA Today</i>	65%	18%	17%
A Political Blog or News Website	61%	22%	17%
A National News Broadcast	58%	21%	21%
CNN	57%	20%	23%
MSNBC	57%	19%	24%
A Talk Radio Show	55%	21%	23%
A Local Newspaper	54%	22%	24%
A Local TV News Broadcast	52%	22%	26%
Fox News	49%	24%	27%

K3: How about the opposition groups in Syria? Have they been successful in bringing down the regime there?			
News Sources	Yes	No	Don't Know
NPR	17%	66%	17%
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	16%	60%	24%
A Sunday Morning Political News Show	18%	54%	28%
A National Newspaper like the New York Times or USA Today	16%	53%	32%
A Political Blog or News Website	19%	52%	29%
A National News Broadcast	18%	51%	31%
CNN	18%	50%	32%
A Local Newspaper	17%	49%	34%
A Local TV News Broadcast	17%	48%	35%
A Talk Radio Show	18%	48%	33%
MSNBC	19%	47%	34%
Fox News	20%	45%	35%

K5: A large group of protestors has been camped out on Wall Street for the last couple of weeks. To the best of your knowledge, are these protestors mostly Republicans or Democrats?	
Political Party	All
Democrats	47
Don't Know	29
Republicans	11
Neither	6
Both	6
Other	1

K5: A large group of protestors has been camped out on Wall Street for the last couple of weeks. To the best of your knowledge, are these protestors mostly Republicans or Democrats?						
News Sources	Republicans	Democrats	Neither	Both	Other	Don't Know
NPR	4%	63%	9%	8%	1%	15%
A Sunday Morning Political News Show	5%	60%	5%	7%	2%	21%
A Talk Radio Show	7%	59%	5%	5%	1%	23%
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	1%	56%	8%	14%	2%	19%
A Political Blog or News Website	9%	54%	7%	8%	1%	21%
A National Newspaper like the New York Times or USA Today	10%	53%	7%	4%	1%	25%
A Local Newspaper	11%	49%	5%	6%	1%	28%
A National News Broadcast	10%	48%	6%	8%	1%	27%
A Local TV News Broadcast	11%	46%	6%	7%	1%	29%
CNN	12%	46%	6%	9%	1%	27%
Fox News	13%	46%	6%	6%	1%	28%
MSNBC	14%	44%	7%	8%	1%	26%

K6: Right now, which candidate seems to be leading in the polls for Republican Presidential nomination in 2012?

Political Candidate	All
Don't Know	40%
Mitt Romney	37%
Herman Cain	18%
Rick Perry	3%
Someone else	1%
Refused	1%

Below: Marginal effects of reported exposure to a media source, controlling for Education, Party Identification, Gender, and all other media sources, using logistic regression. Figures represent the expected change relative to an individual who reported no media exposure at all, e.g., "12.5" refers to a 12.5 percentage point increase in the likelihood of that response, while "-4.6" refers to a 4.6 point reduction in the likelihood of that response.

K2: These days, there is more going on in politics and the world than anyone can keep track of. We'd like to ask about a few things that have been in the news recently, to see how well the news media has been doing its job. To the best of your knowledge, have the opposition groups protesting in Egypt been successful in bringing down the regime there?

Effect of News Sources	Yes	No	Don't Know
Sunday Show	16%	-3%	-13%
Evening News	12%	-4%	-8%
National Newspaper	12%	-5%	-17%
Daily Show	7%	4%	2%
Talk Radio	7%	0%	0%
Blog	5%	1%	4%
NPR	1%	-1%	8%
MSNBC	-3%	1%	2%
Fox News	-18%	8%	10%

K3: How about the opposition groups in Syria? Have they been successful in bringing down the regime there?

Effect of News Sources	Yes	No	Don't Know
NPR	2%	11%	-13%
Daily Show	3%	9%	-12%
Sunday Show	1%	8%	-9%
Evening News	0%	7%	-6%
Talk Radio	4%	4%	-7%
National Newspaper	-1%	2%	0%
MSNBC	2%	1%	-3%
Blog	1%	1%	-2%
Fox News	4%	-6%	2%

K5: A large group of protestors has been camped out on Wall Street for the last couple of weeks. To the best of your knowledge, are these protestors mostly Republicans or Democrats?

Effect of News Sources	Republicans	Democrats	Other	Don't Know
Talk Radio	-2%	17%	0%	-14%
Daily Show	-6%	12%	5%	-12%
Sunday Show	-4%	11%	2%	-9%
Blog	0%	9%	-1%	-9%
NPR	-5%	8%	7%	-10%
National Newspaper	-1%	2%	2%	-4%
Evening News	1%	-1%	2%	-2%
Fox News	3%	-4%	1%	-1%
MSNBC	11%	-5%	2%	-7%

K6: Right now, which candidate seems to be leading in the polls for Republican Presidential nomination in 2012?

Effect of News Sources	Romney	Cain	Other	Don't Know
Talk Radio	-2%	5%	0%	-15%
NPR	-5%	6%	7%	-11%
Daily Show	-6%	3%	5%	-11%
Sunday Show	-4%	12%	2%	-9%
Blog	0%	14%	-1%	-9%
MSNBC	10%	-22%	2%	-6%
National Newspaper	-1%	-8%	3%	-4%
Evening News	1%	2%	2%	-2%
Fox News	3%	-4%	2%	-1%

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1-4 released October 27, 2011

NJ1-8 released October 31, 2011

NJFB1-11 released November 14, 2011

K1. Americans now have more ways than ever before to get their news about politics and world affairs. I'm going to read you a list of news sources. As I read the list, just say "yes" if you got news from that source any time in the past week. **[ROTATE within categories]**

NPR

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

CNN

Fox News

MSNBC

NJ-TV

A National News Broadcast

A Talk Radio Show

A Local TV News Broadcast

A Sunday Morning Political News Show

A Local Newspaper

A National newspaper, like the New York Times or USA Today

A Political Blog or News Website

K2. These days, there is more going on in politics and the world than anyone can keep track of. We'd like to ask about a few things that have been in the news recently, to see how well the news media has been doing its job. To the best of your knowledge, have the opposition groups protesting in Egypt been successful in bringing down the regime there?

Yes

No

Don't Know [vol]

K3. How about the opposition groups in Syria...? PROMPT if necessary ...have they been successful in bringing down the regime there?

Yes

No

Don't know [vol]

K4. Some countries in Europe are deeply in debt, and have had to be bailed out by other countries. To the best of your knowledge, which country has had to spend the most money to bail out European countries? [Open-Ended: do not read response categories]

Germany

France

The UK, England, Britain

The US/America/"us"

Greece

Other
Don't Know [vol]

K5. A large group of protestors has been camped out on Wall Street for the past couple of weeks. To the best of your knowledge, are these protestors mostly Republicans or Democrats?

Republicans
Democrats
Neither [vol]
Both [vol]
Other [vol]
Don't Know [vol]

K6. Right now, which candidate seems to be leading in the polls for Republican Presidential nomination in 2012? DO NOT READ

Mitt Romney
Herman Cain
Rick Perry
Michele Bachmann
Ron Paul
Chris Christie
Someone else
Don't Know
Refused

Sample Characteristics (%)

Gender	
Male	50
Female	50

Age	
18-29	17
30-44	28
45-59	28
60+	26
Ref.	2

In addition to being American, would you say you are...?	
White	63
Black	14
Hispanic or Latino	11
Asian	6
Other/ref.	6

Party ID	
Dem. + lean Dem.	43
ind. + unsure + ref.	23
Rep. + lean Rep.	34