



# Measuring Exposure to News Media Content in Cross-National Electoral Studies

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In general, it is understood that experiments are the only way to truly establish whether media content is influencing political attitudes. However, we know that experimental settings do not accurately reflect how citizens encounter or engage with news media content in the real world. Perhaps this is the reason why research on media effects is characterized by conflicting findings with very little consistent evidence of mass media effects across different contexts. Existing observational studies of media effects tend to rely on reported measures of news exposure and ignore media content all together or use media content data to describe the information context but do not explicitly link measures of respondent exposure to media content. Furthermore, the existing body of research on media effects focuses on a single country or on a comparison of small countries. If we hope to test media effects in a cross-national setting we must develop appropriate measures of news exposure to link with media content. Using the only publically available cross-national data set allowing linkages between media content and voter attitude survey, we propose an approach to testing media effects cross-nationally that approximates experimental conditions in a real world setting. We test this approach in a media priming model that examines whether the EU can be primed in evaluations of national governing parties. The data we use for this study come from the voter and media studies of the 2009 European Election Study.

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