

Public Media Do Serve the State: A Field Experiment*

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VERY PRELIMINARY AND INCOMPLETE

Abstract: Are public media slanted? Do they influence the consumers? We conducted a first randomized experiment in collaboration with a nation’s major broadcasting network to increase a capacity to view the network’s TV programs online for those who are treated. We find a positive effect on the viewing time of its programs. We also find that the treated group more positively evaluated on the government’s foreign policies than the control group. To further study the mechanism, we use an unsupervised machine learning algorithm to measure closeness to the official statements of domestic and foreign authorities on the same topic. We find that public media, compared with private media, are more slanted toward domestic authority’s statements. In contrast, private media are more slanted toward foreign authority’s statements. We show that the positive evaluations on foreign policies are likely to be explained by individuals’ being exposed to information provided by the public media that was relatively closer to domestic authority’s statements. In contrast to previous studies showing the slant in private media outlets in the right-left spectrum, this study adds a new empirical evidence that public media’s information can be biased in favor of domestic authority over foreign authority, which in turn can persuade the viewers to positively evaluate the domestic authority’s policies.

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