Calling it Wrong: Partisan Media Effects on Electoral Expectations and Institutional Trust

Abstract

During the 2012 election, news outlets at either end of the ideological spectrum differed substantially in terms of the polls they covered and resulting electoral predictions. We draw upon the two-wave, nationally representative 2012 ANES Time Series Study to test the effects of exposure to 39 news and entertainment television programs on voter expectations. Respondents with more right-leaning media diets expected Romney to win with a greater vote margin, while those with more left-leaning media diets expected Obama to win with a greater vote margin, than did those with primarily neutral or balanced media diets. Additionally, individuals whose expectations for the election were unmet experienced a decrease in trust in the legitimacy of the electoral process as well as a decrease in trust in the media. Our findings show that partisan media holds the power to reduce institutional support, in part by distorting citizens’ expectations for future events.