

Expert Views in the Media during Canadian and Swedish Elections: Educative or Entertaining?

Éric Montpetit and PerOla Öberg

IN BRIEF

Journalists who interview experts are motivated to select quotations that attract and entertain news consumers. This paper examines whether there is a relationship between how often experts appear in the media and the educational content of their quotes. The authors analysed quotes from experts in four Canadian and four Swedish newspapers during the national election campaigns held between 2000 and 2015. They conclude that newspapers prefer experts whose quotes are entertaining, at the expense of experts who can educate the public. The differences between Canada and Sweden are minimal. This suggests there are powerful forces that transcend national borders at work, including growing competition among media organizations.

EN BREF

Lorsque des experts accordent des entrevues aux journalistes, ceux-ci cherchent à leur soutirer des propos qui sauront attirer et divertir les consommateurs d'information. Les auteurs de cette étude examinent le rapport entre la fréquence à laquelle ces spécialistes apparaissent dans les médias et le contenu éducatif de leurs citations. Ils ont analysé les propos d'experts cités dans quatre journaux canadiens et quatre suédois, pendant les campagnes électorales nationales de 2000 à 2015. Conclusion : au Canada comme en Suède, les journaux préfèrent les propos divertissants à ceux qui pourraient instruire la population, sans grandes différences entre les deux pays. De puissantes forces semblent ainsi transcender les frontières nationales, y compris celles d'une concurrence grandissante entre organisations médiatiques.

ABOUT THIS PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

The news media has a commercial imperative to please consumers. To meet this goal, they sometimes call on pundits, that is, experts in a given field who are frequently solicited by media organizations to comment on the news. Some researchers argue that pundits comment on the news in ways that please journalists and provide content of entertaining value to the public rather than the educative content generally expected of experts.¹ If true, this has important consequences. It limits the contribution experts make to the enlightenment of society and weakens the democratic process. This article examines the extent to which journalists rely on experts who provide entertaining content at the expense of content that could educate voters prior to an election.

There is little research on the extent to which media sources contribute educative or entertaining content, despite the importance to democracy of an informed electorate. Most of this research was done in the United States.² In this Insight, we examine what kind of experts the Canadian and Swedish press use and their effects on the content of election coverage. We acknowledge that our study primarily pertains to experts who comment during elections. Yet our research contributes to broader reflections on the presence of experts in the media and the impact of their visibility on their reputation.

The presence of experts in media reporting is significant.³ In a context where news organizations compete for readers, viewers and listeners, journalists are motivated to select experts' quotations that will attract and maintain the public's attention. Despite this seemingly deceptive approach to the use of expertise, several experts have a strong media presence, possibly because they have an agenda of their own when they agree to give interviews.⁴

This paper examines these propositions through an analysis of 3,735 articles, containing 4,649 quotations, including paraphrases, inserted into newspaper articles by newsprint journalists during national electoral campaigns held between 2000 and 2015 in Canada and Sweden. Specifically, we test the hypothesis that the frequency with which an expert appears in the media affects the educative content that he or she provides. While the literature reviewed in the next section leads us to expect that the frequency of appearance of an expert negatively impacts the educative content of the quotation, we also test the possibility that there might be differences between countries and among newspapers. We expected the effect of frequency

¹ K. Asp, "New Media Logic in a New Institutional Perspective," *Journalism Studies* 15, no. 3 (2014): 256-70; D. Hopmann and J. Strömbäck, "The Rise of the Media Punditocracy? Journalists and Media Pundits in Danish Election News 1994-2007," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 6 (2010): 943-60.

² D. Mutz, *In-Your-Face Politics: The Consequences of Uncivil Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); J. Strömbäck and D. Dimitrova, "Political and Media Systems Matter: A Comparison of Election News Coverage in Sweden and the United States," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 11, no. 4 (2006): 131-47.

³ J. Besley and M. Nisbet, "How Scientists View the Public, the Media and the Political Process," *Public Understanding of Science* 22, no. 6 (2011): 644-59.

⁴ E. Bækkeskov and P. Öberg, "Freezing Deliberation through Public Expert Advice," *Journal of European Public Policy* 24, no. 7 (2017): 1006-26.

to be smaller in Sweden than in Canada because of the difference in media practices in the two countries. Instead, we found little difference between the two countries in the effect of frequency. The more often an expert appears in news coverage, whether in Canadian or in Swedish newspapers, the less educative the content of the quotations. This suggests that journalists might make frequent use of certain sources, not for their knowledge of the issues being discussed, but for their ability and willingness to provide content that is highly attractive to media consumers.

MEDIA AND EXPERT LOGICS

Before turning to the heart of our topic, we want to say a few words on the research investigating the relationship between politicians and journalists. The goal of this research is to determine which of the two groups leads the dance.⁵ The literature presents two opposing logics: *political logic* and *media logic*. With political logic, journalists report the official political message as faithfully as possible. In the context of an election, this logic would entail news coverage that describes the positions of the contending parties on important issues, as provided by the parties themselves. Journalists do not go beyond official party lines. Instead, they play the role of transmitters between political sources and voters. Politicians lead the dance.⁶

Media logic is frequently seen as a journalistic reaction to political logic.⁷ Political actors dislike seeing media coverage that essentially repeats the lines provided by their political adversaries and will often complain that the coverage is politically biased. To make sure that they get at least as much press as their adversaries, political sources turned to communication professionals a long time ago. These professionals maintain close relationships with journalists and tailor campaign messages that minimize the risk of losing votes or maximize the possibility of gaining voters.⁸ Owing to this increased presence of communications professionals, journalists may sense that they are being manipulated. If they choose to reproduce these polished messages as supplied, media consumers are likely to lose interest in press coverage, with negative commercial implications for their news organization. Journalists are therefore inclined to fight back with their own media logic.

With media logic, journalists are not content to faithfully report official political messages. Instead, they provide interpretation. This is often depicted as consistent with a commercial logic, in that interpretive media content has a higher market value to news

⁵ J. Strömbäck and L. W. Nord, "Do Politicians Lead the Tango? A Study of the Relationship between Swedish Journalists and Their Political Sources in the Context of Election Campaigns," *European Journal of Communication*, no. 21 (2006): 147–64.

⁶ Asp, "New Media Logic"; J. Strömbäck, "Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 228–46.

⁷ J. Zaller, "The Rule of Product Substitution in Presidential Campaign News," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 560, no. 1 (1998): 111–28.

⁸ A. Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

organizations than the content of political logic.⁹ In the context of electoral campaigns, such interpretation has resulted in media coverage that leaves behind party positions on issues to focus instead on the “horse race.” In fact, media logic favours content that fits the frame of politics as a strategic game in which commenting on politics is akin to commenting on sport events.¹⁰ This strategic frame is of commercial interest as it is perceived to sustain the attention, notably by stimulating emotions, of a public fed up with news manipulated by communications professionals. When these strategic frames are employed, the public is thought to find entertainment value in media coverage, which uses specific tones to induce excitement, indignation or anger.¹¹

The dominance of one of these logics over the other has significant implications for the content of the information disseminated.¹² Both logics have specific biases that result in the embellishment or exaggeration of facts. Both also focus on specific types of information, each ignoring knowledge and events potentially relevant to the public. In some scholarly work, a third logic – the logic of science – interacts with media and political logic.¹³ Although not devoid of biases of its own, the logic of science values truth-seeking. Proponents of the logic of science are as critical of the aestheticized information of political logic as they are of the distorted facts that prevail in media logic. They believe that experts must educate politicians and the public about complex matters,¹⁴ notably through their presence in the media.

We prefer using the term *expert logic* rather than the logic of science to signify that such a mission is not just the purview of science. While expert logic shares with science logic a concern for truth-seeking, it has the broader purpose of providing specialized knowledge on problems, some with little visibility, in all their complexity.¹⁵ Scientists can credibly work toward this purpose, but so too can other knowledgeable individuals.

More importantly, in expert logic, neither politicians nor journalists lead the dance. Instead, the dance is led by experts who share an educative purpose. Where expert logic prevails, journalists rely on experts as sources of information without any

⁹ N. Landerer, “Rethinking the Logics: A Conceptual Framework for the Mediatization of Politics,” *Communication Theory* 23, (2013): 239-58; K. Brants and P. van Praag, “Beyond Media Logic,” *Journalism Studies* 18, no. 4 (2016): 395-408; M. Kardi, “News Media Logic on the Move? In Search of Commercial Media Logic in German News,” *Journalism Studies* 19 (2017): 1237-56.

¹⁰ J. Cappella and K. Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹¹ K. Wahl-Jorgensen, “The Strategic Ritual of Emotionality: A Case Study of Pulitzer Prize-Winning Articles,” *Journalism*, no. 14 (2013): 129-45.

¹² M. Meyen, M. Thieroff, and S. Strenger, “Mass Media Logic and The Mediatization of Politics,” *Journalism Studies* 15, no. 3 (2014): 271-88; J. Pallas, M. Fredriksson and L. Wedlin, “Translating Institutional Logics: When the Media Logic Meets Professions,” *Organizational Studies* 37 (2016): 1661-84; Kardi, “News Media Logic on the Move?”; Brants and van Praag, “Beyond Media Logic.”

¹³ M. Rhomberg, “Risk Perception and Public Debates on Climate Change: A Conceptualisation Based on the Theory of a Functionally-Differentiated Society,” *Mediekultur. A Journal of Media and Communication Research* 49 (2010): 55-67; A. Ivanova, M. S. Schäfer, I. Schlichting and A. Schmidt, “Is There Medialization of Climate Change? Results from a Survey of German Climate Scientists,” *Science Communication* 35 (2013): 626-53.

¹⁴ H.P. Peters, D. Brossard, S. de Cheveigné, S. Dunwoody, M. Kallfass, S. Miller, and S. Tsuchida, “Interaction with the Mass Media,” *Science* 321 (2008): 204-5; Besley and Nisbet, “How Scientists View the Public.”

¹⁵ P. Quirk, “The Trouble with Experts,” *Critical Review* 22, no. 4 (2010): 449-65; E. Albæk, “The Interaction between Experts and Journalists in News Journalism,” *Journalism* 12, no. 3 (2011): 335-48.

expectation that these experts will provide emotionally charged content of commercial value. Journalists who let experts lead can reasonably believe that they have contributed to the education of the public. This is a valuable contribution in a democracy, especially during an election.¹⁶ Politicians will seek expert advice without expecting that the content of the advice will have political value, but rather that it will help them improve policy.

In news outlets where expert logic prevails, we expect experts' quotations to have educative value. Experts seek to explain the complexity of the world and provide context, rather than making broad generalizations. To do so, they might refer to specialized academic perspectives or research, even though such references might not easily fit within a journalistic format.¹⁷ Empirical research indicates that in some cases journalists call upon experts for careful and neutral analyses of complex policies.¹⁸

To what extent can we expect expert logic to shape behaviours in newsrooms, in the current media environment? While expert logic might be used extensively in some specialized publications, it is less prevalent in the general media, which relies on commercial revenues. Newspapers are struggling because a large share of the advertising revenues on which they have long depended has migrated to online platforms like Google and Facebook. This trend has made them more desperate to retain readers and more likely to feature entertaining content. However, the concept of expert logic remains useful. Citizens expect some level of enlightenment on complex matters from experts, even if they end up paying more attention to entertaining content.¹⁹ Moreover, experts are present in the news whether or not an expert logic is dominant. When other logics prevail, experts in the news sometimes accept and abide by the dominant logic. While many experts who provide media content prefer to educate the public, that is not the only reason experts participate in the media.²⁰

Experts are useful to journalists in media logic, as they provide some protection against charges of biased coverage. For example, journalists minimize the risk of coming across as biased in electoral races if they rely on sources that are perceived as neutral and objective. Experts who supply commentary, using frames that are valued in media logic, are thus useful to journalists. Some experts, however, will adhere strictly to the norms of expert logic, refusing to make themselves easily available to journalists suspected of conforming too strictly to media logic. They might refuse to provide information that fits the preferred frame of these journalists²¹ or to answer questions that fall outside their sphere of expertise, directing journalists toward colleagues instead.

¹⁶ J. Jerit, "Understanding the Knowledge Gap: The Role of Experts and Journalists," *The Journal of Politics* 71, no. 2 (2009): 442-56.

¹⁷ Besley and Nisbet, "How Scientists View the Public"; P.J. Quirk and J. Hinchliffe, "The Rising Hegemony of Mass Opinion," *Journal of Policy History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 19-50.

¹⁸ A. Rich, "The Politics of Expertise in Congress and the News Media," *Social Science Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2001): 583-601.

¹⁹ M.L. Atkinson, *Combative Politics: The Media and Public Perceptions of Lawmaking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); E. Montpetit, *In Defense of Pluralism: Policy Disagreement and Its Media Coverage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁰ Bækkeskov and Öberg, "Freezing Deliberation."

²¹ Besley and Nisbet, "How Scientists View the Public."

Consequently, journalists may turn to other experts who are less qualified but who are willing to supply what they need. Journalists are generally successful at finding experts who agree to play by the rules of media logic, because many experts believe it is in their interest to participate in the media. In fact, frequent participation in the media can grant experts public celebrity status and other reputational benefits.

Experts with frequent media appearances are often described as pundits.²² Pundits are media favourites because of their willingness to comment on the news with frames that suit media logic. During elections, for example, they do not shy away from horse-race metaphors and strategic frames. Journalists often turn to pundits for their predictability more than their capacity to enlighten the public. In such cases, journalists might not know the exact content of a given pundit's commentary before interviewing them, but they know that it will fit a frame likely to maintain public attention. Pundits find it in their interest to appear in news coverage. They therefore seek out opportunities to do so, facilitating the work of journalists.²³ Pundits and journalists thus have a mutually beneficial relationship. Pundits make themselves available to provide content that will sustain the attention of the public in exchange for a certain level of visibility in the media. Journalists like to know that when they call a pundit, they can count on a rapid answer. In exchange, pundits will likely be offered more opportunities to appear in a given newspaper or news program.

In casual conversation, the term *pundit* has a negative connotation. Pundits are often treated as pseudo-experts who are willing to give their views on anything, including matters about which they have little knowledge. In this article, we leave aside such normative judgments and refrain as much as possible from using the term *pundit*. That said, the literature sometimes categorizes individuals as pundits based on how frequently they appear in the media.²⁴ We will therefore focus our analysis on the impact of frequent media appearances on the content of quotations. We posit that media logic prevails over expert logic and put forth the following hypothesis:

The more frequently an expert appears in the media, the less educative the content of his or her quotations.

Increased competition from the Internet and social media faced by conventional media organizations makes it difficult for journalists to resist the pressure to adopt media logic in many different contexts.²⁵ Some studies argue that this pressure is

²² Hopmann and Strömbäck, "The Rise of the Media Punditocracy?"

²³ F. Esser and J. Strömbäck, *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies* (Biggleswade: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21.

²⁴ Hopmann and Strömbäck, "The Rise of the Media Punditocracy?"

²⁵ Strömbäck and Nord, "Do Politicians Lead the Tango?"; Albæk, "The Interaction between Experts and Journalists"; E. Freedman and F. Fico, "Whither the Experts? Newspaper Use of Horse Race and Issue Experts in Coverage of Open Governors' Races in 2002," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81, (2004): 498-510; A. Horsbøl, "Experts in Political Communication: The Construal of Communication Expertise in Prime Time Television News," *Journal of Language and Politics* 9 (2010): 29-49; K.A. Cross, "Experts in the News: The Differential Use of Sources in Election Television News," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 35, no. 3 (2010): 413-29.

mediated by the media system and institutions in a country.²⁶ For example, in a 2006 comparison of media logic between Sweden and the United States, Jesper Strömbäck and Daniela Dimitrova argue that national differences in the impact of media logic arise from differences in the media systems of these countries.

The two countries covered in this article offer appropriate conditions to test the argument. The media landscapes in Canada and Sweden differ significantly. In Sweden, objectivity is more likely to be understood by journalists as providing hard facts. This requires that a journalist find the best expert to speak on a given topic and allow the expert to lead the story. It might thus be easier for an expert who appears in the Swedish media to abide by the rules of expert logic and provide educative content. Canada's media system is more like the American pluralist system. In pluralist media systems, objectivity requires presenting different positions on an issue.²⁷ Finding any two experts with differing views might suffice to meet expectations for objectivity in such systems.²⁸ The resulting expert debates are also more in line with the media logic. Journalists are likely to call on experts who agree to be part of these debates. These experts are likely to provide entertaining content that attracts public attention rather than educative content. These differences between the Swedish and Canadian media systems bring us to a second hypothesis:

The frequency of expert media presence has a smaller effect on the educative content of quotations in Sweden than in Canada.

Media organizations vary significantly within a given country. News on television differs from news in the papers. Tabloids and evening papers differ from broadsheets and morning papers. Given the scarcity of literature comparing news outlets, it is hard to predict how these differences might alter the degree to which media logic has penetrated news organizations. We chose not to present any specific hypothesis on such effects, but we will examine them in the empirical analysis that follows.

DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION

As part of our research, we coded quotations from all sources appearing in press articles discussing election issues during the last ten days of all national or federal election campaigns between 2000 and 2015. We looked at four Canadian and four Swedish newspapers: *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *La Presse*, *Journal de Montréal*, *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*. While these newspapers increased their online presence during this period, they all had a print version

²⁶ Strömbäck and Dimitrova, "Political and Media Systems Matter"; D.V. Dimitrova and J. Strömbäck, "Look Who's Talking: Use of Sources in Newspaper Coverage in Sweden and the United States," *Journalism Practice* 3, no. 1 (2009): 75-91; A. Van Dalen and P. Van Aelst, "The Media as Political Agenda-Setters: Journalists' Perceptions of Media Power in Eight West European Countries," *West European Politics* 37 (2014): 42-64.

²⁷ Strömbäck and Dimitrova, "Political and Media Systems Matter," 134.

²⁸ Mutz, *In-Your-Face Politics*.

throughout. We used the print version for this analysis.²⁹ Our choice of newspapers reflects our concern for diversity. While we chose to focus only on newspapers with a broad reach, we wanted a sample from the popular press, such as the evening newspapers in Sweden, as well as a sample of the so-called serious broadsheets, such as the morning newspapers in Sweden. The *Journal de Montréal*, *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* are closest to tabloids. In Canada, we selected examples of English- and French-language newspapers.

Six federal elections took place in Canada during the period covered (2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015). There were four national elections held in Sweden (2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014), simultaneously with regional and municipal elections. Compared with Sweden, Canada held more elections but produced fewer articles in the last ten days of the campaigns. This might be explained by the fact that the Swedish elections were held simultaneously at all levels of government. In total, 3,735 articles were found during the periods covered, of which 2,128 were published in Swedish newspapers and 1,607 in Canadian newspapers. In these articles, we found a total of 4,649 quotations from external sources: 2,999 in Canada and 1,650 in Sweden. Table 1 shows that Canadian journalists cite expert sources more frequently than do their Swedish counterparts. This is consistent with a pluralist media system. Canadian articles contain more than one citation on average, while several articles in Sweden do not cite external sources at all.³⁰

The dependent variable in our hypotheses refers to the educative content of the quotation. To measure the educative content, we developed a coding scheme that distinguishes among predictions, explanations and contextualization. As suggested by the literature on media and expert logics, some experts present detailed, contextualized explanations.³¹ Others appear to seek public attention, with bold predictions³² and strategic frames.³³ In the context of electoral campaigns, media logic will pressure experts to offer explanations that portray the election as a horse race between contending parties and candidates, and even to call a winner before the election takes place. Experts who resist such pressure, preferring to follow expert logic, sometimes provide institutional or process explanations, as well as historical or international contextualization. Instead of simply commenting on the horse race, experts following expert logic try to help journalists produce content that advances public understanding of electoral systems, government formation, the organization of campaigns and the significance of voting in a democracy.

We coded all citations containing an institutional or process explanation or a contextualization as having educative content (value 1). Contextualization could be historical, international or another form. Examples include:

²⁹ *La Presse* stopped publishing its print version in 2016.

³⁰ The numbers of articles and quotations are particularly low for the *Journal de Montréal* because electronic formats for this newspaper were available only for the 2008 and 2011 elections.

³¹ Quirk, "The Trouble with Experts."

³² P. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³³ Cappella and Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism*.

According to research, support for Social Democrats usually decreases by a few points of percentage at the end of campaigns; the current situation is not unusual. What's new in this election is the low level of support for the Social Democrats at the beginning of the campaign.

A governor-general would let a government exist without testing the confidence of the House for a few months and not more than a few months . . . you don't want to prolong uncertainty.

In contrast, all citations containing electoral predictions and comments on strategies were coded as entertaining (value 0), in the sense that they are likely to attract and sustain public attention. Examples include:

None of that was impressing anyone. But this stuff has definitely moved voters his way big time in Quebec.

The behaviour of the centre-right coalition and of the red-green coalition helps the Sweden Democrats. They attack the party in every situation; they avoid serious debates, instead forcing out a party that, after all, participates in democratic elections. It makes people very angry.

While these last two quotations are not necessarily wrong, their sources do not require any specialized knowledge, unlike sources offering contextualization or institutional explanation. They resort to colourful language to attract public attention, and their content does not rest on research or offer academically informed perspectives. They could come from any lay observer of politics.

Our coding provides for the possibility that a quotation could contain both a prediction and a contextualization or a system explanation. We found some instances of electoral predictions that stem from a particular reading of history or of the political system. For example, an expert might predict the defeat of an incumbent by pointing to historical examples of incumbents who have lost elections during difficult economic times. Although rare, such quotations would be treated as providing educative content. Our coding was designed to avoid overestimating the amount of entertaining content in the newspapers, at the risk of overestimating their educative content.

Of the 4,649 quotations identified, 1,139 contained a prediction, an explanation or a contextualization. We refer to these as content citations.³⁴ Several of the quotations that did not provide a prediction, an explanation or a contextualization were very short. About half of these quotes were from regular citizens who simply provided impressions of candidates and party pledges. However, a significant number of the remaining quotations did not fit into any obvious category. A quick scan suggests they were often short, making it difficult to infer whether their content was entertaining or educative.

³⁴ We were assisted in our research by three coders: two in Canada and one in Sweden. The coders were asked to code a sample of identical English-language articles to ascertain intercoder reliability, which was recorded at 98 percent. Their coding was also subsequently verified by the authors of this study.

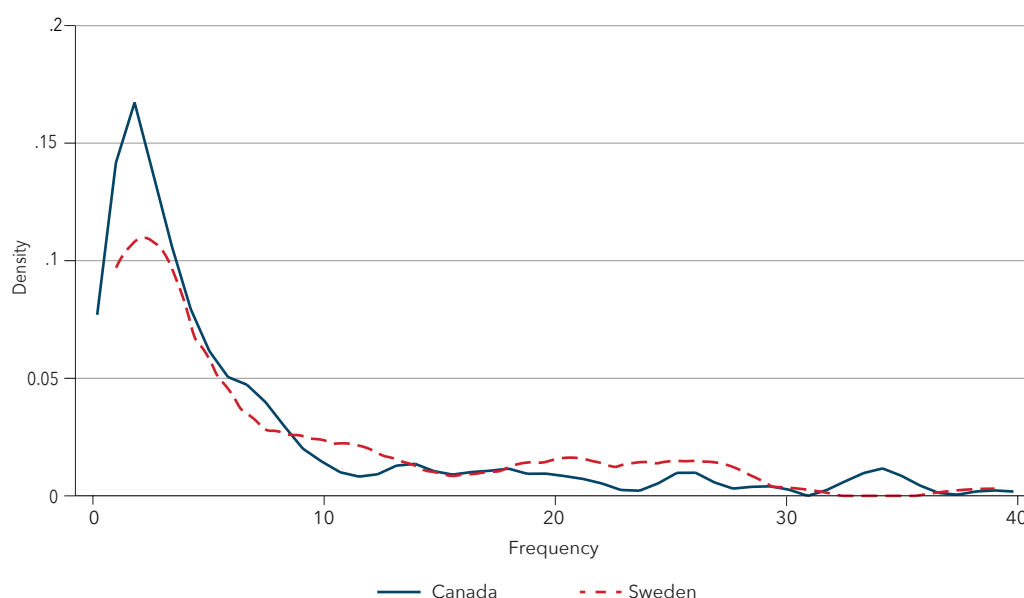
Table 1. Description of the data set

Newspaper	# of articles	# of quotations	# of content citations	# of quotations with educative content
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	356	833	203	59
<i>Toronto Star</i>	550	1,007	168	38
<i>La Presse</i>	571	992	197	61
<i>Journal de Montréal</i>	130	167	54	13
<i>Aftonbladet</i>	519	475	107	25
<i>Expressen</i>	501	476	160	45
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>	420	269	131	31
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	688	430	119	41
Total	3,735	4,649	1,139	313

Source: Authors' calculation.

Content citations represent 21 percent of the Canadian quotations against 31 percent of the Swedish quotations. More importantly, 27 percent of these content citations, in both countries, have educative content. Table 1 indicates some variation in educative content from one newspaper to the next. It also shows that, on average, the newspapers of the two countries are not significantly different in their propensity to rely on external sources to provide educative content.

Our main independent variable is the frequency with which a source is cited in all newspapers included in our analysis. In the data set, the source of the quotation is identified by name. We associated a count with each name. The distribution for each country is presented in figure 1. In the two countries, 25 percent of experts are cited 10 times or more, 60 percent are cited 5 times or less, and 23 percent just once. The patterns of citation frequency in the two countries are similar.

Figure 1. Number of times an expert is cited

Source: Authors' calculation.

Variations might exist not only between the two countries but also among the newspapers of each individual country. Our data associate each citation with the newspaper in which it was published. All citations come from the eight newspapers mentioned above.

The regression models that we estimated included three controls. First, we used a variable indicating whether the expert is a university professor or not. We hypothesized that, of all experts, a university professor might have a particular inclination to provide educative content. Of the 1,139 content citations, 412 come from university professors. Forty-two percent of the citations in Swedish newspapers come from professors versus 32 percent in Canada. Second, we categorized articles according to the nature of the article in which each citation is found. Citations are sometimes found in columns rather than in regular articles. It is plausible that columnists use citations in ways that differ from regular journalists. Less than 4 percent of the 1,139 content citations are in columns. Three-quarters were found in Canadian newspapers. Columnists do not frequently cite experts. This is particularly true of Swedish columnists. Third, we controlled for the election during which the citation was published. Between 2000 and 2015, six elections were held in Canada and four in Sweden. Each election was numbered to produce a categorical variable to account for the possibility that any particular election might have been more or less in tune with educative content.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the results of four regressions, two for each country. Regressions 1 and 3 present main effects only. That is, they show only the relation between the frequency of appearance of an expert in the media and the educative content of his or her citations. Note that we clustered standard errors around the name of the external source to account for the fact that several quotations in the data set may be attributed to the same individual and the frequency of appearance of this individual will not vary. Regressions 2 and 4 include interactive terms that enable the estimation of differences with regard to the effect of frequency of appearance among the newspapers of each country. The format of the dependent variable, whether or not the citation contains educative content, justifies using logistic regression estimates.

Regressions 1 and 3 show that, in both Canada and Sweden, there is a correlation between the increase in frequency with which an expert is cited and a reduced presence of educative content in the citations. As the coefficients in logistic regressions are not straightforwardly interpretable, we produced graphic simulations that indicate an effect of significant magnitude. The introduction of interactive terms in regressions 2 and 4 mitigates the main effect of frequency. The effect of interactive terms is best assessed in graphic format.³⁵ Figure 2, which shows the effect of the

³⁵ T. Brambor, W.R. Clark, and M. Golder, "Understanding Interaction Models: Improving Empirical Analyses," *Political Analysis* 14, no. 1 (Winter, 2006): 63-82.

Table 2a. Logistic regression results on the educative content of quotations (Canada)

	(1) Canada	(2) Canada with interactive terms
Frequency	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)
Newspaper		
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	Reference	Reference
<i>Toronto Star</i>	-0.33 (0.28)	-0.21 (0.32)
<i>La Presse</i>	0.03 (0.28)	0.15 (0.31)
<i>Journal de Montréal</i>	-0.04 (0.61)	0.21 (0.69)
Quote source and article type		
Professor	0.18 (0.28)	0.20 (0.28)
Column	1.27*** (0.36)	1.27*** (0.37)
Canadian election year		
2000	Reference	Reference
2004	1.35*** (0.47)	1.37*** (0.47)
2006	0.68** (0.39)	0.69** (0.39)
2008	0.29 (0.40)	0.29 (0.41)
2011	0.52 (0.43)	0.53 (0.43)
2015	1.23*** (0.43)	1.23*** (0.43)
Interactions		
<i>Globe and Mail</i> x frequency		Reference
<i>Toronto Star</i> x frequency		-0.01 (0.01)
<i>La Presse</i> x frequency		-0.01 (0.01)
<i>Journal de Montréal</i> x frequency		-0.03 (0.05)
Constant	-1.52*** (0.34)	-1.63*** (0.35)
<i>N</i>	622	622
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.08	0.08

Clustered standard errors in parentheses.

p* < 0.1, *p* < 0.05, ****p* < 0.01

statistically distinct from the other three Swedish newspapers, as indicated by the significance of the interactive terms in regression 4 in table 2.

The probability of finding educative content in the citations published in the *Globe and Mail* is about 30 percent, whether the expert is cited frequently or not. This result might appear surprising as the *Globe and Mail* relies on a small number of experts who appear frequently in its electoral coverage. This is similar to the other newspapers. About 25 percent of the citations are from external sources who appear 10 times or more. One explanation might be that the *Globe's* journalists, who have a reputation for rigour, select quotations with educative content even among sources that they call upon

frequency of media appearances on the probability that the quotation will have educative content, confirms the main effect of regressions 1 and 3, with some nuances.

With the exceptions of the *Aftonbladet* and perhaps the *Globe and Mail*, the negative effect of being a frequent media source on contributing educative content is confirmed in all newspapers. It is worth underlining that the probability that a quotation has educative content is low to begin with in the *Aftonbladet*. In fact, a citation from an expert with a single citation has a probability of just above 20 percent of having educative content in the *Aftonbladet*, compared with a probability of about 50 percent in the *Dagens Nyheter*. Furthermore, nearly 34 percent of the citations in the *Aftonbladet* come from experts who appear only once, and about 75 percent appear fewer than 10 times. In other words, frequency does not affect educative content in the *Aftonbladet* because this newspaper publishes little of it to begin with. The paper is

Table 2b. Logistic regression results on the educative content of quotations (Sweden)

	(3) Sweden	(4) Sweden with interactive terms
Frequency	-0.05*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Newspaper		
<i>Aftonbladet</i>	Reference	Reference
<i>Expressen</i>	0.15 (0.34)	0.86 (0.55)
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>	0.05 (0.37)	0.89 (0.63)
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	0.48 (0.34)	1.50*** (0.54)
Quote source and article type		
Professor	0.18 (0.25)	0.20 (0.24)
Column	0.51 (1.25)	0.32 (1.19)
Swedish election year		
2002	Reference	Reference
2006	0.68 (0.48)	0.69 (0.49)
2010	0.79** (0.40)	0.77* (0.41)
2014	0.42 (0.42)	0.44 (0.43)
Interactions		
<i>Aftonbladet</i> x frequency		Reference
<i>Expressen</i> x frequency		-0.06** (0.03)
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> x frequency		-0.07** (0.03)
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i> x frequency		-0.09*** (0.03)
Constant	-1.27*** (0.40)	-1.94*** (0.53)
<i>N</i>	517	517
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.05	0.06

Source: Authors' calculations.

Note: This table presents the results of a regression that measures the relationship between the educative content of quotations and variables likely to be positively or negatively associated with this content. Each coefficient represents the association between a given variable and the educative content of quotations when all the other variables included are held constant. The variable Frequency, which estimates the association between the frequency with which a source is quoted in the press and the educative content of quotes, is of particular interest here. The sign of the coefficient indicates the positive or negative direction of the relationship with the educative content of the quotations. The larger the number of stars (*) next to a coefficient, the larger the probability that there is a positive or negative relationship between the variable and the educative content of the quotations. Note that the size of coefficients in logistic regressions cannot be directly interpreted as the extent of the effect on the dependent variable, educative content. The strength of relationships can nevertheless be visualized in figure 2.

Clustered standard errors in parentheses.

p* < 0.1, *p* < 0.05, ****p* < 0.01

frequently. Another possibility might be that the *Globe* is not different from the other Canadian newspapers covered by our research. The interactive terms in regression 2 in table 2 indicate probabilities above 10 percent that the *Globe and Mail* is in fact identical to the other Canadian newspapers.

Setting aside the *Globe and Mail* and the *Aftonbladet*, the difference in the probability that a quotation has educative content when it comes from an expert cited only once and an expert cited approximately 40 times – a relatively rare occurrence – is of about 10 percentage points in Canada and about 35 percentage points in Sweden (see figure 1). Reliance on frequently cited experts thus has a larger negative effect on educative content in Sweden than in Canada. Experts who appear only once have a 40 percent probability of providing quotations with educative content in the *Svenska Dagbladet* and the *Expressen*, and a 55 percent probability in the *Dagens Nyheter*; the probability drops to about 20 percent for all three newspapers for experts cited 20 times. In Canada, experts who appear only once have a 30 percent probability of providing educative content in their published quotations, a figure that drops to around 25 percent for experts cited 20 times. In sum, the frequency of appearance has a larger

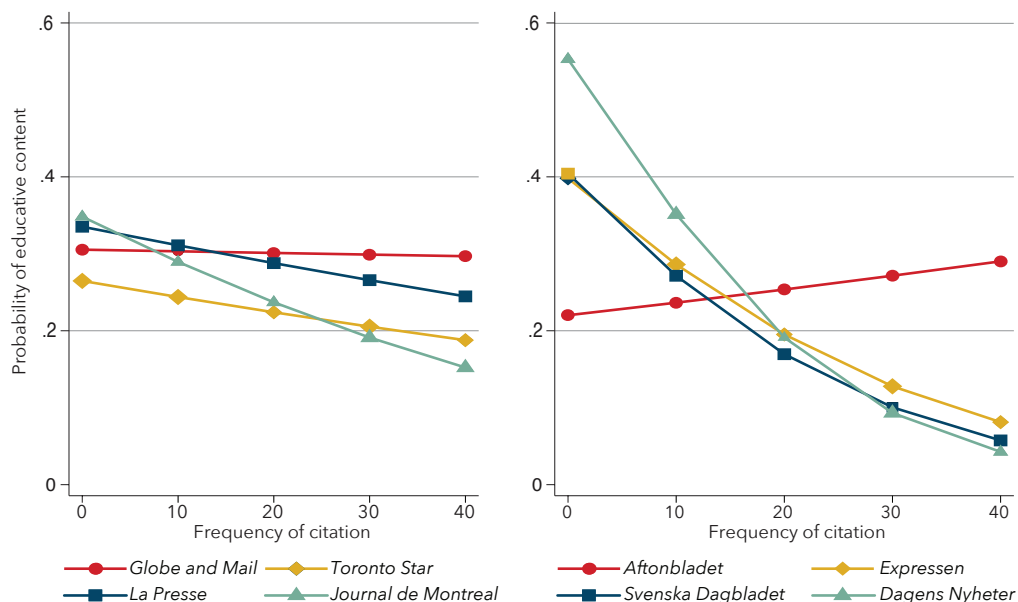
negative effect on the educative content of the quotations in Sweden than in Canada, but the educative content is lower in the latter than in the former country to start with.

While newspapers in Sweden, with the notable exception of the *Aftonbladet*, cite a wide range of electoral experts with educative content, they also frequently feature a small group of experts who produce very little educative content. In Canada, a small group of electoral experts is also featured frequently in the press, but there is a slightly higher probability that they provide educative content than their counterparts in Sweden. However, the experts appearing less frequently in the Canadian press display less educative content than comparable experts in Sweden.

Turning to the control variables in table 2, citations coming from university professors are not any more likely to contain educative content than citations coming from other types of experts, in either Sweden or Canada. This indicates that journalists use expert quotations in similar ways in their reporting, independently of what kind of expert is contacted for a comment. Citations in columns have a higher probability of providing educative content in Canada, but not in Sweden. Note, however, that very few citations are sourced from columns. This is especially true in Sweden. Quotations published during the Canadian elections of 2004, 2006 and 2015 were more likely to feature educative content than quotations published during the elections of 2000, 2008 and 2011. In Sweden, educative content was more likely to be published during the elections of 2006 and 2010 than in the elections of 2002 and 2014.

Together, the four regressions in table 2 and in figure 2 provide strong support for our first hypothesis: *The more frequently an expert is cited, the less educative the content*

Figure 2. The effect of the frequency of media appearances on educative content



Source: Authors' calculation.

of his or her citations. We observe some differences between Canada and Sweden. But they offer little evidence to support our second hypothesis: *The frequency of expert media presence has a smaller effect on the educative content of quotations in Sweden than in Canada.* While we found more citations per article in Canada than in Sweden, a phenomenon we expected as a result of Canada's more pluralist media system, citations in the Canadian press are no less educative than those found in Sweden. Citations from less frequently cited experts in Sweden may contain more educative content than those coming from less frequently cited Canadian experts, but frequently cited experts in Sweden produce citations with the lowest educative content. We also found little variation among the different newspapers. It is worth underlining again that the *Globe and Mail* is not statistically different from the other Canadian newspapers. This might indicate that frequency of expert appearance has the same negative effect on educative content in the *Globe* as it does in the other papers. Conversely, the *Aftonbladet* is statistically distinct from the other three Swedish newspapers because of the poverty of its educative content. In short, there are few exceptions to our first hypothesis. It holds across national media systems and across media outlets.

DISCUSSION

The literature referred to above, which claims that media logic emerged as a reaction to political logic, suggests that journalists rely more now than in the past on a handful of experts to provide entertaining content. In addition, this reliance would trump an expert logic, under which journalists search for the most qualified expert capable of providing educative content. Our findings are highly consistent with the expectations based on this literature.

First, quotations in the two countries have less educative content than entertaining content. In both countries, 27 percent of the content citations contain educative content versus 73 percent that contain entertaining content.

Second, while journalists still cite experts who do not appear frequently in the media, in both Canada and Sweden they rely on a handful of loyal experts likely to provide them with entertaining content. If we define this group of experts as composed of sources cited more than 10 times over the reference period, about 25 percent of the citations come from this group in every single newspaper except the *Expressen*, in which the percentage is close to 50 percent, and the *Dagens Nyheter*, in which it is closer to 15 percent. In the *Toronto Star*, this group is composed of eight experts. It is only twice that size in *La Presse*, which has the largest group in Canada. In the four Swedish newspapers, the group of frequently cited experts vary in size between 9 and 13 members.

Third, we explained above that an expert who contributes to the media frequently is likely to have a mutually beneficial agreement with a journalist, implying that the expert will enjoy recurrent appearances in a limited number of news outlets or programs. The most-cited expert in our data set, a Canadian, is cited 140 times. Of these

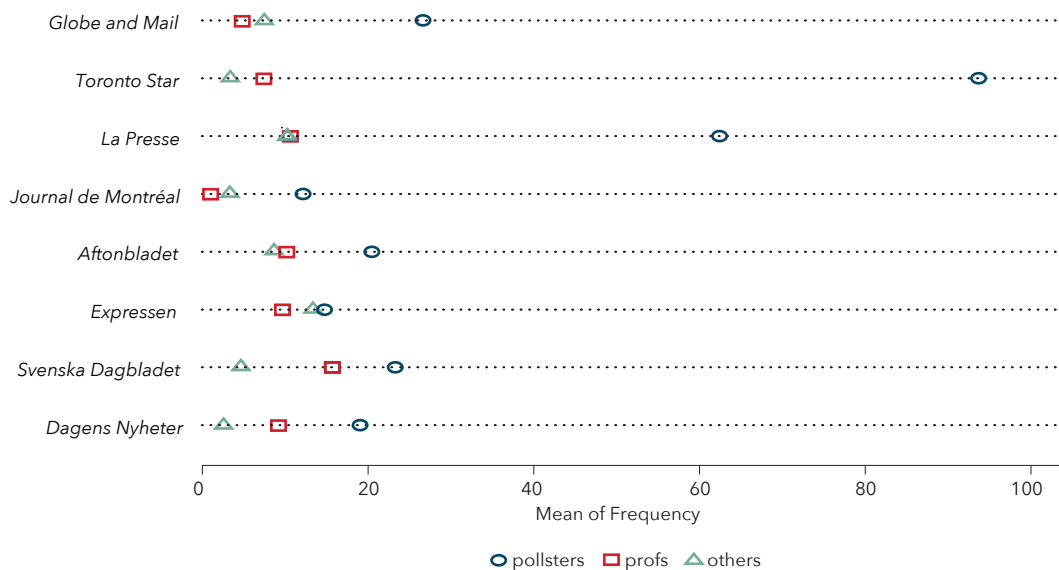
citations, 83 were published in the *Toronto Star* and 44 in *La Presse*. Likewise, all four Swedish newspapers have frequently used experts that grant them near exclusivity.

Fourth, the profile of experts, and especially of experts who comment in the media frequently, can be revealing about the influence of media logic. The definition of expert can be controversial. Some people believe that professional or academic credentials are not needed to qualify as an expert.³⁶ Therefore, coders were instructed to classify the individuals to whom citations were attributed as university professors, pollsters, former politicians, civil servants, media personnel or regular citizens.

In figure 3, we included pollsters and university professors, as they were the most frequent categories, and grouped the other less frequent categories together. While coders came across citations from regular citizens (1,318 out of a total of 4,649), only rarely did they provide content of value for our analysis. Other external sources, notably former politicians, provided content citations, but much less frequently than pollsters and professors. Figure 3 shows that, in all eight newspapers, pollsters provided content citations most frequently. The numbers for the *Toronto Star* and *La Presse* are particularly high, but they are inflated by the presence of a pollster cited 140 times over the reference period. Since media logic implies that external sources are expected to talk about elections using strategic frames, it is not entirely surprising that journalists frequently turn to pollsters.

In some newspapers, notably the *Svenska Dagbladet* and the *Dagens Nyheter*, but also the *Toronto Star*, some university professors remain frequent external sources. In these newspapers, their mean frequency exceeds that of any other category of experts, except

Figure 3. Who provides content citations?



Source: Authors' calculation.

³⁶ H. Collins, *Are We All Scientific Experts Now?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).

pollsters. However, as indicated in table 2, citations from professors are no more likely than citations from other external sources to provide educative content. The citations from professors that find their way into print articles are frequently similar to the citations coming from pollsters in their use of strategic frames and horse-race metaphors. This might, as emphasized above, indicate that journalists use citations from experts in similar ways, independent of what kind of expertise the sources have. This could suggest that a predetermined story line decides what kind of information the journalist will include. It might also indicate that several professors who participate in the media have assimilated media logic, making themselves easily available to journalists and presenting primarily entertaining comments. It is important to emphasize that some university professors do provide content of educative value, but the important finding in relation to our research question is that these professors appear less frequently in news media.

Finding that experts who appear frequently in the media provide content of limited educative value might not be sufficient in and of itself to conclude that media logic is a powerful force. That said, these experts form a small group mostly composed of pollsters and university professors who enjoy privileged access to their preferred news outlet. Like others before us,³⁷ we found similar patterns between the two countries despite their distinct media systems. Finally, our finding that entertaining content prevails in content quotations is in line with expectations in previous research.

CONCLUSION

Our research shows that the more frequently an expert is quoted in news articles during the last part of Canadian and Swedish national election campaigns, the less educative the content of his or her published comments. We conclude that the negative relationship between these two factors adds evidence to the argument that powerful forces, in part the result of efforts to maintain commercial revenues in an age of the Internet and social media, are reducing the educative value of the news. Moreover, we did not find that the distinct Canadian and Swedish media systems mediate the effect of these forces on the content of electoral expert quotations.³⁸

From our analysis, we have no way of knowing whether experts who are frequently cited in the media choose to adapt or whether it is the journalists who select those most likely to provide citations in line with media logic. In all likelihood, it is some of both. Journalists have some form of mutual understanding with certain experts. Journalists give experts visibility in exchange for experts providing suitable content. While we produced results that are consistent with the idea of such a mutual understanding, we know little about it because our study did not include interviews with journalists or experts.

Lastly, we only analyzed the electoral coverage of conventional newspapers in the 10 days before the elections. The choice of media made sense for our study. We

³⁷ Asp, "New Media Logic," 265.

³⁸ Asp, "New Media Logic," 265.

thought conventional newspapers might be less amenable to media logic than televised news.³⁹ If we find media logic to be influential in these venues, it is likely even more influential in television news, which require considerably more resources while operating in highly competitive markets. However, we cannot argue with certainty that the dynamic is similar in news venues other than print newspapers. Moreover, elections might be particularly amenable to media logic, especially in the days preceding an election. It is important to reiterate that experts on elections might behave differently than experts on other topics. A comparison with the coverage of policy issues, as opposed to elections, would be useful to estimate the extent to which our results can be generalized. That being said, experts have an important enlightenment function during elections. To the extent that we accept that experts have an essential function during elections, the effect of media logic on the provision of educative content has worrisome normative implications.

The credibility of experts has declined in recent decades, which may be partly explained by the visibility of a handful of experts who fail to provide the type of content expected by the public.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, when the public is exposed to nuanced experts, whose explanations require time and space, it turns its attention elsewhere, however critical this same public might be of experts who provide entertainment. As a result, there may not be an easy solution to the problem addressed in this paper. News organizations are likely to lose consumers and revenues if they rely exclusively on the most knowledgeable experts, without considering the type of content that sustains the public's attention. Yet giving too much room to experts with weaker substantive knowledge, but who know how to catch the attention of the public, is likely to harm the reputation of experts in general.

In times of fake news, disinformation and thriving conspiracy theories, it is pressing that we all contribute to more in-depth, critical discussions on the role of the media and how it contributes to democratic participation. It is pivotal that the media continue to involve experts in news reports. At the same time, we must provide citizens with resources to help them evaluate how the media uses experts. Experts themselves should be aware that too close a collaboration with journalists might tarnish their reputation; that retaining their capacity to provide content informed strictly by research matters for their credibility. Traditional news venues need to take these issues seriously. We are convinced that more attention to and understanding of the media's role in democracy will make journalists more likely to involve experts in their news coverage for their substantive knowledge rather than for their inclination to satisfy media needs. We hope this article will contribute to a much-needed debate over the role of the media and experts in enlightening the public, enabling meaningful participation in democracy.

³⁹ K. Newton, "Mass Media Effects: Mobilization or Media Malaise?" *British Journal of Political Science* 29, (1999): 577-99.

⁴⁰ Collins, *Are We All Scientific Experts Now?*



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