“EXTRA, EXTRA, VOTE ALL ABOUT IT!”

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When does the news affect politics? My book-length dissertation project argues that how voters in low-information environments hold governments accountable for their performance in office depends upon the strategic interplay of when voters choose to follow the news and when media stations provide relevant news about incumbents. Marshaling evidence from voter surveys, media coverage and precinct-level electoral returns in Mexico, I first examine the demand- and supply-side determinants of voter consumption of politically-relevant news, before demonstrating that such news plays a key role in influencing voting behavior. Focusing on the coverage of salient events like local homicides and the release of reports documenting corruption, the results vividly illustrate how the news can shape political representation in developing democracies.

The analytical components of the book will be structured broadly as follows:

Ch. 1 **Theory.** I develop a theoretical model integrating strategic voter demand for political news and strategic media supply of political news. Building on the demand-side model in my working paper “Signaling sophistication” and the learning model in the Appendix of my job market paper “Political information cycles,” the model derives predictions for the demand and supply sides of information consumption, as well as the equilibrium electoral behavior of voters that update their beliefs about incumbent politicians on the basis of the information they consume. These predictions motivate the empirical analyses in the following chapters.

Ch. 2 **Voter demand for news.** I test for social signaling incentives for voters to strategically acquire political news. Drawing on the experimental and quasi-experimental evidence in “Signaling sophistication,” I show that voters in politically-oriented social networks acquire more political news, particularly around elections.

Ch. 3 **Media supply of news.** This chapter examines the determinants of media coverage. First, I intend to describe patterns of news coverage in the press, and ultimately identify how political alignment between owners and political impacts coverage. Second, I plan to implement a field experiment examining how radio stations respond to the availability of incumbent performance information. Third, I draw on the findings in “Revealing malfeasance” (with Horacio Larreguy and James Snyder) to examine the role of market-based incentives for media stations to serve different types of audience.

Ch. 4 **News and voter beliefs.** This chapter will combine the survey-level findings from “Political information cycles” with new survey-level analyses to examine how voter issue concerns and confidence in incumbent politicians are affected by recent local homicides and the release of audit reports documenting incumbent malfeasance in office. I also show that the least informed voters respond most to such news.

Ch. 5 **Electoral implications.** Bringing together the determinants of voter news consumption in equilibrium, and how voter beliefs respond to new information at the individual-level, this chapter presents the aggregate-level findings from “Political information cycles.” I show that homicide shocks in the news before elections harm incumbent re-election prospects.