

News Seekers, News Avoiders, and the Mobilizing Effects of Election Campaigns: Comparing Election Campaigns for the National and the European Parliaments

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The notion that election campaigns mobilize people politically is often treated as conventional wisdom. There is, however, a scarcity of research on the mobilizing effects of election campaigns in the current high-choice media environment. The same holds true for research on the role of the media—and more specifically on how the mobilizing effects differ between news seekers and news avoiders—and on how mobilizing effects might differ between first- and second-order national election campaigns. Against this background, the purpose of this study is to investigate the mobilizing effects of elections in a high-choice media environment and how they differ between first- and second-order national election campaigns and between news seekers and news avoiders. Empirically, the study draws on a four-wave panel study conducted in Sweden during the 2014 elections to the European Parliament and the national parliament.

Keywords: mobilizing effects, news seekers, news avoiders, first-order national elections, second-order national elections, media effects

The belief that election campaigns mobilize people politically is often treated as conventional wisdom. As elections get closer, the media coverage of and the parties' campaigning for the upcoming elections increase. As that happens, people start to pay attention, and as people start to pay more attention, their political interest is likely to be activated or increased. This, in turn, is thought to increase political participation and turnout.

One key part of this process of mobilization is information, and more specifically, information about the upcoming election received through various media, direct contacts with the parties and their campaigns, and interpersonal communication. Of these channels of communication, media in general and mass media in particular are the most important sources of information (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2014). Without the media covering politics or without people following the news about politics, the mobilizing effects of election campaigns would arguably be much weaker.

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Despite this, there is surprisingly little research on the extent to which media use has an impact on the mobilizing effects of election campaigns. At the same time, changes in political information environments and media use (Esser et al., 2012; Prior, 2007) suggest that it has become less likely that people follow the news. This holds particularly true for those who are less interested politically, that is, those for whom mobilizing effects would be most likely had they been exposed to more news.

The key reason is the transformation from low- to high-choice media environments. This transformation has made it easier than ever for those who are interested in politics and current affairs to seek out news when, where, and through whatever technical means they want, but it has also made it easier for those who are uninterested in politics and current affairs to use media without having to expose themselves to news. According to several studies, this shift has resulted in an increasing number of disconnected citizens and a polarization between news seekers and news avoiders (Aalberg, Blekesaune, & Elvestad, 2013; Blekesaune, Elvestad, & Aalberg, 2012; Ohlsson, 2015; Prior, 2007; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013).

One implication of this process is that the mobilizing effects of election campaigns should not be taken for granted. Another is that the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders might differ significantly.

The mobilizing effects of election campaigns and following the news might also differ between types of elections. In this context, a key distinction is between first- and second-order national elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Typical examples of second-order national elections are midterm elections in the U.S. and elections to the European Parliament. Among other things, second-order national elections are characterized by the perception among political parties, the media, and the public that less is at stake. This helps explain why both political parties and the media usually devote less resources and attention to second-order national elections (de Vreese, 2003; Maier, Strömbäck, & Kaid, 2011; Marsh, 1998; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). This suggests that the mobilizing effects might be weaker in the context of second-order compared with first-order national election campaigns. Differences in how much the parties campaign for and the media cover second- and first-order national elections also suggest that the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders might differ between these types of elections.

Despite this, there is only limited research investigating the importance of media use for the mobilizing effects of elections or comparing the mobilizing effects of first- and second-order national election campaigns. To help remedy this, this study aims to investigate the mobilizing effects of elections in a high-choice media environment and how they differ between (a) first- and second-order national election campaigns and (b) news seekers and news avoiders. Empirically, the study will focus on Sweden, a country that in 2014 held elections to both the national parliament (a first-order national election) and the European Parliament (a second-order national election). Using a representative four-wave panel study, we will be able to investigate the mobilizing effects of both campaigns, as well as the role of media use, in the same sample of people.

The Mobilizing Effects of Election Campaigns

The notion that election campaigns mobilize people politically goes back to the classic *People's Choice* study. In that, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) showed that two important functions of election campaigns are to *activate* and *reinforce* people's latent predispositions. In fact, activation and reinforcement effects were found to be more important than conversion effects, where people change party because of the campaigns.

Since then, numerous studies have investigated various mobilization effects, with a particular focus on turnout (Bergan, Gerber, Green, & Panagopoulos, 2005; Cann & Cole, 2011; Franklin, 2004; Goldstein & Ridout, 2002; Green & Gerber, 2015; Holbrook & Weinschank, 2014). A recurrent finding is that campaign contacts and various get-out-the-vote efforts do matter, although both the content and the means of communication matter (Green & Gerber, 2015).

Mobilization effects do not have to be restricted to turnout, however. From a broader democratic perspective, they could also involve other changes in attitudes, behavioral intentions, or behaviors that involves increasing political participation or increasing support for political actors, organizations, or institutions. Examples aside from general turnout are increasing support for a particular party, increasing political participation, increasing political interest, increasing political talk, or increasing political trust. The essence of mobilization is that citizens are activated politically or, as McClurg (2004) puts it, that "regular citizens become more likely to participate when exposed to external stimuli" (p. 408; see also Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Norris, 2006; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck & Johansson, 2007; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Conceptually and from a broader democratic perspective, then, political mobilization effects refer to changes in attitudes, behavioral intentions, or behaviors that involves increasing political engagement or increasing support for political actors, organizations, or institutions.

In this context, information is crucial. Any kind of mobilization effects presupposes exposure to some kind of information, be it from friends or family, political campaigns, nonpartisan organizations, traditional news media, or digital media. With respect to the role of media, a repeated finding in previous research is that there are positive linkages between media use and various measures of mobilization, ranging from turnout (Brynin & Newton, 2003; Prior, 2005) to political participation (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Liu, Eveland, & Dylko, 2013), political interest and attention to politics (Boulianne, 2011; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010), political efficacy (Aarts & Semetko, 2003; Hansen & Pedersen, 2014), and political trust (Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000). A range of studies has also shown that the use of digital and social media may have mobilizing effects, for example, with respect to political participation (Boulianne, 2015; de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; de Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga, & Shah, 2010; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014).

It also matters what kind of media and media content people are exposed to. Although findings vary, overall research suggests that exposure or attention to broadsheets and TV news is associated with stronger mobilization effects than other types of media use or abstention from following the news (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Aarts & Semetko, 2002; Boulianne, 2011; Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000; Strömbäck & Shehata 2010). In terms of media content, this holds particularly true

for issue-framed news coverage, whereas research suggests that the framing of politics as a strategic game might have demobilizing effects, at least in terms of the effect on political trust (Aalberg, Strömbäck & de Vreese, 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Shehata, 2014; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2013).

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from previous research is thus (a) that election campaigns tend to mobilize people politically and (b) that exposure or attention to news contributes to political mobilization. The latter should hold in general as well as in the context of election campaigns.

Two important caveats should be noted. First, most research has focused on national election campaigns, to which parties, the media, and voters devote more resources and attention than they do for second-order national election campaigns. Thus, we know less about the mobilizing effects of second-order national election campaigns and the role of media use during these campaigns compared with first-order national election campaigns. Second, most research was done when traditional news media use was more widespread and less fragmented than today. Thus, we know less about the role of media use for producing mobilization effects in the current, high-choice media environment.

The Transformation From Low- to High-Choice Media Environment

One key trend during past decades has been the transformation from low- to high-choice media environments (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Prior, 2007). Not least have digital and social media, in conjunction with computers, smartphones, and tablets, dramatically increased the amount of available information and ushered a new era of increasing media choice. Never before have people had such great opportunities to choose when, where, and through what means they follow various forms of media content.

This includes the news, in which the amount of news about current affairs, politics, and elections is greater than ever. Increasing supply does not necessarily equal increasing demand, however. Important in this context is that political information constitutes only a small fraction of the total media supply and that the use of websites focusing on politics or news and current affairs constitute only a minor share of the overall use of the Internet (Hindman, 2009). In fact, studies suggest that increasing media supply might lead to decreasing news media use, not least among those less interested in politics and current affairs (Blekesaune et al., 2012; Prior 2007; Strömbäck et al., 2013).

The main reason is that increasing opportunities affect how individual-level factors such as motivations and abilities work (Delli Carpini, & Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Prior, 2007). In short, the greater the total amount of media and media content, the more selective people have to be when deciding what media and media content to use, and the more important their motivations and abilities become.

Greater supply of various media is therefore likely to be accompanied by greater differences in news media use between groups and a growing share of people who hardly follow the news at all. And although levels of news media use vary across countries (Aalberg et al., 2013; Althaus, Cizmar, & Gimpel, 2009; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011), several studies show an increase in the share of disconnected

citizens, or *news avoiders* (Blekesaune et al., 2012; Strömbäck et al., 2013). Several studies also show that individual motivations, such as political interest, have become a more important predictor of people's news media use (Ohlsson, 2015; Prior 2007; Strömbäck et al., 2013), although habits and situational factors are also important (Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & van Meurs, 2011).

A related implication of the transition from low- to high-choice media environments is that the likelihood that people who are not interested in news are incidentally exposed to news might have declined. This would then result in weaker "trap effects" (Schoenbach & Lauf, 2002). This holds in particular for traditional news media such as newspapers and TV news. With respect to social media the situation might be different (Bode, 2016), depending on who people are friends with or follow on social media such as Facebook. Although several studies show linkages between social media use and political engagement (Boulianne, 2015; de Zuniga, 2015; Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Shehata, Ekström, & Olsson, 2015), questions remain however "about whether the effects are causal and transformative" (Boulianne, 2015, p. 11). Most studies suggest that those who are most likely to use digital and social media for political purposes are those who are highly politically interested, and they are also more likely to follow traditional news media (Boulianne, 2011; Ohlsson, 2015; Strömbäck, 2015). The extent to which social media reach and mobilize people who do not otherwise follow the news in traditional media is therefore largely an open question.

Altogether, the transition from low- to high-choice media environments might have far-reaching consequences for the mobilizing effects of elections. The most important implication is that the likelihood that people who are not interested in politics are exposed to news about the elections has decreased, which would implicate weaker mobilizing effects than in a low-choice media environment. This holds true for both first- and second-order national election campaigns. Because second-order national election campaigns are usually less covered by the media than first-order national election campaigns, it might hold particularly true for second-order national election campaigns that, already to begin with, are less likely to mobilize people politically. This leads us to this study's research questions and hypotheses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to investigate the mobilizing effects of elections in a high-choice media environment and how they differ between first- and second-order national election campaigns and between news seekers and news avoiders. With respect to how the mobilizing effects might differ between first- and second-order national election campaigns, our expectation is that the mobilizing effects will be stronger for first-order national election campaigns. The rationale is that the parties devote more resources to campaigning in and the media provide more extensive coverage of first-order national elections. The likelihood that people will be exposed to information about the elections is thus greater with respect to first- compared with second-order national elections. As a case in point, a study comparing the 2002 national and the 2004 European parliamentary elections in Sweden found that the parties spent only about a third as much in the campaigns for the European compared with the national parliament. The media coverage of the campaigns for the European Parliament similarly amounted to only about a third of the coverage of the campaigns for the national parliament (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). Thus, our first hypothesis is:

H1: The mobilizing effects of elections will be greater for first-order compared with second-order national elections.

With respect to the role of media use, we are particularly interested in the difference between news seekers and news avoiders. Although the operationalization of news seekers and news avoiders differs between studies, the most common approach is to use indices of total news media consumption (Ksiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010; Strömbäck et al., 2013). In media environments where people can form individualized repertoires of news media use, this approach has the advantage of not presuming unidimensionality or high correlations between different varieties of news media use. And while previous studies on news seekers and news avoiders have focused on traditional news media use, in their traditional or digital formats, the use of summed indices allows the inclusion of alternative digital or social media. In this study, we will take advantage of this by using an index that includes following the news not only in traditional but also in digital and social media.

With respect to the mobilizing effects of elections, it is not entirely clear whether they can be expected to be greater among news seekers or news avoiders. On the one hand, news seekers are more likely to be exposed to news that might serve to mobilize them politically. On the other hand, research has shown that news seekers are more politically interested than news avoiders (Boulianne, 2011; Strömbäck et al., 2013). This means not only that news seekers are more likely to be mobilized politically but also that there might be ceiling effects, whereas the scope for mobilizing effects is greater among news avoiders. Based on this, our next hypotheses are as follows:

H2: At the beginning of the election campaigns, news seekers are more mobilized politically than news avoiders.

H3: The mobilizing effects of elections will be stronger among news avoiders than among news seekers.

Because our expectation is that the mobilizing effects will be greater for first- compared with second-order national election campaigns, it follows that we expect H2 and H3 to apply to both types of elections. One question, though, is whether there are any differences between the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders across types of elections and, by extension, whether second-order or first-order national election campaigns more than the other serve to equal the playing field in the sense of bringing news avoiders closer to news seekers in terms of the various indicators of political mobilization. To explore this, we pose the following research question:

RQ1: Are there any differences between the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders in first- compared with second-order national election campaigns?

Methodology and Data

To test the hypotheses and to answer our research question, this study will focus on Sweden. The reason is twofold. First, in 2014, Sweden held elections to both the national parliament (a first-order national election) and the European Parliament (a second-order national election). Second, this will allow us to use a representative four-wave panel study. By focusing on Sweden, we will be able to investigate the mobilizing effects of both first- and second-order national elections, as well as the role of media use, in the same sample of people. This will strengthen our opportunities to make casual inferences.

More precisely, this study will use a four-wave panel study conducted in cooperation with the polling institute Novus in Sweden. The sample for the panel survey was drawn using stratified probability sampling from a database of about 35,000 citizens from Novus's pool of Web survey participants. The participants included in this pool are recruited continuously using random digit dialing. No self-selection is allowed: All recruitment of participants is based on random probability samples. Approximately 13% of those who are initially contacted and invited agree to be part of this pool of respondents, and the pool is representative for the population in terms of sociodemographic characteristics.

The panel survey is based on a sample of 6,897 respondents, aged 18–75 years, from this pool, stratified by gender, age, and county of residence. They were asked to complete a Web survey four times during a period of approximately five months. Wave 1 of the panel took place six weeks before the election to the European Parliament (April 11–22), Wave 2 occurred immediately after the election to the European Parliament (May 26–June 4), Wave 3 six weeks before the national election (August 1–13), and Wave 4 immediately after the national election (September 15–24). All who participated in the first wave were invited to participate in subsequent waves. 2,281 respondents participated in all four waves, resulting in a total cooperation rate of 33% (Cooperation Rate 2, American Association for Public Opinion Research). The cooperation rates for each wave are presented in Table A1 in the Appendix. In this study, we will only include those who participated in all waves.

Measures: Mobilization Effects

Following previous research, from a broader democratic perspective mobilization effects refer to changes in attitudes, behavioral intentions, or behaviors that involve increasing participation or increasing support for political actors, organizations, or institutions. Based on this, there are a number of possible indicators of mobilization that could be used, ranging from attitudes to concrete action. In this study we will focus on attitudes and behaviors that involve increasing political involvement and support for political actors, organizations, or institutions, or the political system itself. Based on previous research and the indicators available in the panel survey, we have included the following measures.

Political Interest

Political interest is often considered "the most powerful predictor of political behaviors that make democracy work" (Prior, 2010, p. 747). As such, it is a key measure of political mobilization, and it has consequently been used in previous research on mobilization effects (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck &

Johansson, 2007). To measure political interest, respondents were asked, "How interested are you, generally speaking, in politics?" The response alternatives range from 1 (not at all interested) to 4 (very interested).

Political Trust

Although dissatisfaction with politics could be a driver of political participation, from a democratic systems perspective, trust is an essential component of the legitimacy of the political system (Easton, 1965). Following previous research, several objects of support can be distinguished, ranging from the most specific (political actors) to the most diffuse (political community; Norris, 1999). In this study, we will focus on trust in political actors and institutions. More specifically, respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, how much trust do you have in . . .," followed by "Swedish politicians," "the national parliament," "the EU [European Union] Commission," "the EU Parliament," and "the government." The response alternatives ranged from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much).

Satisfaction With How Democracy Works

According to Norris (1999) and many others, one dimension of political support is related to regime performance, understood as satisfaction with how a (democratic) regime works. From a democratic perspective, it is an important indicator of the legitimacy of the democratic system. To measure people's satisfaction with how democracy works, respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works?" referring to "in Sweden" and "in the EU" in two different questions. The response alternatives range from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 4 (very satisfied).

Attention to Political News

While attention to political news is rather close to the independent variable in this study, i.e., media use, exposure and attention to political news is conceptually distinct (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986), and attention to politics has been used previously as one indicator of political mobilization (Norris, 2006; Strömbäck, 2008). To measure attention to political news, respondents were asked, "How much attention do you pay to the news coverage of politics?" The response alternatives range from 1 (no attention at all) to 5 (great attention).

Interpersonal Political Talk

The final indicator of mobilization is interpersonal political talk, which has also been used in previous research as an indicator of political mobilization during election campaigns (McClurg, 2004; Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2013). To measure how often people talk about politics with others, respondents were asked, "How often do you discuss politics or current affairs with . . .," followed by "someone in your family," "friends and acquaintances," and "people you do not know (e.g., on the Internet and social media)." The response alternatives (reverse coded) were 0 (never), 1 (more seldom), 2 (one or two days a week), 3 (three or four days a week), 4 (five or six days a week), and 5 (daily). Based on these three questions, we constructed a summed index ranging from 0 to 15.

Although these indicators do not cover the full range of possible mobilization effects, particularly in terms of action, they all cover important aspects of political mobilization in the sense of increasing political engagement or support for political actors, organizations, or institutions.

Measures: News Seekers and News Avoiders

In previous research, news seekers and news avoiders have often been defined based on their values on additive indices measuring respondents' exposure to various *individual media* (Strömbäck et al., 2013). While reasonable, this approach is problematic for two reasons. First, it is well known that self-reports of news exposure often are inaccurate, mainly because of "imperfect recall coupled with the use of flawed inference rules" (Prior, 2009, p. 904). The severity of this problem when it comes to relative levels of exposure—as opposed to absolute levels—is, however, disputed (de Vreese & Neijens, 2016). It may also be more of a problem when measuring exposure to specific media rather than to different media types. Worth noting is also that the problem with overreporting news exposure is likely to underestimate media effects (Prior, 2009). This needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the results. Second, one drawback is that these indices do not cover all kinds of news use. Thus far, there is, for example, no study on news seekers and news avoiders that include following the news through social media or news sites aside from those that are online versions of the most important newspapers. To remedy these problems and construct an index of respondents' total news use that is as comprehensive as possible, we will use a question asking respondents not of their exposure to specific news outlets, but to specific medium types. More specifically, we will use a question asking, "How often do you follow the news about politics by . . . ," followed by "watching TV news," "reading morning newspapers in print," "reading tabloid newspapers in print," "listening to news on the radio," "visiting news sites on the Internet," "taking part of news through the cell phone or tablet," and "taking part of news through social media such as Twitter and Facebook." For each of these, the response alternatives (reverse coded) were 0 (never), 1 (more seldom), 2 (one or two days a week), 3 (three or four days a week), 4 (five or six days a week), and 5 (daily).

Based on this, we have constructed a total news use index (TNUI). The index ranges from 0 (never follow the news in any of the categories) to 35 (follows the news in each category on a daily basis; Wave 1, Cronbach's $\alpha = .44$). Based on respondents' TNUI values, we have classified them as either news seekers (>22) or news avoiders (<11). This classification is based on the mean value 16.64 of the TNUI in Wave 1 plus or minus the standard deviation 5.83.

Results: The Mobilizing Effects of Election Campaigns

We will begin the analysis by addressing what the mobilizing effects of election campaigns are and how they differ between first- and second-order national election campaigns. Because previous studies have shown that Swedish election campaigns for the national parliament have mobilizing effects (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2013), we expect this to hold true also for the election in 2014. Thus far, no study has compared the mobilizing effects of election campaigns to the national and the European Parliament. According to our first hypothesis, it can nevertheless be expected that the mobilizing effects will be greater for first- than for second-order national elections.

To investigate this, we have compared the mean values for each indicator of mobilization between the first and the second panel wave (six weeks before and right after the election to the European Parliament) and between the third and the fourth panel wave (six weeks before and right after the election to the national parliament). The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mobilizing Effects of Election Campaigns for the European Parliament and the Swedish National Parliament, 2014 (Mean Values).

Effect	Second order national election			First order national election		
	April	May	Change	August	September	Change
Political interest ^a	2.88	2.93	+0.05***	2.91	2.97	+0.06***
Trust in politicians ^b	2.83	2.90	+0.07***	2.92	3.07	+0.15***
Trust in parliament ^b	3.08	3.17	+0.09***	3.20	3.36	+0.16***
Trust in EU Commission ^b	2.48	2.48	+0.00	2.51	2.60	+0.09***
Trust in EU Parliament ^b	2.43	2.42	-0.01	2.46	2.56	+0.10***
Trust in government ^b	2.83	2.90	+0.07***	2.95	3.22	+0.27***
Satisfaction EU democracy ^a	2.24	2.25	+0.01	2.25	2.33	+0.08***
Satisfaction national democracy ^a	2.84	2.88	+0.04**	2.87	2.92	+0.05***
Attention to political news ^b	3.32	3.41	+0.09***	3.32	3.65	+0.33***
Interpersonal political talk ^c	5.09	5.22	+0.13***	4.94	5.32	+0.38***

Note. $N = 2,281$. ^aThe scale ranges from 1–4. ^bThe scale ranges from 1–5. ^cThe scale ranges from 1–15. Paired-samples t test. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The results show that the election campaigns to both the European and the national parliament had significant mobilizing effects, although the differences in many cases are not that large. Nevertheless, during both campaigns, people's political interest as well as their satisfaction with how democracy works in Sweden, their trust in politicians, the national parliament and government, their attention to political news, and their interpersonal political talk increased. The exceptions are related to trust in the EU Commission and in the European Parliament and satisfaction with how democracy works in the EU. Interestingly, here the results show mobilizing effects during the national election campaign but not during the campaign for the European Parliament. In other words, trust in and satisfaction with these European institutions increased more during the campaign that was not about Europe than during the campaign that was.

What is most important, though, is the comparison of the mobilizing effects between the two types of election campaigns. In line with H1, predicting that the mobilizing effects will be greater for first-compared with second-order national elections, the results show that the mobilizing effects indeed were stronger during the campaigns for the national parliament compared with the campaigns for the European

Parliament. Whereas the average effect size during the campaigns for the European Parliament was +0.08, it was +0.17 during the campaigns for the national parliament. These results lend support for H1.

Turning to the role of news consumption and the potential differences between news seekers and news avoiders, let us begin with some descriptive data. As detailed earlier, the panel survey includes a question asking respondents how often they follow the news about politics by watching TV-news, reading morning newspapers on paper, reading tabloids on paper, listening to the radio, visiting news sites on the Internet, taking part of news through the cell phone or tablet, or by taking part of news through social media. To capture respondents' total news use, we have summed these items into an additive TNUI. Comparing the means before and after the campaigns for the European Parliament, the results show a small but significant decline ($p < .05$) from 16.64 ($SD = 5.83$) to 16.47 ($SD = 5.73$). In contrast, when we compare the means before and after the campaigns for the national parliament, the results show a somewhat larger and significant ($p < .001$) increase from 16.13 ($SD = 5.95$) to 16.57 ($SD = 5.84$).

Turning to the hypotheses, H2 predicted that at the beginning of the election campaigns, news seekers would be more mobilized politically than news avoiders, whereas H3 predicted that the mobilizing effects of elections would be stronger among news avoiders than among news seekers. The results pertaining to these hypotheses are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, it is clearly the case that news seekers, at the beginning of both election campaigns, are more mobilized politically than news avoiders. More specifically, news seekers are more interested in politics, have more trust in politicians, the national parliament, the European Parliament, the EU Commission, and the government, are more satisfied with how democracy works in Sweden, pay more attention to political news, and talk more about politics than news avoiders. The only case where the difference is not significant is related to how satisfied respondents are with how democracy works in the EU. These results lend support to H2.

With respect to H3, the results are less straightforward. Beginning with the mobilizing effects of the campaigns for the European Parliament, in some cases (political interest, trust in government, attention to political news and interpersonal talk), the mobilizing effects are stronger among news avoiders; in other cases (trust in politicians, trust in the EU Commission, and satisfaction with how democracy works within the EU and in Sweden), the effects are stronger among news seekers. There are also some cases (trust in the national and the European Parliament) in which there is no difference or no significant mobilizing effects to begin with. Turning to the mobilizing effects of the campaigns for the national parliament, there are again several cases (political interest, trust in politicians, trust in parliament, attention to political news, and interpersonal political talk) in which the effects are stronger among news avoiders, but in other cases (trust in EU Commission, trust in the European Parliament, trust in government) in which the effects are stronger among news seekers. Moreover, in some cases (satisfaction with how democracy works in Sweden and the EU), there is no difference.

Table 2. Mobilizing Effects Among News Seekers and News Avoiders During the Election Campaigns for the European Parliament and the Swedish National Parliament, 2014 (Mean Values).

Effect	Second order national election			First order national election		
	April	May	Change	August	September	Change
Political interest ^a						
News seekers	3.26 ^d	3.28	+0.02	3.30 ^d	3.28	-0.02
News avoiders	2.24	2.35	+0.11***	2.35	2.45	+0.10***
Trust in politicians ^b						
News seekers	2.99 ^d	3.11	+0.12**	3.07 ^d	3.16	+0.07*
News avoiders	2.48	2.52	+0.04	2.66	2.81	+0.15***
Trust in parliament ^b						
News seekers	3.25 ^d	3.36	+0.11**	3.38 ^d	3.48	+0.10*
News avoiders	2.70	2.82	+0.12**	2.91	3.09	+0.18***
Trust in EU Commission ^b						
News seekers	2.52 ^d	2.61	+0.09*	2.61 ^d	2.72	+0.11*
News avoiders	2.35	2.30	-0.05	2.45	2.48	+0.03
Trust in EU Parliament ^b						
News seekers	2.45 ^d	2.52	+0.07	2.56 ^d	2.66	+0.10*
News avoiders	2.32	2.33	+0.01	2.40	2.44	+0.04
Trust in government ^b						
News seekers	2.97 ^d	3.03	+0.06	3.05 ^d	3.37	+0.31***
News avoiders	2.54	2.64	+0.10*	2.79	3.01	+0.22***
Satisfaction EU democracy ^a						
News seekers	2.27	2.29	+0.02	2.26	2.32	+0.08*
News avoiders	2.24	2.17	-0.07*	2.23	2.32	+0.09**
Satisfaction national democracy ^a						
News seekers	2.91 ^d	3.01	+0.10**	2.95 ^d	3.00	+0.05
News avoiders	2.66	2.60	-0.06	2.73	2.77	+0.04
Attention to political news ^b						
News seekers	3.86 ^d	3.90	+0.04	3.86 ^d	4.11	+0.25***
News avoiders	2.36	2.66	+0.30***	2.47	2.94	+0.47***
Interpersonal political talk ^c						
News seekers	6.84 ^d	6.91	+0.07	6.77 ^d	7.12	+0.35**
News avoiders	3.30	3.61	+0.31**	3.18	3.70	+0.52***

Note. $N = 2,281$. News seekers and news avoiders refer to those who in the first (second-order national election campaign) or third (first-order national election campaign) panel waves were classified as news seekers and news avoiders, respectively. ^aThe scale ranges from 1–4. ^bThe scale ranges from 1–5. ^cThe scale range from 1–15. ^dThe difference is significant, $p < .05$. Paired-samples t test. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The most pronounced differences are related to attention to political news and interpersonal political talk, followed by trust in government. This holds true in particular for the campaigns for the national parliament. But although the effects are stronger among news avoiders with respect to attention to political news and interpersonal political talk, they are stronger among news seekers with respect to trust in government. It should also be noted that political interest increased more among news avoiders than among news seekers during both election campaigns. Nevertheless, our overall conclusion is that H3 is not supported by the results.

Turning to RQ1, asking whether there are any differences between the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders in first- compared with second-order national election campaigns, the results show no clear pattern. What they suggest is that the election campaigns served to shrink the difference between news avoiders and news seekers somewhat with respect to political interest, attention to political news and interpersonal political talk, but without eradicating them. The overall conclusion, therefore, is that there is no clear pattern with respect to differences between the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders in first- compared with second-order national election campaigns.

Additional Analyses

Although the results show no clear pattern when comparing the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders in first- and second-order national elections, it might be the case that the categorization of people into news seekers and news avoiders is too crude to capture the relationship between media use and political mobilization. To investigate this and the effect of media use on political mobilization, we have run a series of multivariate regression analyses using each of the indicators of mobilization as dependent variable. As independent variable we use the TNUI, ranging from 0 to 35, controlling for age, gender, education, and the lagged value of the dependent variable in question.² By doing this, we take advantage of the panel design, in essence investigating the effect of TNUI on *changes* in each of the indicators of mobilization during the first- and second-order national election campaign, respectively. The results with respect to the impact of TNUI are shown in Table 3.

Important to note is that the results show *changes* in the dependent variables between panel waves, by controlling for the lagged value of the dependent variables, and that the coefficients display how much the value of the dependent variables changes when the TNUI increases by one unit. For example, a one-unit increase in the TNUI corresponds to a change in political interest by .012 during the first-order national election campaign. A 10-unit increase thus corresponds to a change in political interest by .12, and a 20-unit increase corresponds to a change by .24. With this in mind, the results show that there are significant effects of the TNUI on each of the indicators of political mobilization during the second-order national election campaigns and on seven out of the 10 indicators during the first-order national election campaign. The highest coefficients are found for interpersonal political talk, followed by attention to political news and political interest, while the lowest coefficients are found for satisfaction with

² Gender, age, and education are measured in Wave 1, the lagged value of the dependent variables come from Waves 1 (second-order national election) and 3 (first-order national election), respectively, whereas TNUI is measured in Waves 2 and 4, respectively.

how democracy works in EU and Sweden and for trust in the EU Parliament. Overall, these results suggest that news use has an impact on political mobilization, not fully captured when comparing the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders.

Table 3. Effects of TNUI on Political Mobilization.

Effect	Second order national election	First order national election
Political interest	.016***	.012***
Trust in politicians	.013***	.006*
Trust in parliament	.011***	.006*
Trust in EU Commission	.010***	.007*
Trust in EU Parliament	.006*	.004
Trust in government	.006*	.009**
Satisfaction with EU democracy	.006**	.000
Satisfaction with national democracy	.005*	.002
Attention to political news	.021***	.024***
Interpersonal political talk	.066***	.079***

Note. $N = 2,281$. Entries show the unstandardized regression coefficients. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusions

From a democratic perspective, one key function of election campaigns is to mobilize people politically. In this context, the media have traditionally had an important role in alerting people that an election is coming up and in providing people with information that can trigger their interest and participation in, and knowledge about, politics and current affairs in general and the upcoming elections in particular.

The transformation from low to high-choice media environments and the rising share of news avoiders are however signs that the mobilizing effects of elections should not be taken for granted. Although there is more political information available than ever, the same holds true for nonpolitical and non-news media content: As a proportion of the total media supply, it is probably safe to say that the share of political information and news has declined (Hindman, 2009). For those not interested in politics it has in many ways become easier to use media while avoiding political news.

This development raises a host of new questions about the role of news and news use in contemporary democracies, including the extent to which effects that for long have been taken for granted are still valid.

Looking at the results of this study, the good news is that election campaigns still have mobilizing effects. That holds true in the case of both first- and second-order national election campaigns, although another finding is that the mobilizing effects are greater for first- than for second-order national elections. Whether this should be attributed to the greater media coverage of, or to the more intensive political campaigning for, first- compared with second-order national elections is an open question.

Comparing news seekers and news avoiders, another finding is that news seekers, to begin with, are more mobilized politically than are news avoiders. In a high-choice media environment, being a news seeker might in fact be conceptualized as an indicator of political mobilization in itself. This holds true for both first- and second-order national election campaigns. However, this study did not find any consistent pattern with respect to whether the mobilizing effects are greater among news seekers or news avoiders. It also did not find any consistent pattern with respect to whether the difference between the mobilizing effects among news seekers and news avoiders is greater in first- or second-order national elections. What stands out is that political interest, attention to political news, and the frequency of interpersonal political talk increased more among news avoiders than among news seekers during both campaigns. With respect to these indicators of political mobilization, both campaigns had somewhat of a leveling effect. At the same time, the regression analyses show that there are positive effects of total news use on most indicators of political mobilization during both campaigns. This suggests that it matters how much people follow the news and that the leveling effect of election campaigns should not be overestimated. More research is needed to fully understand if, under what circumstances, and in what respects election campaigns have leveling effects in terms of political mobilization.

Finally, news seekers are still much more mobilized politically than news avoiders. Election campaigns might in some ways reduce the difference, but overall this leveling effect is weak and does by no means eradicate the differences between news seekers and news avoiders.

In sum, then, the results show that election campaigns do have mobilizing effects, that these effects are greater for first-order than during second-order national elections, that these effects occur among news seekers as well as among news avoiders, but also that the more people follow the news about politics through various media, the stronger the mobilization effects are. And although the good news is that election campaigns mobilize people politically, the less good news is that these effects do not really serve to reduce inequalities in terms of political mobilization among news seekers and news avoiders. For the future, altogether this raises the prospect that increasing gaps in news use might result not only in weaker mobilizing effects of election campaigns but also greater political inequalities in other respects.

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Appendix

Table A1. Cooperation Rates in the Panel Survey.

Wave	Wave sample	Completed interviews	Total COOP	Wave COOP
1	6.897	3.557	52%	52%
2	3.557	2.995	43%	84%
3	3.557	2.747	40%	77%
4	3.557	2.676	38%	75%

Note. Sample sizes, number of completed interviews, and total and wave cooperation rate for each of the waves. The cooperation rates were calculated as the proportion of all cases interviewed of all eligible units contacted (Cooperation Rate [COOP] 2, American Association for Public Opinion Research).