

Political Power Sharing and Crosscutting Media Exposure: How Institutional Features Affect Exposure to Different Views

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Previous research shows that power-sharing political systems are associated with (a) individual perceptions of political inclusiveness and (b) a more deliberative news media supply. Little, however, is known about the effect of this institutional feature on exposure to crosscutting views through the media. We posit that political systems provide different degrees of institutional power and public visibility to political parties and minorities, and this difference affects crosscutting news exposure. Survey data from three countries ($N = 5,500$ individuals) show that media contribute more to crosscutting exposure in a consensus system (Italy) than a polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism (Spain), or a hegemonic illiberal democracy (Mexico). Additionally, analyses reveal that minority views are positively correlated with crosscutting media exposure in a consensus system and a polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism, but not in a hegemonic system. These findings suggest that certain political system characteristics can override the tendency for selective exposure.

Keywords: crosscutting exposure, comparative, power sharing, survey, news media

Well-functioning democracies require a citizenry that is frequently exposed to a balanced diet of pros and cons on public issues (Baker, 2006; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002). Previous research has shown compelling evidence that frequent exposure to divergent viewpoints enhances political tolerance (Mutz, 2002); awareness of multiple perspectives and political learning (Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002); ability to set aside win-lose approaches (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004); legitimacy and satisfaction with a political process and its outcomes (Esterling, Fung, & Lee, 2015); and political engagement (Torcal & Maldonado, 2014).

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Date submitted: 2019-06-26

¹ We are grateful to Kjerstin Thorson for her advice and suggestions for a previous version of this article. We also thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of the journal for their helpful comments.

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These valuable outcomes can be endangered, however, if citizens' frequent media diets provide only one-sided views of the issues of the day. As extensive studies in the body of literature show, news media can activate party or political heuristics to evaluate political content by making partisan identities salient (Lelkes, 2016), thereby contributing to audiences becoming segregated along political lines (Sears & Freedman, 1967). This is particularly the case in media landscapes that feature a strong correspondence between parties or broader political trends and media outlets (strong political or media-party parallelism), where the media tend to be politically instrumentalized, journalistic advocacy traditions are the norm, and media organizations are under pressure to compete for minimally or unmotivated news audiences (Goldman & Mutz, 2011; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Van Kempen, 2007).

Past research has devoted less attention to investigating the extent to which the political institutional context—for example, electoral rules, party systems, and proportional representation—can offset features of media systems that are facilitators of selective exposure. This gap in the literature is striking given that political regimes and their institutional design seem to explain a great deal of variation in news exposure patterns across countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Previous studies have shown that power-sharing systems (Lijphart, 2012; Powell, 2000) aimed at representing parties and interests more inclusively (proportional representation, multiple parties, coalitional governments, parliamentary systems) have a spillover effect on actual political representation and deliberation in news media coverage (Wessler & Rinke, 2014). Power-sharing systems also moderate the role of citizens' motivations, preferences, and abilities in explaining exposure to political information (Nir, 2012).

In this study, we heeded the call from Wessler (2008) and Wessler and Rinke (2014) to investigate how institutional features at the political system level affect the news media demand side—that is, patterns of exposure to political information through the media. We argue that where political systems offer more opportunities for political representation and exposure to a diversity of viewpoints (power-sharing systems), individual exposure to non-like-minded or crosscutting information will be greater than in systems that favor political majorities, and more than in illiberal democracies, where a political group concentrates a great deal of executive and legislative power and is barely rendered accountable (Bochsler & Kriesi, 2013; Merkel, 2004). Specifically, we expected that different levels of political power sharing will override the tendency of citizens to self-select information in highly partisan and advocative media environments by making them feel better represented and enhancing familiarity with non-like-minded viewpoints.

To test this assumption, we investigated crosscutting media exposure through a three-country comparison: Italy, Spain, and Mexico. In choosing those countries, we fill a gap in comparative studies, which have traditionally scrutinized patterns of political information use in a select group of well-established democracies in Western Europe (Esser & Steppat, 2017; Wessler & Rinke, 2014). We rely on survey data from the Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) collected in three countries with high levels of media-party parallelism, meaning highly partisan and advocative mainstream news outlets and few committed news readers (Durante & Knight, 2012; Fernández-Alonso, 2008; Fernández-Quijada & Arboledas, 2013; Goldman & Mutz, 2011; Guerrero, 2014; Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Hibberd, 2007; Ripollés, 2009; Van Kempen, 2007), but with a broader range of political system types that differ in substantial ways. Our analyses show that the media make a greater contribution to crosscutting exposure in a consensus system that qualifies as a

power-sharing system (Italy) than in a proportional system where political power is more concentrated around broader political majorities (Spain), and that there is also a greater contribution in both of those system types than in illiberal settings (Mexico; Bochler & Kriesi, 2013; Merkel, 2004).

We also investigated how minority status (support for a minority party) related to crosscutting exposure in these three political system types because the level of inclusiveness provided by power-sharing type systems is expected to increase the willingness of less visible political groups to encounter disagreement in the media. Our results offer evidence that being in a political minority is positively associated with crosscutting media exposure in a consensus system and a proportional system with majoritarian outcomes, but not in a system with a hegemonic power structure and illiberal trends (Bochler & Kriesi, 2013; Merkel, 2004). The implications of these results are outlined in the concluding section.

Media–Party Parallelism and Crosscutting Exposure

Media systems that feature a strong correspondence between parties or broader political trends and media outlets are fertile ground for selective exposure to flourish. Previous studies have shown that where political or media–party parallelism is high, citizens are less likely to encounter non-like-minded views in the media than in countries where media partisan alignments are weaker (Goldman & Mutz, 2011; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Van Kempen, 2007).

Extensive studies in the body of literature have shown that people tend to self-select when seeking mediated political information (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Mutz & Young, 2011). Reading or watching content that is in line with one’s political views functions as a heuristic that makes political information easier to process, reduces the ambiguity of political opinions, and encourages citizens to follow the news and be politically attuned (Mutz, 2006; Newton & Brynion, 2001; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Frequent news media users, as well as strong partisans, politically sophisticated individuals, and those who discuss politics with people other than family and friends, tend to search for like-minded political information in greater numbers (Garrett, 2009; Mutz & Mondak, 2006; Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2011; Taber & Lodge, 2006; but see Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017; Castro, Nir, & Skovsgaard, 2018; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; and Sidanius, 1985 for contradictory evidence). However, individual predispositions do not solely explain political news consumption patterns. Systemic factors are powerful predictors of media usage that can help us explain variances in the likelihood of encountering congenial information across countries.

In particular, Goldman and Mutz (2011) and Mutz and Martin (2001) provided evidence that the use of news media in line with one’s views is much more likely where the media are overtly partisan. Media systems with more prevalent media–party parallelism cause individual political predispositions and affections to play a bigger role in people’s political information and media habits. For example, where public service broadcasting is strong, citizens tend to share common news-viewing habits. Conversely, in systems with less consolidated traditions of public media, people’s political motivations and abilities (individual partisanship, interest, knowledge) are much more important determinants of news exposure than in countries where public TV standards for reporting political information, such as political diversity or quality

news, are widespread and spill over into other media outlets (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Iyengar et al., 2010; Pfetsch, 1996; Reinemann, Stanyer, & Scherr, 2016).

High levels of political parallelism also tend to go hand in hand with less committed news audiences and lower average newspaper readership (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Media owners tend to use partisanship as a strategy for product differentiation when media organizations experience significant pressure to reach minimally motivated or unmotivated news audiences. Low newspaper readership is, therefore, correlated with news audience fragmentation. As a comparison between use of (offline and online) news outlets in Norway, Japan, the UK, and the United States illustrates (Elvestad & Phillips, 2018), in countries where newspapers are strong, fewer news brands reach a major proportion of the population (Norway and Japan), as compared with more fragmented and polarized news audiences in the United States. Indeed, citizens in countries with “a low share of news avoiders are also less polarized in their choice of news sources” (p. 15), as Elvestad and Phillips (2018) further posited. Finally, where a select group of political elites own the mainstream media and exert a great deal of influence on media regulation and political reporting, citizens tend to use and seek political information based on ideological leanings (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Tworzecki & Semetko, 2012). Overall, individuals are more prone to select information in line with their political preferences where activating partisan heuristic cues is a particularly useful way to make news decisions or where opportunities to encounter non-like-minded information by coincidence are limited, as is the case in media systems with high levels of media-party parallelism.

Power Sharing and Crosscutting Exposure

Certain political systems’ characteristics can also affect citizens’ exposure to diverse political views through the media. As previous research posited (Kriesi, 2012), news journalists provide more or less visibility to different political voices depending on the actual power of politicians and parties, thereby following the structure of the political system. We argue that in power-sharing systems, where power is more diffuse and, for example, political incumbents are less known by the public, the news media will cover a broader range of political actors and their discourses. In addition, politicians will have greater incentive to respond to each other and stress the political differences between them, and citizens will be more open to and prone to encounter non-like-minded news information because they feel better represented by their political and media institutional contexts. We therefore expect the level of power sharing in a political system to offset the tendency of media organizations to target specific audiences along party lines and override the tendency of citizens to seek like-minded political information.

First, previous studies have shown a spillover effect from a political system’s ability to include and voice diverse perspectives to the media and public opinion. Wessler and Rinke (2014) investigated the impact of the political institutional context on political diversity in news media content. The authors found that in systems where political power is shared among a wide range of political parties and interest groups (power-sharing systems), television news demonstrates more deliberativeness and internal pluralism than in power-concentrating (or majoritarian) systems and defective democracies (Vartanova, 2012). Where political power is more evenly distributed between government and opposition, the incumbency bonus in news coverage has also been found to be of less importance (Schoenbach, De Ridder, & Lauf, 2001). Conversely, the media in majoritarian and presidential systems tend to convey personalized and dramatized

portrayals of a smaller number of well-known powerful actors than in consensus systems (Switzerland), where the news media follow the power structure of the political system (Kriesi, 2012).

Second, political systems that aim to distribute institutional power more inclusively (proportional representation, multiple parties, coalitional governments, parliamentary systems) may not only have a spillover effect of the promotion of political diversity in media content (as illustrated by the findings from Wessler & Rinke, 2014), but also may further provide incentives for politicians to highlight differences between themselves and their political rivals. Nir (2012) showed that in more competitive political systems with multiple parties, politicians need to exert greater efforts toward making their policy options visible and clearly differentiating themselves from each other, which in turn makes people feel more represented and politically engaged.

Third, we argue that actual political inclusiveness and representation at the institutional level will affect the perceptions of inclusiveness at the individual level. As established by the aforementioned studies, high levels of political power sharing are expected to moderate the news media's one-sided portrayals of the issues of the day and, most important for the purposes of this study, offset people's tendency to actively seek like-minded media outlets. This is because power-sharing systems promote the tendency for people to feel represented, especially those belonging to less visible or less powerful political groups. We elaborate on these arguments in the next section.

Perceived Inclusiveness and Crosscutting Exposure

A second expectation regarding the impact of institutional power distribution on crosscutting media exposure concerns citizens holding minority views. In particular, we expect political minorities to be more likely to select information across lines of political difference in systems where their representatives have greater access to institutional power. Such citizens may feel more politically represented and decisive in these systems. In general, members of a political minority experience more disagreement because they have fewer chances to encounter like-minded others (Huckfeldt, Ikeda, & Pappi, 2005; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). In countries with more majoritarian electoral systems, political minorities may feel even more ignored because they actually have fewer incentives to cast the "losing" vote in a district, and their vote can barely make any difference (Hopmann, 2012). In contrast, in countries with more proportional power structures, citizens have greater political choice and are likely "to find someone who represents their interests; they are less likely to feel alienated and indifferent" (Nir, 2012, p. 555). Previous studies have shown that the media can mirror highly inclusive political power structures (Wessler & Rinke, 2014) and can also generate spillover from citizens' affections for and trust in the political system to attitudes toward the media (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018). We therefore expect that in environments with less perceived hostile opinions regarding minority political groups and parties, these groups will have their voices heard more and be more visible in the political and media arenas. Such circumstances make it less likely that citizens will experience feelings of exclusion (Christiansen, 2004), and as a result, they will judge non-like-minded views and information less defensively.

Summary and Hypotheses

Figure 1 presents an outline of our theoretical considerations thus far.

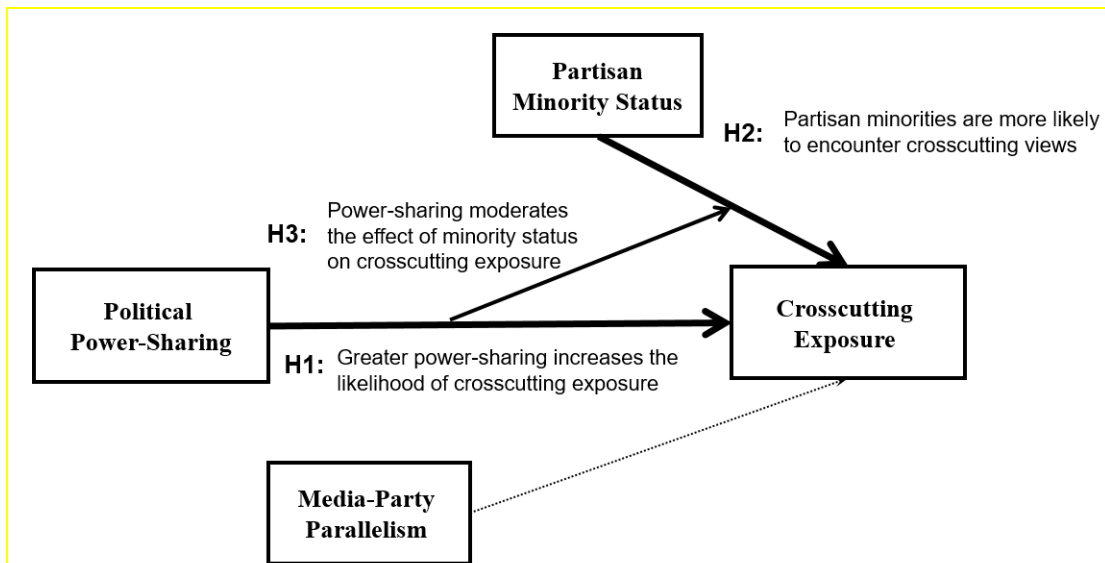


Figure 1. Determinants of crosscutting media exposure. Note. The dashed path was not tested; all cases are constant at high parallelism.

We conceptualize a dimension from the least political power sharing to the most. On one anchor, a *consensus system* (coalitional government, proportional representation, multiple parties, parliamentary system) distributes institutional power evenly, and there are few barriers to newcomers, small parties, and marginalized groups entering the political playing field. On the opposite anchor, and as an extreme case of a power-concentrating system, an *illiberal presidential system with a hegemonic power structure* provides disproportionate political influence to the party in government and operates under a weak system of checks and balances that renders the executive and legislative branches unaccountable. In between is a *polarized pluralist variant* of majoritarianism with a parliamentary system of government, a multiparty system, and a proportional electoral system that yields stable political majorities and a moderately fragmented legislative chamber (Bochsler & Kriesi, 2013; Dahl, 1956; Lijphart, 2012; Powell, 2000).

We anticipate that the level of power sharing of a given political system will override citizens' tendencies to self-select in more overtly partisan and fragmented media environments (high media-party parallelism). We expect to see this latter pattern particularly clearly among political minorities, whose views tend to be less publicly visible and can be made more salient in more inclusive political systems. The media in countries where power is spread among a broader range of political actors follow the institutional dynamics of the political system, where politicians need to be attentive and regularly respond to a broader range of political opponents and their policy agendas. This is in contrast to power-concentrating systems, where personalized and negative media portrayals of a few political leaders are to be expected (Kriesi, 2012),

making less newsworthy minority voices feel excluded, and where non-like-minded political information is judged more defensively. Thus, Figure 1 depicts political power sharing as a contextual factor increasing individuals' crosscutting exposure and amplifying the role of minority status on the individual likelihood of encountering non-like-minded views through the media.

To test these guiding assumptions and relationships, we relied on data from three countries—Italy, Mexico, and Spain—that share high levels of media-party parallelism, but also represent distinct examples of the three political system types just outlined. Media systems in these countries are characterized by journalistic advocacy traditions, politicization of public service broadcasting or broadcasting regulations, instrumentalization of private media, low newspaper reach, and a large number of news avoiders (Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014; Durante & Knight, 2012; Fernández-Alonso, 2008; Fernández-Quijada & Arboledas, 2013; Goldman & Mutz, 2011; Guerrero, 2014; Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Hibberd, 2007; Ripollés, 2009; Van Kempen, 2007), all of which are earmark characteristics or traits of media systems with high levels of political parallelism (Brüggemann et al., 2014).

At the same time, Italy qualifies as an example of a consensus system (Bochsler & Kriesi, 2013; Lijphart, 2012); it has a tradition of governmental coalitions, a strong political role for interest groups (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and a bicameral parliamentary system and proportional electoral system that have brought about a highly fragmented and at times volatile party system despite multiple attempts at reforms, including some majoritarian components (Morlino, 1996).² Spain has been defined as a polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism (Lijphart 2012; Wessler & Rinke, 2014), or a proportional system with majoritarian outcomes (Hopkin, 2005). Until 2015, the Spanish political system was characterized by a proportional electoral system that de facto punished national third parties (because of a combination of the d'Hondt system and small electoral districts), by single-party governments, and by a multiparty system that after 1982 became an imperfect two-party system (Linz & Montero, 2001).³ Finally, Mexico's presidential system and mixed electoral system contribute to strengthening existing political majorities by rewarding them in single-member districts, while at the same time segregating the opposition front by granting a significant share of assembly seats to different minority parties in multimember districts (Díaz-Cayeros & Magaloni, 2001). Mexico is considered an illiberal democracy, with further structural deficits such as weakly controlled executive and legislative branches, a so-called captured liberalism that embeds economic elites and members of the civil society in clientelistic networks, and criminal insecurity, all of which compromise

² For a recent overview of Italy's electoral reforms, see Chiamonte and Emanuele (2018).

³ As with Italy, Spain's party system has recently undergone a breakdown, with the emergence of three new parties—Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox—in direct competition with the long-lasting Socialist Party (PSOE) and Popular Party (PP) since the 2015 and 2019 (for Vox) general elections. The stability of the new political landscape, however, has yet to be seen because the results of three of the four latest parliamentary elections and a vote of no confidence against President Rajoy (PP) have only served to keep government by mainstream parties afloat (either PP or PSOE). High electoral volatility also makes it very difficult to determine "whether we have reached a situation of stable equilibrium, or whether we are still in a transitional phase" (Castillo-Manzano, López-Valpuesta, & Pozo-Barajas, 2017, p. 160).

civil rights and freedom of the press (Bochsler & Kriesi, 2013; Guerrero, 2014; Hughes & Márquez-Ramírez, 2018; Merkel, 2004).

Therefore, we tested the proposition that in consensus systems where institutional power is more inclusively distributed, crosscutting media exposure will be more prevalent than in a polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism, and media will contribute more to crosscutting exposure in both settings than in a hegemonic political tradition with illiberal trends. In other words, we hypothesized that

H1: Greater political power sharing increases the likelihood of crosscutting media exposure.

And we predicted that

H2: Supporters of minority parties would be more likely to encounter non-like-minded views in the media.

We also hypothesized that

H3: An interaction effect such that minorities would be particularly open to encountering crosscutting views in the media in a consensus system with the greatest power sharing.

Data and Methods

Data Source

To test the hypotheses, we used data from the Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP; Gunther, 2019), which contains information on political preferences, patterns of news consumption, and political discussants from more than 5,500 individuals (Italy $n = 1,508$; Mexico $n = 1,600$; Spain $n = 2,411$). Data on national representative samples were collected during presidential (for Mexico) or legislative (for Spain and Italy) elections, spanning a period from 2012 to 2015. Individuals were interviewed face-to-face, and the response rates were 24% in Italy, 49% in Mexico, and 88% in Spain.⁴

Measurements

To measure crosscutting media exposure (XE_m), we used questions concerning party preferences (for the most recent vote) and the individual's perception of the party or candidate who is treated more favorably by the newspaper or news show that he or she most frequently reads or watches.⁵ We created a binary variable where 0 indicated agreement with the party favored by one's favorite media outlets, and 1 otherwise. We built

⁴ For further details on question wording, sampling methodology, and data collection, see the technical report and survey questionnaires at <https://u.osu.edu/cnep/>.

⁵ Individual party preference was operationalized by using the question, "Can you tell me which party you voted for in the most recent (general) election?" Perceived party preference of media outlets (newspapers and TV) was constructed from an item that probed "Which party or candidate was treated more favorably?" by each respondent's favorite/most read or watched newspaper and TV channel.

an average index by summing each individual's responses for newspapers and TV news shows, where the combined index scores ranged between 0 and 1 (see Dilliplane, 2011, for a similar approach).

We additionally operationalized crosscutting exposure in interpersonal discussions (XE_d). To gauge the media's contribution to crosscutting exposure, we benchmarked average levels of crosscutting media exposure against levels of crosscutting exposure in informal political discussions and analyzed media-interpersonal gaps by political system types (consensus, proportional, or illiberal setting).⁶ The main reason for this methodological decision was that levels of crosscutting exposure by any means of communication may be biased by individual and country-level idiosyncratic factors. People tend to encounter disagreement essentially through two modes of communication: through the media and in political discussions. Many of the factors explaining why people encounter non-like-minded views (motivations, cognitions, opportunities) apply to both forms of crosscutting exposure, that is, interpersonal and mediated (see, e.g., Matthes, Knoll, Valenzuela, Hopmann, & Von Sikorski, 2019, for a recent overview). In other words, a great number of reasons why a certain individual may seek non-like-minded views and perspectives could span both communication modes. Therefore, the media-interpersonal gap allowed us to isolate the exact role of the media in making people more or less likely to cross-select across lines of political difference. As an example, say that levels of crosscutting media exposure are found to be stronger in Spain than in Italy. Now let us assume that during the Spanish 2015 election campaign, political polarization was unusually high, and differences between leftist and rightist parties were particularly salient and easy to identify. Had we taken the crosscutting media exposure indicator alone as evidence of greater levels of crosscutting media exposure in a polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism compared with a consensus system, we would have dismissed the fact that in 2015, it was particularly easy for Spanish citizens to identify party leanings of their frequent media outlets (and frequent discussants). A simple comparison of aggregated average levels of mediated and interpersonal crosscutting exposure solved the issue by discounting this contextual factor and provided a more accurate picture of the media's contribution to levels of crosscutting exposure in each political system as compared with the others.

XE_d was constructed from the questions tapping the party preference of the person with whom each interviewee discussed politics most frequently.⁷ The distance between an individual's political preferences and the reported preference of his or her frequent political discussant was measured by creating a binary variable (0 = agreement, 1 = disagreement; see Klofstad, Sokhey, & McClurg, 2013, for a similar approach). To capture minority status, we built on a measure where a value of 0 was assigned to those who voted for the party in office in the most recent election, and 1 to those who did not. We opted for this solution because assessing minority status by using any measure of ideological intensity (i.e., how far an individual is from a majoritarian view on a given scale) risks capturing extremity or attitude strength instead (see Wojcieszak, 2015). Our empirical approach also captures the ability of a party to be politically decisive and newsworthy without setting any arbitrary cutoff point between majoritarian and minority views based on a particular factor—for example, vote shares. It is also less sensitive to institutional and political idiosyncrasies than, say, measures that rely on whether parties achieve the election threshold or which

⁶ For a similar comparison of the media-interpersonal gap to gauge media's contribution to communication across political lines, see Mutz and Martin (2001).

⁷ Respondents were asked to state the person with whom they discuss politics most frequently and whether they knew which party this person voted for.

issues parties own. Finally, our approach allowed us to be consistent with the operationalization of our crosscutting measures, which captured political consistency between people and media by using party ID.

We created an additional variable accounting for the strength of social ties with one's discussants, because previous research showed that those who frequently discuss politics within their core social networks (family members and friends; Mutz & Mondak, 2006) experience high emotional costs from disagreeing and tend to be less tolerant of non-like-minded views (Hopmann, 2012; Klofstad, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2009). The strength of social ties was constructed from an item that probed, "Who is the person with whom you discuss politics most frequently?" We assigned 0 to those naming colleagues and neighbors, and 1 to those who named another family member or a friend.

Subjective political interest was also included as a control, with responses categorized from *not at all* (0) to *very interested* (3), and a scale index of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Taber & Lodge, 2006) was constructed by summing up the correct answers to three to six questions on national and international politics. To control for the amount of political information each individual consumed (Norris, 2000), we also accounted for frequency of exposure to campaign news (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *always*).⁸ Individual partisanship was operationalized to detect the presence of any party attachment (Huckfeldt et al., 2005). Respondents were asked the extent to which they felt close to a party (dummy coded). Further sociodemographic variables (age, education) were also included as controls.

Political Power Sharing and Crosscutting Media Exposure

Our first hypothesis was that more political power sharing increases the likelihood of crosscutting media exposure (H1). Therefore, the contribution of the media to crosscutting views should be lower in illiberal settings than in countries with a proportional system with more majoritarian outcomes, and even lower than in a consensus system.

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) using the ratio of crosscutting media exposure to our benchmark of crosscutting exposure in political discussions as a dependent variable and the countries as independent variables provided partial support for the assumption of crosscutting media exposure variance across different political landscapes. This analysis shows that (a) there are statistically significant differences across countries, $F(2,696) = 4.12, p < .05$, and (b) a consensus system (Italy) had the highest average level of this ratio, followed by a more power-concentrated system (Spain). More specifically, the media—as compared with interpersonal communication—played a more important role in individual levels of crosscutting exposure in a consensus system than in an illiberal one (Mexico), as revealed by a Tukey post hoc test ($.107 \pm 0.38, p = .012$). Bivariate analyses between Italy and Spain or Spain and Mexico revealed no statistically significant differences.

⁸ For reasons of data availability, for Italy, the amount of political information was assessed through a question probing, "How frequently did you read articles on political topics during the election campaign in recent months?"

Mean comparisons of levels of crosscutting media exposure and average degree of crosscutting exposure through political discussions by levels of political power sharing provided robustness to the previous tests and further illustrated the exact magnitude of the media–interpersonal gap within each political system and the importance of the interpersonal benchmark. We found that the contribution of the media to crosscutting exposure ($M = .365$, $SD = .019$) was significantly higher than that of interpersonal communication ($M = .228$, $SD = .025$) in a consensus system, $t(284) = 4.647$, $p < .001$. While average crosscutting news media ($M = .463$, $SD = .019$) seemed to be more important in a proportional system with majoritarian outcomes than in a consensus system, we found this average to be no stronger than the average crosscutting exposure in political discussions ($M = .430$, $SD = .035$), and the difference between them was not significant in this system type, $t(199) = .829$, $p > .1$. By contrast, in illiberal settings, political discussions seemed to result in the highest levels of political deliberation ($M = .472$, $SD = .034$), but the differences with crosscutting news media exposure ($M = .437$, $SD = .023$) were not significant, $t(213) = -.867$, $p > .1$.

Taken together, these results seem to offer evidence that the media make a greater contribution to crosscutting exposure in political systems that enable greater access to power and presence of political diversity than in countries with more hegemonic political traditions, as anticipated. Post hoc analyses of the nature of political discussions in different countries (frequency, weak/strong ties) shed light on plausible underlying mechanisms explaining the media advantage in power-sharing systems, in particular as compared with more defective democracies. Our analyses showed that only respondents from an illiberal democracy tended to engage in crosscutting political discussions with closer friends and family (close ties) more often than with coworkers or neighbors (weak ties; see Appendix).⁹ A great number of respondents in an illiberal setting seemed to feel more comfortable discussing politically contentious issues with safer and more frequent political discussants—that is, with family and friends. This exception seems to be rooted in perceived sanctions for speaking up and seeking dissenting views, and the implications are discussed in the final section of this article.

Support for Minority Parties and Exposure to Non-Like-Minded Views

Our second and third hypotheses predicted that those supporting minority parties would be more likely to experience crosscutting media exposure (H2), especially in more power-sharing systems (H3). Therefore, minorities should use more crosscutting media in a consensus system than in a proportional system with majoritarian outcomes, and even more than in an illiberal democracy with a hegemonic power structure

⁹ Results from a logistic regression with XE_d as the dependent variable and strength of social ties as the main independent variable (with XE_m , interest, partisanship, news exposure, political knowledge, being in a minority, and sociodemographics as controls) showed a positive, yet not significant, impact of social ties for an illiberal setting: $b = .536$, $p = .212$, OR = 1.709, 95% CI [.736, 3.971]. The same regression model reestimated with the other country samples revealed negative and significant log coefficients for social ties for a consensus system, $b = -1.186$, $p = .009$, OR = 0.305, 95% CI [.125, .745], and for a more majoritarian system, $b = -1.372$, $p = .020$, OR = .253, 95% CI [.079, .806]. In other words, in a consensus system and a proportional system with majoritarian outcomes, the weaker the relationship with discussants, the greater the chance of encountering non-like-minded views when discussing politics.

As shown in Table 1, being in a political minority was positively linked to crosscutting media exposure in a consensus system and a polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism, but not in an illiberal setting. Respondents belonging to a minority reported significantly more exposure to dissimilar views through the media in a consensus system and a proportional system with majoritarian outcomes, even after controlling for political interest, news exposure, and other variables (for Italy, $\beta = .387, p < .001$, for Spain, $\beta = .242, p < .1$). In contrast, the relationship between minority status and crosscutting media exposure was negative for an illiberal setting ($\beta = -.189, p < .05$). Put differently, being in a majority seemed to be positively correlated with crosscutting exposure in a system with more hegemonic and illiberal power structures.

Table 1. OLS Regression of Crosscutting Media Exposure on Minority Status.

	Consensus system	Proportional majoritarianism	Illiberal democracy
Minority	0.262 (0.045)***	0.168 (0.058)**	-0.134 (0.050)**
Crosscutting in Political Discussions	0.058 (0.052)	0.091 (0.050)*	-0.004 (0.050)
Political Interest	0.072 (0.033)**	0.008 (0.038)	0.003 (0.023)
Political Knowledge	0.010 (0.026)	0.060 (0.027)**	0.042 (0.018)**
Political News	-0.039 (0.027)	-0.000 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)
Social Ties	0.033 (0.072)	-0.063 (0.070)	-0.057 (0.059)
Partisanship	0.163 (.0180)*	0.089 (0.059)	-0.071 (0.046)
Age	-0.000 (0.001)	0.003 (0.002)*	0.001 (0.002)
Education	-0.004 (0.019)	0.001 (0.020)	0.025 (0.016)
Constant	0.015 (0.180)	0.224 (0.069)***	0.498 (0.042)***
R-squared	.174	.149	.131
N	221	140	208

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets. *Significant at 10% level; **Significant at 5% level; ***Significant at 1% level. Source: CNEP 2013, 2015, 2012.

To further illustrate between-country differences, we ran a regression model with cluster-robust standard errors using the merged data set (Italy, Mexico, and Spain). In this model, we included a cross-level interaction of minority status and country in order to assess how different degrees of political power sharing may affect the likelihood of minorities to encounter non-like-minded views in the media. Whereas supporting a minority party raised crosscutting news media exposure by 0.279 on a 1-point scale in a consensus system (highest levels of political power sharing), in a more power-concentrating proportional system, the predicted effect was 0.175, and in an illiberal democracy (highest power concentration), the expected impact of minority status on XE_m was -0.118 . The marginal effect of minority status on crosscutting media exposure by power sharing levels is illustrated in Figure 2. The slope was steeper for consensus than for more majoritarian systems, showing a more important impact of minority status on crosscutting media exposure in the former than in the latter. The figure also depicts the negative coefficient for an illiberal setting highlighted earlier.

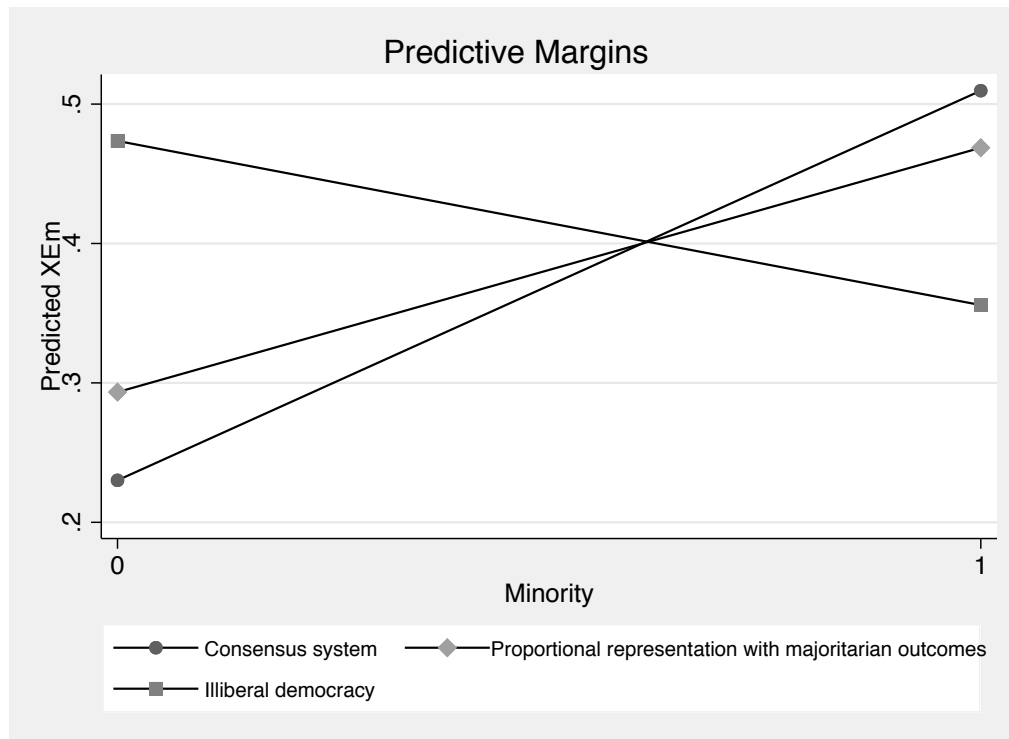


Figure 2. Marginal effect of minority status on crosscutting media exposure (XE_m) from the most to the least power sharing. Note. Data from an OLS regression model with clustered-robust standard errors. More power-sharing systems amplify the impact of minority status on crosscutting media exposure.

Overall, the results showed that while minorities in illiberal democracies tend to avoid uncongenial views, in proportional systems with majoritarian outcomes, and most significantly, in a consensus system, holding minority views made one more likely to engage in crosscutting exposure, which is consistent with H3.

Discussion

Crosscutting media exposure is of unquestioned importance to democracy, as an essential factor in deliberative thinking (Wessler, 2008; Wessler & Rinke, 2014). Studies of its antecedents have focused on individual explanations (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stroud, 2014) and less often on the media context (e.g., Goldman & Mutz, 2011). In this study, we focused on the potential role of institutional features as promoters of crosscutting exposure, comparing three countries with highly partisan media and differing political systems.

Our findings showed that the news media made a greater contribution to citizens' crosscutting exposure in consensus systems that represent people and political interests more inclusively than in more power-concentrating systems or settings with a hegemonic tradition. The extent to which political systems offer higher institutional power to multiple political options also seems to function as a moderator between

political predispositions and exposure to uncongenial views through news media. In particular, holding minority views was positively correlated with crosscutting exposure in consensus and proportional systems with more majoritarian outcomes, but not in illiberal settings. As we reasoned in the expectation for H3, minorities might feel more alienated and less motivated to hear the other side where they have less chance to be politically relevant (illiberal settings) than where they are granted more public visibility (consensus systems). Overall, systems where political power is less concentrated seem to offer more opportunities for encountering dissimilar views through the media and may offset the importance of media system characteristics in explaining news media habits.

Our study has further implications. The results suggest that the contribution of media to citizens' exposure to diverse views might be difficult to generalize beyond the United States (Mutz & Martin, 2001), especially in countries where there are harsher sanctions and higher costs for seeking out and expressing dissenting views. In less consolidated and power-sharing democratic settings, the media are no more important drivers of communication across lines of political difference than personal political discussions are, according to our findings. Post hoc analyses showed that citizens in an illiberal setting with a hegemonic power structure seemed to discuss politics with safe and more private circles of the family. This is in line with European countries that have had recent undemocratic experiences, such as Spain (Lup, 2015). Most important, citizens in a hegemonic setting with illiberal trends also seem to disagree within such safe circles (running counter to past findings in the United States; see Huckfeldt et al., 2005; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Experiencing disagreement with close siblings has been shown to increase individual political engagement (Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2013). The tradeoff of this phenomenon is that potential societal benefits of crosscutting discussions with family members and friends may have a limited scope where people do not pass on crosscutting information to others beyond their close networks.

The conclusions of the present study are limited by the ability to generalize from a specific and small country sample. In particular, Italy is a specific case of consensus democracy (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Kriesi, 2004). The party system in the country collapsed in the 1990s, paving the way for the inception of Forza Italia, which increased the influence of the media on politics by placing a great amount of communicative power in the hands of Silvio Berlusconi. This contingency may have diminished the potential beneficial effects of a power-sharing system on minorities and interest representation in the media as compared with more majoritarian democracies. A more detailed analysis considering specific political dimensions (number of parties, electoral systems, coalitional governments) that accounts for more paradigmatic cases of power-sharing democracies (Switzerland, Belgium) and also takes into account countries with more consolidated traditions of majoritarianism than Spain would strengthen our conclusions and avoid idiosyncratic interpretations of the impact of the distribution of political power on patterns of news consumption. In this vein, further operationalizations of crosscutting exposure accounting for factors such as ideological distances or issue positions between individuals and their media diets could also help uncover whether Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) voters have better chances to cross-select in Mexico, given that this particular party, which has been in office for more than 70 years, is highly politically and economically heterogeneous.

Future research might also address further contextual antecedents of crosscutting exposure (aggregated access to education, distribution of wealth) given that the accessibility of information outside

interpersonal networks is scarce in economically and educationally unequal societies (Smith, 2016). Overall, comparative explanations such as those that we pursued in this study reveal that political system features can provide new and relevant insights into the selective exposure debate.

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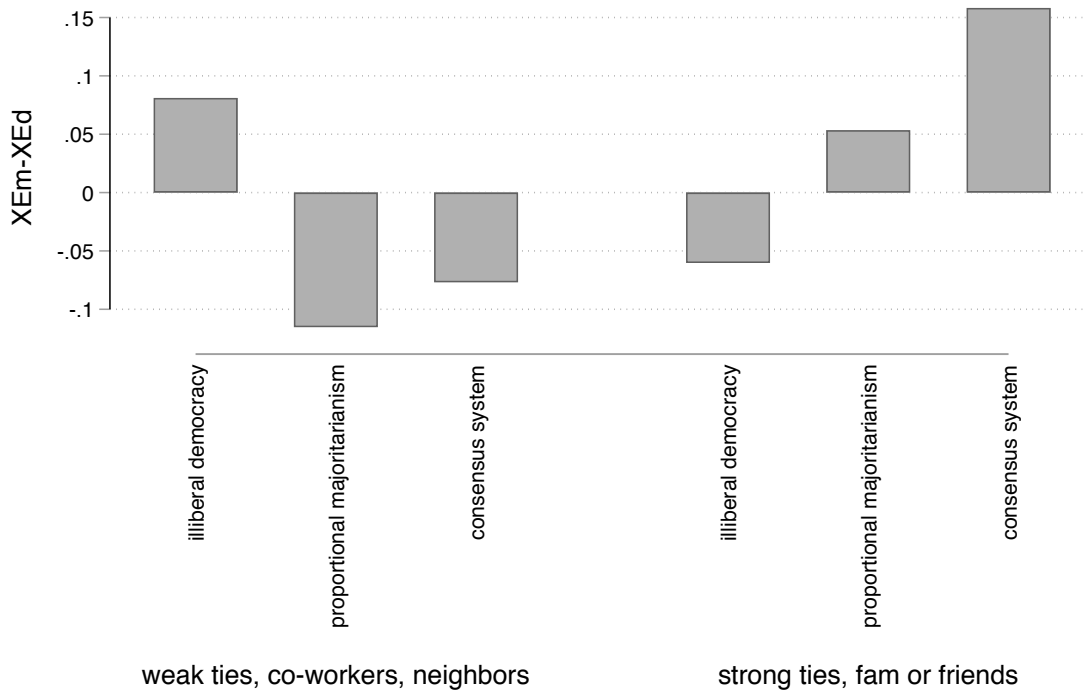
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Appendix: Difference Between Crosscutting Exposure in the Media and in Political Discussions ($XE_m - XE_d$) by Social Ties with Political Discussants.



Note. The y-axis shows the relative importance of the media over interpersonal networks as sources of exposure to dissimilar views ($XE_m - XE_d$). Whereas in a consensus system and polarized pluralist variant of majoritarianism, the media make a greater contribution to diverse viewpoints among those discussing politics with close siblings, in an illiberal setting discussion, networks play a bigger role. Conversely, among those discussing politics with not-so-close individuals (coworkers or neighbors), the media add to exposure to non-like-mindedness in greater numbers in an illiberal system than in consensus or more majoritarian systems.