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The Daily Show Effect

Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy, and American Youth

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We test the effects of a popular televised source of political humor for young Americans: *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*. We find that participants exposed to jokes about George W. Bush and John Kerry on *The Daily Show* tended to rate both candidates more negatively, even when controlling for partisanship and other demographic variables. Moreover, we find that viewers exhibit more cynicism toward the electoral system and the news media at large. Despite these negative reactions, viewers of *The Daily Show* reported increased confidence in their ability to understand the complicated world of politics. Our findings are significant in the burgeoning field of research on the effects of "soft news" on the American public. Although research indicates that soft news contributes to democratic citizenship in America by reaching out to the inattentive public, our findings indicate that *The Daily Show* may have more detrimental effects, driving down support for political institutions and leaders among those already inclined toward nonparticipation.

Keywords: media and politics; political campaigns; The Daily Show*; infotainment; political information; young voters; political socialization*

Introduction: Soft News and *The Daily Show*

There is some ambiguity among political communications scholars in defining soft news (Baum, 2003b; Hamilton, 2004; Patterson, 2000), but there is a consensus that soft-news programming shares certain characteristics. Compared with traditional hard news, these programs feature lower levels of public affairs information and focus more on drama, sensationalism, human interest themes, and personalities (Baum, 2002, 2003b; Patterson, 2000). Although most modern traditional news programs possess both hard

and soft elements, the distinction is that soft-news programming is found in the latter's emphasis on entertainment.

Soft news includes several types of programs: network and cable newsmagazine shows, entertainment and tabloid newsmagazine shows, and daytime and late-night talk shows (Baum, 2003b). Although daytime talk shows (e.g., *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Dr. Phil*) tend to take more of a human interest approach to entertainment, late-night talk shows (e.g., *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*, *The Late Show With David Letterman*), especially in the monologue segments of the programs, are more humor oriented. *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart* fits into this subcategory (Baum, 2003b, p. 119).

As soft-news programming has become more prevalent, scholars have begun to examine how it influences the public. Many have argued that soft news threatens the integrity of the democratic process by overemphasizing trivial events, downplaying significant public affairs issues, and oversimplifying the complex reality of these issues (Fallows, 1996; Kalb, 2001; Patterson, 2000). For instance, Hollander (1995) found that exposure to entertainment-based talk programs artificially inflated viewers' perceptions of their own political knowledge. However, recent research by Baum (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) has challenged this notion. He argues that soft news creates a more knowledgeable citizenry by educating an inattentive public that would not otherwise follow traditional hard news. His research indicates that politically inattentive citizens gather valuable information as an "incidental by-product" of exposure to soft news, especially regarding significant foreign policy events (Baum, 2003b, p. 30). Thus, watching entertainment-based programming can contribute to political learning.

Baum (2005) also demonstrated that exposure to presidential candidates' appearances on entertainment-based talk shows in the 2000 campaign influenced the evaluation of those candidates, particularly among less knowledgeable viewers. His findings illustrate that those who are only passively interested in politics are more likely to warm up to presidential candidates from the opposition party when they see those candidates on entertainment-based talk shows. This is because soft-news programs, particularly entertainment talk shows, have less of an "edge" than hard news. When hosts speak to presidential candidates, difficult questions regarding policy and political strategy give way to friendly small talk and entertaining anecdotes. For instance, when George W. Bush appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, he and Ms. Winfrey discussed the birth of his daughters, his favorite food, and other friendly topics. Candidates see these appearances as an excellent opportunity to showcase their personalities to less engaged and more impressionable citizens (Baum, 2005; Davis & Owen, 1998). In 2003 and 2004, a number of presidential hopefuls appeared on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*.

Most of the existing research into the effects of exposure to talk show programming on public opinion has focused on reactions to candidates' appearances on these shows. What needs further exploration is the effect of talk show programming on citizens when candidates are not present, which is the majority of the time. Throughout the course of a presidential campaign, candidates are frequently the subjects of a multitude of jokes made at their expense. In particular, late-night talk show hosts such as Leno, Letterman, and others are quick to turn any political missteps by candidates into entertaining punch lines. The tone, in other words, is more often than not unflattering (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003; Sarver, 2004).

A small body of research addresses the effect of this relentless roasting on late-night talk shows on viewers' evaluations of presidential candidates. Dannagal Young (2004a) found that exposure to Leno's and Letterman's jokes during the 2000 general election campaign had little direct impact on how viewers' perceived the candidates. Instead, the study identified partisanship and political knowledge as significant mediating factors that tempered the modest effect of jokes that characterized George W. Bush as a dimwitted frat boy and Al Gore as an unfeeling robot.

The lack of evidence directly linking exposure to humorously framed characterizations and perceptions of presidential candidates suggests that the effects are minimal. Although this may be true about late-night talk shows in general, we contend that not all late-night talk shows are the same, and some programs may have greater impacts on certain viewers than others. Several factors in particular point to the possibility that *The Daily Show* may have the potential to exert more influence on youth than other late-night talk shows. We now turn to a discussion of *The Daily Show* and its audience.

The Daily Show and Young Americans

The Daily Show is a late-night talk show hosted by Jon Stewart. The show airs on cable's Comedy Central at 11:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday; reruns are shown at various other times throughout the day. *The Daily Show* is styled as a fake news program and regularly pokes fun at mainstream news makers, especially politicians. It has become increasingly popular, with ratings in 2004 up by 22% from 2003 ("Jon Stewart Roasts Real News," 2004). The show won two Emmy Awards in 2004 (for outstanding variety, music, or comedy series and outstanding writing for a variety, music or comedy program).

Reflecting this popularity, a wide array of political powerhouses as well as presidential hopefuls have appeared on the show as guests. On Sep-

tember 16, 2003, John Edwards announced his candidacy on Stewart's show, making good on a promise that Stewart would be the first person he told about his presidential intentions. Other presidential hopefuls (Bob Kerrey, Dick Gephardt, Dennis Kucinich, and Joseph Lieberman) appeared in 2003; Howard Dean and Carol Moseley Braun appeared in January 2004; and Democratic candidate John Kerry appeared on August 24, 2004. As a result of the program's prominence, *The Daily Show* has been attracting an increasing amount of attention from journalists and scholars.[1]

There are several characteristics about the audience of *The Daily Show* worth noting. First, they are young. Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 years watch the program more than any other age group. Data from the Pew Research Center (2004b) show that almost half of those surveyed in this age group (47.7%) watch *The Daily Show* at least occasionally. The percentage declines precipitously as age increases.[2] Second, these same youth are relying less on mainstream political news sources such as network news, newspapers, and newsmagazines (Davis & Owen, 1998; Pew Research Center, 2004b). From 1994 to 2004, the 18- to 24-year-old age group spent 16 fewer minutes on average following news on a daily basis (35 as opposed to 51 minutes). A full 25% reported that they pay no attention at all to hard news. Significantly, only 23% of regular *Daily Show* viewers report that they followed "hard news" closely. Finally, although *The Daily Show* is not intended to be a legitimate news source, over half (54%) of young adults in this age group reported that they got at least some news about the 2004 presidential campaign from comedy programs such as *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live*. Only 15% of Americans over the age of 45 years reported learning something about the campaign from the same sources (Pew Research Center, 2004a).

The picture that emerges from these data is one in which youth are increasingly less likely to follow traditional hard news on a regular basis and, conversely, are more likely than older Americans to get at least some of their news from programs such as *The Daily Show*. Because young people are more impressionable (Sears, 1983) and thus more prone to any adverse effects *The Daily Show* might have, the political effects of *The Daily Show* are important to understand.

Theory and Hypotheses

Baum's research into the effects of soft news suggests that when candidates appear on talk shows, viewers are likely to evaluate them more positively. But candidate appearances, even during an election season, are rela-

tively rare. What is common, especially on late-night talk shows, is a barrage of jokes based on negative caricatures of candidates (Duerst, Koloen, & Peterson, 2001; Hess, 2001; Niven et al., 2003). *The Daily Show* is particularly harsh in this regard (Jones, 2005; Sarver, 2004). As the result, we expect that *Daily Show* viewers' evaluations of candidates will tend to be more negative.

A variety of factors affect citizens' perceptions and evaluations of candidates. Many of these evaluations center on personal attributes, for example, how well they are liked, how honest they are perceived to be, and whether they are trusted to do the right thing. Political comedy is largely focused on personal traits of public figures rather than policy, and the jokes tend to draw on preexisting negative stereotypes people have of these public figures (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2004; Niven et al., 2003; Young, 2004a).

Although it is possible that the barrage of negative jokes simply entertains the audience of *The Daily Show* without consequence, psychology research indicates that messages delivered with humor are both persuasive and memorable (Berg & Lippman, 2001; Lyttle, 2001). On the basis of this rationale, as well as youngsters' susceptibility to persuasion (Sears, 1986), we expect that exposure to *The Daily Show*'s campaign coverage will negatively influence evaluations of the presidential candidates.

Some studies further suggest that media effects tend to be stronger on the evaluations of lesser known candidates (Moy et al., 2004). And although Kerry was fairly well known by the time our experiment was conducted (fall 2004), few people are as well known as incumbent presidents. Therefore, we expect exposure to the show to negatively influence evaluations of the challenger (Kerry) more than President Bush.

Hypothesis 1: Young viewers' evaluations of presidential candidates will become more negative with exposure to campaign coverage on *The Daily Show.*

Hypothesis 2: Young viewers' evaluations of John Kerry will be more negative than those of George W. Bush with exposure to campaign coverage on *The Daily Show.*

Although most existing research on the political effects of late-night humor has focused primarily on candidate evaluations, there is reason to believe that the effects of *The Daily Show* go further. In addition to frequently poking fun at the candidates, *The Daily Show* makes a habit of ridiculing the electoral and political process as a whole (Jones, 2005). This portrayal has the potential to influence how young people perceive the overall effectiveness of the system. Research has illustrated that negatively framed political messages can create a more cynical public (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995;

Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), and we expect *The Daily Show* to have a similar effect on young viewers.

Additionally, we expect that the cynicism displayed toward the electoral process will spill over on to the news media. The modern mainstream media have become a widely recognized political institution (Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999). Their high visibility and perceived power opens the institution and its practices up to ridicule, which *The Daily Show* takes advantage of frequently. This is implicit in the show's "fake" newscast format but also explicit in its lampooning of mainstream journalists. We contend that the result for young viewers is a more cynical perspective of the news media's ability to fairly and accurately cover politics.

Hypothesis 3: Young viewers' cynicism toward the electoral system will increase with exposure to campaign coverage on *The Daily Show.*

Hypothesis 4: Young viewers' cynicism toward the news media will increase with exposure to campaign coverage on *The Daily Show.*

It could be argued that cynicism is healthy for a representative democracy. A less trusting public is not as likely to be bamboozled by political elites or the media. Recent research, however, has suggested that high levels of cynicism and distrust detract from democratic discourse and overall public interaction (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Hetherington, 2005; Putnam, 2000). If our findings on the effects of *The Daily Show* support our hypotheses, it should prompt researchers to revisit the influence of "soft news" on the inattentive public.

Research Design

To examine the effects of exposure to *The Daily Show* on young adults, we constructed a controlled experiment. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis from introductory-level courses in political science at a medium-sized public university. A common criticism of the use of college students as participants in controlled experiments is that they are unrepresentative of the population as a whole (Sears, 1986), but our concern is with college-aged Americans. Furthermore, the National Annenberg Election Survey (2004) of the audience of *The Daily Show* found that the most likely viewers of the show are of college age. Therefore, our findings are more generalizable to the relevant population. A total of 732 students participated in the experiment and were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions.[3]

The first group ($n = 245$) viewed a video clip of selected coverage of the two major presidential candidates and their campaigns on *The Daily Show.*

The clip was a compilation of several short segments on each candidate, lasting a little over 8 minutes in total. This approximates the amount of time that the "fake news" segment of the program devoted to the campaign on a fairly regular basis throughout the campaign season. The second group (n = 198) viewed a video clip of similar length and focus, but the content of this condition was segments from election coverage on *CBS Evening News*.[4] This clip was also composed of segments that focused equally on both candidates. However, unlike the humorous and sarcastic *Daily Show* clip, the *CBS Evening News* clip reflected what is considered mainstream television campaign coverage. Because our aim was to examine the effects of exposure to *The Daily Show* on young adults, the *CBS Evening News* clip provided a baseline for comparison between humorous and traditional television news. The third condition of the experiment contained no video stimulus; this group (n = 289) served as the control. The experiment was a posttest-only, control-group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Participants who watched *The Daily Show* or the *CBS Evening News* clip filled out a posttest questionnaire immediately afterward. Control-group participants completed the same questionnaire but watched no news clip. The experiment did not include a pretest.[5]

A common critique of experimental research is that laboratory conditions lack generalizability to the "real world" (Kinder & Palfrey, 1993).[6] The best remedy to this validity threat is to supplement the laboratory experiment with a more generalizable method of analysis (Green & Gerber, 2002). The posttest-only experimental design incorporates a more generalizable survey outside of the experimental stimuli by using the control group as a stand-alone cross-section of college undergraduates. The survey contained several measures of exposure to various media sources that could then be correlated with attitudinal variables. Our objective was to explore whether the experimental findings held outside of the laboratory.

To compare the posttest questionnaire results from the three groups, care was taken to maintain control across the conditions. This meant ensuring that the video clips were as similar as possible. Because *The Daily Show* is a mock television news program that purposefully models its format after national network news, this task was easier than we anticipated. In terms of format, both programs are anchor-based presentations and include reports from journalists on the campaign trail. The primary difference between them is that *The Daily Show* focuses on generating humor and sarcasm, whereas *CBS Evening News* focuses on presenting serious television news.

With respect to content, both clips devoted a fair amount of time to the horse race and strategy aspects of the campaign (a total of 2 minutes between the two clips). Beyond this, both display a similar approach to their coverage.

Table 1
***The Daily Show* and *CBS Evening News* Themes of George W. Bush and John Kerry**

	The Daily Show	Time	*CBS Evening News*	Time
Bush as	Incompetent (dim-witted, frat boy)	105 seconds	Incompetent (job loss and education)	70 seconds
	Political divider	24 seconds	Political divider	115 seconds
Kerry as	Exploiting "war hero" image	32 seconds	Exploiting "war hero" image	41 seconds
	Lacking in positive support	18 seconds	Lacking in positive support	20 seconds
	Incompetent campaigner	100 seconds	Incompetent campaigner	38 seconds
	Flip-flopper	15 seconds	Soft on terror	35 seconds

Note: *The Daily Show* clip lasted 7 minutes, 44 seconds; *CBS Evening News* clip lasted 8 minutes, 18 seconds. Both clips were compiled from programming that originally aired in the last week of August 2004.

Both clips focused on images of the candidates, their campaign activities, and their supporters or detractors.[7] Over these images, journalists or others offer commentary, which tended to accentuate the negative.

This too was expected. Only rarely are the images the news media generates completely positive; in fact, traditional campaign news (such as that presented on *CBS Evening News*) tends to be somewhat skeptical (Patterson, 1993). *The Daily Show*, like most political humor, centers on negative caricatures of the candidates in question (caricatures that build on the images that news media help create; Niven et al., 2003; Young, 2004a). Thus, we can say that the overall theme that drives much campaign coverage is exposing candidates' shortcomings (real or exaggerated). This was the case in both of the clips we used. The major difference between the two was *The Daily Show*'s inclusion of sarcasm and humor.

We were also careful to ensure that there was similarity in the topics between the clips. Table 1 illustrates that *The Daily Show* portrayed Bush as an incompetent, dimwitted fraternity boy and cavalier political divider. *CBS Evening News* also painted a portrait of the president as incompetent, using job loss and education as examples, and as a divider. There was adequate congruence between the two, especially between *The Daily Show*'s frame of dumb and rich fraternity guy and *CBS Evening News*'s frame of the president as incompetent. Kerry was portrayed on *The Daily Show* primarily as an awkward (inept) campaigner, and some mention was made of the "flip-flop" issue. *CBS Evening News* raised the issue of Kerry being soft on terror and

painted him as an inept campaigner. Both clips noted that Kerry lacked positive support (his support was primarily anti-Bush) and were critical of how he exploited his war hero image.

Findings

The Experiment

Before examining the effects of exposure to *The Daily Show*, a manipulation check of the experimental stimulus is warranted. This test provides verification that participants experienced the intended effect, in this case, entertainment via *The Daily Show*'s humor. We included an item in the posttest survey that asked participants to agree or disagree with the statement "I enjoyed watching the video clip today." On a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), participants who watched *The Daily Show* registered an average score of 4.54, indicating a high level of overall enjoyment. Participants who watched *CBS Evening News* had an average score of 3.86. The difference between these two groups was significant ($p < .001$).

The evaluation variable for Bush and Kerry was an additive index of several survey items in which respondents were asked to rate how well a number of personality attributes described each candidate (1 = *not well at all*, 2 = *not too well*, 3 = *quite well*, 4 = *extremely well*). These attributes were (a) "really cares about people like me," (b) "honest," (c) "inspiring," (d) "knowledgeable," (e) "decisive," (f) "provides strong leadership," and (g) "competent." Higher index scores represent more positive evaluations of the candidates.[8] See Table 2 for a summary of this index item as well as the control variables used in our model. Table 3 displays ordinary least squares results when candidate evaluations are regressed against indicators of exposure to *The Daily Show* and *CBS Evening News* (1 = yes, 0 = no; the control group is the omitted category); race, gender, party identification, and party intensity are the control variables.

As Table 3 shows, evaluations for Bush and Kerry are negatively associated with exposure to *The Daily Show*. This association is not significant for Bush and only marginally significant for Kerry ($p < .10$). However, when the two indices are combined to create a comprehensive measure of overall candidate evaluation, exposure to *The Daily Show* has a significant negative effect ($p < .05$), even when controlling for party identification, party intensity,[9] and race.[10] Exposure to the *CBS Evening News* clip, on the other hand, did not significantly influence evaluations of either candidate. On the basis of these findings, we can accept our hypothesis that exposure to *The Daily Show* lowers overall candidate evaluations (Hypothesis 1). We can also accept our

Table 2
Demographic and Political Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Percentage
Sex	
Male	45.63
Female	54.23
Race	
White	83.78
Black	11.14
Non-White Hispanic	0.23
Asian	1.14
Other	3.39
Mean age	19.38 (*SD* = 2.93)
Party identification	
Strong Democrat	4.26
Democrat	26.00
Independent/no preference	28.20
Republican	27.79
Strong Republican	13.62
Party intensity (PID folded)	
Weak	28.24
Moderate	53.86
Strong	17.91
Mean overall George W. Bush evaluation (7-28 scale)	21.35 (*SD* = 7.22)
Mean overall John Kerry evaluation (7-28 scale)	18.88 (*SD* = 5.78)
Mean overall candidate evaluations (14-56 scale)	40.24 (*SD* = 5.61)

Note: PID = party identification.

second hypothesis that *The Daily Show* lowers evaluations of the lesser known candidates (Kerry) more than those who are well known (President Bush). Of course, it needs to be noted that although the effects of exposure to *The Daily Show* are statistically significant and discernable, the impact is modest. However, in the context of candidate evaluations, we would argue this effect still has importance given that the impact still maintains significance even when powerful predictors such as party identification are controlled.

To test the effects of *The Daily Show* exposure on cynicism toward the electoral system and the news media, we regressed three separate survey items against the same predictors used in Table 3. These results are reported in Table 4. Because the dependent variables in these models are ordinal measures, the analysis was conducted using ordered probit. The first column of Table 4 demonstrates the effect of the predictors on the participants' faith in

Table 3
Candidate Evaluations by Experimental Condition

Variable	George W. Bush Evaluations	John Kerry Evaluations	Overall Candidate Evaluations
The Daily Show condition	–0.32 (0.49)	–0.56 (0.42)*	–0.89 (0.50)**
CBS Evening News condition	0.43 (0.50)	–0.01 (0.45)	0.41 (0.53)
Race (1 = White, 0 = non-White)	2.79 (0.57)***	–1.37 (0.52)***	1.47 (0.62)***
Male	–0.82 (0.40)**	0.12 (0.36)	–0.71 (0.43)*
Republican (1 = *strong Democrat*, 5 = *strong Republican*)	4.24 (0.20)***	–3.06 (0.18)***	1.18 (0.21)***
Party intensity (1 = *weak*, 3 = *strong*)	0.74 (0.31)***	–0.20 (0.28)	0.56 (0.33)**
Constant	4.44 (0.82)***	30.30 (0.75)***	34.64 (0.89)***
Adjusted R^2	.52	.38	.09
n	657	649	649

Note: All estimates are unstandardized ordinary least squares coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables (evaluations) were based on an additive index of several measures.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

Table 4
Perceptions of Electoral System, Media, and Internal Efficacy by Experimental Condition

Variable	Faith in Electoral System	Trust News Media	Rating News Media's Political Coverage	Internal Efficacy
The Daily Show condition	–.16 (.10)**	–.26 (.10)***	–.14 (.10)*	.23 (.10)***
CBS Evening News condition	.07 (.10)	–.11 (.10)	.03 (.11)	.09 (.10)
Race	.38 (.12)***	.13 (.12)	.01 (.12)	.05 (.12)
Male	.06 (.08)	–.02 (.08)	–.28 (.09)***	.55 (.08)***
Republican	.31 (.04)***	–.12 (.04)***	–.12 (.04)***	–.07 (.04)*
Party intensity	.31 (.06)***	.11 (.06)**	.07 (.07)	.24 (.07)***
α 1	0.29	–1.16	–1.56	–0.71
α 2	1.21	–0.12	–.48	0.49
α 3	1.78	0.28	1.30	0.77
α 4	3.03	1.36	—	1.48
Log likelihood	–936.68	–988.67	–741.44	–984.26
$\chi^2(6)$	139.43***	15.09**	24.35***	65.09***
n	674	674	669	674

Note: All estimates are ordered probit coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

the electoral system. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "I have faith in the U.S. electoral system" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). This variable was used as a measure of cynicism toward the electoral process (Hypothesis 3), because the absence of trust is central to cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 141), and less faith is an indicator of diminished trust. The ordered probit estimates show that participants exposed to *The Daily Show* condition were significantly less likely to agree with the statement. When holding all other variables in the model constant, exposure to *The Daily Show* caused a 23% increase in the probability that a participant would disagree that he or she has faith in the electoral system. This finding confirms our third hypothesis. No such significant relationship existed for those who watched election coverage on *CBS Evening News*.

Our fourth hypothesis states that exposure to *The Daily Show* will increase cynicism toward the news media. We used two indicators to measure this concept (see columns 2 and 3 in Table 4). The first variable is trust in the news media. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "I trust the news media to cover political events fairly and accurately" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The second variable is a rating score of the news media's overall performance in covering politics. The survey item asked, "Overall, how would you rate the performance of the media in covering politics in America?" (1 = *poor*, 2 = *only fair*, 3 = *good*, 4 = *excellent*). The results for both variables illustrate that *The Daily Show* has a negative influence on trust and overall ratings of the news media. Trust in the media was especially influenced by exposure to *The Daily Show*. Holding all other variables in the model constant, those who did not see the Stewart clip had a .48 probability of disagreeing with the statement that they trust the media. Those who saw the Stewart clip, on the other hand, had a .59 probability of disagreeing, a substantial effect indeed. Taken as a whole, these findings confirm our fourth hypothesis. Exposure to *The Daily Show* does indeed seem to generate increased cynicism toward the news media. Again, this relationship did not exist among participants exposed to *CBS Evening News*.

Cynicism is a concept that reflects low external efficacy (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). External efficacy refers to "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands" (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei 1991, pp. 1407-1408). Our experimental results outlined in the first three columns of Table 4 demonstrate that external efficacy is lower among young Americans who are exposed to doses of political humor via *The Daily Show*. Although we hypothesized only about external efficacy in this regard, our posttest questionnaire did include a variable that measured

internal efficacy. *Internal efficacy* refers to "beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics" (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1407).

Although we had no theoretical reason to believe that internal efficacy would shift as a result of exposure to *The Daily Show*, our findings reported in column 4 of Table 4 suggest otherwise. This survey item asked participants to agree or disagree with the statement "Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on" (1 = *strongly agree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*; higher values indicate higher internal efficacy). The results indicate that the effect on internal efficacy is positive for *The Daily Show* and suggests that even though *The Daily Show* generates cynicism toward the media and the electoral process, it simultaneously makes young viewers more confident about their own ability to understand politics. With the other variables in the model held constant, those not in the *Daily Show* condition had a .47 probability of agreeing that politics was confusing to them, whereas those in the condition had a .38 probability of agreeing. This effect was exclusive to the *Daily Show* condition. Our post hoc reasoning behind this relationship is that much of *The Daily Show*'s coverage simplifies politics for its audience in a humorous manner. The complexities of politics are exposed as a function of incompetent leaders, not an incompetent public. Political humor also simplifies political reality because confusing counterarguments on issues and events are largely ignored (Lyttle, 2001; Young, 2004b). Finally, from a use and gratification perspective (see Graber, 2002, p. 203), participants may feel validated in that they "get" Jon Stewart's jokes. We discuss these implications in further detail in the conclusion.

Although the experimental results in Tables 3 and 4 paint a fairly convincing picture about the effects of brief exposure to *The Daily Show*, prior exposure to the program outside of the laboratory is a possible confounding factor. Certainly, it can be expected that participants with frequent prior exposure to *The Daily Show* outside the laboratory would be less susceptible to the effects of a short video clip. Those less familiar with the program may offer a more valid view of the attitudinal effects of the program. An item in the posttest survey allows the opportunity to assess this effect. Specifically, all participants were asked to report how often they watch *The Daily Show* (*never*, *hardly ever*, *sometimes*, or *regularly*). When the sample is broken up into *The Daily Show* viewers (*regularly* or *sometimes*) and nonviewers (*hardly ever* or *never*), the effects of the experimental stimuli change. As Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate, participants who had little or no previous exposure to the show were affected more significantly than those who watch the

Table 5
Candidate Evaluations by Experimental Condition, Non–*The Daily Show* and *The Daily Show* Viewers

	Bush		Kerry		Overall	
Variable	Nonviewers	Viewers	Nonviewers	Viewers	Nonviewers	Viewers
The Daily Show condition	–0.73 (0.65)	0.40 (0.71)	–1.34 (0.63)**	0.47 (0.60)	–2.15 (0.71)***	0.89 (0.74)
CBS Evening News condition	0.15 (0.64)	1.02 (0.80)	–0.18 (0.61)	0.59 (0.67)	–0.03 (0.69)	1.59 (0.84)**
Race	3.52 (0.71)***	2.01 (1.01)**	–1.01 (0.69)*	–2.03 (0.85)***	2.51 (0.77)***	–0.01 (1.06)
Male	–0.30 (0.58)	–0.82 (0.62)*	0.73 (0.56)*	–0.05 (0.52)	0.37 (0.63)	–0.91 (0.65)*
Republican	4.00 (0.29)***	4.31 (0.28)***	–3.03 (0.28)***	–3.20 (0.24)***	1.00 (0.31)***	1.12 (0.30)***
Party intensity	0.63 (0.43)	0.83 (0.44)**	–0.27 (0.41)	–0.20 (0.37)	0.42 (0.47)	0.60 (0.47)
Constant	5.12 (1.05)***	4.00 (1.39)***	30.32 (1.02)***	30.62 (1.17)***	35.23 (1.15)***	34.69 (1.46)***
Adjusted R^2	.54	.49	.36	.42	.13	.06
n	342	315	336	313	336	313

Note: Race was coded 1 = White, 0 = non-White); Republican was coded 1 = *strong Democrat* to 5 = *strong Republican*; party intensity was coded 1 = *weak* to 3 = *strong*. All estimates are unstandardized ordinary least squares coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables (evaluations) were based on an additive index of several measures.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

Table 6
Perceptions of Electoral System, Media, and Internal Efficacy by Experimental Condition (non–*The Daily Show* viewers)

	Faith in Electoral System		Trust News Media		Rating News Media Political Coverage		Internal Efficacy	
Variable	Nonviewers	Viewers	Nonviewers	Viewers	Nonviewers	Viewers	Nonviewers	Viewers
The Daily Show condition	–.26 (.41)**	–.09 (.14)	–.32 (.14)**	–.14 (.14)	–.38 (.15)***	.07 (.15)	.35 (.14)***	.04 (.14)
CBS Evening News condition	.06 (.14)	.11 (.16)	–.16 (.14)	.01 (.16)	–.02 (.14)	.14 (.16)	.08 (.14)	.04 (.16)
Race	.48 (.15)***	.36 (.20)**	.06 (.15)	.22 (.20)	.01 (.16)	.03 (.21)	–.12 (.15)	.26 (.20)
Male	.20 (.13)*	–.02 (.12)	–.07 (.13)	.07 (.12)	–.09 (.13)	–.42 (.13)***	.53 (.13)***	.44 (.13)***
Republican	.26 (.06)***	.34 (.06)***	–.05 (.06)	–.19 (.06)***	–.15 (.07)**	–.11 (.06)**	–.04 (.06)	–.06 (.06)
Party intensity	.19 (.09)**	.41 (.09)***	.05 (.09)	.18 (.09)**	.09 (.10)	.06 (.09)	.27 (.09)***	.22 (.09)***
α 1	–0.05	0.62	–1.17	–1.04	–1.71	–1.46	–0.62	–0.77
α 2	0.85	1.56	–0.10	–0.04	–0.62	–0.39	0.55	0.49
α 3	1.49	2.07	0.20	0.48	1.30	1.27	0.87	0.74
α 4	2.80	3.27	1.31	1.56	—	—	1.64	1.40
Log likelihood	–481.37	–449.88	–509.41	–471.78	–369.50	–366.74	–515.57	–462.63
$\chi^2(6)$	70.80***	75.10***	6.14	13.87**	13.78**	16.06**	35.66***	19.77***
n	352	322	352	322	348	321	352	322

Note: All estimates are ordered probit coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

program more often. For nonwatchers, the negative effects on candidate evaluation, efficacy, and support for the media demonstrated in the previous models from Tables 3 and 4 are intensified.[11]

The findings in Tables 5 and 6 are not particularly surprising. Any potential that *The Daily Show* had to influence the attitudes of the show's regular viewers would have already occurred as a result of prior experience. However, Table 5 also illustrates that regular viewers of *The Daily Show* registered an increase in overall candidate evaluations after exposure to the *CBS Evening News* condition. This could be the result of preexisting cynicism on the part of frequent *Daily Show* viewers. In seeing the candidates outside of the context of the show's generally negative approach to coverage, these viewers might positively adjust their evaluations of the candidates. However, to believe this, we also must believe that *Daily Shows* viewers never, as a rule, see coverage of the candidates from any source other than *The Daily Show*. This is, in short, not the case. We already know that these viewers are, on the whole, more interested and educated than their counterparts (National Annenberg Election Survey, 2004). And considering that regular viewers were not significantly influenced in a similar manner with regard to the other (six) dependent variables, this explanation does not seem likely.

Thus, the overall finding from our experiment is that in the laboratory, *The Daily Show*'s influence on opinion is limited primarily to those who hardly ever watch the program. This finding is still relevant inasmuch as it demonstrates the potential of *The Daily Show* to influence new viewers' perceptions of political leaders and the system as a whole. Moreover, it also leaves open the possibility that other forms of political humor may have a similar effect. We now turn to a discussion of whether this effect holds outside of the laboratory.

The Survey

The benefit of experimental analysis is that causal connections can be established (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). However, a common criticism of experimental analysis is its lack of real-world applicability, because stimuli are administered in a sterile environment that lacks the mundaneness of everyday life. Another criticism is that the effects of the experimental stimuli on participants may be short lived, and results uncovered in a posttest survey tend to wash out after a short duration of time (Kinder & Palfrey, 1993). These concerns are especially valid in an experiment on media effects, but we have addressed them by incorporating an analysis of cross-sectional survey data. As noted above, our posttest-only, control-group design provided the opportunity for a stand-alone survey among the control group. The

Table 7
Candidate Evaluations by Media Exposure (control group only)

Variable	Bush Evaluations	Kerry Evaluations	Overall Candidate Evaluations
Leno and/or Letterman	0.25 (0.38)	–0.23(0.34)	0.01(0.41)
TV tabloids	–0.03 (0.39)	0.10(0.35)	0.07(0.42)
Talk radio	–0.25 (0.35)	0.34(0.32)	0.11(0.38)
The O'Reilly Factor	0.72(0.35)**	–0.39(0.31)	0.32(0.38)
The Daily Show	–0.56 (0.32)**	–0.73(0.29)***	–1.27(0.35)***
Network evening news	–0.09 (0.45)	0.18(0.40)	0.09(0.49)
Local evening news	–0.07 (0.50)	0.22 (0.45)	0.17 (0.55)
Daily newspaper	–0.73 (0.41)**	–0.37 (0.36)	–1.07 (0.44)***
Newsmagazines	–0.02 (0.39)	0.30 (0.35)	0.27 (0.42)
Race	2.31 (0.81)***	–1.28 (0.73)**	1.13 (0.88)
Male	–0.45 (0.72)	1.18 (0.64)**	0.68 (0.78)
Republican	4.52 (0.31)***	–2.95 (0.29)***	1.56 (0.34)***
Constant	7.63 (1.98)***	30.04 (1.87)***	37.41 (2.23)***
Adjusted R^2	.56	.39	.16
n	265	262	262

Note: All estimates are ordinary least squares coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

same dependent variables used above were regressed against media exposure items.

Table 7 lists the relationships between several media sources and evaluations of Kerry and President Bush for the control group only. The media exposure variables were measured by asking respondents to report how often they watched or read a particular source (1 = *never*, 2 = *hardly ever*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *regularly*).[12] We also included controls for race, gender, and party identification. As the results show, there is a significant negative relationship between the frequency of watching *The Daily Show* and evaluations of both candidates, and the relationship is stronger than for evaluations of Kerry and Bush individually. In fact, the coefficient for overall evaluations (–1.27) indicates that regular viewers of *The Daily Show* have, on average, a score of approximately 4 points less than individuals who never watch the show when controlling for the other variables in the model. These findings further substantiate our experimental confirmation of Hypotheses 1 and 2.

As Table 7 demonstrates, no other variables in the model have a significant effect on overall candidate evaluations except for reading the newspaper. Although the effect of exposure to *The Daily Show* is stronger than that

Table 8
Faith in Electoral System and Trust in Media (control group only)

Variable	Faith in Electoral System	Trust News Media	Rating News Media's Political Coverage	Internal Efficacy
Leno and/or Letterman	.16 (.08)**	–.01 (.08)	.02 (.09)	.02 (.08)
TV tabloids	–.01 (.08)	.06 (.08)	.23 (.09)***	–.13 (.08)*
Talk radio	.03 (.07)	–.00 (.07)	.12 (.08)*	.07 (.08)
The O'Reilly Factor	.01 (.08)	–.03 (.07)	.10 (.08)*	.20 (.08)***
The Daily Show	–.09 (.07)*	–.04 (.07)	–.09 (.07)*	.13 (.07)**
Network evening news	–.07 (.10)	–.00 (.10)	–.06 (.10)	.10 (.10)
Local evening news	–.03 (.11)	.27 (.11)***	.22 (.11)**	–.06 (.11)
Daily newspaper	–.04 (.09)	–.11 (.09)	.00 (.09)	.08 (.09)
Newsmagazines	.05 (.08)	–.05 (.08)	–.07 (.09)	.02 (.08)
Race	.16 (.17)	.00 (.17)	–.10 (.19)	–.24 (.17)*
Male	.14 (.15)	.10 (.15)	–.13 (.16)	.43 (.15)***
Republican	.48 (.07)***	.05 (.07)	–.01 (.07)	.04 (.07)
α 1	–.01	–.56	–.26	–.20
α 2	.91	.49	.80	.97
α 3	1.57	.87	2.90	1.36
α 4	2.88	1.99	—	2.13
Log likelihood	–369.40	–399.47	–276.11	–396.04
$\chi^2(12)$	75.60***	14.46	30.54***	52.02***
n	274	274	271	274

Note: All estimates are ordered probit coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

of reading the newspaper, it should still be noted that frequent newspaper readers do have lower overall candidate evaluations than nonreaders. This result may raise some eyebrows and lead one to question whether a little skepticism is a good thing, especially if it is displayed by those who read the daily newspaper with frequency. Although this certainly may be the case, we would also point to the results in Table 8, which demonstrate that newspaper readers do not display cynicism toward the system and the media in the same manner as watchers of *The Daily Show*. Again, this suggests that Jon Stewart may have a unique effect on young viewers.

With regard to the impact on overall candidate evaluations, no television media source in the model follows the same trend as *The Daily Show*. A particular point of interest in these findings is that watching *The Daily Show* cor-

relates much differently with overall candidate evaluations than watching other late-night talk shows such as *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* or *The Late Show With David Letterman*. It can be seen from Table 7 that there is no relationship between exposure to Leno and/or Letterman and evaluations of either candidate. In light of the significant effects of *The Daily Show*, our null findings regarding Leno and Letterman again suggest that the effect of *The Daily Show*'s humor on youth is somewhat unique. Another noteworthy finding is that *The O'Reilly Factor* had no discernable influence on overall candidate evaluations. This is surprising given the program's critical tone. Less surprising, given the fact that Bill O'Reilly was sharply critical of Kerry, was the fact that the show's viewers recorded higher evaluations of President Bush.

Table 8 illustrates how media exposure relates to faith in the electoral system, trust in the news media, ratings of the news media's political coverage, and internal efficacy. Again, this analysis is limited to the control group only and mostly confirms the experimental results. The relationships are weaker, but here again, we see that exposure to *The Daily Show* negatively correlates with faith in the electoral system and assessments of the news media's political coverage. The statistical significance is more marginal, and the effect is not significant on trust in the news media. The overall trend uncovered in the experiment, however, is again confirmed by the survey data. Also, these findings mirror that of the experiment with regard to internal efficacy. Frequent viewers of *The Daily Show* registered higher levels of internal efficacy. *The O'Reilly Factor* was the only other media exposure variable to positively relate to internal efficacy.

Another noteworthy finding in Table 8 is that exposure to Leno or Letterman failed to negatively correlate with cynicism. In fact, the results indicate that those who watch Leno or Letterman have higher faith in the electoral system. This further suggests that *The Daily Show*'s effect on young people in comparison with its late-night counterparts is different. Overall, the findings in Table 8 show that for young people, no other news source drives cynicism toward the candidates and the political system more than *The Daily Show*.

National Sample

The drawback of the survey findings discussed above is that the sample is not randomly selected from the national population. Unfortunately, there is no recent national survey that contains all of the variables relevant to our research. The Pew Research Center occasionally conducts surveys that ask

Table 9
Cynicism Toward the News Media

	Cynicism Toward Media (1 = *low*, 4 = *highest*)	
Variable	18- to 25-Year-Olds	Older Than 25 Years
Watch *The Daily Show*	.14 (.08)**	–.03 (.04)
Regularly read the newspaper (1 = yes, 0 = no)	.11 (.18)	–.09 (.07)*
Watch network TV news (1 = *never*, 4 = *regularly*)	.04 (.08)	–.07 (.03)**
Race (1 = White, 0 = non–White)	.21 (.20)	.10 (.09)
Male	.13 (.18)	.02 (.06)
Education	–.07 (.06)	.01 (.02)
Republican (1 = *strong Democrat*, 5 = *strong Republican*)	–.03 (.06)	.07 (.02)***
α 1	–0.57	–1.76
α 2	0.66	–0.49
α 3	1.75	0.65
Log likelihood	–202.43	–1,467.02
$\chi^2(7)$	8.18	31.49
n	164	1,200

Source: Data from Pew Research Center (2004b).
Note: All estimates are ordered probit coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

individuals how much they watch *The Daily Show*, but these surveys lack political efficacy and leadership support measures items (beyond simple presidential approval-disapproval measures). However, a survey conducted in the spring of 2004 included a measure of cynicism toward the media that closely resembled a dependent variable used in our analysis. Specifically, respondents were asked to disagree or agree with the statement "I often don't trust what news organizations are saying" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Higher agreement with this statement is an indicator of cynicism toward the news media.

This gave us the opportunity to test one of our findings on an admittedly small (n = 164) national sample of youth. Table 9 displays the results of an ordered probit analysis in which our indicator of cynicism toward the news media was regressed on several predictors, including exposure to *The Daily Show*. The findings indicate that even when controlling for other exposure to other media sources, race, gender, education, and party identification, increased exposure to *The Daily Show* is significantly related to cynicism ($p <$ .05) for young adults. The results further illustrate that for the older popula-

tion, cynicism toward the news media is not affected by exposure to *The Daily Show*. These results buttress some of the evidence that emerged from our experiment. Furthermore, they suggest that the effect of *The Daily Show* may be limited to youth, its primary audience.

Conclusion

On October 15, 2004, just a few weeks after our experimental analysis was completed, Jon Stewart appeared as a guest on CNN's hard-hitting debate show *Crossfire*. During his appearance, Stewart was quite critical of the influence that shows such as *Crossfire* had on the American public:

> Stewart: In many ways, it's funny. And I made a special effort to come on the show today, because I have privately, amongst my friends and also in occasional newspapers and television shows, mentioned this show [*Crossfire*] as being bad. . . . And I wanted to—I felt that wasn't fair and I should come here and tell you that I don't—it's not so much that it's bad, as it's hurting America. So I wanted to come here today and say . . . Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop hurting America. . . . What you do is partisan hackery. . . . You have a responsibility to the public discourse, and you fail miserably.
> Tucker Carlson [*Crossfire* cohost]: Wait. I thought you were going to be funny. Come on. Be funny.
> Stewart: No. No. I'm not going to be your monkey.

Jon Stewart is not alone in his criticism of high-octane programs such as *Crossfire*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, or *Hannity and Combs*. Previous research has confirmed that high-conflict programs do negatively influence public support for politicians and political parties, in spite of the fact that the public enjoys watching (Forgette & Morris, 2003; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Our findings, however, suggest that Jon Stewart should not be so quick to cast stones. Although viewers of *The Daily Show* have slightly higher levels of political knowledge than nonviewers (National Annenberg Election Survey, 2004), there are some detrimental effects as well. Our findings suggest that exposure to *The Daily Show*'s brand of political humor influenced young Americans by lowering support for both presidential candidates and increasing cynicism. The experiment results confirmed a causal connection, and the cross-sectional survey data illustrated that the relationship holds up outside the experimental setting. Our analysis of Pew Research Center national survey data further support these findings.

Our research has several implications. First, we have illustrated that young adults' perceptions of presidential candidates, especially those of lesser

known candidates, are diminished as a result of exposure to *The Daily Show*. This latter finding is not unexpected, because attitudes toward President Bush were fairly solidified and were less likely to be affected by humor. But it does have significance for 2008, when there will be no incumbent in the race and a high probability that the sitting vice president will not run. Therefore, the field of presidential candidates is likely to be constituted of individuals who are largely unknown to the public. If young Americans learn about these candidates via Jon Stewart, it is possible that unfavorable perceptions of both parties' nominees could form. This would have the effect of lowering trust in national leaders. Moreover, it may increase the importance of having high name recognition in the primary season, because lesser-known candidates would enjoy less support. Ultimately, negative perceptions of candidates could have participation implications by keeping more youth from the polls.

Second, the evidence presented in this study qualifies previous arguments that soft news adds to democratic discourse (Baum, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). We do not dispute Baum's contention that soft news contributes to incidental political learning among the inattentive public. With respect to their effects, however, all variants of soft news are not created equal. In particular, our findings illustrate that *The Daily Show*'s effect on political efficacy is mixed. To begin with, exposure to the show lowered trust in the media and the electoral process. This may be the result of Stewart's tendency to highlight the absurdities of the political world. Relatedly, we found that exposure to *The Daily Show* increased internal efficacy by raising viewers' perception that the complex world of politics was understandable. Stewart's style of humor paints the complexities of politics as a function of the absurdity and incompetence of political elites, thus leading viewers to blame any lack of understanding not on themselves but on those who run the system. In presenting politics as the theater of the absurd, Stewart seemingly simplifies it.

Both of these finding about political efficacy have implications for political participation that need to be explored further. We have demonstrated that there are attitudinal effects to exposure to *The Daily Show*, but what of behavioral effects? Increased internal efficacy might, all other things being equal, contribute to greater participation. Citizens who understand politics are more likely to participate than those who do not. Moreover, the increased cynicism associated with decreased external efficacy may contribute to an actively critical orientation toward politics. This may translate into better citizenship, because a little skepticism toward the political system could be considered healthy for democracy. However, decreased external efficacy may dampen participation among an already cynical audience (young adults) by contrib-

uting to a sense of alienation from the political process.[13] And it has been demonstrated that lowered trust can perpetuate a more dysfunctional political system (Hetherington, 2005; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

Future studies should explore the participation strand by going outside the lab to conduct panel studies of young adults during the course of an election campaign. It would also be beneficial to expand the study to older Americans as well, although our preliminary results indicate that the effects of exposure to *The Daily Show* may be unique to young adults (see Table 9). *The Daily Show*'s popularity and influence during the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections were exceptional, and it is likely to be repeated and mimicked in 2008. Understanding how the attitudes and behavior of young Americans change throughout months of exposure to *The Daily Show* and other similar programming has become increasingly important.

Appendix
Survey Questions

The candidate evaluation questions were based on the following model: "Does the phrase 'really cares about people like me' describe George W. Bush extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?" In subsequent questions, the phrase "really cares about people like me" was replaced with the word or phrase "honest," "inspiring," "knowledgeable," "decisive," "provides strong leadership," and "competent." Each question had both Bush and Kerry versions, and the order of candidates' names was reversed in half of the surveys. Respondents' choices were coded as follows: 1 = *not well at all*, 2 = *not too well*, 3 = *quite well*, and 4 = *extremely well*.

Media usage questions were based on the following model: "Directions: For each of the following, please indicate if you watch or listen to it regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never." "Watch late night TV shows such as David Letterman and Jay Leno."

Subsequent questions asked about respondents' viewing, listening, or reading habits for "TV shows such as *Entertainment Tonight* or *Access Hollywood*," "talk radio shows," "*The O'Reilly Factor* with Bill O'Reilly," "*The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*," "the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC or NBC. This is different from local news shows about the area where you live," "the local news about your viewing area which usually comes on before the national news in the evening and again later at night," "daily newspaper," and "news magazines such as *Time*, *U.S. News*, or *Newsweek*." Respondents' choices were coded as follows: 1 = *never*, 2 = *hardly ever*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *regularly*.

Notes

1. In late 2003, Stewart was on the cover of *Newsweek*, cited as one of the most powerful players in the 2004 presidential election. In early 2004, CBS News noted that "regardless of who winds up on top in the upcoming election, one of the biggest winners so far has been Jon Stewart. He seems to be everywhere" ("Jon Stewart Roasts Real News," 2004).

2. For example, only 21% of 35- to 44-year-olds watch at least occasionally, and only 17% of people over the age of 54 years watch at the same rate (Pew Research Center, 2004b).

3. Students participated in the experiment on a voluntary basis. Participants were informed that we were interested in understanding college students' political attitudes and beliefs. Specifically, administrators used a script and told participants, "As part of a research project, we [the administrators of the experiment] are conducting a brief survey of news habits and political attitudes of college students." Participants were told that their participation was strictly voluntary and that their responses on the posttest survey were confidential. For the classes that served as the control group, the survey was then administered. The classes that were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions were told, "Before we administer the survey, we would like to show you a brief clip of some television discussion of the ongoing presidential campaign. This clip will last less than 10 minutes."

The experiment was administered during the height of the 2004 general election campaign, between Monday, September 20, and Thursday, September 23. This was almost 3 weeks after the close of the Republican National Convention and a week before the first debate between John Kerry and George W. Bush.

The random assignment of participants was done by classroom rather than by individual. This approach was used because of practical considerations in administering the experiment in an efficient and timely manner. Although the random assignment of entire classes to conditions rather than individuals could lead to significant differences between experimental groups separate from exposure to the stimulus, post hoc differences-of-means tests across each of the classes used in this experiment found no statistically significant differences with regard to the variables of interest at $p < .10$ (Bonferroni post hoc test for multiple-group comparison).

4. Because the major national network news programs follow the same model, any of the three major broadcast providers could have been used. CBS was chosen randomly over NBC and ABC to serve as a representation of this format.

5. Although a classic experimental design includes pretest and posttest surveys, a posttest-only, control-group design does not threaten validity. Participants exposed to the experimental stimuli can be compared with the control group, and significant differences between groups can be legitimately attributed to the manipulation, provided random assignment has taken place. In fact, the lack of a pretest can strengthen the validity of an experiment because the participants are not biased by the introduction of the survey items in a pretest before the stimulus is introduced (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

6. The degree of experimental realism in this experiment was quite high, given that we used actual clips from television broadcasts. The degree of mundane realism, however, was not as high. Certainly, the environment of our experiment lacked a real-world element, because participants watched the clips in college classrooms. Although mundane realism is an important consideration in experimental design, it is secondary to concerns regarding experimental realism and control over the environment because low mundane realism is not a threat to internal validity (Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990; Kinder & Palfrey, 1993).

7. Because our dependent variable was non-policy-related candidate evaluations, we minimized any policy reference in compiling our clips. There was virtually no issue content in *The*

Daily Show clip, whereas the *CBS Evening News* clip featured only about 70 seconds worth (about 14%), focused mainly on the economy.

8. See the appendix for exact question wording. The correlation between these items warranted combination into an index measure of support for each candidate. This was confirmed by a principal-components factor analysis. Each survey item significantly loaded on a single dimension, with a factor score no lower than .44 (eigenvalue = 7.47).

9. When including both party identification and party intensity in the model, there is the concern of multicollinearity. The correlation between party identification and party intensity is moderately weak (.28). However, a variance inflation factor test did not indicate problematic levels of multicollinearity. Thus, both indicators were kept in the experimental model.

10. Theoretically, random assignment controls for all extraneous variables, thus eliminating the need for multivariate models with control variables. However, the random assignment of classes (as opposed to individuals) to experimental conditions prompts the need for a more nuanced model with controls. All statistically significant effects of exposure to *The Daily Show* revealed in our multivariate models were also significant at the corresponding level when a difference-of-means test was conducted between participants in the *Daily Show* condition versus the control group.

11. A second possible confounding factor on candidate evaluations is party identification, which we included as a control variable. However, given *The Daily Show*'s tendency to frequently criticize President Bush as well as the war in Iraq (Jones, 2005), it is possible that party identification and party intensity might significantly interact with exposure to *The Daily Show*. Although the results are not listed, we did interact party identification and party intensity separately with exposure to *The Daily Show* in the models predicting candidate evaluations. The results indicate that intense partisans are not negatively influenced by the stimuli, and Republicans are marginally more negatively affected by the stimuli in terms of overall candidate evaluations, but this relationship is only marginally significant ($p < .10$). These interactions, however, did not alter the direct effect of exposure to *The Daily Show* listed in Table 5 and thus were excluded from the model to avoid multicollinearity complications.

12. See the appendix for question wording.

13. Here, there is no consensus in the literature. There is a body of work that suggests that lower efficacy (or trust) may actually serve to increase participation (Levi & Stoker, 2000, pp. 486-487).

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