Satirical Political Media and Youth
Political Participation: A *Look at The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and The Colbert Report

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**Introduction**

Young people today are generally politically apathetic, and the trend for their participation in politics is a negative one. However, in the recent past, access to all kinds of political media has been booming and ever increasing in the United States. According to some theories this should prompt an increase in young people’s participation in politics. My research focuses on the relationship between *satirical political media* and its’ effects on the participation rates of younger generations that watch it. As such, my research addresses a gap in the literature on the link between information and participation by exploring whether or not the young people watching these shows (specifically IU undergraduates) are more likely to participate in politics. My empirical study focuses on two cases, participation in the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” and Indiana University students’ consumption of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and the *Colbert Report*.

My argument proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the scholarly arguments about the determinants of youth participation in politics, highlighting the theories of media effects as well as the advent of satirical political media. The literature review also addresses auxiliary theories that pertain to the factors that influence political participation in politics. The next section of this thesis will outline my research design. Section three will offer an in depth analysis of the collected data. The next section (four) will present the results of this research, as well as address the problems with the data itself. The final section will assess the findings in light of existing theories and add some qualitative evidence to clarify the mechanisms that might drive the outcomes observed in
the statistical analysis. I also suggest some ways to move beyond this research to address remaining questions.

**Section 1: Theory**

*Media Affects and the Debate over Satirical Media:*

In order to better understand how all media can effect its’ consumers, general media effects must first be addressed. The scholarly literature consistently cites three widely held effects of media on political participation. These affects are agenda setting, framing responsibility, and persuasion via priming.

In *The Media Game: American Politics in the Television Age*, the evolution of the study of media along with an in depth look at these three affects, is aptly explained (e.g. Ansolabehere, Behr, Iyengar 1993). The authors explain how these mechanisms of media greatly affect the public in terms of their actions and understanding of politics. *TDS* and the *CR*, engage in all three of these mechanisms.

Both shows engage in agenda setting. By highlighting certain issues that the media or politicians have addressed, they call the viewers attention to specific issues or events of the day, or set an agenda, and these issues become more important to the viewer than other events/issues that were not addressed. This is what the general media does as well. Through the editing process, the media selects which stories they will focus on, and in effect, decides which events the public will see when they watch the news (Ansolabehere, Behr, Iyengar 1993; Iyengar, Peters, Kinder 1982).

The second media effect, framing responsibility is a process by which the media organizes an event or issue. This organization can be done in a way that makes one or more groups or individuals responsible for the event or issue, but this is not necessarily
the case. This organization makes it easier for the public to make sense of events (Iyengar 1991). It goes beyond just choosing which topics to cover, because this can set the tone for how that event itself will be covered. For example, both Fox News Channel and MSNBC may cover a recent remark made by Sarah Palin, but they will organize their stories about her in very different ways, with very different points of views toward her actions.

Priming is about the subliminal or hidden messages that can influence what the viewer focuses on for any given event or story. Many factors can influence how the viewer is particularly attuned to certain issues/events. When the viewer has been exposed to one issue or stimulus, this is engrained in their memory, and it will influence their reaction or response to other stimuli. In other words, this is where propaganda and subliminal messages come into play, which the media uses to subconsciously influence the viewer’s judgments about any given story (Iyengar 1991).

Bias in the media is another relevant issue in the debates, and one that has been widely researched in recent years. From a business perspective, media biases are rational, as they cater to the conscientious viewer and the biased consumer at the same time. This is discussed in “News Consumption and Media Bias,” by Yi Xiang and Miklos Savary (2007). They explain that media bias began as a means to reach those viewers with specific, already formed views. By re-enforcing the consumers’ worldviews the biased sources that catered to them would be seen as more credible and trustworthy.

Meanwhile, those conscientious consumers who looked for the least amount of bias, and wanted news that was closest to the truth, would spend more time seeking out
news from multiple sources. This is because the conscientious media consumer recognizes that most sources were biased. As long as there was mostly biased news readily available, this type of media consumer would be willing to pay more for news from multiple sources (Xiang and Savary, 2007). Xiang and Savary (2007) claim that the conscientious media consumer would actually benefit from the biased system, in that they ultimately are better informed by viewing many different news sources, even if these source are biased, than if they had viewed just one unbiased source.

There is a limit to this bias, since media may spread false information about events occurring in the world, but people have access to other news sources that may uncover the falsities being reported. Audiences may watch satirical programs, such as The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and the Colbert Report, which point out the falsities and errors in biased reporting and hold the media responsible for what it claims. The Internet, and the innumerable amount of information coming from different sources, in addition, puts a check on how far pundits can go before another source calls their bluff. The issue then is, do their viewers/listeners double-check the information being given to them (and they may not depending on what type of news consumer they are) and do viewers always believe what they read/watch/hear in the media? Often, consumers prone to seek out bias can discern this boundary between bias and complete falsities (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006).

Based on these classifications of types of news media consumers, it may be that the conscientious viewer is drawn to satirical shows like TDS and the CR, as well as the biased viewer. The conscientious viewer may watch the shows because they criticize all media outlets, from MSNBC, to Fox News Channel, giving an overview of where these
news sources have been biased and dropped the ball on thorough reporting. The biased
viewer may watch the shows because they perceive the liberal bias that many claim both
shows present. Or, viewers of the satirical shows simply find them funny and
entertaining. They may even have disdain for politics, and enjoy shows that attack it
from all angles.

These questions are a part of the debate about what these shows are doing in the
realm of politics, and media, and what audiences of the shows use them for. *The Daily
Show* itself claims that it is not a source of political knowledge or news, but simply an
entertaining program, but viewers of the show have named Jon Stewart as the most
influential news anchor/pundit in recent PEW polls (“Most Admired Names in News,”
Oct. 7th-10th, 2010).

In *Entertaining Politics; Satiric Television and Political Engagement*, the
evolution of television news media from network anchors, to punditry, and finally to the
satire created in response to punditry, is presented. Jones (2010) claims satirical political
media is a response to the changing economy, and to the terrorist attack on September
11th, 2001. He argues that politics have become, and perhaps have always been to some
degree, a source of entertainment and drama, and that “politics [are] increasingly crafted
through and for media spectatorship, and hence the desired separation between media
and politics is no longer possible (Jones 2010, 14).”

Jones is making the point that while *TDS* and the *CR* are satirical, this does not
mean that they are always so different from the ‘real’ news. Jones (2010) argues that
satirical shows play an important role in the political arena, and have an informed,
politically savvy audience, who are attune to the subtle and not so subtle critiques these
shows make of politicians, pundits, and the political system itself (2010). He falls on the side of the debate that takes these shows and their viewers seriously, and finds that these shows are not simply for entertainment.

Jones also refutes Robert Putnam’s (2000) assertions that the media are acting to disassociate people from one another, leading to less cooperative activity, because watching political media can be seen as engaging in a political world. Putnam (2000) explores how disconnected American society seems from a past full of community groups and community activities. Putnam asserts that television is generally disengaging and prevents individuals from actually getting out into their community, or in this case, prevents them from being politically active. Jones, however, sees watching a political show as a way to participate in politics, especially for young people whom, “have personalized engagement in politics and conceive of political activity as primarily discursive (and populist) in nature (Jones 2010, 33).”

Jones views “fake news” as a reaction to the obvious flaws and biases in pundit TV, in that Stewart and Colbert use satire to express the news media’s failure to accurately explain events, and their inability to effectively get at the truth of the matter. This satire became especially important to the general public political discourse after the September 11th attacks, as the mainstream media seemed too timid and afraid to be politically incorrect and critical of the government (Jones 2010). News media was (partially) responsible for uncovering the lies about weapons of mass destruction capabilities in Iraq and for challenging the Bush administration when it was being hypocritical and misleading to the public. In most cases, however, the mainstream news media was failing to live up to its’ responsibilities.
This is where satirical news stepped in and shined, using satirical rhetoric and research to find the evidence of the hypocrisy, and to find evidence of the ‘real’ news’ inability and/or unwillingness to report on what was really going on (Jones 2010). The two shows use editing to uncover the holes in the mainstream news’ reporting, and to illustrate how, when, and where politicians and reporters have contradicted themselves. They also show when the media and politicians have flat out lied and in interviews with these same individuals, they often ask for an explanation for their un-journalistic behavior.

FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) has also cited both shows for their apt ability to hit politicians and pundits where it hurts the most, by calling them out for their inability to report the facts, for their hypocrisy, and for misleading the public for their own political and financial gains. In a 2004 article addressing the problem of the press no longer investigating the credibility of their sources and information, Jon Stewart was cited as bringing attention to this problem in a satirical interview he conducted with Rob Corddry, an ‘anchor’ on the show (Rendall, 2004). In this interview, satire was used to categorize the media’s handling of the John Kerry Vietnam scandal as ridiculous because the facts showed that Kerry was not at fault, while the media had bought into the scandal, claiming that the facts represented “Kerry’s side of the story.” Stewart asks Corddry, who represents the media, “doesn’t objectivity mean objectively weighing the evidence, and calling out what’s credible and what isn’t (Stewart, 2004)?” The FAIR article goes on to explain that Stewart’s satirical picture of the media was a dead on criticism (Rendall, 2004).
Another FAIR article reports on Stephen Colbert staying in character and “ironically congratulating journalists for giving cover to Bush on tax cuts, WMD and global warming.” in his speech at the 2006 White House Correspondent’s dinner. The article praises Colbert for addressing the inaccuracies and biases in the media with his colorful satire, and shames the media talking heads that later called Colbert too political and not funny (Rendall, 2006). FAIR is taking the position that Colbert and Stewart were completely correct in their criticisms, and that these shows play a role in keeping the media objective, by reminding it of its’ journalistic code of ethics and responsibilities.

With an organization that stands for fairness and objectivity praising both of these shows, then it is safe to say that in these instances at least, the shows are not being biased. In fact, FAIR is claiming that they are making very real and justified critiques of all figures in media and politics, not just of the left, and not just of the right. Stewart and Colbert are willing to criticize any political figure who’s not doing their job, or who is doing their job for the wrong reasons.

This thesis tests whether or not these shows have a more serious impact in the political realm. If viewers of these shows are participating in politics either in direct reaction to the show, or because this is a general side affect of being a viewer of the show, than Jones’ and FAIR’s assessments of the shows will prove to be correct. There has been little empirical data to support their claims, and this research aims to provide that data.

Factors Related to Participation in Politics:

Media consumption is only one of many factors that lead to political participation. Verba, Burns, and Schlozman have done extensive work in determining what factors
explain the variation in levels of political participation (2003). Generally, potential to participate depends greatly on one’s socioeconomic status (high SES leads to higher potential to participate), and parental factors, such as parental education and participation in politics. Children of parents who received high levels of education are likely to attain the same high levels of education as well, and are more likely to participate in politics. The authors refute Alexis De Tocqueville’s notion that in democracy, there is a total “equality of conditions” and equality in terms potential to participate in politics, at birth (e.g., Verba, Burns, Schlozman 2003).

Elizabeth S. Smith (1999) investigates factors that affect the young specifically, when it comes to their potential to participate in politics. In her study, she identifies participation in extracurricular and parental support as precursors for both college attendance and political participation. She then cites college itself as a major indicator for later and consistent political participation. She links a drop in participation in these activities as an explanation for a drop in youth participation in politics (Smith, 1999). The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), further confirms Smith’s claims with their various studies of youth engagement from middle school through college (CIRCLE 2001-present), showing that generally, students who do not attend college did not participate in many extracurricular activities, and do not later participate in politics.

Sunshine Hillygus explores what it is about specific types of college majors that lead to higher levels of political participation and engagement (2005). In her study, she looks at SAT scores as an indicator for later political participation, claiming that high verbal scores reflect an aptitude for politics. Those with high verbal SAT scores tend to
go on to major in the social sciences and other majors that develop language and civic skills. These skills, she claims, are what it takes to be able to understand and participate in politics throughout life (Hillygus, 2005). Within social science majors, there can be higher levels of political interest and knowledge, both factors that additionally lead to political participation, combined with the literary and analytic skills necessary for participation. This means that students within these majors are generally much more likely to be political participants (Hillygus, 2005).

In my study, I will account for all of these potential explanatory factors by addressing them with survey questions. The survey (number 2) will ask students about their political background to account for the factors besides media consumption that may be influencing their potential to participate in politics. As justified above, the other factors that will be accounted for are as follows: majors, level of political knowledge, level of political interest, parents’ background and political interest, students’ employment status, students’ political party identification, and students’ political viewpoint. The analysis will account for age and gender for demographic purposes. However, I expect that these two factors will have less of an effect on the dependent variable (participation in politics) and therefore will not be as important to my analysis.

Through a multivariate logistic regression analysis, I will be able to determine which of these factors are statistically significant in affecting the dependent variable. By comparison, I will be able to determine how influential the factor of viewer ship is against these other factors, on the dependent variable (participation in politics).

*Research Design: One question, two surveys*
To investigate this issue, I conducted two surveys. The first survey asked participants what motivated their attendance to the “Rally to Restore Fear and/or Sanity,” an event hosted by *TDS* and *CR*. The second survey, administered to IU undergraduates of all different backgrounds, generated more specific data about students’ media consumption and political participation. This survey also accounted for other factors that can explain political participation. These two surveys generated a significant amount of original data that begins to draw a picture of what *TDS* (*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*), and the *CR’s* (*The Colbert Report*) rally meant to attendees, and what level of political participation IU undergraduate viewers are engaged in.

The first survey is an important precursor to the second, more specific survey. This is because if the rally itself was viewed as a political event by it’s’ attendees, than it represents a direct way in which the shows lead to political participation. This rally, held on October 30th, 2010, was just a few days before the mid-term congressional elections. If attendees participated in politics that day, then the rally takes on more significance in the political realm. This first set of data revealed that 86.1% of participants attended the rally “to support the political message,” and that 70.2% of participants marked this as the most important reason for their attendance. These participants also voted. In fact 76.1% of respondents voted in the 2010-midterm elections, showing that the attendees, who are also regular viewers of the shows, are politically active.

These two surveys generated rich and complementary data. This data can begin to describe regular viewers of the show in ways that have not been looked at before. By comparing the data, the hypothesis, as explained in the next section, is adequately addressed and explored.
The Hypothesis:

The literature reviewed above yields a series of hypotheses about the relationship between a number of political factors and youth participation. In addition, I developed a number of expectations based on preliminary understanding of satiric media from my own personal experiences with it and based on my observations.

The first segment of the study, which focuses on the rally, yields a number of interesting propositions. I hypothesize that attendees of the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,” attended for political reasons, and saw the event as political participation. I also suggest that IU students, who watch The Daily Show and the Colbert Report regularly, are more likely to vote than those who do not watch these shows, because students who watch the shows are more knowledgeable than those who do not. It is a combination of watching the shows, and their political background (major, parent’s political participation, interest level, party identification, political viewpoint, and their level of political knowledge), that determine if this person is politically active or not.

Case Selection:

To explore the validity of these propositions I relied on IU undergraduate students as my sample for satirical media consumption. The IU students were available, and easily accessible for this project and provide a good sub sample of the major general college-based audience of these shows. The Daily Show and the Colbert Report have a young audience, between the ages of 18-29, and 13-30% of the time, these young people consume the shows as a news sources (PEW “Americans Spending More Time Following the News,” September 12, 2010). That statistic is one factor that brought me to this project. I was interested in seeing how TDS and the CR were influencing their young
audiences. Seeing as undergraduates are generally between the ages of 18-29 (but concentrated between the ages of 18-22), and that this is the typical demographic of viewer for these shows, that is the age range I will be using in my study.

*Two Sources of Data:*

Originally, I had intended to conduct one, data rich survey on the IU undergraduate population, their media consumption habits, and their political participation habits. However, in September the two shows in question began to plug their “Rally to Restore Fear and/or Sanity” on a nightly basis. Without defining the rally, Jon Stewart continuously encouraged his viewers, who were sick of the madness, to attend, giving out specific information (it would be on the National Mall in Washington, D.C, starting at 11am, on October 30th, 2010), as well as informing viewers of car pools and methods of getting to the rally.

Meanwhile, satire came into the picture with Stephen Colbert, who turned the rally into a competition between Stewart’s sanity, and his fake fear mongering. He also encouraged viewers to attend in order to counter John’s point of view. Little was revealed about which guests would be there, what the specific message of the rally was, or how many people were expected to attend. As all of this unfolded, I decided that this rally was incredibly relevant to me research, and that it could potentially represent a way in which the shows encouraged political participation directly. I decided that I would attend myself, for personal and research purposes, and that I would collect some data from this rally.

When I arrived in D.C. the night before the rally, I had already decided I would conduct a survey of its participants to determine if this rally was in fact an act of political
participation or not. I decided that the best method to collect this data would be using an online survey program, as explained below. Little did I know over 250,000 people would attend the rally that day, which featured musical guests such as the Roots, Cat Stevens, Ozzy Osborne and Kid Rock, as well as other famous guests to keep us all entertained and engaged throughout the rally.

The rally, while there were political punch lines throughout, was light-hearted and did not seem to have one strong political message. That is, until the last 20 minutes of the three hour long event, when Jon Stewart gave a serious speech in an effort to explain himself. Here, he exclaims that having passionate arguments does not mean that we are all enemies, and that being moderate is an okay thing to be, in fact, it’s what he sees as what the majority of us are. Some poignant quotes from his speech include:

“The country’s 24 hour political pundit perpetual panic conflictinator did not cause our problems but its existence makes solving them that much harder. The press can hold its magnifying up to our problems bringing them into focus, illuminating issues heretofore unseen or they can use that magnifying glass to light ants on fire and then perhaps host a week of shows on the sudden, unexpected dangerous flaming ant epidemic.

If we amplify everything we hear nothing.

We work together to get things done every damn day! The only place we don’t is here or on cable TV. But Americans don’t live here or on cable TV.

Because we know instinctively as a people that if we are to get through the darkness and back into the light we have to work together. And the truth is, there will always be darkness. And sometimes the light at the end of the tunnel isn’t the Promised Land. Sometimes it’s just New Jersey. But we do it anyway, together (Jon Stewart, Oct. 30th, 2010).”

*text from the National Examiner

At the end of his speech he expresses his gratitude for all who attended, and proclaims that we had restored his sanity. Clearly, there was intense political motivation
for this rally that occurred just a few days before the midterm elections. I was glad I attended, and was eager to find out how others felt.

The first source of data is derived from a survey, ten questions in length, addressing attendees of the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear (See Appendix A, 1).” It was administered to anyone on the social networking sites facebook and redit that claimed to attend the rally. This survey examined who went to the rally and why, as well as whether or not attendees voted in the midterm elections. I hypothesized that most participants went for political reasons, despite Jon Stewart’s claims that the rally was not meant to be political (Gross interview, Sept. 29th, 2010). This survey opened on November 5th, 2010 (a week after the rally), and remained opened until November 17th, 2010. 711 individuals began the survey, while only 505 completed it. However, given estimates that between 150,000 to 300,000 people attended the rally, this sample size is still large enough to be representative of this population.

*See Appendix A, 1 for survey 1, “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear”*

I encountered a number of problems in data collection that may have introduced some bias into the analysis. Given that no attendance was taken at the rally, there is no way of knowing exactly how many people attended and who attended. This means that getting a random sample was virtually impossible. The demographics of those who took my survey are 69% male, 31% female, with 35% of respondents being 22 years old or younger, 50% being between the ages of 23 and 35, and 15% being older than 35. Relying on the social networking sites (Facebook, and redit) was the best possible option in terms of administering an online survey, and getting it to the rally attendees. In fact,
on the facebook rally event page, over 200,000 people claimed they attended. However, the male respondents spiked after I posted the survey on redit, which has a largely male population, and led to a largely young male bias in my sample.

Other sampling issues are due to the nature of the rally itself, estimating an exact sample size was difficult. However, sample size does not change drastically unless the given population size changes drastically. This means that given the same confidence level, sample size doesn’t change between a population of 150,000 and a population of 300,000. 350 respondents was my goal, and this was surpassed even with some individuals not completing the survey or completing it inappropriately. Given my method of analysis here, which is simply looking at the final summary statistics, the sample size of 505 respondents is adequate (Israel, 2009).

So, the bias in this data will come from the fact that only attendees who were reachable via facebook and redit could take the survey. It is possible that these respondents are somehow already more politically inclined because they use these sites, but there is no evidence to suggest this is the case, as these sites are not used primarily for political purposes. Users of redit also skewed the results, as most of the respondents from this source were male and between the ages of 21-29. It is impossible to know what the demographics of the rally itself were when it comes to sex and age, but at least 78 participants of the survey were 50 years or older, so there is variation here even with the redit respondents.

There were some design flaws in the survey as well. In the survey, the first question asks whether or not the rally was attended. If the respondent replied ‘no’ or
don’t know’ than they were thanked for their time and asked to exit the survey. Due to some technical difficulties, and to my lack of experience with creating surveys and using survey monkey, respondents could still continue onto the rest of the survey, even if they were directed to exit. While most realized that the rest of the questions pertained to their attendance, a few respondents continued to answer the questions. This accounts for the lower numbers of survey completion than expected, based on the number of people who began the survey. Respondents who did not attend the rally were removed from the final analysis of the data.

Despite these issues, the respondent rate for this survey is high. Facebook and reddit proved to be invaluable tools to access a population that otherwise would be impossible to reach. I also feel, after attending the rally, that the results, which will be explained further in my analysis, accurately answer my research question. I was simply looking to see if attendees of the rally saw it as a political event with some empirical data. Even with some flaws in the data set itself, I can say confidently from my personal experience, that the rally was a political event. This data simply reinforces that qualitative judgment.

To address more general questions about participation and account for other factors, I implemented a second approach. The second survey was directed at IU undergraduates between the ages of 18-29, specifically. It contains 26 questions and it was opened on February 21st, 2011, and closed on March 9th, 2011. I also used survey monkey, and facebook for this survey. In order to reach a more representative sample I went to large introductory classes across each department, including SPEA, Business,
Psychology, and Informatics and Computing. There I briefly explained my project with a 
PowerPoint presentation, and provided a link to the survey for those who are interested. I 
was careful not to explain in detail what as I was looking for, simply stating that I was 
interested in the media consumption habits of IU undergraduates. I did this to avoid 
influencing who took the survey and to avoid influencing their answers. I also asked 
professors across departments, as well as my own advisors in the Political Science 
Department and Anthropology departments to send around the link to my survey, with 
the same brief explanation.

*See Appendix A2 for survey 2: “IU Undergraduate Media Consumption”

Many questions in the survey are from the PEW surveys on media consumption, 
conducted June 8-28, 2010, and September 12, 2010 (See Appendix A, II). I used these 
because they have already been tested and proven to obtain accurate data. I also added 
specific questions addressing their voting habits, party affiliations, class standing and so 
on to account for factors beyond media consumption, that affect the dependent variable of participation.

The final count for respondents to the survey is 365 individuals. In this case, I 
was able to use the technology correctly, and only IU undergrads between the ages of 18- 
29 could complete the survey. These respondents are fairly representative of the general 
student body and students across majors responded (IUB Common Data Set, 2010-2011). 
While there is some bias here, in that I could not get access to a randomly generated 
email list, and a larger percentage of the students (35.2%), are Political Science majors, I
have accounted for that by making this major a separate variable. I did the best that I could to get the most random and unbiased sample given my resources.

The difficulties with this data source primarily stemmed from choosing which variables to account for, which I’ve explained and justified with the literature review, and testing out my survey for technical issues. In fact, I had a few students take the survey before it was opened, to test its length, the understandability of the questions themselves, and the technical ease of the survey. This ensured that the survey itself was designed well, and the trial run proved that it was. When it was opened, it went well, with only one respondent filling out the survey in a dishonest fashion by checking all possible multiple choice answers to every question. The data itself represents a fairly accurate sample of the IU undergraduate student body, and the sample size is ideal. When analyzing the data, it became clear that there was some very interesting and rich information to be unpacked, both signs of a great data set.

Section 3: Analysis

Defining the variables:

The data from the first survey will be looked at mostly for descriptive purposes. The variables being measured here are participation in the rally itself (Q1), reasons for attending the rally (Q7), prioritizing reasons for attendance (Q8), and voting in the 2010 midterm elections (Q9). (For the full survey, please see appendix A 1.) I am not testing an independent variable directly here; so looking at a breakdown of percentages for each question will be adequate enough to explain the data.

I must acknowledge the bias here that most attendees of this rally were probably more willing to be active in this way than the average viewer. The rally, from my
experience there, certainly drew a politically savvy and active crowd, so it does not represent all viewers of the shows. It in fact represents those viewers who go above and beyond when it comes to *TDS*, the *CR*, and getting politically active. However I suspect, and in fact know that I was one of many IU undergraduates in the crowd, so the rally is relevant to this research.

For the second survey the independent variable I am most concerned with here is the consumption of satirical political media. As explained earlier, this can be operationally defined as consumption of the two television shows *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert. While there was some debate as to whether the two shows should be looked at as one or two separate variables, there is too little variation between regular viewers of either show to count them as separate variables. When correlated, the two shows are watched in the same way approximately 80% of the time. Therefore, the variable here will be entitled, ‘comedy,’ to represent regular viewers of both of these shows.

Ultimately the variables of major, political viewpoint, party identification, political interest, media consumption, and level of political knowledge will be used in the regression. While many more questions were asked to address other factors, such as parents political/educational background and behavior, gender, age, employment status, time spend consuming TV in general and TV news specifically, voter registration status, and methods for voting, all of these factor are unnecessary to use in the regression analysis. This is because there was either too little variation in the data, as is the case with age and gender, or because some of these factors accounted for each other. For example, simply knowing whether or not an individual voted or not (a measure of the
dependent variable), explains if they were registered. To get at my question, I was less concerned with where and when individuals voted, and more concerned with if they had or not.

With the questions addressing parents’ backgrounds, there was some redundancy. Questions about party ID, political knowledge, and political viewpoint and so on, are often very clearly connected to a parent’s political background. Because of this, I will not be measuring parents’ political background as a variable in the regression. In order to better understand the research question at hand, ultimately parent’s behaviors were not as pertinent.

Operational Definitions for variables used in regression:

Question 1 (See appendix A, 2), accounts for the independent variable of major, which has been divided into six subcategories. These categories are political science, social sciences, natural/hard sciences, arts, professional degrees and don’t know/undeclared. As explained earlier, Political Science became a separate sub-variable because of the high percentage of respondents within that category (35.2%). Social science is operationally defined as those who responded that they were public and environmental affairs (SPEA) majors, library and information science majors, other social science majors, humanities majors, history majors, social work majors, and general studies majors. Natural/hard sciences are operationally defined as those who responded to be natural sciences majors, math majors, and informatics and computing majors. The variable art is operationally defined as those who responded to be fine arts or music majors. Professional degrees are operationally defined as business majors, nursing
majors, education majors and health physical education and recreation majors. Don’t know/undeclared is self-explanatory.

For the Political Viewpoint variable, the definition will be liberals, conservatives, moderates, or no political viewpoint. While I also experimented with a variable deemed ‘extreme view,’ in order to specify individuals who categorized themselves as ‘very’ anything (liberal, or conservative), I ultimately decided to look at how people of different views behaved. As you will see, those who identified themselves as liberal did behave differently than those without a viewpoint, than conservatives and than moderates.

*See Appendix BII, Chart 2 “Political Viewpoint”

Party identification will be defined as those who labeled themselves as partisans or not partisan. It made sense to make this a dichotomous variable, given that I was already accounting for different political viewpoints. If individuals identified with any political party (democrats, republicans, or other), they were coded as partisans.

*See Appendix BII, Chart 1 “Party identification”

Level of political interest will also be measured on a dichotomous scale. In question 10 of the survey (see appendix A, II), this was asked on a 5 point scale from 1-not interested to 5-extremely interested. For the analysis purposes this will be re-categorized, and those that answered slightly interested or moderately interested will be coded as having low political interest. Those that answered 4-5 (very to extreme) will be coded as having high political interest.

*See Appendix BII, Chart 3 “Political Interest”

Media consumption will be categorically divided into types of media that is consumed or not consumed. If respondents responded that they 1) regularly watch, or 2)
sometimes watch these programs then they’ll be counted as consumers, while if they
responded that they 3) hardly ever or 4) never watch these programs then they are non-
consumers (see appendix A, II, question 16). The types of media will be categorized as
follows: Comedy (*TDS* and *CR*), Biased Media (*MSNBC, Fox News Channel, Bill
O’Riely, Glen Beck, Rachel Maddow, and Chris Matthews*), and general media (*PBS, C-
Span, CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN*).

Political knowledge was tested from questions 19-24. I aggregated the questions
into three levels of political knowledge, none, low and high. If respondents answered
zero questions correctly, they have no political knowledge (for the purposes of this
survey). If respondents answered one to two questions correctly, they have a low level of
political knowledge. If they answered three or more questions correctly, they have high a
high level of political knowledge.

When it comes to the dependent variable, participation, I used the data to
construct variables being measured. The first is whether or not respondents voted in the
2010-midterm elections (see appendix A, II, question 13). The second measure of
participation is being addressing in question 13 of the survey (appendix A, II). If
respondents have participated in three or more activities (besides voting) they will be
considered ‘political activists’ (Carmines and Woods, 2002). If respondents participated
in less than three additional activities they will be considered inactive.

*See Appendix BII, Chart 4 “Political Participation: Voting Rates” and Chart 5
“Political Participation: Activism”*

After coding the dependent variables (major, political viewpoint, party
identification, political interest, media consumption, and political knowledge), I used the
program STATA to run a logistic regression model, or a ‘logit (see appendix C for full coding list).’ This was used because I had so many multi-dimensional independent variables, but all of these were coded as binary, with a value of 0 (‘no’) or 1 (‘yes’). With these kinds of variables, running the ‘logit’ was appropriate. I ran this regression model in four different ways. First, looking at voting as the dependent variable, I ran one model accounting for all of the independent variables at once to see which were significant (see table 1). I did this for the dependent variable political activist as well (see table 3). In addition, I ran the regression looking at just media consumption, as it was interesting to see which forms of media are significant when compared with each other (comedy vs. general media vs. biased media) I did this for both measures of participation (see table 2 and 4).

Section 4: Results

Survey 1: “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear”

The results for the first survey are consistent with the propositions outlined above. After going to the rally, it was no surprise that of the 505 people who completed the survey, 88.5% watch The Daily Show with Jon Stewart regularly or sometimes, and 88.1% watch the Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert. This made sense. What was surprising is that a combined 5.7% of survey participants replied that they never watch the shows, yet they still went to the sponsored rallies (see appendix B1, charts 1 and 2). There are many things that could explain this, like attendance because they live in the D.C. area, or because family and friends were going, but this survey cannot adequately explain their attendance.

*See Appendix B1, Chart 1 “TDS Consumption” and Chart 2 “CR Consumption”*
Another expected result derived from the data, is that when asked why participants attended the rally, 86.1% picked “I attended the rally to support the political statement of the rally.” For this question, more than one of six choices could be selected. The next 2 most popular selections were, “I attended for entertainment reasons (60.9%)” and “I attended to support The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and the Colbert Report (57.2%)” (See appendix B1, chart 3). While these results are not surprising, there are some problems with the nature of this survey question. By giving survey participants options for why they attended, I may have been influencing they’re conceptions of why they attended. The opportunity to pick more than one answer offsets this problem. However, to leave this question open ended would have complicated the analysis. Also 20.3% said they attended for ‘other’ reasons. It is unfortunate that I will not know what this large percentage of participants attended.

*See Appendix B1, Chart 3 “Reasons For Attendance”*

When asked “if you attended the rally for a number of reasons, which reason is the most important to you?” respondents were now only able to select one of the same choices for the question discussed above. While the numbers changed, the most popular selections remained the same (to support the political statement, for entertainment reasons, to support the two shows). Notably, 70.2% of survey participants found participating to support the political statement of the rally was the most important explanation for attendance, while 12% found entertainment reasons to be the most important, 10% to support the two shows, 1.5 attended to support a friend, and 7% attended for other reasons. This suggests that there is a strong relationship between interest in satiric media and political views (see appendix B1, chart 4). This indicated
that the rally was a political event for most attendants, and that the act of going to the rally was a mode of political participation in itself, even while much of the content of the rally was satirical. Ultimately, the people defined what the rally was, and it was a political event.

*See Appendix B1, Chart 4 “Reasons for Attendance, One Choice Only”

Most rally attendees also participated in other types of political activity. They overwhelmingly voted in the 2010 midterm elections. In fact, 76.1% of the audience voted (see appendix B1, chart 5). This indicates that regular viewers of the shows who were motivated enough to attend this political event; also participate in politics in other ways.

*See Appendix B1, Chart 5 “Vote in Mid-Term Elections”

While I do not have the empirical data to definitively claim that the rally itself was partially about voting, I can say from being there that this crowd was pushing a vote, a vote ‘for sanity.” I recall one sign that read, “If you’re here and you do not vote, than you’re an idiot.” That seemed to be the general feeling throughout the crowd.

To conclude my analysis of the first survey, my hypothesis about the rally is correct. This was a political event for attendees. This means that the rally itself represents a way in which the shows lead directly to participation in politics. The first survey was also an important precursor to the second, more specific survey, because it demonstrates a direct way in which the shows lead to political participation. The timing of the rally, just three days before the midterm elections, also gives it greater significance in the political realm, especially after it can be deemed a political event.
The content of the rally is also an important indicator that my hypothesis is correct, because it was generally similar to that of the two shows, (except for the numerous musical and special guests). Given that this rally was an act of political participation, and its format was similar to that of the shows, than it is not hard to perceive how these shows are encouraging political participation. The “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,” represents a direct effect of the shows, and that effect was political participation.

Survey 2: “Indiana University Undergraduate Media Consumption Survey”

For the second survey, administered to IU undergraduates of all different backgrounds, a more specific and detailed set of data was generated about students’ media consumption habits and political participation habits. As explained in earlier sections, this survey also accounted for other factors that can explain political participation (see hypothesis table below). This survey was used to address the core hypothesis of this project. This hypothesis is that watching The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, and watching the Colbert Report, two satirical political programs, can be a factor leading to an increased likelihood of young people’s (IU undergraduates) participation in politics.

The “Hypothesis Table,” goes through each factor I was testing for that may influence the dependent variable, participation in politics. For example, taking the first factor, satirical political media, I could fill in the sentence with viewing satirical political media will lead to an increase in political participation. This may be done for each hypothetical factor, with yes or no in the “prediction” column indicating a positive or
negative relationship. The variable factor breaks down how I addressed each factor in the survey.

**Hypothesis Table: How each Hypothesized item will Effect Political Participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Prediction (Yes, No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satirical Media</td>
<td>TDS</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Identification</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Viewpoint</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard/Nat'l Sciences</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Degrees</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other/Undeclared</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22-29</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Status</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-time Intern</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part-time intern</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Vote</td>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Parent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither parent</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Education</td>
<td>No HS</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Some College</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voter Registration
In Bloomington Yes
Outside of Bloomington No
Not registered No

*Key: For column, “Hypothesis” is referring to a theory about each of the factors listed and how they are related to political participation. “Variables” breaks down how each of these factors was defined as an independent variable. “Prediction” indicates what kind of relationship I predict the variable will have with the independent variable, participation in politics. “Yes” is a positive relationship, “No” is a negative relationship.

The next section of this thesis will present the data from the second survey using logistic regression models. First, Satirical Media will be compared with other media sources for both measures of the dependent variable, voting and political activism. The other factors being accounted for in the regression, are ultimately, party identification, political viewpoint, major, political interest, and political knowledge. This has been explained and justified in previous sections of the thesis.

**Table 1: Logistic Regression with Voting as the Dependent Variable-Media Only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Media</td>
<td>1.432*</td>
<td>0.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satirical Pol. Media</td>
<td>0.560*</td>
<td>0.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased Media</td>
<td>-0.380</td>
<td>0.258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=365
Pseudo R2=0.0880
LR chi2 (3) = 43.83

Table 1 presents an analysis how just the media is weighing on the dependent variable of voting. The variables with a * next to their coefficients, are significant factors when it comes to voting in the 2010 midterm elections, because they had P-values of 0.05 or less. In this analysis, the variable that measures viewer ship of satirical political media is a significant and positive factor. This means that those IU undergraduates who watch
either the general media or satirical political media are more likely to be voters than those who watch biased media, when looking at media alone.

This indicates, in the larger context, that those who argue that media effects are significant, are in fact correct when media is looked at alone, at least when it comes to the general media and the satirical political media. Perhaps around election time in particular, the media plays an even more integral role than usual in getting out the vote. The media also affects who individuals vote for, but that is not what is being measured here.

This data also indicates that satirical media in particular, as some scholars have argued, is accomplishing something that the biased media it mocks, is not. Being that biased media has no effect on political participation here, but the general media (which tends to abide by journalistic ethics more often than its biased counterparts), and satirical media do have a positive relationships with voting, theories indicating that these types of media are affecting politics may be correct. In addition, this data implies that my hypothesis is correct when looking at just media and the dependent variable of voting. This changes, however, when other factors are accounted for, as will be explained below.

**Table 2. Logistic Regression with Voting as the Dependent Variable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degrees</td>
<td>-0.786*</td>
<td>0.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>0.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1.518*</td>
<td>0.788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1.578*</td>
<td>0.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td>0.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Pol. Interest</td>
<td>1.541*</td>
<td>0.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Pol. Knowledge</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>0.347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Media</td>
<td>0.813*</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satirical Pol. Media</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>0.283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 is also looking at voting as the dependent variable, and it indicates that, when accounting for all of the variables, satirical political media is not a statistically significant factor. This is a different result compared to looking at different types of media alone. As in the previous table, all of the variables with a * next to their coefficients are significant factors when it comes to voting in the 2010 midterm elections, because they had P-values of 0.05 or less. Ultimately, professional degrees have a significant and negative relationship with voting. A political science major, interestingly enough, is not a significant factor for voting. I did not include the other majors (Nat’l/Hard Science, Arts, Social Sciences, and don’t know/Undeclared) in this chart, because none of them were statistically significant, and they were part of my null hypotheses,’ so the results were not surprising.

As expected, having political viewpoints at either end of the spectrum, or being Liberal or Conservative, had positive coefficients, and were both significant factors for voting. It is interesting that having high levels of political interest is a strong and significant factor for voting, while having high levels of political knowledge is not a significant factor. This is counterintuitive and seems to be opposed to the literature. Watching general media (NBC, ABC, CBS, C-Span, CNN), remains a significant and positive factor for voting behaviors of IU undergraduates, even when accounting for all

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biased Media</td>
<td>-0.439</td>
<td>0.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme View</td>
<td>-0.561</td>
<td>1.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>1.166</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 365
Pseudo R2 = 0.2436
LR chi2 (11) = 0.000
the variables. This suggests that individuals who watched the general media are more influenced by it when it comes to their behavior, than they are when watching other political media. I can speculate this is due to their lack of cynicism, which many proclaim both biased and satirical media encourage, or their stronger commitment to political participation.

The question to be answered after adding these factors is, why does satirical media lose its significance when it comes to the political participation measure of voting? The variable “high political interest,” is very similar to the variable of satirical media. In fact when these two variables are tabulated, 123 subjects out of 192 who watch political satirical media are also highly interested in politics. That means that these variables tabulate 64% of the time, so when interest level is added to the regression, political satirical media loses its’ significance to a considerable degree. This along with the other variables that can account for participation diminishes political satirical media’s influence over the dependent variable of voting because there is much overlap and similarity among the variables. The behavior of watching the two shows regularly seems to be accounted for and linked to other political behaviors. Those who are highly interested and informed are also those that watch the shows. So, when accounting for all factors being measured, we cannot say that it is primarily the shows that lead to voting.

Table 3: Logistic Regression with Political Activism as the Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Media</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>0.280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satirical Pol. Media</td>
<td>0.730*</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased Media</td>
<td>0.198</td>
<td>0.258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=365
Pseudo R2= 0.0471
Table 3 presents media’s relationship to political activism. Again, the * indicates significance based on the Z score. When looking at media alone, watching satirical political media is the only positive and significant factor of political participation. This is very interesting when comparing it to media and its effects on voting (Table 1). What we can say here is that those who watch *TDS* and *CR* are more likely to be political activists that those who watch general media and biased media, when looking at media variables alone.

I speculate that this is the case because being a political activist goes above and beyond the call to vote, and perhaps fewer factors can influence or push individuals to take this kind of political action. Perhaps the content of *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* is encouraging participation beyond voting, and the other media is not, or does not have this kind of influence over their viewers.

The type of agenda-setting, framing, and priming that the two shows utilize may be geared towards activism, challenging it’s viewers to get involved in more than just one area, in more than just one way. Content analysis of the shows, in future research, would be a way to test this speculative theory. However, it may also be true that the “Rally to Restore Fear and/or Sanity” itself is biasing this result, because it is possible that regular viewers of the shows who took this survey, also went to the rally. Adding a question about it to the survey would have been interesting. Since the concept of the shows hosting a rally, which has been deemed as political, is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is hard to say that it has inspired more activism within its’ attendees. It may have, and this may be what is reflected in the data.
Table 4: Logistic Regression with Political Activism as the Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degrees</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td>0.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1.168*</td>
<td>0.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>0.819</td>
<td>0.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Pol. Interest</td>
<td>1.816*</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Pol. Knowledge</td>
<td>-0.775*</td>
<td>0.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Media</td>
<td>-0.411</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satirical Pol. Media</td>
<td>0.0324</td>
<td>0.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased Media</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>1.432*</td>
<td>0.697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=365
Pseudo R2 =0.2202
LR chi2 (11) =102.41

Table 4 presents all of the factors as indicators of political activism, or participating in three or more political activities beyond voting. (* Indicates statistical significance) It appears that fewer students are political activist than voters (33.42% vs. 42.74%), which was expected, and that less variables are significant factors here. Being liberal, having high levels of political knowledge, having high levels of political interest, and being a partisan, are all significant factors of political activism. So, once again, satirical political media is not a significant factor when accounting for all other factors being measured. However, no media is significant for political activism.

The most interesting result of this data is that having high levels of political knowledge actually has a negative significant relationship with political activism. This is counter-intuitive, and warrants further investigation. As asserted in the analysis of table 3, I speculate that because being a political activist is more costly than voting, fewer
factors will actually lead to this type of behavior. This result implies that Putnam’s argument, that media leads to less participation and more isolation, may in fact be correct, at least where political activism as a measure of political participation, is concerned.

**Discussion: A Qualitative Approach**

Ultimately, I did not find what I expected, but my hypothesis is not wrong either. While satirical political media (watching *TDS* and *CR*), is not a significant indicator of political participation (voting and political activism) when accounting for other factors, it is a significant factor when comparing it to other forms of media. This suggests that watching *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and watching the *Colbert Report* may be more influential than other media, when it comes to political participation.

I speculate that while the two shows themselves do not necessarily mean more active viewers, that a certain type of person is drawn to the shows. Those who were especially dedicated were at the rally, and I had a chance to talk to a few of them. Using a small recorder I asked those around me who were willing to chat, why they came to the rally. It was a great way to get more information about the specific political message of the event.

One ‘baby boomer’ couple answered my question. They said besides the *New York Times*, Jon Stewart was the only media outlet giving a fair report of things. When the wife heard about the rally, she told her husband “we’ve got to do this, we’ve got to go. We’re sixties people, you know…and it brought back…it was political, I think it is

*Interview quotes from October 30th, 2010, by Amanda Hariton*
political.” She went on to try to explain the political statement of the rally as she saw it. She said it was “directed to those in the news who are speaking so loudly, and too me, speaking so crazily.” I asked her which people, and she named Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and political figures that “make Nixon look like a prince.” There were a fair number of baby boomers at the rally, many of them toting signs that were very political. I think what this couple was acknowledging was the great polarization in the arena, and especially during this particular election season, where there were more than a few extreme right-wing tea party candidates.

Another woman said she felt like she “needed intelligent voices running our country and not people who are fear mongering and people that foster hate, and people that are really only in it for themselves, and to get money, and to get re-elected. I feel like we need rational voices and that’s why I’m here.” This woman’s sentiment suggests that she takes Stewart and Colbert very seriously as commentators about the national political arena and state of things. A young man she was with simply replied to my inquiry with a smile and said, “I hope everybody here votes.” This sentiment also reflects how much importance the rally held for some in attendance, or at least for this young man, who was viewing it as very much a political activity in that he felt it would influence the coming election.

Other young people answered my question with comical undertones and sarcasm, saying, “to not being extreme” and “because I love Glen Beck.” White another twenty something told me “it’s a big event, I wouldn’t miss it…tell my kids someday maybe.” Another said that “right here is a collection of a majority of Americans who enjoy
hearing smart opinions.” He finished his statement in a comical way, giving out his phone number and a flattering description of himself.

I think many young people at the rally echoed those feelings of these young men and women. The rally was political, sure, but it was also a way to be light-hearted and enjoy laughing at politics, while making a serious critique of it. Some young people wanted to be a part of some kind of political movement that spoke to them, as the man who thought he might tell his kids about the rally. Perhaps that is why some young people attended something that may have been their first big political event.

The last person I interviewed remarked that while Jon Stewart is a comic first, he could be incredibly serious and analytical. He went on to talk about an interview Stewart did on NPR with Terry Gross, and how here Stewart tried to seriously explain what the rally was not. It was not to counter Glenn Beck, and it was not to start a political party. This middle-aged man then said “but if you can have Reagan, and Frankle, anything is possible, and I’d like to see Jon Stewart run for office.” Again, here are some serious political undertones that indicate that the rally itself could have been the beginning of a satirical political movement.

I also had the pleasure of interviewing Rob Riggle, an actor and comedian who was an ‘anchor’ on TDS, over the phone. The interview was very impromptu, but ultimately Riggle maintained, as all actors affiliated with the show, do, that it was always all for comedy’s sake. But he said, “if it’s getting people to think about things in a different way, though, that’s just a bonus.” This statement contradicts itself, as I think Stewart and Colbert do when they maintain that they’re doing it all for the laughs.

*Interview conducted on September 10th, 2010, by Amanda Hartion*
They must know how important their show is, and how much of a role it’s playing in the arena of politics. They knew enough to throw a rally that attracted over 200,000 people in DC, and they also knew enough not to define that rally, but to let their viewers make of it what they wanted to.

I think what the data from my surveys and what this qualitative data suggests is that the shows are having an impact, but that it is hard to measure precisely what this impact is. Television shows can have such different values for different people, and when dealing with something on such an individual level, it’s hard to generate broad based quantitative data to better understand how the individual uses a show.

If given the opportunity to go back and correct some error in this project, I would certainly improve upon my first survey. Besides the technical difficulties, I could have conducted an entire thesis on this rally, and I could have gotten richer data from attendees. I also should have asked attendees how far they traveled to get to the rally, as this would indicate their level of commitment, and it would draw a better demographic image of rally attendees.

For the second survey, I simply would have asked fewer questions, as I was left with some interesting data that I had no use for. Having this extra data left me with some tough decisions concerning what to use and what not to use, and how this would affect my results. Letting go of data is always hard to do. I also would have implemented the survey earlier so that I had more time to collect more data.

Further investigation of this data would be interesting as well, if I was asking different questions. For example, investigating why watching general news is a significant and positive variable when it comes to voting, would be interesting to look at.
Also, why is it that a high level of political knowledge is a negative factor when it comes to political activism? My data simply cannot answer these questions, but they would be great for another research project. Also, more research on the content of these shows, as well as a look at how viewers vote, would be an interesting way to investigate who they are impacting in the political arena.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and Stephens Colbert’s Colbert Report use satire to criticize the mainstream political media for becoming largely opinion based and much less objective than political media of the past. While the hosts of each show maintain that they’re just trying to make people laugh, I wondered if there was not more to what they were doing in the larger political media. The audience ultimately defines what impact the shows have on the national political realm, as they did with the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear.” This rally was largely seen as political, according to my research, and overwhelmingly, attendees of this rally also voted in the 2010-midterm elections, indicating that these regular viewers of the shows are in fact politically active.

As the data from the second survey revealed, the shows do have an impact, but they are not the only, or the most important factors, when it comes to political participation. Media affects, more generally, may not be as far reaching as some scholars had indicated in their research. However, based on my personal experience at the rally itself, I maintain that these shows are having an impact on the political arena, and that the
most dedicated viewers of the shows are being pushed to participate by them. While viewing of the shows may not directly lead to participation in politics, it is a building block for what does lead to participation, not a barrier to it.

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Appendix A

1. “Rally to restore Sanity and/or Fear” Survey

1. Did you attend the "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear" (this includes going to a "Viewing party" or event that showed the rally on TV)?

*  
○ ○ ○ Yes  
○ ○ ○ No  
○ ○ ○ Don't know

2. Are you...

○ ○ ○ Male  
○ ○ ○ Female

3. What is your age? (Open ended)

4. In general, which party do you feel closer to (Democrat, Republican, a different party, Unsure)? (Open ended)

5. How often do you watch "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart?"

○ ○ ○ Regularly  
○ ○ ○ Sometimes  
○ ○ ○ Hardly ever  
○ ○ ○ Never  
○ ○ ○ Don't know

6. How often do you watch the "Colbert Report?"

○ ○ ○ Regularly  
○ ○ ○ Sometimes  
○ ○ ○ Hardly Ever  
○ ○ ○ Never  
○ ○ ○ Don't Know

7. There are a variety of reasons for attending a rally. Which of these applies to you?

   ○ ○ ○ I attended for entertainment reasons.  
   ○ ○ ○ I do not know why I attended.  
   ○ ○ ○ I attended to support the political statement of the rally.  
   ○ ○ ○ I attended to support "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," and/or "The Colbert Report."  
   ○ ○ ○ I attended because a friend or family member attended.  
   ○ ○ ○ I attended because my friends and family attended.  
   ○ ○ ○ other

8. If you attended the rally for a number of reasons, which reason is the most important to you?
I attended because my friends and family attended.
I do not know why I attended.
I attended for entertainment reasons.
I attended to support the political statement of the rally.
other
I attended to support "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," and/or "The Colbert Report."

9. Did you vote in the 2010 midterm elections?
Yes
No
Don't Know

10. Did you bring anything political to the rally (signs, T-shirts)?
Yes
No
Don't Know

2. "IU Undergraduate Media Consumption" Survey

1. Are you an Indiana University undergraduate student, and if so, what is your major
(check all that apply)
I am not an Indiana University undergraduate student
Informatics and Computing
Library and Information Science
Music
Public and Environmental Affairs
Political Science
Other Social Science
Humanities
History
Natural sciences
Education
Business
Journalism
Fine Arts
Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
Social Work
Mathematics
Telecommunications
Nursing
General Studies
Don't know/ Undeclared

2. How old are you?
18-22
23-29
younger than 18
older than 29

3. Are you a full-time student?
4. What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Transgender

5. What is your employment status (check all that applies)?
- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Temporarily laid off
- Unemployed
- Internship full-time
- Internship part-time
- Volunteer
- Don't know

5. Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?
- Very Liberal
- Liberal
- Moderate
- Conservative
- Very Conservative
- Don’t Know
- Somewhat Liberal
- Somewhat Conservative
- Other

6. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a…
- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Don’t know

7. Did your parents vote in the 2010-midterm elections on November 2nd?
- Mother Voted
- Father Voted
- Both parents voted
- Other Guardian in household (step parent) voted
- Neither Voted
- Don’t know

8. What is the highest level of education your parents have completed?
   - Mother
   - Father
   - Step Parent/Guardian
Did not Graduate from High School

High School Graduate

Some college no degree

2 year college degree

4 year college degree

postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD)

Don't know

9. Are you registered to vote?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don't Know

10. Are you registered to vote at your current address in Bloomington?
    - Yes, I am registered in Bloomington
    - I am registered at a different address
    - I am not registered to vote
    - Don't know

11. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not interested, 5 being extremely interested, how interested are you in politics?
    - 1-not interested
    - 2-slightly interested
    - 3- moderately interested
    - 4-very interested
    - 5-extremely interested
    - Don't know

12. Did you vote in the November 2nd, 2010 elections?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know

13. Did you vote in person on Election Day?
    - In person on Election Day at a polling place or precinct
    - In person before Election Day
    - Voted by mail (absentee)
    - Don't know
    - Did not vote

14. Thinking about political activities, during the past year did you...(check all that
15. How often do you watch certain television programs?

- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

- CBS, ABC, NBC News
- CNN
- MSNBC
- Fox News
- Local News
- C-Span
- PBS News
- The Daily Show with John Stewart
- The Rachel Maddow Show
- Glenn Beck
- Colbert Report
- The O'Reilly Factor
- Hardball with Chris Matthews
- Anderson Cooper 360

16. Thinking about the programs listed above, which most closely reflect your own political views (check all that apply)?

- CBS, ABC, NBC News
- CNN
- MSNBC
- Fox News
- Local News
- C-Span
- PBS News
- The Daily Show with John Stewart
- The Rachel Maddow Show
- Glenn Beck
- Colbert Report
- The O'Reilly Factor
- Hardball with Chris Matthews
- Anderson Cooper 360

17. How do you get most of your news about national and international issues?
18. Which party has the majority in the US House of Representatives?
- Democrats
- Republicans
- Other
- Don’t know

19. On which of these activities does the US government currently spend the most of its budget?
- Education
- National Defense
- Interest on national debt
- Medicare
- Don’t know

20. Who is the current speaker of the US House of Representatives?
- Mitch McConnel
- Nancy Pelosi
- Newt Gingrich
- John Boehner
- Don’t know

21. Compared with the 1990s, is the current Federal Budget Deficit...
- Bigger
- Smaller
- No difference
- Don’t know

22. Is the National Inflation rate reported by the government closer to...
- 1%
- 5%
- 10%
- 20%
- Don’t know

23. The federal government loaned money to banks under the bank bailout program known as TARP. How much of the money has been paid back to the government?
- All of it
- Less than half of it
- More than half of it
- None of it
- Don’t know
24. On average, how many hours of TV do you watch in a day?
- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- More than 8
- Don't know

25. How many hours of this time do you devote to TV news?
- None
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than 8 hours
- Don't know
Appendix B I: “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” Survey Results (Survey 1)

1. *TDS* Consumption

![Bar chart showing how often survey participants watch "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart"]
2. **CR Consumption**

How often do you watch the "Colbert Report?"
3. Reasons For Attendance

There are a variety of reasons for attending a rally. Which of these applies to you?

- 86.1%: I attended to support the political statement of the rally.
- 60.9%: I attended for entertainment reasons.
- 57.2%: I attended because a friend or family member attended.
- 20.3%: Other.
- 17.2%: I do not know why I attended.
4. Reasons For Attendance, One Choice Only

If you attended the rally for a number of reasons, which reason is the most important to you?

- I attended to support the political statement of the rally: 70.2%
- I attended for entertainment reasons: 11.5%
- I attended because my friends and family attended: 10.0%
- I do not know why I attended: 0.8%
- Other: 5.9%
5. Vote in Mid-term Elections

Did you vote in the 2010 midterm elections?
Appendix B II: IU Undergraduate Media Consumption and Political Participation Survey Results (Survey 2)

1. Party Identification

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...

- Democrat: 43.3%
- Republican: 23.6%
- Independent: 17.2%
- Don't know: 8.9%
- Other: 7.1%
2. Political Viewpoint

Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?

- Liberal: 24.5%
- Moderate: 19.9%
- Conservative: 11.9%
- Very Conservative: 2.1%
- Don't Know: 4.3%
- Somewhat Liberal: 11.3%
- Somewhat Conservative: 9.2%
- Other: 4.0%
3. Political Interest

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not interested, 5 being extremely interested, how interested are you in politics?

- 1 - not interested: 4.0%
- 2 - slightly interested: 18.0%
- 3 - moderately interested: 24.4%
- 4 - very interested: 26.8%
- 5 - extremely interested: 26.5%
- Don't know: 0.3%
4. Political Participation: Voting rates

Did you vote in the November 2nd, 2010 elections?

- Yes: 47.7%
- No: 52.0%
- Don't know: 0.3%
5. Political Participation: Activism

Thinking about political activities, during the past year did you...(check all that apply)?

- Been a member of any political organization: 21.8%
- Attend local political meetings (such as a school): 23.0%
- Try to persuade someone to vote: 47.5%
- Put up a political sign or bumper sticker: 23.3%
- Work/volunteer for a candidate, campaign or: 20.6%
- Comment on political blogs or online: 24.6%
- Donate money to a candidate, campaign, or: 10.4%
- Petition: 20.9%
- Contacted elected officials or news media: 24.5%
- Tried to change local policies in a place like a: 16.0%
- All Other Responses: 15.3%
Appendix C: Coding Key for Second Survey

*The following reflects how variables were coded on STATA*

**Political Knowledge:** (questions 19-24)
High knowledge=1 if 3 or more of the questions are correct
Low Knowledge=1 if at least 1 or 2 questions correct
No Knowledge-= 0 questions correct

Correct answers: 19-choice 2, 20-choice 2, 21-choice 4, 22-choice 1, 23-choice 1, 24-choice 3.

**Political Interest:** (question 12)
Choices: 1=not interested
2=slightly interested
3=moderately interested
4=very interested
5=extremely interested

Not interested=choices 1, or no reply
Moderately Interested= choices 2 or 3
Highly interested= choices 4 or 5

**Party Identification:** (question 7)
Choices: 1=Democrat
2=Republican
3=Independent
4=Don’t Know
5=other

Partisan=choice 1, 2, 3, or 5
Dem=1
Repub=2

**Political Viewpoint:** (question 6)
Choices: 1=Very Liberal
2=Liberal
7=Somewhat Liberal
3= Moderate
8=Somewhat conservative
4=Conservative
5= Very conservative
9=other

Extreme View=choices 1,2,4,5
Liberal=choices 1,2,7
Conservative=choices 8,4,5
Moderate=choice 3

**Major:** (question 1)

Choices:
1=no IU undergrad 12=Business
2=informatics and computer sciences 13=Journalism
3=Library and information science 14=Fine Arts
4=music 15=HPER
5=Public and environmental affairs 16=Social work
6=Political science 17=Math
7=Other social science 18=Telecommunications
8=Humanities 19=Nursing
9=History 20=General Studies
10=Natural Sciences 21=Don’t know/undeclared
11=Education

Political Science= choice 6
Other Social Science=choices 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 16, 20
Hard/Natural Sciences=choices 2, 10,17
Professional Degrees=choices 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19
Arts=choices 4, 14

**Media Consumption:** (question 16)

Frequency choices=
1=regularly
2=sometimes
3=hardly ever
4=never
5=don’t know

Program choices=
1=CBS, ABC, NBC 8=**TDS**
2=CNN 9=Maddow
3=MSNBC 10=Glen Beck
4=Fox News Channel 11=**CR**
5=Local News 12=O’Reily
6=C-Span 13=Mattews
7=PBS 14=Cooper

Viewer=choices 1,2
General media=choices 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 14
Biased Media=choices 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, 13
Satirical Media=choices 8, 11

**Voting:** (question 13)

Choices: 1=Voted
2=Did Not Vote
3=Don’t Know

Political Activism: (question 15)
Choices:
1=Political Organization
2=attend political meetings
3=persuade someone to vote
4=political sign/bumper sticker
5=Worked/volunteered for a campaign/political organization
6= Commented on political blogs/forums
7=Donated money
8=Petitioned
9=Contacted officials/media
10=Tried to change local/national policy
11=None of the above
12=Don’t Know