

News Grazers, Television News, Political Knowledge, and Engagement

Jonathan S. Morris and Richard Forgette

This study examines the modern-day television “news grazer” in American politics. We define news grazers as those individuals who watch television news with remote control in hand and switch to another channel when an uninteresting topic comes up. Using survey data from the Pew Research Center, we find that news grazers differ significantly from nongrazers in news-gathering habits, political knowledge, and behavior. These effects remain significant even when controlling for other factors associated with news-grazing frequency, such as age and gender. The implications for the present and future of democratic political engagement are discussed.

Keywords: *news grazers; television news; cable news; mass media*

Television continues to be a primary source of political news for most Americans (see Paletz 2002). Generally, television news has a more significant influence than newspapers on the public’s emotional reactions to politicians, institutions, and the issues (Graber 2001; Hart 1994; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998; Postman 1986). Reading the news facilitates more cognitive responses, which are relatively stable and often confirm preexisting attitudes. The drama and imagery of televised news has the greatest potential to stir our emotions—sympathy, envy, empathy, dislike, and even disgust. These emotional impressions often stay with people for extended time periods, and thus, color impressions of political issues (Graber 2001, 2006).

The manner in which the American public watches television news has changed during the past several decades. Today, people watch TV news at more intermittent intervals and often in a distracted or disinterested state. More generally, electronic multitasking has become commonplace in America, especially among young adults. The television news consumer has more options and has become more skilled at navigating the electronic media environment. This news-grazing phenomenon is largely because of the diffusion of the remote

control device (RCD), the expanding number of viewing alternatives on the television, and the consequent market competition and audience segmentation among news media providers. News consumers have countless news opportunities that are constantly updated and easily accessible on cable television and the Internet. News grazers are individuals who take advantage of this new media environment to check in on the news from time to time with no set patterns and with a passive eye toward information and events. Along the same lines, news grazers tend to follow the news on television with their remote control in hand, flipping to other channels when they become disinterested (Pew Research Center 2004).

News grazers are not rare in America. Data from a 2004 Pew Research Center survey found that 62 percent of the public agrees that they are TV news grazers. This number is a noticeable increase from just a few years before in 1998, when fewer than 57 percent of the public classified themselves as TV grazers. Furthermore, almost half of the American public (46 percent) classify themselves as someone who “checks in on the news from time to time,” as opposed to someone who “watches or listens at regular times” (Pew Research Center 2004). In other words, about half of the American public does not follow a regular news regimen—they graze electronic media for information that catches their fancy.

Although television has been the primary political news source in America for several decades, the emergence of the news-grazing population in America prompts us to consider its effects on public opinion and political engagement. This article presents a theory of news grazing in America and profiles news grazers' political attitudes and behavior. News grazers seek different news in different ways than nongrazers, and the consequences are significant. News grazers gravitate toward those sources of news that best fit their news-gathering style—cable news. However, even with a significantly higher level of exposure to cable news than nongrazers, news grazers display some troubling characteristics with regard to quality democratic citizenship. When controlling for several demographic factors, news grazers are less knowledgeable about politics and less engaged in the political process than nongrazers. They also display higher levels of cynicism and an aversion to policy-oriented political news.

Television and Remote Control Use

In 1952, Zenith developed the first television RCD, called Lazy Bones. As an accessory to the television, Lazy Bones was a motor that attached to the television's tuner. When activated, the motor would turn the tuner, or knob, and allow watchers to view another station. The motor was attached to a remote electronic controller by a cable. Thus, by pressing the button on the attached controller, a television watcher could change channels from across a room without having to get out of her seat.

As a product, *Lazy Bones* was a failure. There were only a few stations to choose from in the early 1950s, and Americans were highly selective in their viewing. Given the limited programming, viewers only turned on the television when there was a specific program they wished to view. When the program was through, the television was turned off. In that environment, a product that allowed people to turn channels without getting up and walking over to the television did not offer much added benefit. Also, the long cable that stretched across the floor from the television to the controller was an eyesore and considered more of a domestic trip wire than a technological advancement.

Despite these humble beginnings, the concept of this electronic television knob was revolutionary. *Lazy Bones* was one of the world's first commercial television RCDs. And when Robert Adler invented the wireless television remote control in 1956, the device was on its way to becoming an intricate household component that would influence the future of telecommunications in America and around the world. Following the 1950s, television evolved into a dominant aspect of everyday American life. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the number of viewing options for TV users increased dramatically, as did the number of hours Americans spent watching. As we entered the twenty-first century, 98 percent of U.S. households had at least one television, and 75 percent had two or more. The average American spent almost four hours a day watching television, and the average number of channels available per home numbered well over forty (Putnam 2000; TV-Free America 2004). Because Americans spend more time watching television and because there are more viewing options, the remote control has become one of the modern day's most useful entertainment inventions. Virtually all televisions, VCRs, and DVD players are sold with accompanying remote control devices, and "universal" remote controls have become increasingly common for controlling all television-oriented entertainment on one remote device.

Intellectual curiosity into the effect of the RCD on the television industry and viewing audience has prompted a wide array of studies. Research is primarily focused on questions of who clicks RCDs to graze the television landscape and why. Everyone today with a television clicks to some degree, but Americans click at varying rates. Almost all Americans use their television remote control from time to time in both purposeful fashions (fast-forwarding through prerecorded programs, actively searching for a program, or changing channels to avoid commercials) and random fashions (flipping aimlessly from channel to channel). The act of flipping is one with which most Americans are familiar. Ferguson (1994) noted, "Pressing buttons on a remote control to change channels is akin to looking at one's wristwatch. Everyone does it periodically" (p. 35).

Several important demographic characteristics are significant factors in determining how much a person clicks. A notable clicking factor is age (Bellamy and Walker 1996; Ferguson and Perse 1993; Heeter and Greenberg

1988). Younger Americans are more likely to have grown up in the age of the television RCD (late 1980s and beyond), and their familiarity breeds increased use. Also, popular perception is that the modern communication environment of flashy graphics, pithy messages and sound bites, and a multitude of gratifying entertainment options have cultivated an attention-deficient Generations X and Y (see Wallis 2006; Wattenberg 2006). The apparent lack of attentiveness among youngsters fosters a higher frequency of clicking. Older Americans, on the other hand, were technologically socialized to television in its early stages of few channels, few choices, and no RCDs. As the RCD has become more common, those in and above the forty-five to fifty-five age range have not been as quick to use the clicker. Baby boomers and earlier generations watch less television than today's youth, and they are more deliberate when they do so, typically tuning in with a specific programming goal in mind (Bellamy and Walker 1996).

Gender has been found to influence television grazing as well (Heeter 1988; Heeter and Greenberg 1988; Thoman 1989). Men flip more than women. Some observers have argued that older men use the remote control with much more frequency than older women, but the differences between young men and women are much smaller. In fact, some research has found that young women have the tendency to click more often than their male counterparts (Bryant and Rockwell 1993; Cornwell et al. 1993), suggesting that the "clicking gender gap" is waning. Other research, however, argues that young men tend to view frequent flipping and physical possession of the remote control as a source of power (Ferguson and Perse 1993; Perse and Ferguson 1993).

News Grazing, Television News, and Public Opinion

Television channel surfing reflects the news-grazing phenomenon. Those who are inclined to channel surf are more apt to get their news in a similar manner. Figure 1 illustrates that age and gender do influence news grazing. As with the channel-surfing phenomenon, men and younger adults are more likely to agree that they watch the news with remote control in hand, clicking to other stations when a disinteresting topic comes up.

Television news grazers are dependent on the remote control. Before the era of the RCD, television watchers were captive audiences for the news. A significant number of television watchers were exposed to coverage of political news and events because they simply did not wish to turn the channel from something they were previously viewing (Bellamy and Walker 1996). The result was significant learning even though interest in politics was not always necessarily high (Krugman and Hartley 1970; Prior 2005; Robinson 1974; Zukin and Snyder 1984).

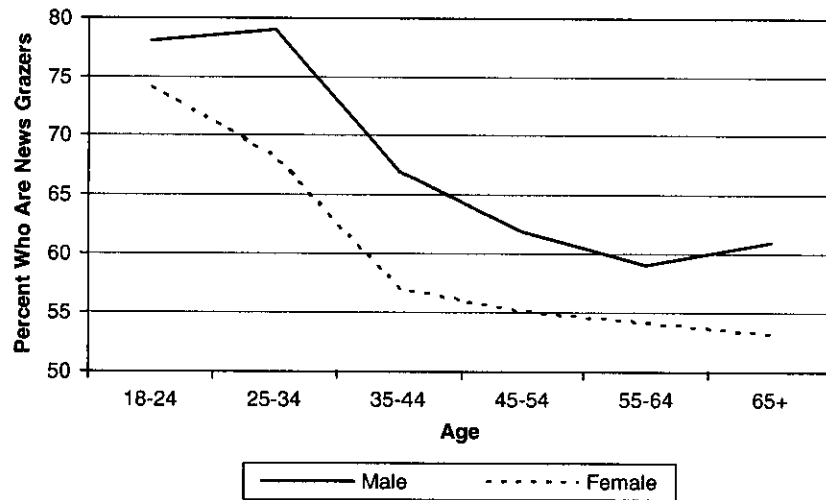


Figure 1

News Grazing by Age and Gender

Source: Data obtained from The Pew Research Center's 2004 Biennial Media Consumption Study.

Today, the combination of the RCD, an array of viewing options, digital video recorders (DVRs), and defined channel repertoires have empowered television viewers to pursue viewing options that best fit their interests. Most cable and satellite providers, for example, offer subscribers the option of creating personalized channel repertoires. Thus, news grazers can actively avoid political news or actively pursue it. Prior (2005) argues that this situation has led to a greater political-knowledge gap in America. In the past, the less engaged public was "accidentally" informed about politics via television news, because viewers had fewer options and greater difficulty in turning the channel. Today, however, no such impediments exist, as viewers are equipped with a wide landscape of viewing choices and the skill to navigate it. This evolution, Prior argues, promotes greater learning among those who pursue news, while learning is actually stifled among the less engaged Americans because they have the ability to avoid news in quest of sheer entertainment.

The American news grazer, however, does not appear to avoid the news in general. Prior contends that channel flippers alter their viewing repertoires to coincide with their interests, but there is little evidence to suggest that less politically engaged Americans construct their repertoires so narrowly as to eliminate all news channels. While grazers are not typically regular followers of traditional news, they do follow other sources of news with the same degree of frequency as

Table 1
News consumption habits: News grazers versus nongrazers

Percent of Americans Who ...	News Grazers	Nongrazers
Regularly read the daily newspaper	53 percent	59 percent
Regularly read news magazines	14	15
Regularly watch network television news	30	39
Regularly watch cable news	39	40
Go online for news every day	19	19

Source: Data obtained from the Pew Research Center's 2004 Biennial Media Consumption Study.

nongrazers. As Table 1 demonstrates, television news grazers get their news from cable television and the Internet with similar frequency as nongrazers. News grazers do, on the other hand, follow the daily newspaper and network television news with significantly less frequency than nongrazers. The most important illustration from Table 1, however, is that news grazers are not a disengaged group that barely keeps up with the news (when compared to nongrazers).

Grazers are, however, less aggressive seekers of news, and their approach to consuming information is much more passive than that of nongrazers. According to the Pew Research Center's Biennial Media Consumption (2004) survey data, 73 percent of television news grazers say they check on the news from time to time instead of at regular intervals. Only 53 percent of nongrazers do the same. Also, the nature of the news they are seeking is a significant departure from what the nongrazer seeks. News grazers are seeking news and information that grabs and keeps their attention. When uninteresting topics arise in the news, grazers will turn the channel.

The brass ring for almost all television sources is to capture the attention of news grazers, as a high proportion of them fall into the most desirable target audience for advertisers. Of the eighteen- to forty-nine-year-old age bracket that is highly coveted by television advertisers, two-thirds classify themselves as news grazers. Of those who are fifty and older, on the other hand, only 56 percent are news grazers. Thus, the battle among television news providers to capture the news grazer's attention has heated up considerably in the modern fragmented political news environment. Commercial success in today's ultra-competitive television market requires that the news product cater to the interests of the news grazer. Television news producers cover news topics that are less likely to prompt news grazers to flip to another station (Bellamy and Walker 1996). Some research has found that television news providers have adjusted to this situation by downplaying politics in their coverage and emphasizing entertainment-oriented "soft" news (Patterson 2000). We expect that

“soft” news will be more attractive to news grazers as the entertainment aspect will make them less likely to click to another channel.

It is this tendency to click away from what they might consider uninteresting news that separates grazers from nongrazers. Although news grazers report similar amounts of exposure to the news as nongrazers, it is the type of news coverage they do and do not follow that differentiates the two groups. From a gratification perspective, increased channel flipping is the result of the desire to avoid unpleasant stimuli as well as pursue entertainment (Perse and Ferguson 1994; Speck and Elliot 1997; Bellamy and Walker 1991). And it is hard political news (as well as political advertising) that has been cited as one of the major factors that will prompt an individual to turn the channel (Bellamy and Walker 1991).

We will show that news grazers watch more news stories that are entertainment oriented rather than public policy-oriented news. Subsequently, news grazers’ familiarity with entertainment-oriented news (also known as “soft news”—see Baum 2003; Patterson 2000) is similar to or greater than that of nongrazers. However, when it comes to familiarity with news of public policy (also known as “hard” news), news grazers significantly lag behind nongrazers, even when controlling for demographic factors. Thus, our contention is that news grazers do not avoid the news in general—they instead simply avoid certain types of news, particularly hard news. A consequence of this phenomenon is that news grazers’ knowledge of issues and news events fluctuates depending on the nature of the news topic. In addition to assessing effects on political knowledge, we will also demonstrate behavioral consequences. We will show that as news-grazing frequency increases, the propensity to participate in the political process decreases.

Data and Methods

To test our expectations, we rely on data from the Pew Research Center’s 2004 Biennial Media Consumption Survey. Since 1998, the Pew Research Center has conducted this biennial study that examines media habits of the American mass public. The data from 2004, which were collected between April and May of that year ($N = 3,000$), are the most recent. The survey was a nationwide telephone sample of three thousand adults, and the margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points. In addition to several instruments that measure exposure to various media sources, there are also multiple attitudinal and demographic indicators.

In this survey, each respondent was asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “I find that I often watch the news with my remote control in hand, flipping to other channels when I’m not interested in the topic” (1 = *completely disagree*; 2 = *mostly disagree*; 3 = *mostly agree*; 4 = *completely agree*). It is this item that we used to measure the frequency of television news grazing. Several dependent

variables were selected to be tested against the news-grazing variable. A set of variables measured the degree to which respondents enjoyed following the news in general as well as what styles of news they preferred. Additionally, we include several measures of attitudes toward the media in general and measures of how often an individual uses a specific media source (never, hardly ever, sometimes, or regularly). Primarily, the dependent variables were measured at the nominal or ordinal level. Thus, maximum-likelihood estimation was the applied analysis technique. Of course, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here.

Findings

Table 2 illustrates the television news-viewing tendencies of news grazing, when controlling for demographic factors as well as access to cable or satellite television. In each equation, the dependent variable is the amount of self-reported exposure to the television news source (1 = *never*; 2 = *hardly ever*; 3 = *sometimes*; 4 = *regularly*). As the estimates show, news grazers watch each of the three major cable news channels with greater frequency than do nongrazers. Holding all other variables in the model constant, those individuals who “completely agree” that they are news grazers have a .27 probability of regularly watching CNN, a .30 probability of regularly watching Fox News, and a .13 probability of regularly watching MSNBC. Nongrazers, on the other hand, had only a .17 probability of watching CNN regularly, a .20 probability of watching Fox News regularly, and a .08 probability of watching MSNBC regularly.

News grazers were not, however, more likely to watch national or local television news. In the equations for exposure to nightly national news on ABC, CBS, and NBC, the news-grazer variable was insignificant. For local news, the news-grazer variable was significant but negative, thus indicating that those who watch the news by clicking around the television landscape are less likely to settle on the local news than are those who target specific television news programs (nongrazers). Also, news grazers’ attraction to cable news does not translate to C-SPAN. C-SPAN’s primary coverage gavel-to-gavel of the House of Representatives as well as the Senate (on C-SPAN II) gets relatively low ratings (only 5 percent of Americans watch C-SPAN on a regular basis). It is not surprising, therefore, that congressional hearings and floor proceedings are ineffective in attracting news grazers’ attention.

Modeling exposure to news sources in general is a necessary first step, but it does not provide much information regarding news grazers’ preferences for various types of television news. We anticipated that news grazers would be more attracted to entertainment-oriented news and less attracted to what they consider more mundane or boring news. Table 3 illustrates how news grazing frequency relates to exposure to various types of news topics. As can be seen,

Table 2
Television news-viewing habits by news-grazing frequency^a

	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC	C-SPAN	NBC	CBS	ABC	LocalTV News
News grazing ^b	.14 (.05)**	.14 (.05)**	.14 (.05)**	-.01 (.04)	.05 (.05)	-.00 (.05)	.00 (.05)	-.16 (.04)**
Cable/sat. TV ^c	1.86 (.17)**	1.29 (.06)**	1.05 (.17)**	1.25 (.14)**	-.06 (.15)	-.25 (.15)	-.06 (.15)	.17 (.11)
Age	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)**	.00 (.00)	.01 (.00)**	.01 (.00)**	.01 (.00)**	.01 (.00)**	.02 (.00)**
White	-.58 (.15)**	-.52 (.15)**	-.51 (.15)**	-.52 (.11)**	-.33 (.14)*	-.60 (.15)**	-.66 (.14)**	-.19 (.11)
Income	.03 (.03)	.05 (.03)*	.09 (.03)**	.02 (.02)	.02 (.03)	-.04 (.03)	-.00 (.03)	.03 (.02)
Education	.01 (.04)	-.12 (.04)**	.07 (.04)	.17 (.03)**	.01 (.04)	-.07 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.08 (.03)**
Male	.11 (.11)	.02 (.11)	-.10 (.11)	.32 (.08)**	-.26 (.11)*	-.27 (.11)*	-.29 (.11)**	-.23 (.08)**
Constant 1	1.03	.39	1.22	2.39	-.36	-1.44	-.94	-2.33
Constant 2	1.73	.97	1.99	3.31	.39	-.68	-.18	-1.63
Constant 3	3.39	2.35	3.94	5.14	1.93	.85	1.45	-.38
LR χ^2 (7)	181.10**	113.18**	99.58**	198.86**	23.44**	50.28**	43.49**	101.47**
N	1,202	1,201	1,184	2,400	1,201	1,202	1,205	2,426

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

a. The dependent variables are the amount of exposure respondents reported for each source (1 = never; 2 = hardly ever; 3 = sometimes; 4 = regularly).
b. The news-grazing variable was measured by asking respondents to agree or disagree with the statement, "I find that I often watch the news with my remote control in hand, flipping to other channels when I'm not interested in the topic" (1 = completely disagree; 2 = mostly disagree; 3 = mostly agree; 4 = completely agree).

c. Does the respondent have cable or satellite TV? (1 = yes; 0 = no).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 3
Types of news-story exposure by news-grazing frequency

	How Closely Respondent Follows Different Types of News ^a						
	Figures and Events in Washington	International Affairs	Local Government	Sports	Entertainment	Culture and the Arts	Weather
News grazing	-.20 (.04)**	-.23 (.04)**	-.14 (.04)**	-.00 (.03)	.01 (.04)	-.04 (.03)	-.01 (.04)
Age	.02 (.00)**	.02 (.00)**	.02 (.00)**	.00 (.00)	-.02 (.00)**	.00 (.00)	.01 (.00)**
White	-.04 (.11)	-.16 (.11)	-.26 (.11)*	-.38 (.10)**	-.38 (.10)**	-.42 (.10)**	.00 (.11)
Income	.12 (.02)**	.09 (.02)**	.10 (.02)**	.06 (.02)**	-.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
Education	.19 (.03)**	.27 (.03)**	.05 (.03)*	.00 (.03)	-.04 (.03)	.32 (.03)**	-.13 (.03)**
Male	.35 (.08)**	.51 (.08)**	-.03 (.08)	1.22 (.08)**	-.43 (.08)**	-.50 (.08)**	-.30 (.08)**
Constant 1	-.37	-.13	-.68	-.40	-3.38	-.22	-3.62
Constant 2	.86	1.01	.53	.45	-1.93	1.18	-.243
Constant 3	3.05	3.22	2.55	1.81	.25	3.23	-.56
LR χ^2 (6)	277.29**	341.57**	179.33**	295.84**	129.78**	247.50**	80.12**
N	2,423	2,421	2,418	2,422	2,418	2,424	2,422

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

a. The dependent variables are the amount of exposure respondents reported to type of news (1 = not at all closely; 2 = not very closely; 3 = somewhat closely; 4 = very closely).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

higher levels of news-grazing frequency are not positively associated with any of the listed news types. However, there are several negative associations. Specifically, Table 3 shows that news grazers are significantly less likely to follow news about figures and events in Washington, international affairs, and local government. But this negative association disappears for news stories regarding sports, entertainment, culture and the arts, and the weather. Overall, the findings from Table 3 show the tendency for news grazers to avoid hard political news that focuses on government and public policy. They do not actively seek out entertainment-oriented news more than nongrazers, but there is evidence to indicate that grazers avoid it as they avoid policy-oriented news.

The news grazers' avoidance of news about politics and government is further illustrated in Table 4. As the first two columns of estimates show, increased news-grazing frequency is negatively associated with an individual preference for news stories that feature debates between people with differing points of view as well as news with in-depth interviews with political leaders and policymakers. News grazing frequency does not, however, significantly associate with an individual's tendency to like news that is sometimes funny or news that is enjoyable and entertaining.

Taken as a whole, the findings from Tables 1 through 4 uncover an interesting trend. Overall, increased news-grazing frequency is positively associated with greater exposure to certain news sources, especially cable news. On the other hand, there is no evidence that news grazers are more likely than nongrazers to pursue any specific news format or type of news. Instead, news grazers appear to avoid particular types of news while not avoiding others. It is the policy-oriented news that grazers avoid, as well as news that is heavy with political discussion and debate. It appears that more entertainment-oriented news does not have this effect. That is, when news grazers are watching the news on television, it is the political and policy-oriented shows that will prompt them to click to another station, but news with a softer orientation will not.

Are the television news preferences of the news grazers associated with levels of political knowledge and/or engagement? Our findings indicate that this is indeed the case on both counts. Regarding political knowledge, Table 5 shows that increases in news-grazing frequency are negatively associated with the ability to correctly identify the majority party in the U.S. House of Representatives as well as the name of the terrorist organization responsible for the September 11 attacks. Both of the issues are political or government related. But the final column illustrates that there is no significant relationship between news-grazing frequency and knowledge of whether Martha Stewart was found guilty in federal court. This guilty verdict, of course, was much more likely to be discussed on entertainment-oriented television programming. The result is that news grazers were just as likely as nongrazers to be exposed to

Table 4
News story preferences by news grazing

	Respondent Likes News That . . . ^a			
	Presents Debates between People with Differing Points of View	Has In-Depth Interviews with Political Leaders and Policymakers	Is Sometimes Funny	Makes the News Enjoyable and Entertaining
News grazing	-.08 (.04)*	-.14 (.04)**	.03 (.04)	.01 (.04)
Age	-.00 (.00)	.01 (.00)**	-.01 (.00)**	-.01 (.00)**
White	.08 (.12)	.12 (.12)	.34 (.11)**	.11 (.11)
Income	.08 (.02)**	.10 (.02)**	.00 (.02)	-.02 (.02)
Education	.23 (.03)**	.25 (.03)**	.04 (.03)	-.05 (.03)
Male	.13 (.08)	.15 (.07)	-.22 (.08)**	-.31 (.08)**
Constant	-.98 (.24)**	-1.77 (.24)**	-.24 (.23)	.72 (.23)**
LR χ^2 (6)	145.18**	194.51**	24.78**	33.23**
N	2,418	2,408	2,409	2,409

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

a. The dependent variables measure whether a respondent liked a given type of news (1 = liked it; 0 = did not like or it did not matter).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 5
Knowledge by news grazing

	Respondent Correctly Identified . . . ^a		
	Which Political Party Is the Majority in the U.S. House	the Name of the Terrorist Organization Responsible for the Sept. 11 Attacks	Whether Martha Stewart Was Found Guilty in Court
News grazing	-.11 (.04)**	-.13 (.05)**	-.08 (.05)
Age	.02 (.00)**	-.01 (.00)**	.01 (.00)**
White	.07 (.12)	.53 (.14)**	.10 (.14)
Income	.11 (.02)**	.15 (.03)**	.15 (.03)**
Education	.32 (.03)**	.35 (.04)**	.25 (.04)**
Male	.61 (.09)**	.73 (.12)**	-.37 (.11)**
Constant	-2.51 (.26)**	-.59 (.29)*	-.53 (.30)
LR χ^2 (6)	329.54**	293.83**	156.41**
N	2,426	2,426	2,426

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

a. 1 = correct answer; 0 = incorrect answer or answered *don't know*.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 6
Voter turnout by news grazing

	Voting Frequency ^a	Voted in 2000 Presidential Election ^b
News grazing	-.10 (.04)**	-.11 (.05)**
Age	.04 (.00)**	.04 (.00)**
White	-.20 (.11)	-.02 (.14)
Income	.16 (.02)**	.26 (.03)**
Education	.19 (.03)**	.26 (.04)**
Male	.07 (.08)	-.18 (.11)
Constant 1	.45	-2.86 (.32)**
Constant 2	1.59	—
Constant 3	2.30	—
Constant 4	3.59	—
LR χ^2 (6)	497.46**	350.02**
N	2,400	2,213

a. Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (1 = *never votes*; 2 = *seldom votes*; 3 = *votes part of the time*; 4 = *nearly always votes*; 5 = *always votes*).

b. Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (1 = voted in 2000 presidential election; 0 = did not vote). Respondents younger than twenty-two were excluded from this analysis.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

the news in this particular case, as it had more entertainment value for a broader section of the mass public.

Table 6 extends the findings on knowledge into the arena of political engagement. To measure voting, we use two related measures as dependent variables. Specifically, the first column estimates the respondent's overall assessment of how often the respondent votes (never, seldom, part of the time, nearly always, or always). The second column estimates whether the respondent did vote in the previous presidential election (2000, in this case). When controlling for several demographic factors that influence the tendency to vote, we still find that news-grazing frequency is negatively associated with voting in both models.

Finally, our analysis considers age-cohort effects. The relationship between news-grazing frequency and voting appears not to be consistent across age groups. Instead, we found that the negative relationship between news grazing and participation via voting was strongest among the youngest adults, particularly eighteen- to 24-year-olds. In fact, the relationship between news grazing and voting is not significant for any other age cohort except senior citizens (sixty-five years old and older). Among senior citizens, however, the relationship between television news grazing and voting frequency is in fact positive. Why this relationship among senior citizens is significantly positive is unclear. But what is clear is that news grazing has the strongest negative effect on voting

Table 7
Vote frequency and news grazing by age cohort

	Vote Frequency ^a					
	18-24 Years Old	25-34 Years Old	35-44 Years Old	45-54 Years Old	55-64 Years Old	65 Years and Older
News grazing	-.47 (.12)**	-.04 (.09)	-.14 (.08)	-.11 (.08)	-.15 (.10)	.21 (.10)*
Age	.04 (.06)	.05 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.05 (.04)	.05 (.02)**
White	-.20 (.27)	-.01 (.21)	-.36 (.23)	-.19 (.26)	-.04 (.34)	-.62 (.47)
Income	.10 (.06)	.14 (.05)**	.09 (.04)*	.25 (.05)**	.20 (.06)**	.24 (.06)**
Education	.20 (.09)*	.30 (.07)**	.27 (.06)**	.04 (.06)	.22 (.07)**	.15 (.07)*
Male	.16 (.24)	-.07 (.19)	.14 (.17)	.28 (.18)	-.49 (.22)*	.31 (.23)
Constant 1	-.87	1.13	-.48	-1.04	.59	1.41
Constant 2	.46	2.46	.45	-.04	1.79	2.33
Constant 3	1.03	3.12	1.23	.75	2.68	3.07
Constant 4	1.82	4.41	2.61	2.33	3.81	4.47
LR χ^2 (6)	23.57**	40.64**	47.26**	48.99**	43.89**	48.27**
N	244	382	523	482	350	419

Note: Cell entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

a. The dependent variable is the degree to which the respondent votes (1 = never votes; 2 = seldom votes; 3 = votes part of the time; 4 = nearly always votes; 5 = always votes).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

in the age cohort that news grazes the most (eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds). This relationship could be a short-term phenomenon with eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds that dissipates with age, or it could be an indicator of the tendencies of a new generation of news grazers who are navigating the most complex television news environment in history.

Conclusion

In their exploratory study of remote-control use, Bellamy and Walker (1991) determined, "An especially substantial finding was the gratification for the selective avoidance [with the remote control] of unpleasant stimuli, including politicians, political ads, news reporters, and others" (p. 429). Contrary to this finding, our results indicate that news grazers do not necessarily avoid the news on television. Controlling for other factors, we find that news grazers watch cable news more frequently than nongrazers. And when it comes to following other sources of news such as news magazines, the Internet, or even newspapers, the differences are marginal.

However, our findings do confirm the notion that news grazers avoid hard political news. They are less apt than nongrazers to follow news about Washington, international affairs, or local government and less likely to enjoy news with political debate or in-depth interviews. On softer news, however, there are no differences between grazers and nongrazers. Possible consequences of these tendencies, it appears, are that news grazers are less knowledgeable about the political world and less likely to participate in it.

Our findings also have implications for the current state of cable news in America. Although we did not directly examine the content of cable news, our results indicate that news grazers are not getting much hard news from these sources. This could be because grazers effectively navigate around the hard news stories that appear on cable and only stop on these channels when more entertainment-based stories such as celebrity news are the topic at hand. An alternative explanation is that hard news is disappearing from cable news as owners and producers realize that softer news is more attractive to their target demographics. Certainly, future content analysis research should examine exactly how much of the news on cable news is policy oriented and how much is entertainment.

The news-grazing trends discussed in the study could have significant implications for the present and future. On television, the Internet, and beyond, young adults have adapted their mass media habits to the ever-changing environment, and one manifestation is to news graze. Seventy percent of young adults report that they check in on the news from time to time rather than at regular times. For those older than age forty-five, that number drops to 36 percent (Pew Research Center 2004). Provided that young Americans take

their grazing habits into adulthood, thus establishing a multitasking society, it will be interesting to see if the apolitical correlates remain in place. If so, we could witness a further slide in overall political participation rates in an already disengaged mass public.

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Biographical Notes

Jonathan S. Morris is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at East Carolina University. His recent publications have appeared in *Political Communication*, *American Politics Research*, and *Political Research Quarterly*.

Address: Department of Political Science, Brewster Hall, A-121, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858; e-mail: morrisj@ecu.edu.

Richard Forgette is a professor and chair of the Department of Political Science, University of Mississippi. His most recent book is *Congress, Parties, and Puzzles* (2004).

Address: Department of Political Science, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS 38677-1848; e-mail: rforgett@olemiss.edu.