

Demand for Slant: How Abstention Shapes Voters' Choice of News Media

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Abstract

Binary decision models predict that voters prefer information sources whose biases conform to their own. By contrast, we show that allowing for abstention generates cross-over in news consumption. That is, the option to abstain induces voters with considerable leanings towards a candidate to demand information that is less biased towards that candidate than voters who are less leaning towards that candidate. This non-monotonicity in the demand for slant generates disproportionate demand for media outlets that are either centrist or only moderately biased. This suggests that, when studying the market for political news, we should be specially careful in our assumptions about the consumer side. It also suggests that rigid ideological segregation in news consumption is perhaps less of a problem than previously thought.