

TELEVISION AND NEOPOPULISM
IN LATIN AMERICA:
Media Effects in Brazil and Peru

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*Received 3-24-2004; Revise and Resubmit 6-14-2004
Received Revised 7-13-2004; Final Acceptance 8-12-2004*

Abstract: Several Latin American countries have experienced the emergence of neopopulist politicians who eschew ties to traditional parties and orient their campaigns toward the atomized poor. This article examines the role of television in the electoral success of these politicians. Using survey data, I assess the impact of television exposure on vote choice in the 1989 election of Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil, the 2000 election of Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and the 2001 election of Alejandro Toledo in Peru. These cases achieve variation on two predictors of media effects: the presence of a neopopulist outsider and biased television coverage of the campaign. Statistical analysis confirms our theoretical expectations of media effects in the first two elections (where coverage was biased) but not in the third. These findings suggest that bias is the more reliable predictor of television's impact on Latin American presidential elections, rather than the presence of a neopopulist candidate.

In recent years, several Latin American countries have witnessed the election of neopopulist presidents who emerged from outside the political establishment, bypassed intermediary institutions in their appeals to voters, and oriented their campaigns toward the atomized poor. Analysts have differed in their conceptualization of neopopulism, but many have posited a relationship between this phenomenon and the growing political salience of television.¹ Weyland (2001), for instance, argues that

*I am particularly grateful to Ruth Berins Collier for multiple rounds of comments on earlier versions of this article. Others who provided helpful feedback include David Collier, Chappell Lawson, Mary Sprague, Laura Stoker, participants in the University of California, Berkeley Latin American politics research seminar, and three anonymous LARR reviewers. Acquisition of data was facilitated by Sandro Macassi of the Asociación de Comunicadores Sociales Calandria and Patricia Zárate of the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (both in Lima, Peru) and the CIRELA Project and UC DATA at the University of California, Berkeley. The research for this article was supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

1. See Torre (2000) for a dissenting view.

television has helped neopopulists connect with the masses much as radio did for traditional populists, but that modern-day television has been even more effective in conveying politicians' charismatic qualities. Waisbord (2003, 201) maintains that neopopulism in Latin America "cannot be understood without an examination of contemporary media politics." Schneider (1991) adopts the appellation "telepopulism" to describe Fernando Collor's use of electronic media in his rise to prominence in Brazil. Sanborn and Panfichi (1996, 48) argue that one of the major changes associated with Alberto Fujimori's neopopulist presidency in Peru is the increasing importance of mass communication, particularly television.

Outside of the neopopulism literature *per se*, analysts have gone further, suggesting that television plays an important *causal* role in the emergence and electoral success of politicians such as Collor and Fujimori. Gibson (1992, 30) argues that the majority of the "New Right" movements in Latin America (including Collor's) "have risen to prominence not by the strength of party organization, but by the power of the mass media." Castells (1997, 316) suggests that Collor "was elected president out of nowhere because of his masterful television performance." Mainwaring and Scully (1995, 471) maintain that both Collor and Fujimori became frontrunners in their respective campaigns "thanks in good measure to television exposure." Sartori (1997, 133) offers these two candidates as support for the claim that "video-politics facilitates the election of improvised . . . flash 'outsiders'."

When considering their status as neopopulist politicians and the nature of media coverage during each campaign, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the use of television gives an electoral advantage to candidates such as Fujimori and Collor. While this specific hypothesis has been elaborated only outside of the literature on neopopulism, it is consistent with this literature's claim of a more general connection between the rise of neopopulism and the increasing political importance of television. A hypothesis of this sort should be amenable to empirical testing using survey data on voting behavior, but no analysis has yet sought to substantiate it. Indeed, with the notable exception of recent research on Mexico (Lawson 2002, 2004; Lawson and McCann 2005; Moreno 1999; Poiré 1999), there has been virtually no assessment of the media's effect on political behavior in Latin America, regardless of whether a neopopulist was a contender in the race.

In this paper I conduct an analysis of survey data to address the impact of television exposure on voting behavior in elections where at least one candidate was a neopopulist outsider. Specifically, I examine whether television is beneficial to neopopulist candidates because of their specific political strategies, or whether the influence of television in these elections derives more from biased coverage of the campaign. In order

to adjudicate between these two hypotheses, I compare the impact of television in three elections that vary on these predictors of media effects: the 1989 election of Collor in Brazil, the 2000 reelection of Fujimori in Peru, and the 2001 election of Alejandro Toledo in Peru. Taken together, the evidence from these cases suggests that bias, rather than a neopopulist political strategy, is the more reliable predictor of media effects in Latin American elections. While limitations in existing data mean that this finding should not be treated as a definitive conclusion, it constitutes a hypothesis that merits ongoing attention in the future as more appropriate survey data become available.

NEOPOPULISM AND TELEVISION: EXPECTED AFFINITIES

The increasing political influence of television is certainly not confined to neopopulism or Latin America; the United States has undoubtedly moved furthest in this direction, and the “Americanization” of politics has been noted in parts of the world ranging from Western Europe to Russia (Castells 1997, 324–328). What is it, then, about the election of neopopulists in Latin America that might lead us to expect such a strong role for television?

In this section, I examine the features of neopopulism and consider how television might play a role in the electoral success of a particular type of neopopulist—the outsider politician who runs for office with the backing of an uninstitutionalized personal-electoral vehicle. This characteristic and the fact that neopopulists design their campaigns to appeal to the atomized poor give rise to two conditions that are conducive to media effects: few partisan cues for choosing among candidates and few alternatives to television as a source of political information. However, in many cases these features coincide with a third, conceptually distinct predictor of media effects: bias in television campaign coverage.

When speaking of populism and neopopulism in Latin America, I have in mind an essentially political concept, consistent with the definition elaborated by Weyland (1996, 2001) and with the sociological and political dimensions of Roberts’s (1995) radial conceptualization. A definition of populism as a political strategy includes two key characteristics: populists relate to the masses in a top-down fashion that seeks to subordinate or bypass established forms of political intermediation, and they focus their efforts on appealing to a previously excluded political constituency.² Following this definition, neopopulism implies the

2. This definition is most consistent with that advanced in Weyland (1996). In more recent work, Weyland (2001) has focused on populists’ circumvention of existing intermediary institutions rather than their appeal to a previously excluded constituency. However, this latter component of the definition is still consistent with his insistence

populism of the 1980s to the present, in which the target of appeals is the atomized poor and informal sector rather than the organized working class. Neopopulism differs from classical populism precisely because this new constituency lacks formal organization. While classical populists circumvented existing political institutions in their appeals to the masses, they typically created new institutions to mobilize workers (Collier 2001). Neopopulists, by contrast, usually relate to the masses in a direct and unmediated fashion; they engage not in mass mobilization but merely mobilization of their supporters on election day.

The first component of neopopulism, the weak intermediation of traditional political institutions such as parties and labor unions, explains why television has proven particularly important for neopopulists seeking to communicate directly with the masses. As a medium that is now widely accessible even in the remote regions of most Latin American countries, television is a viable means of bypassing existing institutions and communicating a personal message to millions of voters simultaneously. Levels of television ownership are relatively high in Latin America: in the three most recent years for which data are available, the number of televisions per capita in the region was about 50 percent higher than the figure for low and middle income countries as a whole and also higher than the regional averages for East Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2003). Surveys from the countries most closely associated with neopopulism also reveal television to be an important and credible source of political information, as discussed below.

The usefulness of television as a direct vehicle for political communication explains why all neopopulists (and many other candidates as well) find it important for their campaigns. In only a subset of these cases, however, might television be expected to play a particularly strong role in influencing vote choice. Weyland (2001) distinguishes between two types of neopopulists: those who take over and subordinate an existing political party and those who emerge from outside of the established party system, eschewing all ties to existing parties. In the latter case, a party label may be formally necessary for electoral competition, but outsider neopopulists usually solve this problem by crafting disposable electoral vehicles, created for the occasion and evaporating thereafter.

When neopopulist candidates compete in an election with no ties to established political parties or other familiar institutions such as labor unions and business associations, television may be particularly effective at influencing public opinion and swaying vote choice. The oldest research tradition in the field of political communication, based largely on

that the definition of populism not be tied to support by any particular class, since the specific constituencies targeted by populists have changed over time from the organized working class to the informal sector and atomized poor.

work done in the United States, finds that the media may frame political debates or place certain issues on the public agenda but that they have only minimal effects on voting behavior.³ However, these findings are based on an environment of solid political cleavages and high levels of party identification. The actual influence of television on vote choice is likely to be stronger when partisan cues do not serve as a clear guide to choosing among candidates (Lawson and McCann 2005)—a characteristic of cases where neopopulists enter the race without ties to traditional parties. In these situations, television should play a much stronger role in defining their candidacies and conveying essential information to voters.

Just because television may be more important in helping voters get to know candidates without a familiar partisan label does not necessarily mean that it will lead them to favor such candidates. To understand why voters who watch more television coverage of the campaign might be more likely to vote for a neopopulist outsider, we have to consider the second feature of neopopulism elaborated above: candidates adopting this political strategy orient their campaigns toward the atomized poor. In part, this approach involves promises of material benefits: neopopulists seek to appeal directly to the poorest of the poor through targeted antipoverty measures and executive philanthropy (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996). To a significant extent, however, the unique appeal of neopopulist candidates involves a campaign centered on “low” politics—images and discourse designed to resonate with the popular classes rather than elites (Ostiguy 1997). By speaking in the vernacular, dressing casually, espousing an affinity for popular styles of music or sports, and engaging in showy, spectacle-filled campaigns that emphasize their charismatic qualities, neopopulist candidates make the large masses of poor voters more likely to identify with and support them.

When neopopulist outsiders run campaigns that are likely to have unique appeal among the atomized poor, there is reason to believe that the use of television will be particularly influential in persuading voters to support them. In research on the mass media in U.S. and European elections, the “minimal effects” finding is based not only on an abundance of partisan cues for choosing between candidates, but also on a series of different options for information about the campaign, including local political organizations and a variety of print media (Lawson and McCann 2005). These alternatives allow voters to select information sources that accord with their political preferences, such that

3. The classic studies in this literature include Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954); Campbell et al. (1960); Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948); and Patterson and McClure (1976). For a review, see Chaffee and Hochheimer (1982); for a recent criticism of the “minimal effects” findings see Zaller (1996). Lawson and McCann (2005) provide an extensive list of citations on media effects.

exposure to political information during the campaign tends to reinforce rather than alter existing opinions. Such luxury of choice does not apply, however, to the large masses of atomized poor whom neopopulist candidates in Latin America have targeted for support. Often semi-literate or with low levels of education and lacking strong political organizations or other alternative sources of information, the atomized poor may have few other options for informing themselves about politics than to turn on the television set.⁴

A weak role for intermediary institutions and an effort to appeal to the atomized poor, however, are not the only reasons that the use of television might be expected to benefit one candidate over his or her opponents. Similar expectations would arise when there is significant bias in television coverage of the campaign—a characteristic that is conceptually distinct from neopopulism but may be empirically associated with it. Just as poorly educated and demobilized voters have few alternatives to television as a source of political information, voters in a country where all coverage is biased toward a particular candidate have few alternatives in terms of different television stations or news programs. While the concept of neopopulism does not imply biased television coverage, such bias may coincide with the candidacy of neopopulists in Latin America. Because the mass media in Latin American countries are often controlled by wealthy individuals, campaign coverage may systematically favor candidates thought to be friendlier toward market reform (for instance, Collor versus Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva). Moreover, neopopulists running for reelection (e.g., Fujimori) may be able to use the power of their office to influence television coverage in their favor.

PREDICTORS OF MEDIA EFFECTS IN THE ELECTIONS OF COLLOR, FUJIMORI, AND TOLEDO

Given the variety of conditions that are expected to generate media effects in Latin American elections, examining the role of television in the rise of neopopulism calls for an explicitly comparative strategy. To assess whether media effects derive from bias, the presence of a neopopulist outsider, or both, we must compare cases that differ on these hypothesized explanatory variables. In this section I discuss three elections involving neopopulist politicians in Latin America and characterize them with respect to these predictors of media effects.

4. The lack of political organization among the atomized poor explains why we have a particularly strong expectation of media effects in favor of neopopulists, as opposed to populists in general. Organized workers who were the target of traditional populist appeals could always turn to unions or other local institutions for information about politics. In contrast, the atomized poor are essentially reliant on information coming directly from the candidates themselves—primarily via television.

Collor in 1989: A Neopopulist Outsider and Biased Television Coverage

The 1989 election of Fernando Collor in Brazil is a case where one would expect television exposure to have a strong effect on voting behavior, on the basis of both neopopulist politics and biased coverage. During the 1989 campaign, the early front-runner candidates (who all had an established history in Brazilian national politics and were supported by traditional parties) were severely challenged by the emergence of Collor, a politician who appeared seemingly out of nowhere and quickly became a major competitor. Collor competed under the label of the National Reconstruction Party, a personalist electoral vehicle created largely because campaign regulations required a party affiliation, and he refused endorsements from other parties or organized interests (Schneider 1991). His campaign discourse attacking parties and the political class contrasts notably with that of his principal opponent Lula, who emphasized his position as the leader of a programmatic leftist party.

More than being just a simple outsider candidate, Collor epitomized neopopulism in that his campaign specifically sought to target the unorganized poor and illiterates who had been enfranchised with Brazil's transition to democracy in 1985. In seeking their votes, Collor drew upon the widespread perception of corruption under the Sarney government and its connection to Brazil's hyperinflation, which disproportionately harmed the poor (Moisés 1993; Weyland 1993). Just as significantly, Collor ran an anti-elite campaign centered on low politics, emphasizing his passion for sports and other popular pursuits, and he remained vague on the specifics of policy or ideology. His image as a young and handsome candidate (named by *People* magazine in 1990 as one of the fifty best-looking people in the world) also surely helped his resonance among television viewers.

Above and beyond Collor's status as a neopopulist outsider, the political importance of television in Brazil and the pro-Collor bias of campaign coverage lead us to expect media effects in his favor. At the time of the 1989 election, 73 percent of Brazilian homes had access to television, and 86–89 percent considered the medium to be their most important source of political information (Lima 1990; Porto 2003).⁵ Television also enjoys a much higher level of credibility than Brazil's political institutions (Porto 2003). For most Brazilians, television is nearly synonymous with Rede Globo, the country's dominant network, whose share of the national television audience was consistently above 59 percent during the 1989 campaign and as high as 84 percent during prime time (Lima 1990).

5. The figures for political information are higher than for ownership presumably because those without a television set can still watch in the homes of neighbors or in public places such as bars, cafes, and community centers.

Globo has a history of slanted coverage of Brazilian politics, and the 1989 campaign was no exception. Quantitative analysis of the time of coverage devoted to different candidates, for instance, suggests that Globo's news broadcasts were biased in favor of Collor. During June and July, Collor's share of airtime was significantly more than that of his two major challengers combined. The quantity of coverage became more balanced toward the end of the campaign, but Collor still remained comfortably on top.⁶

Admittedly, disparities in the quantity of coverage do not necessarily reflect biases in the tone of coverage, and very little data on the content of broadcast news during the 1989 campaign are readily available for analysis. Nonetheless, the pieces of evidence that do exist suggest that the content of Globo's newscasts was at least moderately biased in favor of Collor. For instance, following the final debate between Collor and his run-off opponent Lula, Globo's nightly newscast aired an edited version that showed Collor speaking more frequently (3:34 for Collor versus 2:22 for Lula) and highlighted his opponent's gaffes (Conti 1999; Porto 2003). Circumstantial evidence also suggests that Globo's coverage intentionally favored Collor. In early August 1989, for instance, Globo owner Roberto Marinho was overheard asking Collor which television stations were not supporting his candidacy so he could personally address the situation (Lima 1990).

Fujimori in 2000: A Familiar Incumbent and Extensive Media Control

Peru is another country in which television has been intimately intertwined with the career of a neopopulist president—Alberto Fujimori. In assessing the question of media effects, Fujimori's initial victory in the 1990 presidential election might be the ideal case to examine, because television coverage of this campaign is generally regarded to have favored his opponent Mario Vargas Llosa. Thus, if any media effects benefited Fujimori in the 1990 election, they would have to be explained on the basis of his neopopulist political strategy rather than the television coverage that probably worked against him. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find appropriate survey data covering this election. However, Fujimori's second reelection in 2000 is also a useful case for contrasting with the 1989 election in Brazil, albeit for different reasons. In this

6. Figures for the three leading candidates (others excluded) are as follows. June 16–30: Collor, 55 percent; Leonel Brizola, 24 percent; Lula, 21 percent. July 1–31: Collor, 63 percent; Brizola, 6 percent; Lula, 31 percent. August 28–October 29: Collor, 49 percent; Brizola, 31 percent; Lula, 20 percent. Figures for July cover all news programming and the show *Bom Dia Brasil*; others cover the evening news broadcast *Jornal Nacional* (Lima 1990, 42–43; Rubim 1989, 17).

election, the principal basis for an expectation of media effects is the Fujimori regime's extensive control of broadcast television, ensuring favorable coverage of his campaign and negative depiction of opponents.

Fujimori was perhaps the quintessential neopopulist president during his decade in power. He ran with different temporary or "disposable" parties in each of his three elections; he sought to provide material support in exchange for votes of the poor through targeted antipoverty programs; and his campaigns crafted an image of a *presidente como tú*, who spoke imperfect Spanish, donned ponchos and drove tractors on visits to rural areas, and had more in common with the Peruvian underclass than with the white Lima elite (Levitsky 1999; Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996).

During the 2000 campaign, however, any advantages conferred by Fujimori's neopopulist strategy would likely have been negated by the candidacy of another neopopulist—Alejandro Toledo. While Fujimori remained an antiparty candidate throughout his term, he certainly was not a little-known outsider in 2000, as was Toledo. Moreover, Toledo sought to appeal to many of the same poor voters as Fujimori, and by emphasizing his Indian ancestry and rags-to-riches personal success story, he made a more authentic case for identifying with Peru's poorest voters. On the basis of political strategy alone, therefore, we might have reason to expect that television exposure would give a slight benefit to Toledo.

Nonetheless, any possible benefit Toledo derived from his outsider status and neopopulist campaign style was easily trumped by the Fujimori regime's extensive control of the mass media. During the 1999–2000 campaign season, Fujimori's national security advisor Vladimiro Montesinos sought to ensure favorable television coverage through covert payoffs to station owners. These efforts built upon an even longer history of violent acts used to intimidate the media (Conaghan 2002). Broadcast television was an obvious target for the Fujimori regime because of the political importance of the medium in Peru. Ninety-four percent of Peruvian residents and 91 percent of those in the next-to-lowest socioeconomic bracket had a television at home as of 1997 (Nájar 1999, 360).⁷ For nearly two-thirds of the population, television remains the medium most frequently consulted for information about current events, as well as the most credible source of information (Tanaka and Zárate 2002).

The tangible result of the Fujimori regime's media control was that television coverage of the 2000 campaign was markedly biased in favor of the incumbent. According to analyses conducted by Transparencia

7. Data for the lowest socioeconomic bracket (sector E) were not available.

(1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), the vast majority of the coverage during the campaign was dedicated to Fujimori. At no point did the president drop below 66 percent of the total coverage, nor did any of his challengers receive more than 23 percent. During most of the campaign, his share of airtime was between 78–89 percent.⁸ Moreover, a decline in coverage of Fujimori in January and concurrent spike in Alberto Andrade's share of airtime has been attributed to an increase in *negative* coverage, as television stations sought to discredit Andrade's candidacy.⁹ On the whole, Fujimori dominated the airwaves in Peru even more than Collor did in Brazil during the 1989 election.

As in the case of Brazil, imbalances in the quantity of coverage in Peru do not necessarily indicate bias in the content of television news. However, data on the content of campaign coverage are readily available for the Peruvian case; they reveal a level of bias even more extreme than that suggested by airtime alone. Fowks (2000) analyzed coverage of the four major candidates on the leading television network América Televisión during the final three months of the campaign. Strikingly, 100 percent of the airtime for each of the opposition candidates was labeled negative coverage, while 97 percent of the coverage of Fujimori was positive and 3 percent was neutral.¹⁰ Fowks's descriptive analysis of coverage on three other television stations shows that they too largely adhered to América Televisión's pattern of bias.

Toledo in 2001: A New Neopopulist and Balanced Television Coverage

To gain additional leverage on the question of what conditions give rise to media effects in Latin America, it is useful to look at a case in which the presence of a neopopulist outsider (as opposed to biased coverage) is the principal basis for expecting television exposure to benefit a particular candidate. Peru's 2001 election, held after the corruption

8. Figures for the four leading candidates (others excluded) are as follows. October 1–31: Fujimori, 89 percent; Toledo, 2 percent; Luis Castañeda, 4 percent; Andrade, 6 percent. January 11–25: Fujimori, 66 percent; Toledo, 3 percent; Castañeda, 8 percent; Andrade, 23 percent. February 28–March 3: Fujimori, 80 percent; Toledo, 10 percent; Castañeda, 4 percent; Andrade, 6 percent. March 1–21: Fujimori, 78 percent; Toledo, 16 percent; Castañeda, 3 percent; Andrade, 2 percent. Analysis covers all daytime and evening news programming on broadcast channels two, four, five, seven, nine, and eleven, except October 1–31 (which omits channel eleven) and February 28–March 3 (which covers evening news only).

9. See "Television Coverage of Presidential Candidates: The Third Transparencia Survey," <<http://qsilver.queensu.ca/csd/peru2000/press/special6.shtml>>.

10. Analysis covers nightly and Sunday news programs, February 8–14, March 1–7, and April 1–8, 2000. Figures for each candidate include coverage of the candidate himself, his message, and his campaign team.

scandal that ended Fujimori's presidency, meets these criteria. First, there was essentially no bias in the television coverage of the campaign because the Fujimori regime's extensive mechanism for media control had been exposed and effectively dismantled. Second, Alejandro Toledo was the only neopopulist outsider in the race.

Peru's 2001 election is notable in that the country's traditional party system experienced a modest comeback—both of Toledo's major competitors had ties to parties with a long history in Peruvian politics. Former president Alan García returned from a decade of exile to compete for office with the support of APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), the country's best-organized and best-known political party. On the right, the major competitor was Lourdes Flores, who had previously been a senator for the Popular Christian Party (PPC), one of four traditional parties competing in the 1980s. Flores crafted a new electoral alliance in 2001, running on the ticket of the National Unity (UN) coalition, although the PPC was one of the UN's major constituents (Kenney 2003). In contrast to his two competitors, Toledo was the only candidate for whom past or present party affiliation (not to mention past history as an office holder) provided no effective guide to voters.

In terms of the targets of their appeals, there were more similarities between Toledo and García; both ran typical neopopulist campaigns that sought to appeal to the unorganized poor. García was labeled a neopopulist during his former presidency (Weyland 2001), and in the 2001 campaign he proposed a number of interventionist policies and targeted benefits for the poor that would have been likely to endear him to this constituency. However, Toledo's economic platform was similar to García's, and he had the added advantage of being a candidate with whom the vast majority of Peruvians could identify on a personal level. Judging from campaign style alone, it is difficult to say whether television exposure would have been more likely to favor Toledo or García. However, when one considers that only Toledo was an outsider candidate, theory suggests that television exposure should work to his net benefit.

In contrast to the previous year's campaign, television coverage of Peru's 2001 election was remarkably balanced, so any observed media effects cannot be attributed to bias. Analysis of the quantity and tone of broadcast television news coverage conducted by *Transparencia* (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) shows that the same television stations that were so negative toward Fujimori's opponents in 2000 were evenhanded in their treatment of the different candidates in 2001. During the three months prior to the April 8 first-round vote, Peru's broadcast television networks devoted approximately equal time to the three leading candidates. At no point did any candidate receive more than 46 percent or less than 22 percent of the total coverage. Each candidate received a majority of

airtime for one of the three months, rather than a single candidate dominating for the entire period.¹¹

Analysis of the content of coverage (conducted during March 2001 only) shows that television stations were even more balanced in their treatment of the major candidates than figures on airtime would suggest. Coverage of Toledo was 69 percent positive during this period, 20 percent neutral, and 12 percent negative; for García, it was 63 percent positive, 32 percent neutral, and 5 percent negative; and for Flores, it was 67 percent positive, 23 percent neutral, and 10 percent negative. The one notable discrepancy is a slightly higher percentage of neutral coverage and slightly lower percentage of negative coverage for García—certainly a minor deviation when compared to the extensive bias in content that has been documented for the 2000 campaign.¹²

COMPARING MEDIA EFFECTS: DATA SOURCES, METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES, AND STATISTICAL RESULTS

Because the elections of Collor, Fujimori, and Toledo vary on the presence of a neopopulist outsider and the degree of bias in television coverage, examining media effects in each case should allow us not only to assess *whether* television played a role in the electoral success of each politician but also to draw some tentative inferences as to *why*. In this section I first discuss the data sources used to compare media effects across the three elections and the methodological challenges that are inherent in this task. I then turn to the analysis of the influence of television in each election and the insight this offers into the causes of media effects in Latin America.

To assess media effects in these elections, I analyze three different surveys that inquire about patterns of television exposure, actual or intended vote choice, and a number of demographic and party-identification

11. Figures for the three leading candidates (others excluded) are as follows. January 8–31: Toledo, 30 percent; García, 44 percent; Flores, 25 percent; February 1–28: Toledo, 39 percent; García, 22 percent; Flores, 40 percent; March 1–31: Toledo, 46 percent; García, 30 percent; Flores, 24 percent. Figures cover all daytime and evening news programming on broadcast channels two, four, five, seven, nine, and thirteen. Alan García received a somewhat larger share of coverage in January because of the newsworthiness of his return from exile to enter the race. Toledo's larger share of coverage during the final month derives almost entirely from the programming of a minor station with small market share.

12. These data are for the aggregate of television coverage across all broadcast television stations. However, coverage was quite comparable among them. The correlation of airtime devoted to Toledo and to García during the January–March period was .89; for net positive coverage in March it was .93. Coverage of Flores vis-à-vis her competitors was also fairly consistent across all stations except channel thirteen—a minor station that focused almost exclusively on the two leading contenders.

control variables. For the Brazilian case, I use a national survey conducted by Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião e Estadística (IBOPE) from November 29 to December 2, 1989—several weeks prior to the run-off vote on December 17.¹³ For Peru's 2000 election, I use a survey of residents of Lima and Callao that was carried out March 4–5 (one month prior to the first-round vote) and was designed by Veeduría Ciudadana de la Comunicación Social and Asociación de Comunicadores Sociales Calandria. For Peru's 2001 election, I present the results of an analysis conducted by the Comparative Infrastructure of Representation in Latin America (CIRELA) Project (2004), which administered a survey to Lima residents during the summer of 2002. While the field dates for this survey are well after the 2001 campaign, the survey does inquire about vote choice in the first round of the election as well as general patterns of media exposure.

Comparing media effects in each election based on an analysis of these three surveys presents several methodological challenges. The first concerns the difficulty of cross-case comparison when the surveys used to inform each case differ in uncontrollable ways. As noted above, the three surveys were conducted at different points in time with respect to each campaign. Moreover, they sample different populations—while the Brazilian survey is nationally representative, the two Peruvian surveys sample only from the capital city.¹⁴ In addition, they measure several important variables in somewhat different ways. The Brazilian survey inquires about exposure to television in general, while the Peruvian surveys ask about exposure to television news, and the survey for Peru 2000 includes only an interviewer-coded measure of socioeconomic status rather than a question about income posed directly to the respondent. In light of these and other differences among the three distinct surveys, the conclusions that we draw from comparing media effects in each case are best treated not as definitive findings but as hypotheses that can be tested with greater confidence in future elections as better survey data are made available.

A second methodological issue concerns whether the measurement of television viewing distinguishes among different networks. When analyzing media effects in countries like Mexico where there are significant disparities in the coverage of competing television stations, it is common to differentiate among them. In two of the three surveys

13. The IBOPE survey, "National Voter Survey—Wave 20," was accessed through the archive of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (survey BRIBOPE89-OPP603).

14. The main problem with using a survey of Lima residents only is that dynamics might be different outside of the capital city. However, analysis of a different, nationally-representative survey administered in November 1999 (results available on request) shows that the impact of television on approval of Fujimori's job as president is similar when estimated for Lima residents or for Peruvians as a whole. These results suggest that with respect to media effects, Lima is indeed representative of the rest of the country.

analyzed here (Brazil 1989 and Peru 2001), television exposure is measured only in the aggregate, such that comparison of media effects across different networks is impossible. Regardless of these practical data limitations, however, I argue that it is substantively justified to focus on aggregate television exposure in each election. As discussed above, coverage varied little across Peruvian broadcast television stations during the two campaigns—they were more or less equally biased toward Fujimori in their treatment of the 2000 race and were all relatively balanced during the following year's campaign. In the Brazilian case, the Globo network held a near monopoly on viewers; for most voters in the 1989 election, watching television meant watching Globo.

The lack of a meaningful choice among different television networks in each of these elections has important implications for the potential problem of self-selection to ideologically congruent news sources. Because voters are not randomly assigned to watch different television stations, they may choose one that accords with their pre-existing political preferences, such that watching television does not actually cause any change in their intended vote. Where television exposure is measured in the aggregate and voters have no meaningful choice among different networks, self-selection is much less of a potential problem. It is still possible that pre-existing preferences might lead voters to not watch television at all, relying instead on other sources of political information. However, in at least the Brazilian case, there is evidence to the contrary: in a survey conducted one month prior to the first-round election, supporters of the three leading candidates listed television news as an important source of political information in approximately equal proportions (Straubhaar, Olsen, and Cavaliari 1993).

Statistical Analysis of Media Effects

In order to test our hypotheses about the conditions that give rise to media effects in the election of neopopulist candidates, I estimate statistical models of the relationship between exposure to television and vote choice in the second round of Brazil's 1989 election and the first round of Peru's 2000 and 2001 elections.¹⁵ For the Brazilian election, vote is operationalized as a choice among Lula, Collor, or failing to cast a valid ballot. In both Peruvian elections, vote is measured as a choice among the

15. Neither Peruvian survey inquires as to vote or vote intention in the run-off. The Brazilian survey does report vote in the first round, though I omit these results for economy of presentation. The bivariate relationship between television and vote choice in the first round of Brazil's 1989 election is somewhat unusual: the group that was least supportive of Collor consisted of those who watched television most frequently. In the multivariate model, however, this relationship is reversed, and results are similar to those for the run-off.

three leading candidates (Fujimori, Toledo, and Andrade in 2000; Toledo, García, and Flores in 2001) and a residual category that covers not voting, casting a null or blank ballot, or voting for a minor candidate. As noted above, the Brazilian survey inquires about exposure to television in general, whereas for both Peruvian elections this variable measures the frequency of watching television news (broadcast only for Peru 2000; unspecified for Peru 2001). In each case, television is a four-category variable with slightly different though essentially comparable values.¹⁶

A useful first step in assessing media effects in each election is to examine the simple bivariate relationship between vote choice and exposure to television. When these two variables are cross-tabulated for Peru's 2000 election, there is a statistically significant relationship—voters who watched television news more frequently supported Fujimori in greater proportions than those who watched less often.¹⁷ This finding is notable given that the survey used for the 2000 election has the smallest sample size (292 observations valid for both of these variables). For Brazil's 1989 election and Peru's 2001 election, however, there is no significant bivariate relationship between television and vote choice—at each level of television viewership, voters supported the different candidates in roughly equal proportions.

While sometimes informative, bivariate cross-tabulations of this sort are limited in that they cannot control for confounding variables. In Peru's 2000 election, for instance, the relationship between television exposure and vote intention might be explained by a third variable such as education. The lack of a significant relationship in the other two elections might be similarly spurious. To isolate the effects of television, therefore, I estimate multinomial logit models for each election, controlling for a common set of demographic predictors of vote choice as well as regional and party-identification variables, where relevant.¹⁸ Common control variables in each model include age, education, sex, and income (socioeconomic status for Peru's 2000 election). In the nationally representative Brazilian survey, I include additional controls for urban versus rural

16. Response categories are "never," "rarely," "sometimes," and "frequently" (Brazil 1989); "never," "occasionally," "regularly," and "daily" (Peru 2000); "less than once a week," "once a week," "several times a week," and "daily" (Peru 2001).

17. Chi-squared statistic is 23.5 with nine degrees of freedom; $p = .005$.

18. The multinomial logit model builds in the assumption of the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA)—namely, that the probability of choosing between any two alternatives is independent of the probability of choosing any other alternative. In models of vote choice, this assumption could cause problems if two or more of the candidates can reasonably be viewed as substitutes—for instance, if they both share a similar ideological orientation (Alvarez and Nagler 1998). Following the procedure described by Greene (2003, 724) and Long (1997, 182–84), I have tested for IIA in each of the models estimated in this paper. The results consistently support the IIA assumption.

residence and different regions of the country, since Collor is likely to have appealed more to voters in rural areas and the northeast region from which he hailed. I also control for identification with the two major programmatic parties supporting candidates in these elections: the Workers' Party (PT)—(Lula's party in Brazil's 1989 election) and APRA (García's party for Peru's 2001 election). Given that the other major candidates were backed by personal electoral vehicles, identification with these parties is conceptually indistinguishable from intention to vote for the candidates who created them.

The results of this analysis, reported in table 1, show that there were statistically significant media effects in favor of the winner in Brazil's 1989 election and Peru's 2000 election (both of which had biased television coverage) but not in Peru's 2001 election (where television coverage was balanced).¹⁹ For the Brazilian case, the estimated effect of television exposure is statistically significant at the .001 level. In the model for Peru's 2000 election, the coefficient for television exposure is significant across both choice categories, but only at the .1 level. This lower level of significance is arguably acceptable, however, given the unusually small sample size relative to the number of parameters estimated.²⁰ On the basis of these models, therefore, we can infer that voters who watched television more frequently (*ceteris paribus*) were more likely to vote for Collor or Fujimori and less likely to vote for any other candidate—results that accord with our theoretical expectations. In Peru's 2001 election, however, television exposure is estimated to provide an advantage (albeit statistically insignificant) for García.²¹ This result runs counter to our expectation that media effects in this election would favor the neopopulist outsider Toledo.

Several of the other coefficients in these models offer confirmation that we are indeed dealing with examples of neopopulism in each

19. To assess the possibility that television exposure is serving as a proxy for general campaign attentiveness, I also estimated the Peruvian models with controls for exposure to radio and print news and the Brazilian model with a control for interest in politics (results available upon request). In each case the coefficients for television change only minimally and retain their previous level of significance.

20. The sample size of the survey is 400; the much smaller N of 111 for this model is due to the large amount of missing data for socioeconomic status. I have chosen to include this variable in the interest of completeness. When omitting it, the valid N is almost three times as large, and the effect of television is significant at the .01 level for Toledo and the .05 level for Andrade.

21. The survey used for Peru's 2001 election includes an oversample of eight poor districts in Lima; the results presented here are for the unweighted sample. When re-analyzing the data with sampling weights to correct for unequal probabilities of selection across districts, the results (available upon request) are essentially the same. All significant coefficients remain significant in the same direction, and the effect of television is still insignificant.

Table 1 Vote Choice in Brazil's 1989 Run-off Election and Peru's 2000 and 2001 First-Round Elections

	Brazil 1989	Peru 2000		Peru 2001	
	Lula	Toledo	Andrade	García	Flores
Television	-0.534*** (0.150)	-2.284† (1.254)	-2.289† (1.205)	0.318 (0.423)	0.017 (0.452)
Age	-0.304** (0.117)	5.572*** (1.685)	2.185 (1.637)	-0.509 (0.698)	-2.001* (0.805)
Education	0.836*** (0.212)	3.234† (1.708)	2.361 (1.589)	-0.679 (0.701)	1.424† (0.776)
Income ^a	-0.242 (0.198)	1.337 (1.128)	1.889† (1.003)	1.595 (1.227)	2.547* (1.113)
Male	0.111 (0.085)	0.840 (0.704)	-0.185 (0.603)	-0.203 (0.245)	-0.584* (0.272)
Urban	0.510*** (0.098)				
South ^b	0.036 (0.118)				
Northeast	-0.268** (0.111)				
Center-West/ North	-0.897*** (0.151)				
PT (Brazil)	3.759*** (0.225)				
APRA (Peru)				2.457*** (0.259)	0.050 (0.375)
Intercept	-0.750*** (0.180)	-4.244* (2.119)	-1.828 (1.911)	-0.934† (0.515)	-1.227* (0.557)
Ln L	-2313		-122		-810
N	3245		111		674

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .1$.

NOTE: Multinomial logistic regression coefficients with estimated standard errors in parentheses. Choice of none/other/blank/null estimated for each model but not reported. Baseline is the winner of each election: Collor for Brazil 1989, Fujimori for Peru 2000, Toledo for Peru 2001. All independent variables scaled 0–1.

a Interviewer-coded socioeconomic status for Peru 2000.

b Reference category for regional dummies is the Southeast.

election. In every instance where the results reach a .1 level of statistical significance, voters with less income and education are estimated to be more likely to support the neopopulist candidate—an outcome we would expect given their campaigns target these very same voters. In Brazil's 1989 election, the coefficients for the geographical control variables are

also statistically significant in the expected direction—rural voters were more likely to support Collor, as were those in the poorer Center-West, North, and Northeast versus the more prosperous Southeast.

Predicted probabilities of voting for the different candidates based on different levels of television exposure (reported in table 2) allow for a straightforward interpretation of media effects in each of these elections. For the run-off vote in Brazil's 1989 election, the difference between never and frequently watching television is associated with a 13 percentage point increase in the probability of voting for Collor. In Peru's 2000 election, with even more extreme bias in television coverage of the campaign, the estimated effect of exposure to television is much larger: the difference between never watching the news on broadcast television and watching every day is associated with a 48 percentage point increase in the probability of voting for Fujimori. In Peru's 2001 election, however, the estimated effect of television is not only statistically but also substantively insignificant. The difference between watching television less than once a week and watching daily is associated with a 4 percentage point increase in the probability of voting for García—largely at the expense of voting for a minor candidate or failing to cast a valid vote.²²

The results of this analysis cast doubt upon the hypothesis that the use of television gives an electoral advantage to neopopulist politicians because of their outsider status and appeals to the atomized poor. In the 1989 election in Brazil, television did work to Collor's benefit, as expected. However, this election is an overdetermined case of media effects; both Collor's status as a neopopulist outsider and Globo's biased coverage of the campaign suggest that voters who were exposed to more television would be more likely to support him. Comparing Collor's election to the reelection of Alberto Fujimori in 2000 helps to adjudicate between these two hypotheses. Ultimately, television did have a strong impact on the probability of voting for Fujimori, but the only plausible explanation for this outcome is the extensive bias in television coverage of the campaign. Finally, in the 2001 election of Alejandro Toledo, television coverage of the campaign was notably free of bias; the principal basis for expecting media effects in this election is Toledo's status as a neopopulist outsider. However, the small and statistically insignificant media effects in 2001 actually worked to the benefit of Alan García.

22. Because television viewing habits at the time of the survey are used as a proxy for television viewing during the campaign, it is quite likely that this variable contains random measurement error, attenuating the estimated effect of television. In reality, therefore, television exposure during the 2001 campaign may well have had a stronger effect in favor of García than is reported here. Nonetheless, such a result would still contradict our theoretical expectation of media effects benefiting Toledo.

Table 2 Predicted Voting Probabilities by Frequency of Watching Television

<i>Election</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Frequency of Watching Television</i>			
		<i>Least</i>			<i>Most</i>
Brazil 1989: Run-off	Collor	.46	.50	.55	.59
	Lula	.47	.43	.39	.36
	Other/None	.07	.07	.06	.05
Peru 2000: First Round	Fujimori	.14	.26	.43	.62
	Toledo	.18	.16	.12	.08
	Andrade	.23	.20	.15	.10
	Other/None	.45	.39	.30	.20
Peru 2001: First Round	Toledo	.42	.41	.41	.41
	García	.11	.13	.14	.15
	Flores	.21	.21	.21	.21
	Other/None	.26	.25	.24	.22

NOTE: Computed based on the voting models reported in table 1, with all interval-level control variables set to their median values and all nominal variables set to their modal values. See text for the description of different levels of television viewership for each country.

In the absence of biased coverage, the characteristics leading television viewers to favor a particular candidate may be more subtle and idiosyncratic than the outsider status of most neopopulist politicians and their appeals to the atomized poor. García, for instance, is considered a skilled politician who made dramatic improvements to his image over the course of the 2001 campaign. He entered the race in January as a former president who had presided over disastrous hyperinflation and spent a decade in exile avoiding corruption charges; by April he was able to finish second in the first-round vote. It is quite possible, therefore, that voters who watched more television during the campaign were slightly more likely to favor the former president simply because they were more exposed to the comparatively positive image of García the viable candidate.

CONCLUSION

While several scholars have suggested that television played an important role in the election of Fernando Collor and Alberto Fujimori—both of whom are prominent examples of the phenomenon of neopopulism—no systematic analysis of survey data has yet sought to substantiate this claim. In this paper I have shown that television did indeed contribute to the electoral victories of Collor in 1989 and Fujimori in 2000. However, the reason that television exerted an influence in these elections does not necessarily have anything to do with neopopulist politics. While theories of political communication suggest that television will benefit neopopulists

because of their lack of party affiliation and campaigns targeting the atomized poor, biased television coverage of the campaign is another strong reason to expect media effects in Latin America. When comparing the elections of Collor, Fujimori, and Alejandro Toledo, only biased campaign coverage emerges as a reliable predictor of media effects.

One should not conclude from this analysis that television is irrelevant to the concept of neopopulism in Latin America. Just as outcomes on election day are not the only important question in Latin American politics, media effects are not the only way that television might be important for the practice of neopopulism. In particular, television may be essential to neopopulists' style of governance once in office, even if it does not necessarily help them get there. The ability to communicate effectively and mobilize support for policies via television rather than intermediary organizations is a potentially important factor in the practice of delegative democracy (O'Donnell 1994)—a concept more relevant to the way politicians exercise power once elected than to how they gain power in the first place. Similarly, the shift from intermediation by parties, unions, and social movements to a form of politics where candidates communicate primarily through the media may have strong implications for the concept of interest representation. In contrast to traditional forms of intermediation, television is principally a one-way forum for communication—candidates can effectively present themselves to voters, but a disaggregated mass of voters cannot articulate demands to politicians via the television set.

With respect to the hypothesis that television helps neopopulists get elected in the first place, however, this analysis has suggested that such predictions are true only when television coverage of the campaign is also biased in favor of the neopopulist candidate. In the absence of such bias, the presence of a neopopulist outsider is not a reliable predictor of media effects. Ultimately, there are probably many more subtle and idiosyncratic factors that influence the manner in which voters in different elections respond to candidates' televised campaigns. Coming up with a generalizable statement about political strategy and its implications for the impact of television on vote choice may be a difficult if not impossible task.

Because of the inherent difficulty in comparing the results of different surveys from different elections, the finding that bias is the most reliable predictor of media effects in Latin America can be advanced only as a tentative conclusion. In place of a more definitive statement, I offer this finding as a hypothesis for examination in future Latin American elections, in which panel data permit a more foolproof assessment of media effects and survey instruments are designed to allow for a more confident comparison of results across countries. With politicians such as Venezuela's Hugo Chávez demonstrating the continued relevance of

the concept of neopopulism, and with media bias unlikely to disappear from the region anytime soon, this question will be an important one for scholars of Latin American politics in the years to come.

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