INATTENTIVE CITIZENS: Impact of Elections on Political Interest Across Five Million Citizens Worldwide

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Abstract

Democracy, now more than ever, requires constant vigilance and active citizen engagement. Understanding whether, when, and why individuals pay attention to politics is therefore essential to the health of democracy worldwide. Using millions of observations from global survey data, I find that attention to politics is 12% higher *after* elections. However, this surge is short-lived, returning to pre-election levels after 10 days. There is also no discernible pre-trend, with political attention remaining stable prior to the election. Political interest is higher in elections where the first round is decisive, when an incumbent loses and when economic policy is more uncertain. Conversely, political interest tends to be lower in autocratic states and developing countries. Following elections, citizens consume news and discuss politics more frequently. Evidence supports a model of costly information acquisition where citizens are only attentive to politics and acquire information post-election. Campaigns and respondent selection cannot rationalize the results. The findings highlight how the costs of attention can limit sustained political engagement—particularly in low-income contexts, where higher opportunity costs reduce citizens' ability to stay informed—with significant implications for political accountability and development outcomes.

Key Words: Attention, Political Interest, Elections, Information Acquisition, Event Study

JEL Codes: D72, D83, F50

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1 Introduction

Attention plays a central role in economic models of decision-making (Loewenstein and Wojtowicz, 2023). Thus far, the economics literature has mostly focused on attention to *economic* stimuli such as prices, taxes and income and macroeconomic shocks (Gabaix, 2019; Maćkowiak et al., 2023; Reis, 2006). However, people nowadays are becoming more exposed to a constant influx of *political* stimuli. In the 1980s, national elections on average occurred every three years, but today, elections have become more frequent, happening every two years (Hyde and Marinov, 2021). Do people still pay attention to politics or are they becoming desensitized to it?

This question is particularly relevant in developing countries, where fragile political systems require greater citizen vigilance, but where individuals face higher opportunity costs in paying attention to politics (Dean et al., 2018). Indeed, around two-thirds of countries globally have experienced declines in political interest over time, the majority of which are developing economies. Understanding what drives political attention is essential, as political interest not only shapes participation (Prior, 2018) but is also critical for ensuring accountability and improving governance—key elements of the development process. Despite the importance of understanding people's attention to politics, empirical evidence on this remains limited, especially in the developing world.

In this paper, I provide new findings on people's (in)attention to politics in the context of national elections. Do citizens have election fever—characterized by heightened interest in the political process—or are they sick of the perpetual election cycle, which leads to inattention and inaction? To answer this, I compile what is, to my knowledge, the most extensive dataset of publicly available surveys and country panels on politics. The dataset combines 39 surveys with 185 waves and consists of over 5 million observations from 150 countries spanning the years 1960 to 2023. This not only provides a global context but also extends over a significant time period. The vast number of observations allows me to conduct analyses at the *daily* level.

Employing a pairwise event study design which leverages the quasi-random timing differential between survey and election dates (Go et al., 2024), I document a 12% or 0.33 increase in political interest when comparing respondents surveyed one day after versus one day before an election. This is equivalent to a 3.3-3.6pp increase in voter turnout and voting intention. This 'post-election fever' effect diminishes and returns to pre-election baseline levels after 10 days. Moreover, there is *no* distinguishable pre-trend in attention to politics prior to the election day.

My results are robust to (i) choosing different day windows, (ii) adding country, survey, election and

time fixed effects, and (iii) adding individual-level and interview-related controls. Additionally, I conduct a placebo test by utilizing planned, rather than actual, election dates, which reveal no discernible results. This is reassuring for my empirical strategy, proving that the actual election itself is the influential factor. Further bolstering my results, I leverage the panel structure of the data by introducing individual fixed effects, and continue to observe significant results. Finally, I find that my results are robust to employing the more general and flexible RD specification.

To guide my empirics, I construct a simple model of uncertainty, positing that citizens incur a cost to acquire information in order to mitigate uncertainty about the state of the economy. The model makes the following predictions: (1) citizens are interested and obtain information only *after* the election, (2) higher uncertainty about the state of the economy requires more information acquisition, and (3) because the incumbent's policies are more predictable, information acquisition is lower in an incumbent victory. In my model, I interpret information acquisition as an expression of political interest and attention (i.e. people pay attention to politics and acquire more information).

I argue that my results can be rationalized by such a model. First, I show that public interest in winning candidates or parties, as proxied by Google Trends data, exhibits a significant surge post-election, compared to that of the runner-up. Media outlets also amplify coverage on elections immediately after the event. Second, my findings suggest that people find first-round elections without runoffs more interesting due to the decisiveness of their results. Third, when the winner is known, uncertainty concerning the future piques public interest. Particularly, interest is higher when economic policy is uncertain and lower when the incumbent wins. Finally, all such patterns related to the increase in interest are likewise evident when I consider information acquisition—frequency of news consumption and political discussions—as my dependent variable.

The results may also be consistent with other potential explanations. First, there is a possibility of selection bias in survey respondents, where more politically interested individuals might be inclined to refuse participation, potentially due to busy schedules before the election. Second, conditional on survey participation, respondents before the election may be generally less interested in or pay less attention to the interview, and not just specifically about politics. Third, campaigns and mobilization activities may have a lagged effect, and increase attention to politics. Fourth, the surge in interest might simply be driven by citizens who have voted and have a stake in the political process, without regard to future uncertainty. Fifth, individuals may pay attention to elections primarily for their entertainment value, viewing them as a spectacle rather than as events with meaningful consequences for future outcomes. Encouragingly, none of these potential mechanisms is supported by the evidence that I have.

My results contribute to the behavioral literature on rational inattention and limited attention (Gabaix, 2019; DellaVigna, 2009; Maćkowiak et al., 2023 and citations within). While much of this literature has focused on inattention to economic stimuli such as prices and taxes, I extend this framework to political stimuli like elections. Several theoretical models have explored rationally inattentive voters (Martinelli, 2006; Matějka and Tabellini, 2020; Devdariani and Hirsch, 2023), but to my knowledge, this is the first paper to empirically document political inattention.[1] My findings provide empirical support to rational inattention and costly information acquisition models, showing that citizens seek political information selectively when it becomes immediately relevant, such as after elections.

In addition, my findings advance the development literature on poverty and attention (Dean et al., 2018), where cognitive and opportunity costs are shown to limit decision-making capacity among the poor. I extend this perspective to political engagement, demonstrating how high attention costs can inhibit sustained political interest, particularly in low-income settings. Moreover, this work complements existing research on access to political information and accountability (Pande, 2011; Besley and Burgess, 2002), by showing that attention is a necessary precondition for information to influence behavior. While prior studies have focused on the effects of information provision, I emphasize the more fundamental constraint of political attention, which can limit the effectiveness of such interventions.

My study aligns with research on how campaigns and elections affect political interest (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Verba et al., 1995). A central debate in this field concerns whether political interest is *situational*—dependent on events and short-term stimuli—or *dispositional*, meaning intrinsic and enduring. The dominant view, advanced by Prior (2010, 2018), suggests that political interest is remarkably stable over time, with one exception (i.e. Germany reunification). My findings challenge this view, demonstrating systematic but short-lived surges in political interest immediately after elections. By combining high-frequency, globally representative data with a rigorous empirical strategy, I reveal temporary yet meaningful fluctuations in political attention—nuances not captured in earlier work. The focus on regular political events like elections suggests that political interest is influenced not only by critical junctures in history, but also by these more normal and recurring events.

Finally, I add to the political economy literature on the causes of political interest.[2] Individual characteristics such as gender (Wolak, 2020), education (Campante and Chor, 2012), employment status (Emmenegger et al., 2017), voting behavior (Holbein and Rangel, 2020), personality (Larsen, 2020),

[1] The closest related work examines limited attention to political news (Snyder and Strömberg, 2010; Eisensee and Strömberg, 2007; Durante and Zhuravskaya, 2018), but my approach differs by using a broader measure of political attention–interest in politics as a whole—and examining its impact on news consumption and political discussions.

[2] The primary difference between the economics and political science literatures lies in the empirical treatment of political interest, which is usually conflated with political participation in the former, but treated as a distinct variable in the latter.

age, income and family ties (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011) have been shown to impact political interest. In contrast, my paper focuses on a transient contextual factor—elections—in spurring political interest.

The implications of my findings are significant. While people may catch the post-election fever, they quickly get sick of it—attention to politics peaks a day after the election before reverting immediately to pre-election levels. This has important consequences for the functioning of democracy, especially in developing countries, where weak institutions rely on citizen vigilance to maintain accountability (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). On one hand, citizens only pay attention to politics *post*-election, rather than making more informed voting decisions *pre*-election. On the other, citizens' interest is short-lived, prompting a reevaluation of how to sustain civic engagement beyond election day. The question that arises is how to drive interest both *before* and *beyond* the elections to catalyze enduring political action.

In Section 2, I describe my data and provide summary statistics, and discuss my empirical strategy in Section 3. In Sections 4 and 5, I present my empirical results, propose a mechanism and discuss the implications of my findings. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2 Data

In this study, I investigate the impact of elections on political interest. The dependent variable is attention to politics, while the independent variable is the difference in days between the election day and the survey date. Below, I discuss the two main data sources in turn. In Appendix A, I detail the auxiliary datasets I use to explore underlying mechanisms.

2.1 Surveys on Politics (SoP) Dataset

For this paper, I construct a novel dataset that includes a wide range of well-known public surveys and country-level panels covering political themes.[3] The political attention variable comes from the question '*How interested are you in politics?*' or '*How often do you pay attention to...politics?*' and their variants.[4] For most surveys, the values range from 1 (not at all interested / hardly at all) to 4 (very interested / all the time). The SoP Dataset spans 1960 to 2023, encompassing 150 countries and more than 5 million observations. This extensive dataset serves as the foundation for the global analysis of the relationship between elections and political attention over the past six decades.

[3]These surveys, which include barometers, election studies, social surveys and country panel studies, are listed in the Data References section.

[4]I follow existing literature in treating these concepts interchangeably and hence harmonizing the corresponding survey questions. Prior (2018) demonstrates that both measures tend to capture similar underlying constructs. In the following sections, I use attention to politics and political interest interchangeably.

2.2 National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) Dataset

To incorporate election dates, I merge the survey data with the NELDA Dataset which includes all national-level elections from 1945 to 2020, across more than 200 countries (Hyde and Marinov, 2021). The substantial overlap between NELDA and the SoP dataset makes it the ideal resource for constructing the independent variable across my entire sample.

2.3 Auxiliary Datasets

To explore the underlying mechanisms, I utilize auxiliary datasets, including Google Trends, the GDELT Event Database, the Economic Policy Uncertainty Index and the V-Dem Dataset. These datasets provide insights into public interest, news coverage of geopolitical events, and policy-related uncertainty, respectively. More details on these data sources and methodology are provided in Appendix A.

2.4 Sample Construction

In constructing the sample for this paper, I adhered to the following two-step procedure. First, in cases with runoff elections, only the first round was used. Because the runoff usually occurs 2-3 weeks after, the respondents in between rounds will be considered as both treatment group in the first round and control group for the second round. To avoid this, I exclude succeeding round/s of elections. Second, I merged the closest election to the survey date, regardless of whether the survey comes before or after the election. This allows me to assign respondents to the event that has the greater potential to impact their interest or sentiment. The final dataset contains 715 elections in 150 countries, from 1960 to 2023, totaling over 5 million observations. Appendix B presents summary statistics and more information about the sample.

3 Empirical Strategy

Establishing the impact of elections on political interest presents an empirical challenge. Interest in politics can drive voter turnout and engagement, which may influence whether and when elections are held and subsequent electoral outcomes. Conversely, elections can also reinforce attention to politics. The electoral process, campaigns, and election-related events can capture the public's attention and spark interest in politics (Beach et al., 2018; Larsen, 2020). Elections often serve as focal points for political discussions and media coverage, attracting people who may not otherwise be engaged in political matters.

The identification strategy uses a pairwise event study design as in Go et al. (2024), which leverages the differential timing between two events. In my case, I capitalize on the randomness of the timing of surveys vis-à-vis elections. With the exception of election-specific studies, surveys are typically not scheduled to align with electoral events, resulting in a quasi-random distribution of respondents before and after elections. When a respondent is surveyed, i.e. how many days before or after an election, is also quasi-random, varying even as little as a day before to just a day after an election. By exploiting this idiosyncratic timing, I can measure the impact of elections on political attention, effectively eliminating potential confounders.

Formally, I estimate the following empirical models:

$$PolInt_{it} = \alpha + \gamma_1 Post_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

$$PolInt_{it} = \alpha + \gamma_1 Post_{it} + \gamma_2 Days_{it} + \gamma_3 Post \times Days_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{2}$$

$$\forall\ Days_{it} \leq \{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8\}$$

where $PolInt_{it}$ is the level of political interest of individual i on date t, $Post_{it}$ is whether the survey interview happens before (0) or after (1) the election, and $Days_{it}$ is the number of days to/from the closest election (in absolute value). Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level.

The primary coefficient of interest, denoted as γ_1, estimates the impact of elections on political interest. Equation 1 is my main specification, uncovering the extensive margin, or whether the interview occurs before or after the election. Equation 2 extends the analysis to the intensive margin, considering how close in time the interview is conducted relative to the election. This is measured by γ_3, which quantifies the duration effect, i.e. whether respondents surveyed nearer to the election exhibit differences from those surveyed farther. For both models, the rich dataset allows me to limit the sample to narrow N-day windows, ranging from the smallest 2-day window (1 day before and 1 day after the election) to the largest 16-day window (8 days before and after).[5]

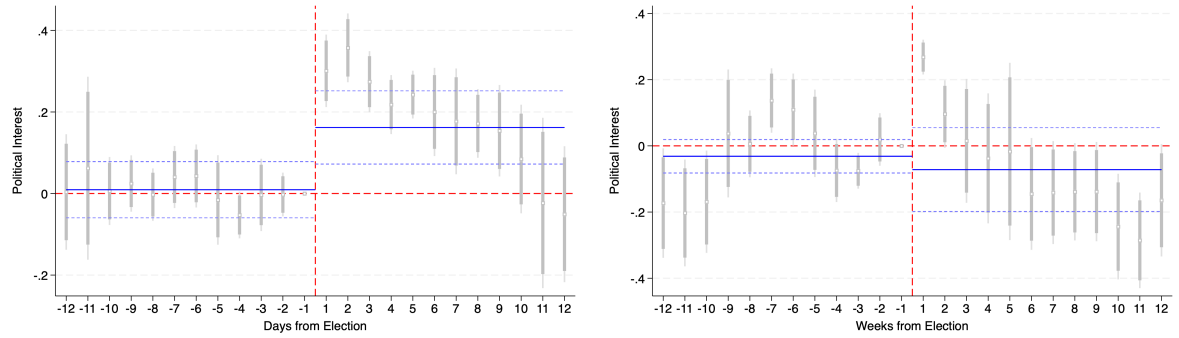
[5]Strictly speaking, N-day windows consist of $2N+1$ days since the election day is included. There are only 840 observations where the election and survey dates coincide, and removing these from the sample does not change any of the results.

4 Results

4.1 Elections and Attention to Politics

Figure 1 shows the event study plot of political interest (in the *y*-axis) across days leading up to and moving away from the election (in the *x*-axis). The coefficients are the mean political interest for all respondents surveyed each day. Graphical analysis provides suggestive evidence of a large discrete jump from before the election to immediately after the election. In addition, there is a sudden decrease in political attention days after the election, returning to baseline levels after 10 days. Notably, the level of political attention appears relatively stable before the election. A similar picture emerges when considering weeks around the election.

Figure 1: EVENT STUDY OF POLITICAL INTEREST



(a) Days from Election (b) Weeks from Election

NOTE. The dependent variable is political interest. The horizontal axis ranges from 12 days (Panel A) or weeks (Panel B) before and after the election. The vertical red dashed line signifies the election day. The gray square is the coefficient estimate, with the thick gray bar showing the 90% confidence interval and the thin gray bar showing the 95% confidence interval. The coefficient values are relative to the day before the elections. The solid blue line is the mean of the coefficients for the pre- and post-periods, with the dashed blue lines representing the 95% confidence interval.

Table 1 Panel A presents estimated coefficients from Equation 1. The dependent variable is the level of political interest of individual i at time t, with larger values indicating stronger interest in politics. Each column represents the number of days before or after the election included in the analysis. The primary finding is that interest in politics surges immediately following the election. Specifically, I observe a 0.33 point increase in political interest after the election, relative to the pre-election baseline of 2.78. In the data, a one-point increase in political interest is associated with a 10-11pp increase in voter turnout and voting intention.[6] Hence, the headline result is linked to a 3.3-3.6pp increase in voting behavior and intention, from a base of 66%.

As I extend the time window, the coefficients decrease. This pattern suggests that adding observa-

[6]This number is derived from regressing voter turnout and voting intention on political interest and should not be interpreted as a causal estimate.

Table 1: POLITICAL INTEREST BY *N*-DAY WINDOWS

	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Basic Specification								
Post-Election	0.334	0.353	0.323	0.307	0.296	0.272	0.258	0.251
	(0.0427)	(0.0375)	(0.0291)	(0.0284)	(0.0256)	(0.0269)	(0.0273)	(0.0277)
Panel B: Interaction with Days from/to Election								
Post-Election	0.301	0.344	0.414	0.408	0.391	0.412	0.414	0.396
	(0.0446)	(0.0521)	(0.0659)	(0.0517)	(0.0638)	(0.0516)	(0.0385)	(0.0306)
Days	0.216	0.0576	0.0240	-0.00174	0.00125	0.0105	0.0119	0.00841
	(0.0402)	(0.0253)	(0.0222)	(0.0113)	(0.0131)	(0.0109)	(0.00889)	(0.00695)
Post × Days	0	-0.00133	-0.0441	-0.0371	-0.0298	-0.0382	-0.0388	-0.0333
	(.)	(0.0269)	(0.0263)	(0.0164)	(0.0205)	(0.0148)	(0.0106)	(0.00783)
Dep Var Mean	2.78	2.83	2.81	2.79	2.78	2.77	2.76	2.76
R^2	.0269	.0269	.0212	.0188	.0191	.0169	.0153	.0145
N	20,781	48,708	80,710	115,597	149,929	177,036	197,166	217,413

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

tions further away from the election includes respondents who are less likely to be influenced by the election. I formally test this by estimating Equation 2. By interacting the intensive margin variable $Days_{it}$ (representing the proximity to the election) and $Post_{it}$ (indicating the post-election period), I capture the duration effect. This allows me to investigate whether the impact of the election on respondents' interest in politics varies depending on their proximity to the event. In Table 1 Panel B, I present my findings, which align with the event study graph. I observe that political interest tends to rise following the election ($\gamma_1 > 0$). However, as I move further away from the election date, this effect diminishes ($\gamma_3 < 0$). For instance, in column 7, or a week after, I notice that political interest increases by 0.41 points. Nevertheless, this effect gradually diminishes: each passing day reduces interest by 0.04, and it takes approximately 11 days for this election-induced effect to completely fade away. In simpler terms, the impact of the election is more pronounced among respondents in close proximity to the event, but it diminishes and eventually disappears for respondents who are further away from the election date.

Consistent with the graphical evidence, there is no discernible trend in political interest before the election ($\gamma_2 = 0$). In other words, interest in politics appears relatively stable leading up to the election. This finding, when considered alongside the previous results, suggests that the primary factor driving changes in political interest occurs *after* the election, rather than *before* it. Furthermore, this effect diminishes as time progresses.

These results run contrast to existing literature that emphasizes the stability of political interest and

the null or weak effects of elections (Prior, 2010). By using a larger sample and a different identification strategy that allow me to exploit high-frequency data, I have shown that political interest, at least in the short-run, can be significantly impacted by political events like elections.

4.2 Robustness Checks

Before delving into the underlying mechanisms, I first address the validity of my identification strategy and robustness of my results. As my identification strategy heavily hinges on the timing assumption, I first conduct a test concerning the selection of day windows (expanding the 16-day window) and demonstrate that results are robust to a wide range of windows (D.1). Next, I introduce time-based fixed effects and show that results remain statistically significant (D.2). Then I do a placebo test comparing *planned* elections with those that *actually* occurred (D.3). Reassuringly, effects are only present in elections that did take place. I also perform a balance test to ensure that respondents are similar before and after the election, and find no significant differences (D.4). Finally, I account for individual-level factors and find my results to be robust to these adjustments (D.5). All figures and tables can be found in Appendix D.

4.3 Alternative Identification: Panel Fixed Effects + RDD

After establishing the robustness of my results across various model specifications, in Appendix E, I explore alternative identification strategies to enhance the credibility of my conclusions. First, I leverage the panel structure of a subset of the dataset to introduce individual fixed effects, thereby accounting for time-invariant factors that influence political interest (Larsen, 2020). Second, I replace the event study approach with a regression discontinuity design, where the election date serves as the cutoff point with the number of days before or after as the forcing variable. Reassuringly, all my results continue to hold even when employing alternative approaches that incorporate more stringent fixed effects or more flexible functional forms and optimal bandwidth methods.

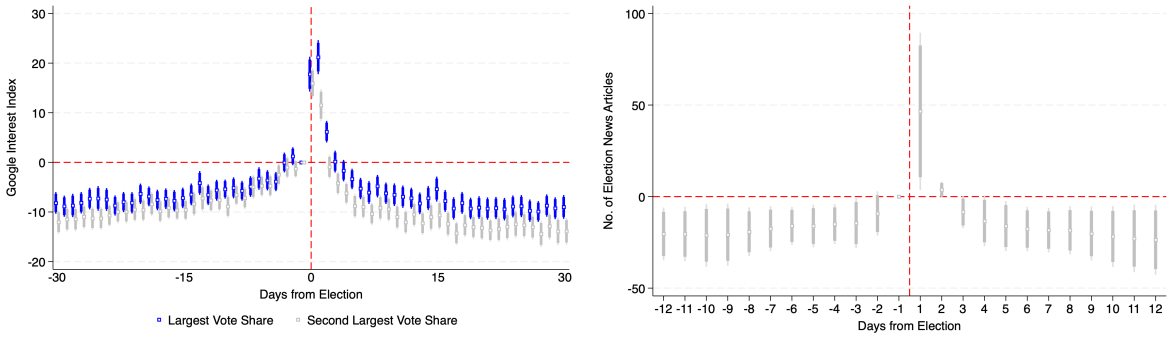
4.4 Mechanism: Election Results and Uncertainty

4.4.1 Interest in Election Results

The main findings presented so far point to mechanisms that occur *after* the election. I argue that electoral results are what drive attention to politics. To test this, I scrape Google Trends data within a 60-day window around the election for the winner and runner-up (alternatively, largest and second

largest parties) in each election. Given the richness of online data, I am able to perform a day-by-day event study analysis to support my conjecture. Figure 2a plots the daily coefficient of the interest index. Interestingly, both the winner and runner-up have statistically similar levels of interest for all days before and during the election. On the day after the election, the winner garners significantly higher interest (i.e. more searches) than the runner-up. This difference decreases over time, and eventually becomes negligible. This is consistent with my argument that interest peaks when results become available, as evident in the particular focus on the winner.[7] This heightened interest in election results coincides with an uptick in news articles that mention 'elections', as Figure 2b illustrates. I claim that the sudden surge in news coverage a day after the elections is likely driven by reporting of the results.

Figure 2: MEDIA AND PUBLIC INTEREST



(a) Google 'Interest over Time' Index

(b) News Articles on Elections

NOTE. The dependent variable is the Google 'interest over time' index (Panel A) and the number of news articles on elections (Panel B). The horizontal axis ranges from 30 days (Panel A) or 12 days (Panel B) before after the election. The vertical red dashed line signifies the election day. The gray square is the coefficient estimate, with the thick gray bar showing the corresponding 90% confidence interval and the thin gray bar showing the corresponding 95% confidence interval. The coefficient values are relative to the day before the elections. For Panel A, blue and gray correspond to the largest and second largest vote share getter, respectively.

4.4.2 When Are Election Results Interesting?

Following my model in Appendix C, I test the following predictions. First, attention to politics and information acquisition only increase post-election, since there is a cost to such action. Second, a corollary of this is that information acquisition is only valuable when the winner is announced (and not before), so in elections with runoffs, the first round will require less information acquisition (i.e. garner lower interest). Third, greater uncertainty implies the need for more information acquisition and equivalently, higher attention to politics. Last, and related to the previous point, since the incumbent presents lower policy uncertainty, interest and information acquisition are both lower when an incumbent wins.

Complementing the preceding results and the model predictions, in Table 2 Panel A, I compare first-

[7] While official and final results may come days or weeks after, for many countries, preliminary results are definitive a day after the elections.

round elections leading to a runoff (thus having two rounds) with those that do not. I demonstrate that people exhibit greater interest in first-round elections because these are decisive and the result for the initial winner is final. Conditional on the revelation of the winner, citizens display heightened attention to politics when there is uncertainty about the future state of the economy. In Panel B, I illustrate that when an incumbent wins, interest is lower, likely due to the predictability of policies. I substantiate this assertion in Panel C, where environments with higher economic policy uncertainty (also consistent with situations when an incumbent loses) attract increased interest from individuals. While the model does not explicitly differentiate between regime types, the comparison between democracies and autocracies aligns with the information acquisition mechanism. In autocracies, where ruling parties or leaders face little to no risk of electoral defeat, election outcomes typically confirm existing expectations. As a result, these elections reveal minimal new information, since most citizens already anticipate that the ruling party will remain in power. Conversely, in democracies where electoral outcomes are uncertain, the potential for leadership change provides a stronger incentive for individuals to pay attention and acquire political information. The results in Panel D support this interpretation, showing that the increase in post-election interest is driven entirely by democracies.

4.4.3 Political Interest and Information Acquisition

As I argue in my model, citizens may invest in information acquisition to mitigate the uncertainty. First, I find that consistent with the increase in news coverage (i.e. supply side), there is a parallel increase in online news consumption (i.e. demand side). Table 3 Panel A demonstrates a rise in the frequency of reading news, mirroring earlier results. Second, I also show in Panel B that discussions about politics with family and friends become more frequent a day or two after the elections. Both findings point to significant, albeit transient, behavioral changes towards information acquisition. This is consistent with the idea that since information acquisition is costly, citizens only obtain information after the election. In Appendix F.1, I replicate Table 2 but instead use the information acquisition variables (i.e. frequency of news consumption and political discussions) as my dependent variable. Similar to the previous set of results, I find evidence supportive of the model predictions.

Table 2: ELECTION RESULTS

	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Elections with Runoff vs. Single Round								
Post-Election	0.327	0.346	0.317	0.301	0.292	0.269	0.256	0.247
	(0.0443)	(0.0394)	(0.0305)	(0.0296)	(0.0253)	(0.0262)	(0.0271)	(0.0270)
Two-Round	-0.251	-0.262	-0.278	-0.304	-0.305	-0.314	-0.322	-0.349
	(0.0705)	(0.0790)	(0.0820)	(0.0834)	(0.0714)	(0.0692)	(0.0650)	(0.0623)
Post × Two-Round	-0.435	-0.406	-0.356	-0.286	-0.270	-0.269	-0.259	-0.234
	(0.112)	(0.106)	(0.0859)	(0.0602)	(0.0662)	(0.0647)	(0.0623)	(0.0625)
Dep Var Mean	2.78	2.83	2.81	2.79	2.78	2.77	2.76	2.76
R^2	.0328	.0318	.0254	.0227	.0228	.0212	.02	.0198
N	20,781	48,708	80,710	115,597	149,929	177,036	197,166	217,413
Panel B: Incumbent Victory								
Post-Election	0.342	0.373	0.355	0.338	0.325	0.297	0.280	0.273
	(0.0461)	(0.0444)	(0.0353)	(0.0354)	(0.0329)	(0.0338)	(0.0329)	(0.0326)
Incumbent	-0.0458	-0.00935	0.0782	0.0875	0.0743	0.0552	0.0450	0.0366
	(0.0663)	(0.0716)	(0.102)	(0.0917)	(0.0678)	(0.0619)	(0.0620)	(0.0657)
Post × Incumbent	-0.00937	-0.0899	-0.163	-0.168	-0.174	-0.144	-0.125	-0.123
	(0.0437)	(0.0511)	(0.0686)	(0.0594)	(0.0652)	(0.0775)	(0.0809)	(0.0830)
Dep Var Mean	2.78	2.83	2.81	2.79	2.78	2.77	2.76	2.76
R^2	.0277	.0286	.0225	.02	.0205	.0181	.0163	.0156
N	20,781	48,708	80,710	115,597	149,929	177,036	197,166	217,413
Panel C: Policy Uncertainty								
Post-Election	0.0447	0.0443	0.0346	0.0505	0.0280	-0.00256	-0.0225	-0.0322
	(0.0786)	(0.0774)	(0.0738)	(0.0806)	(0.0860)	(0.0935)	(0.0987)	(0.103)
Uncertainty	-0.00611	-0.00360	-0.00759	-0.00937	-0.0193	-0.0191	-0.0250	-0.0273
	(0.0886)	(0.0968)	(0.110)	(0.115)	(0.0990)	(0.0956)	(0.0940)	(0.0917)
Post × Uncertainty	0.298	0.323	0.302	0.266	0.284	0.290	0.297	0.301
	(0.0774)	(0.0884)	(0.0783)	(0.0785)	(0.0781)	(0.0822)	(0.0824)	(0.0852)
Dep Var Mean	2.83	2.89	2.87	2.84	2.82	2.81	2.8	2.8
R^2	.032	.0324	.0242	.0205	.022	.02	.0188	.0183
N	14,711	37,780	64,808	94,480	124,389	147,168	164,203	179,683
Panel D: Democracy vs. Autocracy								
Post-Election	-0.235	-0.124	-0.00940	0.0217	0.0487	0.126	0.163	0.170
	(0.0624)	(0.0308)	(0.0612)	(0.0539)	(0.0694)	(0.0542)	(0.0579)	(0.0656)
Democracy	0.268	0.236	0.322	0.316	0.330	0.339	0.355	0.374
	(0.163)	(0.117)	(0.124)	(0.116)	(0.102)	(0.0970)	(0.0953)	(0.0977)
Post × Democracy	0.576	0.480	0.332	0.286	0.249	0.151	0.102	0.0890
	(0.0787)	(0.0531)	(0.0698)	(0.0628)	(0.0744)	(0.0619)	(0.0665)	(0.0738)
Dep Var Mean	2.79	2.83	2.82	2.79	2.78	2.77	2.77	2.76
R^2	.03	.0293	.0237	.0211	.0215	.0201	.019	.0186
N	20,224	47,754	79,481	114,045	148,042	174,832	193,967	213,398

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

Table 3: INFORMATION ACQUISITION

	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: News Consumption								
Post-Election	0.479	0.131	0.264	0.274	0.172	0.137	0.151	0.165
	(0.0996)	(0.147)	(0.264)	(0.279)	(0.217)	(0.195)	(0.191)	(0.190)
Dep Var Mean	1.65	1.49	1.68	1.7	1.67	1.66	1.63	1.62
R^2	.0172	.00141	.00418	.00426	.00178	.00118	.00148	.00182
N	10,235	25,817	46,736	67,790	88,807	100,725	110,123	119,317
Panel B: Political Discussions								
Post-Election	0.657	0.892	0.586	0.428	0.451	0.433	0.429	0.407
	(0.198)	(0.164)	(0.304)	(0.368)	(0.350)	(0.321)	(0.302)	(0.291)
Dep Var Mean	3.67	3.9	3.73	3.6	3.58	3.55	3.51	3.46
R^2	.0189	.0318	.0135	.00724	.00816	.00768	.00776	.0071
N	10,996	27,785	44,286	59,052	72,309	83,462	94,287	104,176

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is the frequency of news consumption and political discussions. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

4.5 Alternative Explanations

4.5.1 Campaigns

An alternative explanation posits that campaigns actively generate support for candidates, consequently boosting interest among the public (Beach et al., 2018; Larsen, 2020; Arceneaux, 2006). If campaigns played a dominant role, one would expect to observe a steady increase in interest leading up to the election. While Figure 1 shows little to no fluctuations in pre-election interest, my main results suggest that campaigns alone cannot fully account for the observed trends. The sharp and discontinuous increase in interest immediately following the election—rather than a gradual buildup—indicates that electoral results, rather than campaign activities, are likely the main driver of this surge.

To further examine this, I collect data on campaign start dates for all elections in my sample and use the beginning of the campaign period, rather than election day, as the reference point in my empirical approach. As shown in Figure F1, neither the daily nor the weekly analysis around campaign start dates reveals a trend similar to the one observed previously. This does not imply that campaigns have no effect on political interest. Rather, the results suggest that, while campaigns may generate engagement in certain contexts, the most pronounced shift in political interest occurs *after* the election. The influence of campaigns, particularly in the lead-up to elections, may exist but appears to be overshadowed by post-election factors (i.e. announcement of results). Existing literature shows that campaign effects on political interest tend to be gradual, driven by repeated exposure rather than a sudden shift, making it

unlikely that they are responsible for the sharp, discontinuous increase in interest observed immediately after elections (Canen and Martin, 2023; Le Pennec and Pons, 2023).

4.5.2 Respondent Selection

Another counterargument is that elections might not inherently boost interest; rather, highly interested individuals, due to involvement in campaign activities and other pre-election events, may opt out of survey participation.[8] This could also explain the lower interest observed in first-round elections, potentially due to the increased workload. To investigate this, I compare refusal rates for surveys conducted before and after elections and find no significant differences across time. I also add the response rate as a control in Table D2 and find that results remain unchanged.[9]

Beyond selection into survey participation, I further examine whether overall interest during the interview, proxied by the duration, differs before and after elections. The results in Table D2 remain robust with the inclusion of this control. In addition, the lengh of the interview does not show any discernible trend before or after the election, reinforcing the assertion that conditional on opting in, respondents are not more or less interested in the interview over time.

4.5.3 Stake in Election Results

A competing mechanism can be voters' stake in the election, which leads to increased interest in the election results. Voters might acquire information not to alleviate uncertainty about the economy, but rather, to know about the winner of the electoral process they just participated in. To test this, I restrict the sample to survey data with pre- and post-election waves. Given this panel data structure, I can observe the same set of respondents and their voting behavior. I compare respondents who report to have voted in the election (i.e. those who have a clear stake in the elections) with those who did not. In Table F3, while voters are generally more politically interested ($\beta_{Voted} > 0$), non-voters exhibit an increase in interest post-election ($\beta_{Post-Election} > 0$). In fact, voters are not significantly more interested than non-voters after the elections ($\beta_{Post \times Voted} = 0$). Hence, these findings show that involvement in the political process does not seem to be driving my results.

[8] While Voogt and Saris (2003) find that more politically interested individuals are more likely to participate in surveys, the argument here is that these individuals might also disproportionately refuse to participate in pre-election surveys.

[9] Unfortunately, refusal rates are not measured on a daily basis but are aggregated for the entire survey round. As a result, while the coefficient decreases when this control is added, the effect is largely driven by the fact that refusal rates are measured at the survey level and do not vary across individual respondents. Including other survey-level controls, such as the total number of respondents, has a similar effect in attenuating the coefficients.

4.5.4 Elections as a Spectacle

An alternative explanation for my findings, unrelated to information acquisition, is that respondents view elections primarily as a spectacle, with increased political interest driven by the entertainment value of elections rather than by concerns about future policy outcomes. While the distinction between these motivations is subtle, I aim to show that entertainment alone is unlikely to account for the entirety of my results. First, in Table 2 Panel C, I use a variable specifically designed to capture policy uncertainty and find that political interest increases when uncertainty about future policies is higher—consistent with the political risk hypothesis. Second, in Table F4, I test whether increased media coverage, which could reflect the entertainment value of elections, is solely driving the results, and find that this does not fully explain the observed patterns.

5 Discussion

5.1 Does Political Interest Drive Political Behavior?

Although I am constrained in answering this question, I provide evidence to support this conjecture.[10] Previously, I have shown that parallel to the increase in political interest, I see a similar increase in news consumption and political discussions. Also, in Appendix F.5, I present positive correlations between political interest and voting behavior and intention. Echoing existing literature, I show that not only are *self-reported* turnout and voting intention higher when political interest is higher, the same is also true for *actual* turnout based on official election statistics (Butler and De La O, 2011; Prior, 2018). In the data, a one-point increase in political interest is correlated with a 10-11pp increase in voter turnout and voting intention. Back-of-the-envelope calculations imply that the main result, an increase in political interest by 0.33 points, is equivalent to a 3.3-3.6pp increase in voting behavior, from a base of 66%. Pushing the argument further, if this surge in interest happened pre-election, voter turnout could increase by a significant number, potentially impacting election results.[11]

[10] Due to my identification strategy, I can only use questions on behaviors done at present or in a 'typical week'. Thus, I am unable to consider other political behavior variables (e.g. signing a petition, attending a rally, etc.) which are asked within a wide time range (e.g. last 6 months, this year, ever).

[11] Apart from turnout, vote choice can also be influenced by the increase in political interest. In Figure B2, I show that people who hold stronger ideologies (whether leftwing or rightwing) are also more politically interested. Hence, if elections can mobilize those who are less politically engaged, this could mean more votes coming from 'centrists', potentially bringing in swing votes that can change the results.

5.2 Political Interest and Attention

The literature in behavioral economics on inattention has provided evidence on individuals' limited attention to taxes, probabilities, one's ability or the future (Gabaix, 2019). However, despite its importance, there is yet no evidence on individuals' attention to politics. In this paper, I put forward the first empirical evidence of people's increased attention *after* elections, or alternatively, their relative inattention to politics *before* elections. This headline result can be rationalized by a model of costly information acquisition, with a positive cost parameter (i.e. $c > 0$).[12] That is, because acquiring information (and paying attention to politics) is costly, the economic agent chooses to do so only once the state of the world has been revealed, or when election results become available.[13] Although not directly comparable, my results are consistent with the literature on inattention providing quantitative evidence that individuals underperceive certain economic stimuli ($m = 0.44$). In the context of political stimuli, I show that there is a significant and positive cost to political attention, implying that individuals are inattentive to politics before elections compared to after ($m < 1$).

5.3 Attention to Politics and Development

Political interest is closely related to a country's level of development. In Figures B3 and B4, I show that many developing countries have experienced declines in political interest over time. This pattern aligns with the findings in Table B4, which indicate that low and middle income countries tend to have lower levels of political interest, in general and after elections. These results are consistent with the development literature emphasizing the high cognitive and opportunity costs of attention (Dean et al., 2018), particularly in low-income settings where individuals face competing demands for limited resources. While prior work has shown that access to political information can enhance accountability and governance (Pande, 2011; Besley and Burgess, 2002), political attention is a necessary precondition—information alone cannot influence behavior if individuals are not attentive to it. In this sense, fostering political interest is essential for ensuring that the potential benefits of political information can be fully realized.

[12] The model outlined above implies a negative relationship between c the cost of information acquisition (or paying attention) and m, the attention parameter in the literature.

[13] In the counterfactual where political interest does not change as a result of the election, this can be explained by costless information acquisition as agents are indifferent between obtaining information before or after the election. This can be proven by setting $c = 0$ in the model, and having equal utilities across time periods.

6 Conclusion

Economists have paid much attention to the importance of attention to economic stimuli such as the macroeconomy, prices, and taxes. Given the pervasiveness of politics in people's lives, this study expands the literature to the political sphere, where empirical evidence remains limited. Amidst the ubiquity of political stimuli such as elections, do people still pay attention to politics?

To answer this, I assemble a global dataset combining publicly available surveys and country-level panels, leveraging high-frequency daily data. I find that political attention increases by 12% one day after an election, but immediately diminishes after 10 days. Attention to politics is stable prior to the election, suggesting that campaigns do not significantly alter political interest. Results support a model of uncertainty and costly information acquisition: political interest is higher in elections where the first round is decisive, when incumbents lose and when economic policy is more uncertain. Following elections, citizens consume news and discuss politics more frequently to mitigate this uncertainty.

This study sheds light on the functioning of democracy when citizens pay attention to politics and take action only in the days immediately following the election, prompting a reevaluation of how to foster sustained civic engagement before and beyond election day. From a political economy and development perspective, understanding the long-term implications of transient political engagement is crucial for both democratic accountability and development outcomes. In particular, there is scope to examine how politicians respond to limited public attention before elections and declining interest afterward—and how this shapes the policies they prioritize and implement.

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Appendix A Auxiliary Datasets

GOOGLE TRENDS | Online behavior is increasingly becoming a valuable source of data for gauging public sentiment and interest. To track political interest, I scraped Google Trends, analyzing data for all elections within a 60-day timeframe, i.e. encompassing 30 days before and after the election day. My focus was on searches related to the names of the winning and runner-up parties or candidates. The advantage of this approach is that the searches are specific to the politician or political party because each has his/her/its own 'key' assigned by Google. However, the downside is that certain countries' political figures or parties are not indexed in Google Trends, even though they appear in regular search results. For this dataset, I use data from 2004 onwards for 176 countries worldwide. As a measure of public interest in elections, I employ as proxy Google's 'interest over time' index.

GDELT EVENT DATABASE | The Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) Event Database is a large-scale dataset that tracks and analyzes global news media coverage. Although primarily an event-based dataset, I construct a measure of how many news articles feature elections on a daily basis, from April 2013 to present for 187 countries worldwide. To do this, I infer the content of the news article based on the URL, which includes the headlines. Then I count the number of URLs that contain the keyword 'elect' (excluding 'select' and 'electr'). This dataset on news production (i.e. supply side) complements the Google Trends dataset which is user-driven (i.e. demand side). More information is available at `https://www.gdeltproject.org`.

EPU INDEX | The Economic Policy Uncertainty (EPU) Index dataset measures the level of uncertainty related to economic policies in different countries. It is constructed based on the frequency of newspaper articles that mention terms related to economic uncertainty, policy, and economy (Baker et al., 2016). The dataset is available at a monthly frequency for 22 countries from 1985-2023. More information is available at `https://www.policyuncertainty.com/methodology.html`.

V-DEM DATASET | The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Dataset classifies countries into four regime types using the Regimes of the World index: closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral democracies, and liberal democracies (see Coppedge et al. (2022) for definitions). For the purposes of this study, I simplify this classification into a binary variable, grouping closed and electoral autocracies as 'autocracies' and electoral and liberal democracies as 'democracies'. More information is available at `https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds22`.

Appendix B Data and Statistics

B.1 Sample Composition

The 'complete' column shows the available data, while the 'sample' column uses a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after the election), which is what I use in most of the regressions. On average, there are 7,587 respondents per election, and 7.80 elections included per country (ranging from 1-28 elections). Approximately 5 waves are available for each survey, with each wave having 29,690 observations.

B.2 Summary Statistics

The first column, '1 day', shows that for that window, observations come from 100 different elections (before the elections) and 102 elections the day after. The average number of days from the election is 0.88 before (due to including the day itself) and 1 after. Moreover, political interest is 2.87 after the election, much higher than that before, which is 2.54. The other columns can be analyzed in the same way. To the right of the cutoff, there are slightly more elections and observations are generally surveyed closer to the election date. Notably, political interest starts out much higher after the election than before it, but ultimately converges when a larger window is considered.

Table B1: SAMPLE COMPOSITION

	Cross-Section Surveys		Country Panels		Combined Total	
	Complete	Sample	Complete	Sample	Complete	Sample
Countries	150	50	16	12	150	53
Years	1974-2023	1974-2020	1960-2022	1960-2020	1960-2023	1960-2020
Elections	708	104	79	61	724	155
Surveys	20	15	20	15	39	29
Waves	128	52	57	45	185	97
Observations	2,325,833	40,624	3,166,849	176,789	5,492,682	217,413

NOTE. Public surveys include the regional barometers, social surveys and election studies. The sample here uses a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after the election), which is the sample I use in most of the regressions.

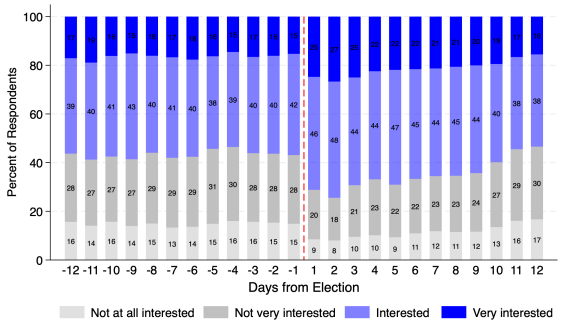
Table B2: SUMMARY STATISTICS BY *N*-DAY WINDOW

Variable	1 day	7 days	15 days	30 days	60 days	90 days	180 days	360 days
Elections Before	100	119	131	146	180	207	295	414
Elections After	102	143	162	182	218	244	322	432
Days Before	0.88	4.14	7.72	14.71	28.04	36.04	69.89	157.82
Days After	1.00	3.92	6.53	10.77	19.95	27.58	73.01	149.74
Pol. Int. Before	2.54	2.57	2.57	2.54	2.60	2.56	2.49	2.49
Pol. Int. After	2.87	2.83	2.76	2.71	2.64	2.60	2.51	2.48
Observations	20,781	197,166	325,245	493,818	820,795	979,179	1,598,004	2,829,376

NOTE. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 720-day window (i.e., 1 year before and after).

An alternative way to show this pattern is to show the distribution of respondents answering various levels of political interest before and after the election. In Figure B1, it is evident that post-election, more respondents claim to have higher interest in politics (i.e. greater percentage of 'interested' and 'very interested' respondents). However, using the full sample considers all respondents per day, and does not necessarily represent the same individuals across time. To address this, Table B3 uses the panel sample where I compare the same respondents before and after the election. A similar pattern emerges where after the election, more respondents experience an increase in political interest (i.e. numbers in blue cells are larger than those in red cells).

Figure B1: POLITICAL INTEREST (FULL SAMPLE)



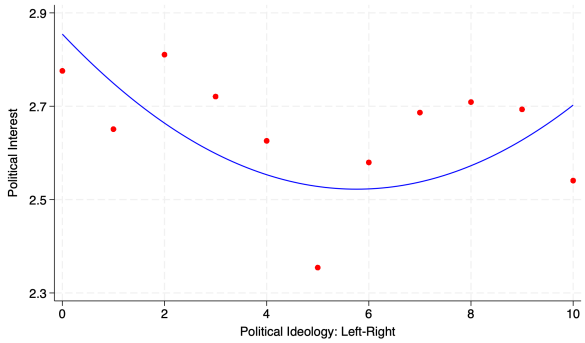
NOTE. The vertical axis is the percent of respondents with that level of political interest while the the horizontal axis indicates the number of days before and after the election.

Table B3: POLITICAL INTEREST (PANEL ONLY SAMPLE)

		Pol. Int. (After)			
		1	2	3	4
Pol. Int. (Before)	1	71.18	22.92	5.09	0.81
	2	7.52	71.15	20.33	1.00
	3	0.68	9.38	78.56	11.39
	4	0.16	0.99	16.16	82.69

NOTE. Column and row titles indicate the level of political interest: 1 (not at all interested), 2 (not very interested), 3 (interested), 4 (very interested). The panel includes observations within a 24-day window (i.e. 12 days before and after the election).

Figure B2: POLITICAL INTEREST, BY POLITICAL IDEOLOGY



NOTE. The vertical axis is political interest, and each red circle is the mean political interest for each value in the political ideology scale. The blue curve is the quadratic fit when regressing political interest on political ideology.

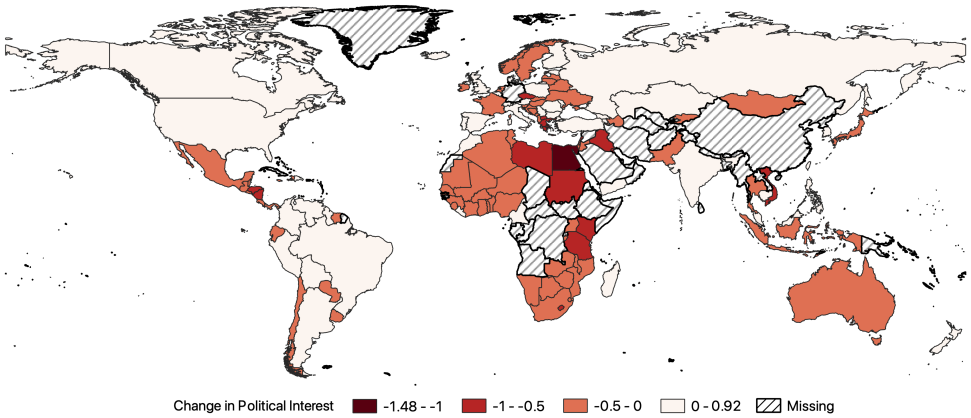
B.3 Attention to Politics and Development

Table B4: ATTENTION TO POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-Election	0.332	0.356	0.315	0.292	0.278	0.258	0.245	0.237
	(0.0444)	(0.0422)	(0.0300)	(0.0268)	(0.0177)	(0.0188)	(0.0206)	(0.0212)
Developing	-0.280	-0.194	-0.293	-0.299	-0.346	-0.349	-0.326	-0.304
	(0.140)	(0.159)	(0.145)	(0.147)	(0.137)	(0.125)	(0.118)	(0.112)
Post × Developing	-0.331	-0.382	-0.223	-0.172	-0.126	-0.110	-0.142	-0.173
	(0.136)	(0.122)	(0.116)	(0.130)	(0.127)	(0.115)	(0.111)	(0.106)
Dep Var Mean	2.79	2.83	2.82	2.79	2.78	2.77	2.76	2.76
R^2	.0321	.0327	.0266	.0239	.0251	.0243	.0239	.0234
N	20,284	47,626	79,050	113,355	147,346	173,531	192,718	212,112

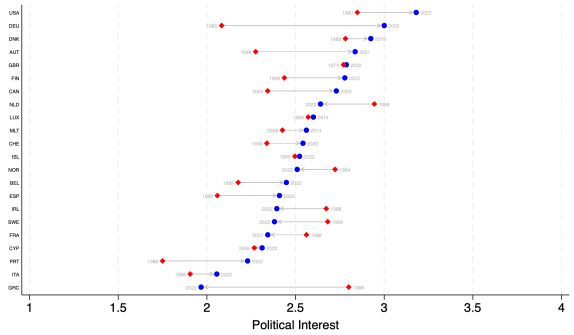
NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. The interaction variable, Developing, is a binary variable equal to 1 for low and middle income countries, and 0 for high income countries. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

Figure B3: CHANGE IN POLITICAL INTEREST

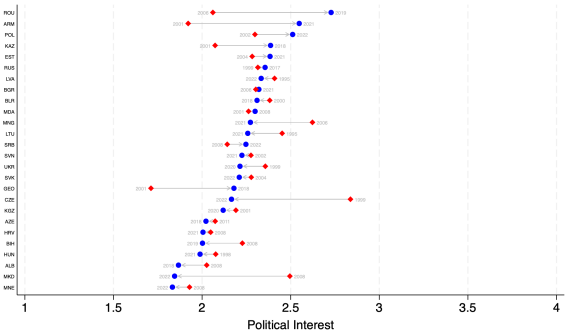


NOTE. The figure shows the change in political interest from the earliest to the most recent year available for each country. A negative value (shaded in red) indicates a decline in political interest over time, while a positive value (white) indicates an increase. Countries with hashed lines represent those with missing data.

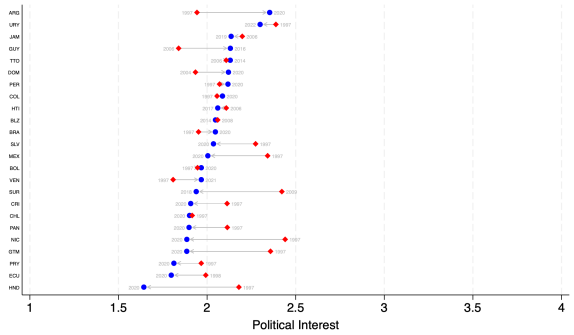
Figure B4: POLITICAL INTEREST, BY COUNTRY



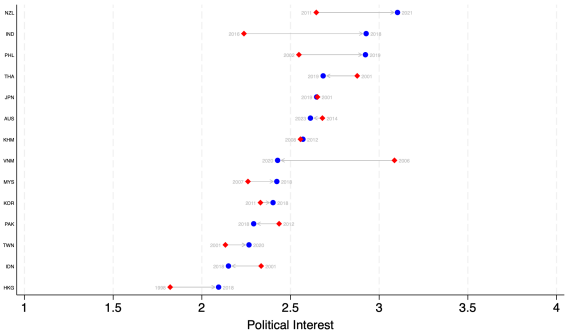
(a) Western Europe & North America (WENA)



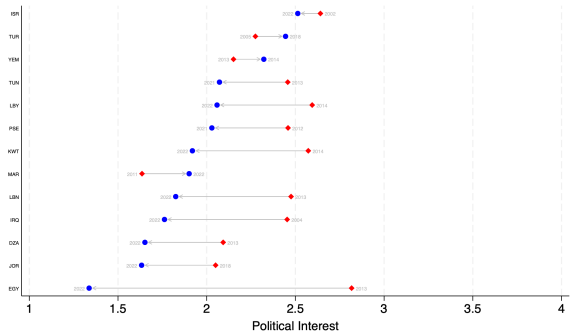
(b) Eastern Europe & Central Asia (EECA)



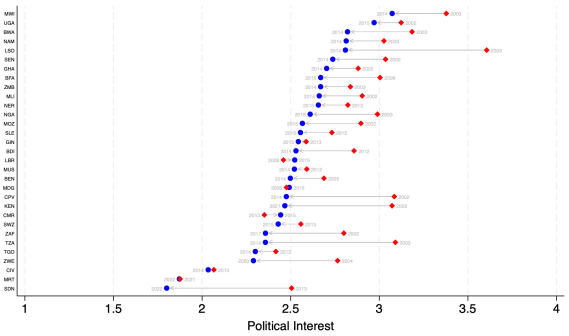
(c) Latin America & the Carribean (LAC)



(d) Asia & the Pacific (APAC)



(e) Middle East & North Africa (MENA)



(f) Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

NOTE. The horizontal axis is political interest while the countries under each region are displayed on the vertical axis. The red diamond is the mean political interest for the earliest year available for the country, while the blue circle is the mean political interest for the most recent year available. The earliest and most recent years for each country are written in gray beside the diamond and circle, respectively.

Appendix C Conceptual Framework

Following models of attention (Gabaix, 2019), I propose a simple model of uncertainty and costly information acquisition where citizens want to know the state of the economy, s, after the election.[14] The state of the economy depends on which candidate wins the election and determines citizens' utilities.

C.1 Candidates

There are two candidates: incumbent i and newcomer n. Candidate i wins with probability $p \in (0,1)$. Candidates have their own chosen policy, which then leads to a particular state of the economy. If candidate $\theta \in \{i,n\}$ wins, $s = s_\theta$ where s_θ follows some distribution with variance σ_θ^2. The distributions can be arbitrary, as long as $\sigma_i^2 < \sigma_n^2$ since historically, citizens are more familiar with the incumbent's policies, rendering them more predictable.

C.2 Citizens

Citizens' utilities are based on the difference between the citizen's action a and the state of the economy:[15]

$$U_2(a) = -(s-a)^2$$

Although a can be construed as any general action that the citizen can take, a typical example could be individuals choosing how much to invest in their firms. If the policy environment incentivizes such investments, it would benefit individuals to invest more (high s, high a). On the other hand, if the policy environment is corrupt, then less investments might be ideal if they would just be expropriated (low s, low a).

To simplify the model, citizens have two options. On the one hand, they can acquire information and pay the cost c, which leads to knowing s_θ, the state of the economy under candidate θ with certainty.[16,17] On the other hand, they can simply not acquire information and perform action a given what is known at the time they make the decision.

There is a measure 1 of citizens in the economy indexed by $c \in [0,\infty)$, with a distribution $F(c)$, which is increasing in c.

C.3 Timeline

The model has the following timeline:

1. PRE-ELECTION RESULTS STAGE | At $t = 0$, without knowing the results of the elections, citizens choose whether or not to acquire information about either or both of the candidates.

2. ELECTION RESULTS STAGE | At $t = 1$, the winner is announced (i.e. $s = s_\theta$) and citizens decide whether to obtain (any or more) information depending on their previous choice.[18]

3. POST-ELECTION RESULTS STAGE | At $t = 2$, the value of s_θ is known, and citizens realize their corresponding utilities.

[14] Alternatively, one can think of the state of the economy as synonymous to or resulting from a type of economic policy. For example, the government providing incentives to invest in certain industries may lead to lower unemployment or higher economic growth.

[15] In what follows, the subscripts indicated in the utility function and the expectation operator signify the relevant time period.

[16] Thus, obtaining information and incurring c lead to $U_2(a) = 0$.

[17] Note that it is not the actual value of s but the variable s_θ that is known as a result of information acquisition. For example, when citizens research about the policies of candidate θ, they become aware of s_θ—the possible states under θ, not necessarily that the state is $s_\theta = k$ for some constant k.

[18] That is, if at $t = 0$ they have already acquired information about one candidate, at $t = 1$ they will only either acquire information about the other candidate or not at all.

C.4 Results

LEMMA 1: At $t = 1$, citizens choose $a = E_1[s_\theta]$, the expected value of s_θ given all available information at $t = 1$.

Proof: Expectation minimizes the mean squared error.

LEMMA 2: If no information about the winner is obtained at $t = 0$, citizens acquire information about the winner at $t = 1$ if: (1) winner is i and $c < \sigma_i^2$, or (2) winner is n and $c < \sigma_n^2$.

Proof: Consider the first case where the incumbent wins. If citizens acquire information, $E_1[U_2] = 0 - c$, otherwise, $E_1[U_2] = -E_1[(s_i - E_1[s_i])^2] = -\sigma_i^2$. Hence, citizens acquire information if $c < \sigma_i^2$. The second case where the newcomer wins is proved similarly.

Hence, if no information is obtained at $t = 0$, there are 3 possibilities: (1) citizens with $c \leq \sigma_i^2$ will acquire information about the winner at $t = 1$ regardless of who wins, (2) citizens with $\sigma_i^2 < c \leq \sigma_n^2$ will acquire information at $t = 1$ only if n wins, and (3) citizens with $c > \sigma_n^2$ will not acquire information at $t = 1$.

PROPOSITION 1: No information is acquired at $t = 0$.

Proof: If c is low enough (case 1), citizens will prefer to acquire information and incur the ensuing cost. If c is high enough (cases 2 and 3), citizens will prefer to not acquire information and just accept the positive utility deviation. For each case, there are four options. First, I compute for the expected utility when no information is acquired at $t = 0$, which is the proposition being proven. Second, I compute for the expected utility when information is only obtained about i at $t = 0$. Third, I do the same exercise, but only for n at $t = 0$. Finally, I calculate the expected utility when information is obtained about both candidates at $t = 0$. For each option, I consider the probability p of candidate i winning, and the residual probability $1 - p$ of candidate n winning. I assume no discounting across time periods.

Case 1: $c \in [0, \sigma_i^2]$

	$t = 0$	$t = 1$	$E_0[U_2]$
Option 1: No information acquisition at $t = 0$	0	$p(-c) + (1-p)(-c)$	$-c$
Option 2: Information about i, no information about n	$-c$	$(1-p)(-c)$	$-c-(1-p)c$
Option 3: Information about n, no information about i	$-c$	$p(-c)$	$-c-pc$
Option 4: Information about i and n	$-2c$	0	$-2c$

Clearly, Option 1 has the highest $E_0[U_2]$.

Case 2: $c \in (\sigma_i^2, \sigma_n^2)$

	$t = 0$	$t = 1$	$E_0[U_2]$
Option 1: No information acquisition at $t = 0$	0	$p(-\sigma_i^2) + (1-p)(-c)$	$-[p\sigma_i^2 + (1-p)c]$
Option 2: Information about i, no information about n	$-c$	$(1-p)(-c)$	$-[c + (1-p)c]$
Option 3: Information about n, no information about i	$-c$	$p(-\sigma_i^2)$	$-[c + p\sigma_i^2]$
Option 4: Information about i and n	$-2c$	0	$-2c$

Again, Option 1 has the highest $E_0[U_2]$ since $p\sigma_i^2 < \sigma_i^2 < c$.

PROPOSITION 2A: Higher uncertainty about the state of the economy implies more information acquisition at $t = 1$, regardless of who wins.

Proof: The mass of information acquirers is $F(\sigma_\theta^2)$, and since F is increasing, $F(\sigma_1^2) > F(\sigma_2^2)$ if

Case 3: $c \in [\sigma_n^2, \infty)$

	$t=0$	$t=1$	$E_0[U_2]$
Option 1: No information acquisition at $t=0$	0	$p(-\sigma_i^2)+(1-p)(-\sigma_n^2)$	$-[p\sigma_i^2+(1-p)\sigma_n^2]$
Option 2: Information about i, no information about n	$-c$	$(1-p)(-\sigma_n^2)$	$-[c+(1-p)\sigma_n^2]$
Option 3: Information about n, no information about i	$-c$	$p(-\sigma_i^2)$	$-[c+p\sigma_i^2]$
Option 4: Information about i and n	$-2c$	0	$-2c$

Again, Option 1 has the highest $E_0[U_2]$ since $(1-p)\sigma_n^2 < \sigma_n^2 \leq c$.

$\sigma_1^2 > \sigma_2^2$.

PROPOSITION 2B: Citizens acquire more information at $t=1$ if n wins.

Proof: Since $\sigma_i^2 < \sigma_n^2$, then using the same argument above, $F(\sigma_i^2) < F(\sigma_n^2)$.

Although the model focuses on information acquisition, I can also interpret c as the cost of taking an interest in politics since paying attention to and following politics is costly.[19]

The model is designed as a simple framework to generate predictions that align with the empirical patterns observed in the data. The main limitation of the model is that it only allows for a binary choice in information acquisition. The empirical data suggest that some level of political interest exists even before Election Day, which is not entirely consistent with the model's stark predictions. This simplification, however, serves to highlight the core intuition behind the results. The model could be extended to allow for a continuous information acquisition process, where individuals face a tradeoff between incurring a higher cost to gather early information and gaining a strategic advantage, versus waiting until after the election when uncertainty is reduced. Such a refinement could more accurately capture the variation in political interest over time while maintaining the model's core predictions.

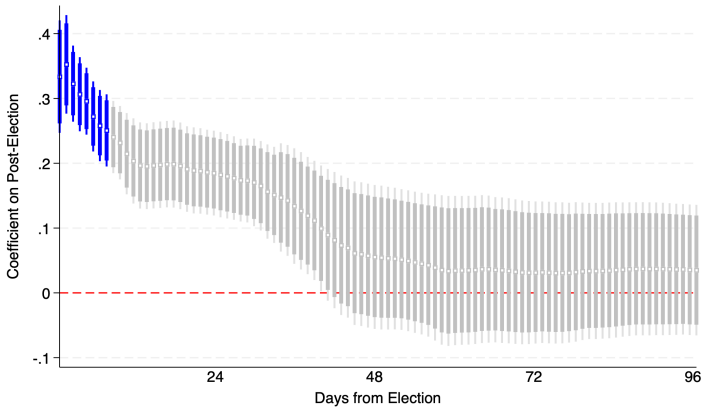
[19] Lupia and Philpot (2005) define political interest as 'a citizen's willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other endeavors'.

Appendix D Robustness Checks

D.1 Election Window

Figure D1 illustrates the coefficient estimates for $Post_{it}$ as I manipulate the window size. While the previous tables showcased estimates based on shorter windows, this analysis demonstrates that the results remain robust and applicable for a wide range of windows. As anticipated, there is a gradual decline in both the estimated values and statistical significance as the period converges to the 96-day window.

Figure D1: ELECTION WINDOW BY DAY



NOTE. The dependent variable is political interest and the independent variable is the $Post_t$ dummy which equals 1 if the survey comes after the election, and 0 otherwise. The horizontal axis ranges from 1 to 96 days after the election. The square is the coefficient estimate, with the thick bar showing the 90% confidence interval and the thin bar showing the 95% confidence interval. The gray bars are the interval estimates for each day until the end of the 96-day window. The blue bars are the pre-selected windows in the results tables.

D.2 Fixed Effects

Considering the critical role of time in my identification strategy, I incorporate a combination of fixed effects, encompassing factors such as the day of the week, the month and year when the survey was conducted, as well as the timing of the election. Additionally, I include fixed effects related to the country, survey wave, and the type of election (e.g., presidential or legislative). The results, as presented in Table D1, demonstrate that in all model specifications, the statistical significance of my findings remains intact.

Table D1: ADDING FIXED EFFECTS (14-DAY WINDOW)

	None	Country	Survey	Survey Date	Election	Election Date	Election Type	All
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-Election	0.258	0.136	0.0637	0.135	0.0834	0.0845	0.245	0.156
	(0.0273)	(0.0298)	(0.0172)	(0.0264)	(0.0178)	(0.0183)	(0.0250)	(0.0396)
Dep Var Mean	2.76	2.76	2.76	2.76	2.76	2.76	2.76	2.76
R^2	.0153	.0522	.0565	.0519	.0711	.0662	.0245	.0798
N	197,166	197,166	197,166	197,166	197,166	197,166	197,166	197,166

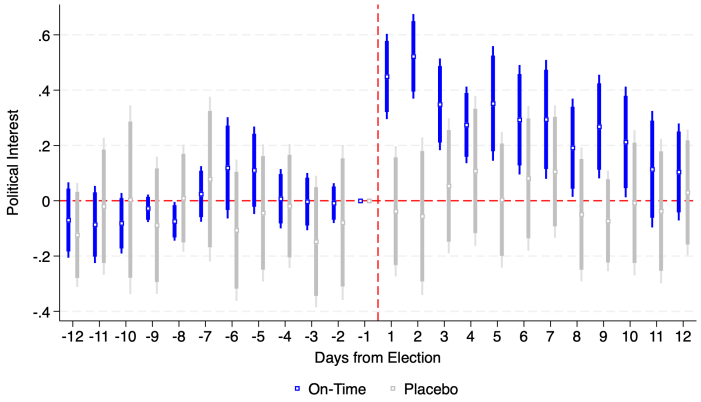
NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the fixed effects included in the specification. The table uses a 14-day window (i.e., 7 days before and after the election).

D.3 Placebo Test: Planned vs. Actual Elections

In certain regions around the world, the timing of elections is not fixed and can be determined by the incumbent government. Consequently, the *actual* occurrence of elections may differ from their initially

planned dates. Various factors, such as the death of leaders, snap elections due to coalition breakdowns and natural disasters, can contribute to this discrepancy. To validate my approach, I conduct a placebo test utilizing the 'original' election date, which represents the timing that would have been followed had these unforeseen events not happened. As depicted in Figure D2, while the jump in interest for on-time (actual) elections remains notably significant, there is no discernible effect associated with placebo (planned) elections. This reinforces the validity of my identification strategy and underscores the significance of actual, rather than planned, elections in shaping political interest.

Figure D2: POLITICAL INTEREST FOR ON-TIME VS PLACEBO ELECTIONS



NOTE. The dependent variable is political interest. The horizontal axis ranges from 12 days before and after the election. The vertical red dashed line signifies the election day. The square is the coefficient estimate, with the thick bar showing the 90% confidence interval and the thin bar showing the 95% confidence interval. The coefficient values are relative to the day before the elections.

D.4 Balance Test

A potential concern is that certain types of respondents select into being interviewed before versus after the election day. For example, it is possible that younger individuals who are busy with pre-election preparations are therefore more likely to be interviewed after the election. If younger individuals are also more politically interested, then this could explain part of the results. To alleviate these concerns, I perform a balance test, where I consider whether respondents are different before and after the election day. In Figure D3, I show that gender, age, education and income are continuous around the threshold, with no significant jumps that could explain my headline results.[20]

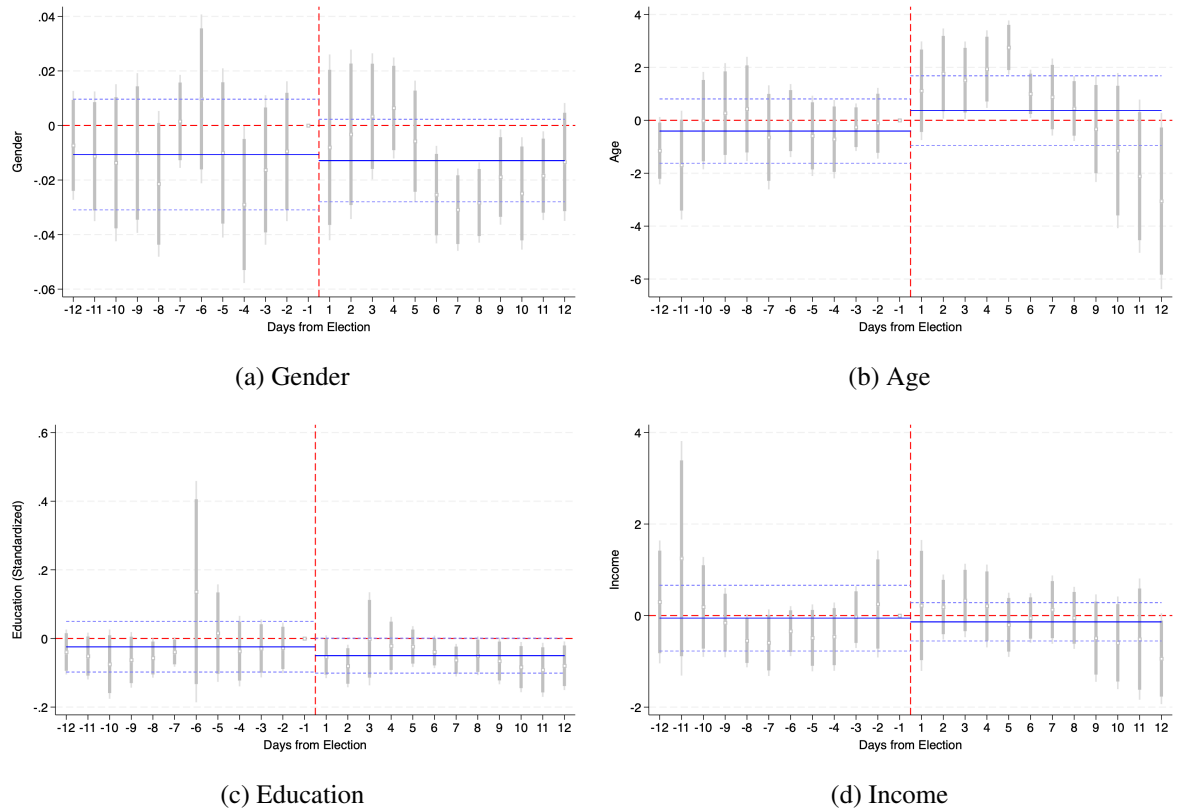
D.5 Individual-Level Controls

Even with the balance test, previous research has emphasized the influence of individual characteristics on political interest (Wolak, 2020; Campante and Chor, 2012; Alesina and Giuliano, 2011). To address this, I incorporate variables such as gender, age, education, and income into the analysis.[21] Another concern is that changes in sample composition can have a large effect on observed political attitudes and that including demographic and ideological controls mitigates this selection issue (Gelman et al., 2016). Accordingly, I incorporate respondents' self-placement on the ideological scale (from 1 to 10, left to right). I also include the length of interview and the survey response rate to proxy for interest in the interview. In Table D2, the findings indicate that even when factoring in these controls, my results remain robust and consistent.

[20]Gender is coded as a binary variable equal to 1 if male and 0 if female. Age is measured in years. Education is standardized to be comparable across surveys, while income is categorized based on groupings provided in each survey (usually in deciles).

[21]In the following table, I include dummy variables for gender and income, with age and education entering as linear (continuous) controls. Notably, results remain unchanged even when using categorical dummies for each year of age or level of educational attainment (e.g. basic, secondary, tertiary).

Figure D3: BALANCE TEST



(a) Gender

(b) Age

(c) Education

(d) Income

NOTE. Horizontal axis shows the number of days from the election. Each gray circle corresponds to the mean of the specific variable for each chosen bin, relative to the mean value on the day before the elections. Solid black curves are smoothed local quadratic polynomials on either side of the discontinuity. The solid blue line is the mean of the coefficients for the pre- and post-periods, with the dashed blue lines representing the 95% confidence interval.

Table D2: ADDING INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CONTROLS (14-DAY WINDOW)

	None	Sex	Age	Education	Income	Ideology	All	Length of Interview	Response Rate
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Post-Election	0.258	0.257	0.243	0.295	0.253	0.296	0.275	0.264	0.150
	(0.0273)	(0.0274)	(0.0260)	(0.0354)	(0.0374)	(0.0272)	(0.0496)	(0.0320)	(0.0537)
Dep Var Mean	2.76	2.76	2.76	2.78	2.8	2.91	2.93	2.79	2.78
R^2	.0153	.046	.0298	.0527	.0396	.0693	.138	.0159	.0273
N	197,166	196,850	195,951	164,524	141,188	134,598	94,892	163,030	161,537

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the controls included in the specification. The table uses a 14-day window (i.e., 7 days before and after the election).

Appendix E Alternative Identification Strategies

E.1 Panel Data with Fixed Effects

Below, I exploit the panel structure of the data to include individual fixed effects. This approach addresses concerns related to surveys conducted entirely before or after an election, where there is no within survey variation in $Post_{it}$. The estimates presented in Table E1 reaffirm the robustness of my previous results.[22] Effectively, this specification turns off the dispositional channel of political interest (i.e. factors that are intrinsic and enduring), and illustrates that political interest can respond to situational stimuli beyond internal factors.

Table E1: USING PANEL DATA (14-DAY WINDOW)

	None	Individual	Panel Wave	Individual + Wave	Survey Date	Election Date	Election Type	All
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-Election	0.245	0.0109	0.135	0.0446	0.108	0.0780	0.245	0.0639
	(0.0209)	(0.00386)	(0.0484)	(0.0316)	(0.0152)	(0.0240)	(0.0213)	(0.0221)
Dep Var Mean	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
R^2	.0144	.00015	.0423	.00308	.0426	.0454	.0145	.00645
N	161,375	161,375	161,375	161,375	161,375	161,375	161,375	161,375

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the fixed effects included in the specification. The table uses a 14-day window (i.e., 7 days before and after the election).

E.2 Regression Discontinuity Design

The original identification strategy can be thought of as a RDD employing a linear function of the running variable and a pre-selected bandwidth value (i.e., the N-day windows). In this subsection, I make use of more flexible functions of the running variable and optimal bandwidth methods through the RDD.

Formally, I estimate the following regression equation:

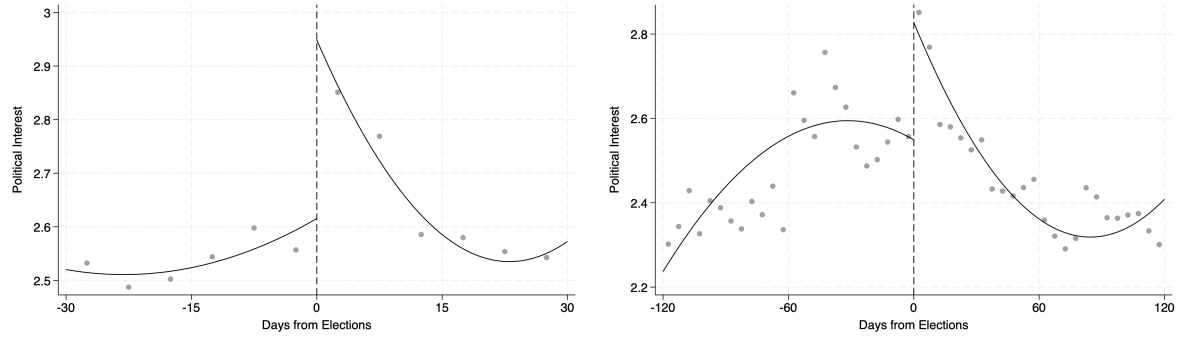
$$\begin{aligned} PolInt_{it} &= \alpha + \beta Post_{it} + f(Days_{it}) + g(Post_{it}, Days_{it}) + \varepsilon_{it} \\ &s.t.\ Days_{it} \in [-h, h] \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where variables are defined as before, and $f(\cdot)$ and $g(\cdot)$ are linear, quadratic and cubic functions of the running variable (i.e., number of days from the election). The optimal bandwidth value h is given by the bandwidth selection procedures used. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level.

Figure E1 shows a discrete jump in interest after the elections. Estimates presented in Table E2 are statistically significant, regardless of the specific functional form and bandwidth approach chosen for the analysis.

[22] The specification in column 4 achieves statistical significance when a wider window is considered.

Figure E1: RDD PLOTS



(a) 60-Day Window

(b) 240-Day Window

NOTE. Horizontal axis shows the number of days from the election. Each circle corresponds to the mean of political interest for each chosen bin. Solid curves are smoothed local quadratic polynomials on either side of the discontinuity.

Table E2: POLITICAL INTEREST USING RDD

	Linear		Quadratic		Cubic	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Post-Election	0.252	0.303	0.328	0.375	0.344	0.404
	(0.093)	(0.088)	(0.085)	(0.087)	(0.083)	(0.087)
BW Method	MSERD	CERRD	MSERD	CERRD	MSERD	CERRD
Bandwidth	85.1	64.3	124	90.2	186	137
N	957,271	842,178	1,192,065	979,179	1,662,397	1,281,824

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the functional form of the running variable employed. Bandwidth is the value used for estimation of the regression function below the cutoff, computed using either one common MSE (i.e. MSERD) or CER (i.e. CERRD)-optimal bandwidth selector.

Appendix F Other Results

F.1 Elections and Information Acquisition

In this subsection, I test the predictions of my model. Generally, the results are promising and align with my expectations: information acquisition is lower with first-round elections with runoffs ($\beta_{Post \times Two-Round} < 0$), lower in incumbent victories ($\beta_{Post \times Incumbent} < 0$), and greater in high uncertainty environments ($\beta_{Post \times Uncertainty} > 0$). While the signs of the interaction coefficients are consistent, statistical significance is observed in only select specifications. Therefore, we take these findings to be suggestive, but not conclusive.

Table F1: FREQUENCY OF NEWS CONSUMPTION

	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Elections with Runoff vs. Single Round								
Post-Election	0.501	0.146	0.277	0.285	0.180	0.143	0.155	0.170
	(0.0909)	(0.141)	(0.266)	(0.281)	(0.217)	(0.195)	(0.191)	(0.190)
Two-Round	1.691	1.337	1.304	1.132	0.878	0.679	0.588	0.520
	(0.805)	(0.999)	(1.033)	(1.006)	(1.001)	(0.913)	(0.835)	(0.853)
Post × Two-Round	-1.563	-1.057	-0.995	-0.613	-0.454	-0.274	-0.163	-0.140
	(0.492)	(0.446)	(0.329)	(0.284)	(0.231)	(0.223)	(0.317)	(0.458)
Dep Var Mean	1.65	1.49	1.68	1.7	1.67	1.66	1.63	1.62
R^2	.0226	.00426	.00593	.00567	.00263	.00177	.00198	.00228
N	10,235	25,817	46,736	67,790	88,807	100,725	110,123	119,317
Panel B: Incumbent Victory								
Post-Election	0.214	0.0949	0.368	0.393	0.272	0.232	0.250	0.272
	(0.114)	(0.0616)	(0.310)	(0.322)	(0.224)	(0.196)	(0.199)	(0.207)
Incumbent	1.447	1.449	1.916	1.816	1.641	1.563	1.543	1.517
	(0.420)	(0.447)	(0.442)	(0.390)	(0.386)	(0.372)	(0.369)	(0.365)
Post × Incumbent	0.213	-0.407	-1.159	-1.307	-1.205	-1.232	-1.275	-1.317
	(0.423)	(0.715)	(0.931)	(1.030)	(0.993)	(1.001)	(1.015)	(1.003)
Dep Var Mean	1.65	1.49	1.68	1.7	1.67	1.66	1.63	1.62
R^2	.106	.041	.0381	.0291	.0214	.019	.02	.0207
N	10,235	25,817	46,736	67,790	88,807	100,725	110,123	119,317
Panel C: Policy Uncertainty								
Post-Election	0.517	0.196	0.450	-0.578	-0.547	-0.500	-0.519	-0.476
	(0.0698)	(0.119)	(0.278)	(.)	(0.000809)	(0.00210)	(0.00543)	(0.00821)
Uncertainty	0.246	0.406	0.449	0.484	0.569	0.593	0.511	0.495
	(0.0835)	(0.0844)	(0.0833)	(0.124)	(0.202)	(0.231)	(0.212)	(0.200)
Post × Uncertainty	0	0	0	1.045	0.879	0.783	0.807	0.771
	(.)	(.)	(.)	(0.293)	(0.185)	(0.150)	(0.155)	(0.163)
Dep Var Mean	1.56	1.41	1.59	1.62	1.6	1.58	1.56	1.54
R^2	.026	.00601	.0159	.0188	.013	.0121	.0125	.0131
N	9,495	24,161	43,707	63,621	83,526	94,472	103,453	111,717

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is the frequency of news consumption. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

Table F2: FREQUENCY OF POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS

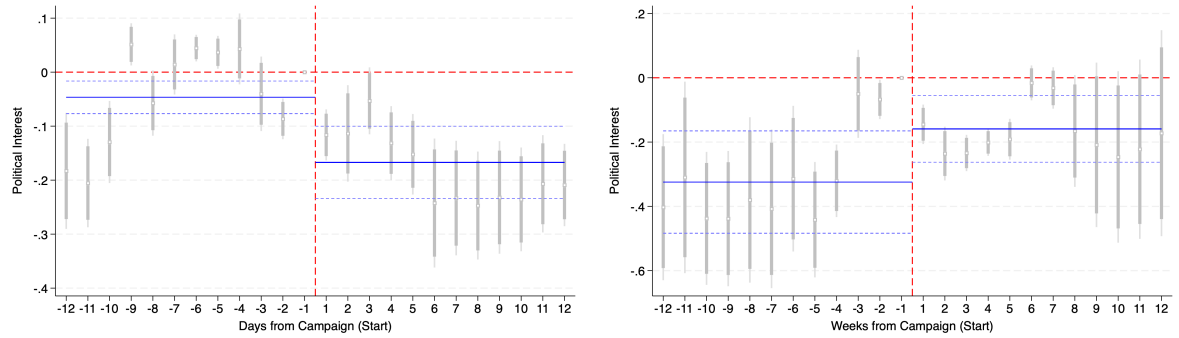
	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Elections with Runoff vs. Single Round								
Post-Election	0.651	0.881	0.577	0.421	0.450	0.432	0.430	0.407
	(0.206)	(0.171)	(0.311)	(0.378)	(0.359)	(0.330)	(0.311)	(0.301)
Two-Round	-0.703	-0.911	-0.885	-0.828	-0.801	-0.824	-0.778	-0.802
	(0.357)	(0.297)	(0.296)	(0.329)	(0.354)	(0.366)	(0.354)	(0.340)
Post × Two-Round	-0.730	-0.967	-0.679	-0.448	-0.520	-0.463	-0.471	-0.416
	(0.322)	(0.282)	(0.368)	(0.380)	(0.367)	(0.344)	(0.321)	(0.314)
Dep Var Mean	3.67	3.9	3.73	3.6	3.58	3.55	3.51	3.46
R^2	.0228	.0368	.0171	.0103	.0117	.0114	.0111	.0108
N	10,996	27,785	44,286	59,052	72,309	83,462	94,287	104,176
Panel B: Incumbent Victory								
Post-Election	0.762	0.978	0.644	0.471	0.491	0.459	0.445	0.427
	(0.162)	(0.138)	(0.317)	(0.406)	(0.386)	(0.373)	(0.366)	(0.360)
Incumbent	-0.473	-0.392	-0.128	-0.103	-0.136	-0.163	-0.197	-0.194
	(0.323)	(0.295)	(0.345)	(0.329)	(0.312)	(0.302)	(0.294)	(0.292)
Post × Incumbent	-0.389	-0.639	-0.561	-0.409	-0.397	-0.186	-0.0652	-0.0728
	(0.258)	(0.274)	(0.438)	(0.495)	(0.470)	(0.472)	(0.478)	(0.477)
Dep Var Mean	3.67	3.9	3.73	3.6	3.58	3.55	3.51	3.46
R^2	.03	.0448	.0186	.0102	.0113	.00942	.00899	.00841
N	10,996	27,785	44,286	59,052	72,309	83,462	94,287	104,176
Panel C: Policy Uncertainty								
Post-Election	0.398	0.384	0.328	0.342	0.348	0.273	0.217	0.114
	(0.0330)	(0.0257)	(0.0718)	(0.0772)	(0.0928)	(0.107)	(0.137)	(0.170)
Uncertainty	0.886	0.816	0.741	0.742	0.722	0.720	0.666	0.626
	(0.259)	(0.247)	(0.262)	(0.251)	(0.257)	(0.240)	(0.253)	(0.250)
Post × Uncertainty	0.286	0.538	0.295	0.125	0.151	0.216	0.285	0.379
	(0.192)	(0.183)	(0.357)	(0.427)	(0.401)	(0.364)	(0.352)	(0.339)
Dep Var Mean	3.82	4.04	3.83	3.68	3.67	3.64	3.6	3.56
R^2	.0321	.0443	.0215	.0141	.0157	.0168	.0178	.018
N	9,622	24,884	39,444	52,309	63,789	73,193	82,529	90,514

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is the frequency of political discussions. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

F.2 Alternative Explanation: Campaigns

To obtain data on campaign start dates, I first use data from ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2024) on blackout periods for campaigning and opinion polls. I then supplement this with extensive online research, consulting each country's electoral laws to determine the official campaign period. For countries without specific legal provisions on campaign duration (e.g., United States), I reference electoral commission guidelines, government websites and reliable news sources to approximate the campaign's start. In the U.S., for instance, I use the date of the last national convention of each major party—when the presidential candidate is formally nominated—as the campaign start date.

Figure F1: POLITICAL INTEREST AND CAMPAIGNS



(a) Days from Campaign Start

(b) Weeks from Campaign Start

NOTE. The dependent variable is political interest. The horizontal axis ranges from 12 days (Panel A) or weeks (Panel B) before and after the start of the campaign period. The vertical red dashed line signifies the start of the campaign. The gray square is the coefficient estimate, with the thick gray bar showing the 90% confidence interval and the thin gray bar showing the 95% confidence interval. The coefficient values are relative to the day before the elections. The solid blue line is the mean of the coefficients for the pre- and post-periods, with the dashed blue lines representing the 95% confidence interval.

F.3 Alternative Explanation: Stake in Election Results

Table F3: POLITICAL INTEREST AND VOTER TURNOUT

	1 days	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-Election	0.419	0.429	0.327	0.342	0.320	0.322	0.279	0.270
	(0.0773)	(0.0614)	(0.157)	(0.109)	(0.0807)	(0.0785)	(0.0658)	(0.0609)
Voted	0.600	0.660	0.720	0.663	0.602	0.548	0.502	0.497
	(0.141)	(0.0989)	(0.0178)	(0.0238)	(0.0677)	(0.0794)	(0.113)	(0.103)
Post × Voted	0.118	0.116	0.00901	0.0305	0.0896	0.107	0.161	0.169
	(0.132)	(0.105)	(0.0180)	(0.0211)	(0.0612)	(0.0758)	(0.111)	(0.102)
Dep Var Mean	2.8	2.8	2.81	2.78	2.76	2.77	2.77	2.76
R^2	.131	.14	.113	.107	.107	.0976	.0965	.0959
N	848	1,841	3,057	4,631	5,762	8,225	10,530	12,378

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

F.4 Alternative Explanation: Elections as a Spectacle

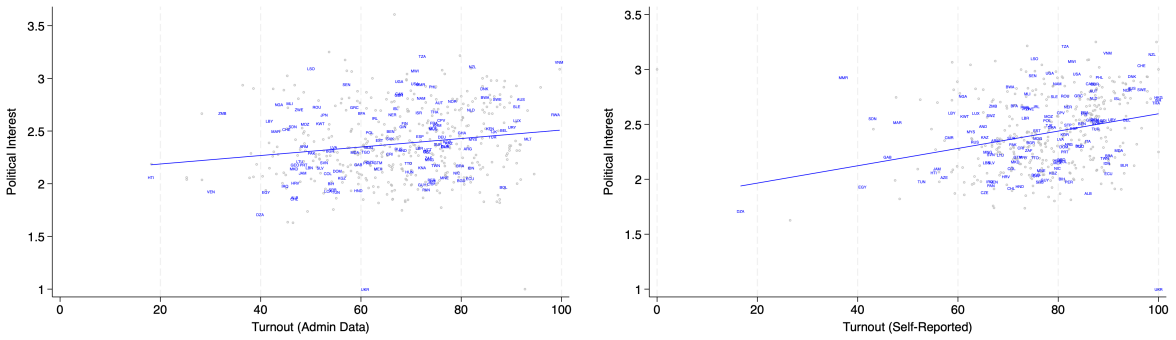
Table F4: POLITICAL INTEREST AND NEWS COVERAGE

	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days	8 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-Election	0.235	0.297	0.249	0.274	0.280	0.256	0.244	0.233
	(0.0456)	(0.0882)	(0.0976)	(0.0963)	(0.0970)	(0.0922)	(0.0947)	(0.0887)
News Coverage	-0.0408	-0.00173	-0.00875	0.0210	0.0464	0.0585	0.0664	0.0751
	(0.133)	(0.109)	(0.0833)	(0.0797)	(0.0612)	(0.0537)	(0.0543)	(0.0631)
Post × News Coverage	0.124	0.0814	0.0731	0.0305	0.0114	0.0119	0.0127	0.0180
	(0.0834)	(0.0845)	(0.0817)	(0.0837)	(0.0878)	(0.0806)	(0.0783)	(0.0733)
Dep Var Mean	2.86	2.9	2.88	2.85	2.84	2.83	2.83	2.83
R^2	.0237	.0247	.017	.0158	.0175	.0162	.0149	.0144
N	15,686	38,207	64,768	91,386	118,230	137,840	150,041	162,651

NOTE. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country level. Dependent variable is political interest. News coverage is a binary variable equal to 1 if there is a news article about the election during that day, and 0 otherwise. Column titles indicate the number of days before and after the election included in the particular window. The shortest is a 2-day window (i.e., 1 day before and after), while the longest is a 16-day window (i.e., 8 days before and after).

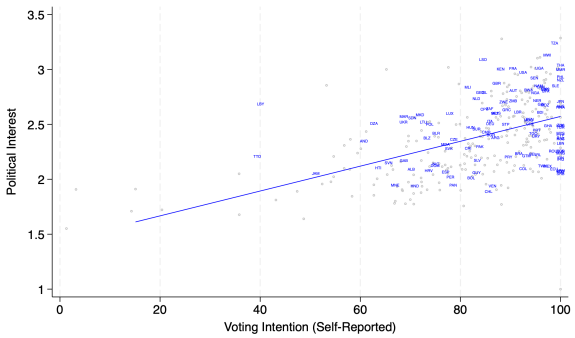
F.5 Political Interest and Voting Behavior and Intention

Figure F2: POLITICAL INTEREST AND TURNOUT



(a) Administrative Data (b) Self-Reported Data

Figure F3: POLITICAL INTEREST AND VOTING INTENTION



NOTE. The vertical axis is political interest while the horizontal axis is voting intention. The blue ISO code and best fit line present the most recent year available for each country.