

WORKSHOP 16

16. Political information, public knowledge and perceptions of reality

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Informed citizens are better citizens judged by the standards of democratic theory. They are more likely to participate in politics, to have meaningful, stable attitudes on issues, to link their interest with their attitudes and to choose political representatives who are consistent with their own attitudes. In order to express attitudes and act according to their self-interest, citizens need relevant and up to date information about current affairs. However, several scholars have questioned the quality and the form of information provided by the news media. Market mechanisms and news criteria are said to provide a poor information environment. The claim is that there is a rise of tabloid, soft news in television and a tendency for many newspapers to compete with television by shifting to shorter more entertaining and less fact-orienting stories. This workshop will focus on the political information given by the news media to the public, and how this information influences the public's knowledge and perception of political reality. The aim of the workshop is to contribute to the research agenda in two areas: (i) Do the information given by the news media vary across different media systems and types of media within these systems? (ii) Do between and/or within system variations in news content influence political knowledge and public perception of political reality? The workshop will offer an arena for sharing and discussing the results of diverse empirical research on these topics. Contributions are invited from comparativists and country specialists, and we particularly welcome papers which combine theoretical and empirical approaches.