

Research Note:

The 2008 Presidential Primaries and Differential Effects of ‘The Daily Show’ and ‘The Colbert Report’ on Young Adults

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Drawing on data from a survey of 18-24 year olds during the early 2008 primary season, we show that viewers of the left-leaning “The Daily Show” were more likely to evaluate 2008 Republican presidential primary candidates negatively, while viewers of the prima facie right-oriented “The Colbert Report” had higher evaluations of Republicans. The research is important because an increasing number of young adults rely on political humor as legitimate political news, and this is especially true with regard to “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report.” Thus, it is important to understand how viewership may affect their political attitudes and beliefs.

On September 16, 2010, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert each announced plans to hold political rallies on the National Mall in Washington DC. Stewart’s “Rally To Restore Sanity” and Colbert’s “March To Keep Fear Alive” took place on October 30, 2010, immediately prior to the 2010 mid-term congressional elections. Stewart’s rally was announced as a response to Glenn Beck’s “Restoring Honor” Tea Party movement rally in the Mall a few weeks prior, while Colbert’s was billed as a response to Stewart’s (Carter 2010a; de Moraes 2010). These announcements garnered a good deal of attention in the press, much focused on the effects they might have on the election (Ambinder 2010; Carr 2010; Carter 2010b; Deggans 2010; Goodale 2010a, 2010b).

While the actual effect of the rallies is unclear, research suggests that late night political humor does have some effect on the political knowledge (Cooper and Bailey 2008; Hollander 2005; Pfau, et al. 2007; Cao 2008; Moy 2008), attitudes (Young 2004; Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Baumgartner 2007; Morris 2008), and participation (Moy, et al. 2005; Pfau, et al. 2007; Cao 2010; Cao and Brewer 2008) of its viewers. This is especially true with younger viewers, the primary audience of these programs (Pew Research Center 2008).

However research also tells us that the effects of various late night political humor programs are not monolithic. For example, one recent study demonstrated that viewers of “The Daily Show” (TDS) evaluated Republican candidates lower than Democratic candidates during the 2004 conventions (Morris 2008). Another suggests that political predispositions affect how “The Colbert Report” (TCR) viewers perceived Colbert’s own political views (LaMarre, et al. 2009). All political humor is not created equal.

We take this as a starting point for the present analysis. Drawing on media framing theory (Entman 1993; McCombs 1997) and opinion data taken from a survey of 18-24 year olds during the early 2008 primary season, we show that there are differences between how viewers of the left-leaning “The Daily Show” and the *prima facie* right-oriented “The Colbert Report” evaluated candidates for their party nomination. In particular, there seems to be an association between TDS viewership and negative opinion of 2008 Republican presidential primary candidates, as well as TCR viewership and positive views of these same Republicans. The research is important because an increasing number of young adults rely on political humor as legitimate political news, and this is especially true with regard to TDS and TCR (Pew Research Center 2008). In the case of the 2008 presidential primary season, the most open in modern times, humor-based programming may have been a significant factor in helping many young viewers familiarize themselves with the candidates.

Partisan Frames and Political Humor on Comedy Central

In spite of the fact that TDS and TCR have similar origins, shared the same producer for a time, appear back-to-back on the same channel, and are both “mock” news programs, they are quite different. Importantly, both take identifiably partisan approaches to their commentary, and this may have implications for how viewership affects the political attitudes of viewers.

We contend that these differential effects can best be understood in context of the theory of framing, which suggests that individuals assess and evaluate the subjects of media coverage (policies, institutions, processes, individuals) in a manner consistent with “the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes” for that coverage (McCombs 1997: 37). The selection of certain attributes (to the exclusion of others) results in the promotion of a “particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman 1993: 52; see also Nelson et al. 1997).

Much of the previous research into the effects of political humor on attitudes focuses on the dominant negative frame of political humor, or the idea that politicians are inept, corrupt, self-interested, and cannot be trusted (Moy, et al. 2005; Niven et al. 2003). This seems to reinforce pre-existing negative attitudes viewers have about politics, government, and politicians (Baumgartner 2007, 2008; Baumgartner and Morris 2006, 2008; Morris 2008; Young 2004). But while Jay Leno, David Letterman, and other late night talk show hosts target politicians (in particular, presidents) of each side of the aisle (Niven, et al. 2003), Stewart and Colbert take distinctly partisan approaches to their humor.

While earlier research into TDS found that viewers had lower evaluations of both presidential candidates in 2004 (Baumgartner and Morris 2006), recent research shows that Stewart's humor may not be as even-handed as it once was. Content analyses of TDS confirms that Republicans are targeted by Stewart with greater frequency and ferocity than are Democrats (Morris 2008). Framing theory suggests that we should see this bias reflected in evaluations of each party's presidential candidates. Formally, we hypothesize that:

H1a: Viewership of TDS will be associated with higher evaluations of Democratic presidential candidates.

H1b: Viewership of TDS will be associated with lower evaluations of Republican presidential candidates.

Our expectations regarding the framing effects of TCR viewership are different. Colbert's program is modeled after "The O'Reilly Factor" on the Fox News network, and Colbert takes on the persona of a blustery, hyper-partisan conservative host. While his approach is an implicit indictment of right-wing talk show hosts, politicians, and policies, the *prima facie* frame is one that targets liberals and Democrats and is supportive of conservatives and Republicans. This was easily seen in context of the presidential primaries, where Democratic candidates were explicitly chastised by Colbert. For example, Colbert referred to Obama as a Muslim, a terrorist, and "mistakenly" called him "Barack Osama Bin Laden Obama" ("No Fact Zone" N.D.).

There is good reason to suspect that this explicit, pro-Republican frame is the one that is processed by many viewers. Research has found that many people miss the intended point of political satire (Carl 1968; Gruner 1987). This problem is compounded in the case of heavy satire, which presents two

conflicting messages. High school and university instructors who have assigned Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" can attest to the fact that many students completely miss the essay's irony. This is consistent with research on the processing and interpreting of dual meaning messages. Work in the field of linguistics suggests that interpreting irony (or any message that has a dual meaning) involves going beyond the literal to get at the actual meaning. While people process the literal message, many are not inclined or predisposed to engage in the additional cognitive effort to process the actual message (Giora et al. 1998; Giora, and Fein 1999a; Giora, and Fein 1999b).

Recent research has similarly found that Colbert's explicit message may trump his more nuanced implicit message in the minds of a significant number of young adults. One study found that viewers were moved to agree with his explicit pro-Republican message, even while controlling for partisan identification (Baumgartner and Morris 2008). These conclusions mirror that of earlier research on viewership of the satirical comedy "All in the Family," which found that exposure to the program, which also contained dual messages, moved viewers toward the racist views of the protagonist Archie Bunker, or, reinforced some pre-existing racial stereotypes they may have held (Vidmar and Rockeach 1974). Some individuals, in other words, seemed to process only the explicit message(s) of the program, which is understandable given that Colbert's satire often brings pre-existing stereotypes about the weaknesses of liberals and the strengths of conservatives to light. Thus, we expect viewership of TCR to be associated with Colbert's explicit, pro-Republican frame, rather than his implicit frame which criticizes the right. This leads to our second hypothesis:

H2a: Viewership of TCR will be associated with lower evaluations of Democratic presidential candidates.

H2b: Viewership of TCR will be associated with higher evaluations of Republican presidential candidates.

In the following section we discuss our methodology and present our findings.

Data, Method, And Findings

Data were collected from a web survey of 18-24 year old college students in December of 2007. We obtained our sample by first requesting undergraduate student email addresses from the registrars of 350 public universities from all 50 states. All told, we were received approximately

385,000 email addresses from 114 institutions (32.6 percent) in 36 different states. We then emailed these students, asking them to participate in our six-wave “American Values Survey.” Potential respondents were told they would be entered into a lottery for a cash prize in exchange for their participation. After eliminating the small percentage of individuals who were either under 18 or over 24 years of age (less than one percent), we had a total N of 10,343.¹ The first wave of the survey, from which data for this analysis are drawn, was administered from December 15, 2007 through December 23, 2007. A total of 4,961 responses were recorded, resulting in a response rate of 47.9 percent.

The survey asked how respondents perceived major candidates for the presidential nomination. In December of 2007, these included Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards for the Democrats, and John McCain, Rudy Giuliani, Mike Huckabee, and Mitt Romney for the Republicans. Evaluations of these candidates were measured by asking respondents, “On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about the following candidates? The higher the number, the more favorable you feel; the lower the number, the less favorable you feel.”² These thermometer scales served as the dependent variables in the analysis. Table 1 provides a descriptive breakdown of these thermometer scores.

The main predictors of interest were levels of exposure to TDS and TCR. To measure this, separate questions asked respondents, “During a typical week, can you tell us about how many days do you watch ‘The Daily Show with Jon Stewart?’” and, “‘The Colbert Report’ with Stephen Colbert?” Values ranged from 0 to 4 (each program typically airs four new episodes per week, Monday through Thursday). We also included questions asking respondents about their viewing habits with regards to the “The Late Show with David Letterman” (Letterman) and “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno” (Leno; values range from 0 to 5, as these programs air Monday through Friday). We do not expect the Leno or Letterman variables to be significant, in either direction. The lack of sophistication, depth, and volume of political

¹ Approximately 2.7% of those emailed opted in to the study. While the selection of universities was not random (we mailed the first seven in each state), the regional distribution of our sample was relatively broad, although slightly skewed toward the South (58.7%). Students from all 114 institutions were represented. While there are problems associated with opt-in Internet surveys (Yaeger and Krosnick 2009), the sample represents a fairly viable cross-section of students at American public institutions of higher education.

² Respondents who had not heard of a given candidate were treated as missing data.

Table 1. Summary Statistics

<i>Candidate Thermometer Scores</i>	<i>Mean (St.D.)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
		<i>Did Not Know Candidate</i>	
Hillary Clinton	4.69 (3.13)	5%	
Barack Obama	6.27 (2.90)	9	
John Edwards	4.83 (2.60)	22	
Rudy Giuliani	5.03 (2.65)	20	
John McCain	4.64 (2.48)	31	
Mitt Romney	3.83 (2.54)	50	
Mike Huckabee	4.18 (2.78)	52	

<i>Independent Variables (Range)</i>	<i>Mean (St.D.)</i>
<i>Media Exposure</i>	
Daily Show (0-4)	1.18 (1.54)
Colbert Report (0-4)	1.25 (1.58)
Tonight Show-Leno (0-5)	0.64 (1.23)
Late Show-Letterman (0-5)	0.47 (1.04)
Read Newspaper (0-7)	2.10 (1.96)
CNN (0-7)	1.51 (1.80)
MSNBC (0-7)	1.20 (1.66)
Fox News (0-7)	1.48 (1.83)
<i>Demographic and Other</i>	
Political Knowledge (0-5)	3.14 (1.56)
Political participation (0-8)	1.06 (1.39)
Age (18-24)	20.15 (1.66)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>TDS</i>	<i>TCR</i>
		<i>Audience*</i>	<i>Audience*</i>
Race: White	85%	87%	87%
Gender: Male	31	40	41
Partisan Identification: Rep.	28.1	21.0	22.8
Partisan Identification: Dem.	33.7	39.9	38.6
Ideology: Conservative	22.8	15.9	17.5
Ideology: Liberal	35.8	45.6	43.8

* Watches the program at least once per week.

material in broadcast network talk shows makes them fundamentally different from the political humor of Comedy Central (Jones 2005; Peterson 2008). However they are added as an important control, in an attempt to capture as much late night talk show viewership as possible.

The analysis also included the demographic controls age, race (white=1; nonwhite=0), and gender (male=1; 0=female). In addition we also controlled for partisanship (1=strong Republican; 2=Republican; 3=Independent /other/ don't know; 4=Democrat; 5=strong Democrat), ideology (1=very liberal; 2=liberal; 3=moderate/ don't know; 4=conservative; 5=very conservative), political sophistication (political knowledge³ and participation⁴), and exposure to other media sources (number of days per week that one reads the newspaper or watches various television news sources). See Table 1 for a descriptive breakdown of each of these variables.⁵

Because the effectiveness of political humor hinges on the viewer's understanding of the issue or individual being ridiculed, it is necessary to examine the relationship between humor source exposure, news exposure, and political sophistication. Table 2 presents a correlation matrix of these variables. As can be seen, the correlations are positive in all cases, and the vast majority of the relationships are statistically significant ($p \leq .01$). The correlation between TDS exposure and TCR is highest, and it also evident that increased usage of either Comedy Central comedy program is significant and positively associated with exposure to all other media sources except Fox News. Both TDS and TCR exposure are positively related to higher levels of political knowledge and participation.

Ordinary least squares regression analysis of TDS and TCR viewership and evaluations of the Democrat frontrunners (Clinton, Obama,

³ Candidate knowledge was measured by an additive index (Cronbach Alpha=.72) of the number of correct responses to the following five questions: "Several candidates are seeking the nomination for president in 2008. Do you happen to know which of the candidates": (1) Is a practicing Mormon?, (2) Was formerly the mayor of New York City?, (3) Is a Senator from New York State?, (4) Is a first-term U.S. Senator from Illinois? (5) Was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War?

⁴ Participation measure was an additive index (Cronbach Alpha=.65) of the number of number of activities an individual had participated in over the past 12 months: (1) Written or called any politician at the state, local, or national level, (2) Attended a political rally, speech, or organized protest of any kind, (3) Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs, (4) Written a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine or called a live radio or TV show to express a political opinion, (5) Posted a message on a blog to express a political opinion, (6) Signed a petition, (7) Worked for a political party or campaign, (8) Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government.

⁵ The sample slightly over-represented women (69%) and whites (85%), but was relatively consistent with other national samples with regard to partisan identification (33.7% Democrat, 38.2% independent/no preference) and ideology (35.8% liberal, 41.4% moderate). See American National Election Studies 2008 Time Series Study (<http://www.electionstudies.org>).

Table 2. Correlation Matrix: Media Exposure, Political Knowledge & Participation

	TDS	TCR	Leno	Letterman	Newspaper	CNN	MSNBC	Fox News	Knowledge
TCR	.87								
Leno	.15	.13							
Letterman	.14	.13	.52						
Newspaper	.17	.16	.15	.16					
CNN	.24	.21	.17	.20	.28				
MSNBC	.20	.20	.20	.20	.23	.51			
Fox News	.01*	.02	.19	.20	.18	.35	.35		
Knowledge	.24	.25	.04	.02*	.21	.18	.18	.46	
Participation	.21	.20	.04	.03*	.26	.23	.23	.04	.26

Note: Cell entries are Pearson’s r correlation coefficients. All coefficients are statistically significant at $p \leq .01$ unless denoted as * (not significant at $p \leq .01$).

and Edwards) individually and collectively revealed that viewership of either program was insignificant (See Table 3 on the next page).⁶ The exception was evaluations of Obama and viewership of TDS, which was both positive and significant, as predicted. Thus we must reject hypotheses H1a and H2a. While it is not clear why the effect of TCR was not significant in these models, the lack of association between TDS exposure and higher likeability toward Democrats is not entirely surprising. While Stewart’s message is framed in a manner that is critical of Republicans, he does not necessarily lavish praise on Democrats. After all, the nature of satire is to criticize, not to praise.

Table 4 presents the findings from OLS analyses of the individual frontrunner Republicans and an additive index of the four. Overall, we suggest these results support H1b, and H2b, which state that exposure to TDS will be associated with lower levels of support for Republican candidates and that exposure to TCR will be associated with higher levels of support for Republican candidates. For each candidate, the TDS coefficients are negative, and the TCR coefficients are positive (except for John McCain). The coefficients for the candidate index are both statistically significant and in the opposite direction. Only support for John McCain was unrelated to TCR and TDS exposure⁷, which in the case of the latter, is likely due to the

⁶ Diagnostics for the OLS regression models indicated strong evidence of heteroskedasticity (Breusch-Pagan/Cook Weisberg test was significant at $p < .01$ for all models). Thus, robust standard errors were used.

⁷ The correlation between frequency of days watching TDS and TCR is strong and statistically significant ($r = .87, p < .001$), which presents multicollinearity concerns. Although variance

Table 3: Democratic Candidate Thermometer Scores

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Hillary Clinton</i>	<i>Barack Obama</i>	<i>John Edwards</i>	<i>All Democrats</i>
Daily Show	-.01 (.05) <i>-.01</i>	.11 (.05)* <i>.06</i>	.03 (.05) <i>.02</i>	.20 (.10) <i>.04</i>
Colbert Report	-.07 (.05) <i>-.04</i>	.01 (.05) <i>.00</i>	-.01 (.05) <i>-.01</i>	-.12 (.10) <i>-.03</i>
Leno	.07 (.04) <i>.03</i>	.05 (.03) <i>.02</i>	.06 (.04) <i>.03</i>	.19 (.08)* <i>.04</i>
Letterman	.08 (.04) <i>.03</i>	.05 (.04) <i>.02</i>	.11 (.04)* <i>.05</i>	.26 (.09)** <i>.04</i>
Newspaper	.04 (.02)* <i>.03</i>	.03 (.02) <i>.02</i>	.04 (.02) <i>.03</i>	.11 (.05)* <i>.03</i>
CNN	.11 (.03)** <i>.06</i>	.07 (.02)** <i>.05</i>	.07 (.03)** <i>.05</i>	.24 (.06)** <i>.06</i>
MSNBC	.01 (.03) <i>.01</i>	.08 (.03)** <i>.04</i>	.09 (.03)** <i>.06</i>	.15 (.06)* <i>.04</i>
Fox News	-.03 (.02) <i>-.02</i>	-.11 (.02)** <i>-.07</i>	-.12 (.02)** <i>-.08</i>	-.25 (.05)** <i>-.07</i>
Knowledge	-.10 (.03)** <i>-.05</i>	.07 (.03)* <i>.03</i>	.09 (.03)** <i>.05</i>	.14 (.07)* <i>.03</i>
Participation	-.07 (.03)* <i>-.03</i>	-.05 (.03) <i>-.02</i>	-.05 (.03) <i>-.03</i>	-.17 (.07)** <i>-.04</i>
Party	-1.39 (.05)** <i>-.43</i>	-1.07 (.05)** <i>-.36</i>	-.69 (.06)** <i>-.26</i>	-3.11 (.13)** <i>-.44</i>
Ideology	-.59 (.05)** <i>-.19</i>	-.56 (.05)** <i>-.19</i>	-.38 (.06)** <i>-.15</i>	-1.61 (.13)** <i>-.23</i>
Male	-.38 (.08)** <i>-.06</i>	-.24 (.08)** <i>-.04</i>	-.15 (.08) <i>-.03</i>	-.92 (.19)** <i>-.06</i>
Age	.12 (.02)** <i>.06</i>	-.03 (.02) <i>-.02</i>	.01 (.02) <i>.01</i>	.08 (.05) <i>.02</i>
White	-1.09 (.11)** <i>-.12</i>	-.78 (.10)** <i>-.09</i>	-.05 (.11) <i>-.01</i>	-1.98 (.27)** <i>-.10</i>
Constant	9.25 (.48)**	11.95 (.46)**	7.29 (.50)**	28.60 (1.14)**
Adjusted R ²	.38	.33	.19	.47
F ₁₅	271.19**	176.11**	63.86**	268.59**
N	4642	4440	3815	3713

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standardized regression coefficients are in italics.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ (two-tailed).

largely positive relationship between McCain and Stewart over the years (Grann 2008).

inflation factor scores were acceptable (no scores over 5), we conducted an alternative test. First we constructed a dichotomous measure of whether or not an individual watched TDS or TDR most frequently (those who reported watching neither program or both at an equal rate were dropped). This new variable was coded as follow: 1=watch TCR more than TDS, 0=watch TDS more than TCR. When the analyses are run using this variable rather than the exposure variable, findings from the initial analyses continue to hold (results not shown).

Table 4: Republican Candidate Thermometer Scores

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Rudy Giuliani</i>	<i>John McCain</i>	<i>Mitt Romney</i>	<i>Mike Huckabee</i>	<i>All Republicans</i>
Daily Show	-20 (.05)** <i>-.12</i>	.04 (.05) <i>.02</i>	-.13 (.05) <i>-.08</i>	-.12 (.06) <i>-.07</i>	-.39 (.16)* <i>-.08</i>
Colbert Report	.11 (.05)* <i>.07</i>	.03 (.05) <i>.02</i>	.09 (.05) <i>.06</i>	.14 (.06)* <i>.08</i>	.45 (.15)** <i>.09</i>
Leno	.06 (.04) <i>.03</i>	.04 (.04) <i>.02</i>	.13 (.04)** <i>.07</i>	-.02 (.05) <i>-.01</i>	.24 (.13) <i>.04</i>
Letterman	.17 (.04)** <i>.07</i>	.08 (.05) <i>.03</i>	.01 (.05) <i>.00</i>	.05 (.05) <i>.02</i>	.42 (.16)** <i>.06</i>
Newspaper	.04 (.02) <i>.03</i>	.06 (.02)** <i>.05</i>	.04 (.02) <i>.03</i>	.00 (.03) <i>.00</i>	.14 (.08) <i>.04</i>
CNN	-.02 (.03) <i>-.01</i>	.06 (.03)* <i>.04</i>	-.01 (.03) <i>-.01</i>	.10 (.03)** <i>.07</i>	.09 (.09) <i>.02</i>
MSNBC	-.02 (.03) <i>-.01</i>	-.03 (.03) <i>-.02</i>	-.06 (.03)* <i>-.05</i>	-.04 (.04) <i>-.03</i>	-.12 (.09) <i>-.03</i>
Fox News	.16 (.02)** <i>.11</i>	.08 (.03)** <i>.06</i>	.19 (.03)** <i>.15</i>	.06 (.03)* <i>.05</i>	.61 (.09)** <i>.15</i>
Knowledge	.00 (.03) <i>.00</i>	.19 (.03)** <i>.11</i>	.23 (.04)** <i>.12</i>	.24 (.04)** <i>.12</i>	1.14 (.12)** <i>.19</i>
Participation	-.14 (.03)** <i>-.08</i>	-.07 (.03) <i>-.04</i>	-.03 (.03) <i>-.02</i>	.02 (.03) <i>.01</i>	-.20 (.10)* <i>-.04</i>
Party	.72 (.05)** <i>.27</i>	.52 (.06)** <i>.21</i>	.44 (.06)** <i>.18</i>	.48 (.07)** <i>.18</i>	2.02 (.21)** <i>.26</i>
Ideology	.24 (.06)** <i>.09</i>	.32 (.06)** <i>.13</i>	.50 (.06)** <i>.20</i>	.84 (.07)** <i>.31</i>	1.95 (.21)** <i>.25</i>
Male	-.13 (.08) <i>-.02</i>	.32 (.09)** <i>.06</i>	-.12 (.10) <i>-.02</i>	-.04 (.11) <i>-.01</i>	.09 (.31) <i>.01</i>
Age	-.07 (.02)** <i>-.04</i>	-.04 (.02) <i>-.02</i>	-.00 (.03) <i>-.00</i>	-.00 (.03) <i>-.00</i>	-.14 (.09) <i>-.03</i>
White	.45 (.12)** <i>.06</i>	.40 (.12)** <i>.05</i>	.26 (.13)* <i>.03</i>	.35 (.15)* <i>.04</i>	1.43 (.46)** <i>.06</i>
Constant	3.12 (.50)**	1.42 (.52)**	-.18 (.59)	-1.17 (.65)	.92 (1.89)
Adjusted R ²	.20	.15	.22	.24	.37
F ₁₅	70.93**	40.58**	44.36**	47.50**	77.74**
N	3938	3402	2457	2353	1925

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standardized regression coefficients are in italics.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ two-tailed).

Additionally, the size of the standardized coefficients show that TCR and TDS had a stronger impact on the Republican candidate index than all other media exposure variables except Fox News, the most popular media source among Republican identifiers (Jamieson and Cappella 2008). Finally, it should be noted that the explanatory power of the models for individual

Republican candidates is lower than that of the front-running Democratic candidates (Clinton and Obama), illustrating the higher name recognition among the Democratic field. Therefore, the explanatory power of the Republican composite model is lower than that of the Democratic model ($R^2 = .37$, as opposed to $.47$).⁸

An additional set of questions that spring from Table 4 are associated with possible moderating effects. Previous research on the effects of humor has highlighted partisanship as a possible intervening variable (Young 2004), which may serve to reinforce preexisting attitudes among those on one side of the spectrum or another. This is especially important with regard to viewership of TCR, because the satire offered by TCR operates on two levels and at least one level of this satire may not be readily assessable to a sizeable portion of the audience, namely, self-identified Republicans. This does not seem to be the case. See Table 5. Because we have taken partisan identification out of the models, their explanatory power decreases relative to the models presented in Tables 3 and 4. However, it can be seen from Table 5 that increased exposure to TCR is positively associated with views toward the Republican field as a whole among Democratic respondents. Among Republicans, higher levels of exposure to TDS is associated with higher levels of support for the Democratic candidates. This suggests that persuasion, even among partisans, is possible when it comes to humorously-framed political material.

In general, our findings suggest that the differing partisan frames in TDS and TCR are associated with unique views of Republican presidential candidates during the primary season among young adults. Self-identified Democrats that watched TCR were friendlier toward Republican candidates than those that did not watch TCR. Likewise, self-identified Republicans that watched TDS were friendlier toward Democratic candidates than those who did not watch TDS. Overall, our findings lend credence to the notion that various forms of political humor may have different effects on viewers.

⁸ Because the correlation analysis from Table 2 indicated that several of our independent variables were associated, we investigated the possibility that humor exposure may interact with other media variables or the political knowledge and participation items. Several iterations of the models presented in Table 4 were analyzed with these interaction terms included, and the direct effects did not substantively change. While TDS did significantly interact with MSNBC to influence some attitudes toward candidates, TCR did not significantly interact with any of the media sources or political sophistication. Triple interactions between TCR, media exposure, and political knowledge were also insignificant.

Table 5: Composite Thermometer Scores by Partisanship

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Democratic Respondents Only (Strong Democrats and Democrats)</i>		<i>Republican Respondents Only (Strong Republicans and Republicans)</i>	
	<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	<i>Republican Candidates</i>	<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	<i>Republican Candidates</i>
Daily Show	-.12 (.15) <i>-.04</i>	-.33 (.24) <i>-.09</i>	.50 (.19)** <i>.13</i>	-.21 (.29) <i>-.04</i>
Colbert Report	.04 (.15) <i>.01</i>	.57 (.24)* <i>.15</i>	-.30 (.17) <i>-.08</i>	.17 (.26) <i>.04</i>
Leno	.10 (.13) <i>.03</i>	.52 (.19)** <i>.11</i>	.22 (.14) <i>.05</i>	-.06 (.22) <i>-.01</i>
Letterman	.10 (.15) <i>.02</i>	.36 (.21) <i>.07</i>	.36 (.17)* <i>.07</i>	.36 (.34) <i>.06</i>
Newspaper	.09 (.07) <i>.04</i>	.04 (.12) <i>.01</i>	.00 (.09) <i>.00</i>	.29 (.14)* <i>.09</i>
CNN	.06 (.08) <i>.02</i>	.15 (.15) <i>.05</i>	.34 (.10)** <i>.11</i>	-.10 (.18) <i>-.03</i>
MSNBC	.16 (.09) <i>.06</i>	-.14 (.13) <i>-.04</i>	.15 (.11) <i>.04</i>	-.17 (.19) <i>-.04</i>
Fox News	-.19 (.09)* <i>-.06</i>	.61 (.17)** <i>.16</i>	-.30 (.08)** <i>-.11</i>	.54 (.13)** <i>.17</i>
Knowledge	.54 (.11)** <i>.16</i>	1.09 (.20)** <i>.22</i>	-.25 (.12)* <i>-.07</i>	1.64 (.23)** <i>.30</i>
Participation	.01 (.09) <i>.00</i>	-.27 (.15) <i>-.07</i>	-.23 (.13) <i>-.05</i>	.07 (.19) <i>.01</i>
Ideology	-1.46 (.19)** <i>-.22</i>	1.64 (.32)** <i>.19</i>	-2.56 (.23)** <i>-.34</i>	1.11 (.39)** <i>.11</i>
Male	.10 (.30) <i>.01</i>	.15 (.50) <i>.01</i>	-.81 (.32)* <i>-.07</i>	.26 (.58) <i>.02</i>
Age	.05 (.08) <i>.02</i>	-.30 (.14)* <i>-.08</i>	.10 (.10) <i>.03</i>	-.11 (.16) <i>-.03</i>
White	-1.95 (.35)** <i>-.15</i>	1.23 (.69) <i>.07</i>	-1.36 (.77)* <i>-.06</i>	1.33 (1.09) <i>.04</i>
Constant	22.33 (1.74)**	8.74 (3.02)**	19.77 (2.28)**	10.85 (3.67)**
Adj. R ²	.11	.16	.21	.18
F ₁₄	11.11**	9.01**	23.56**	9.45**
N	1306	660	1090	603

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standardized regression coefficients are in italics.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ (two-tailed).

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