

Boise State University

ScholarWorks

College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs
Poster Presentations

2013 Undergraduate Research and Scholarship
Conference

4-15-2013

Report on the Media's Affect in Relation to the Creation of Optimism or Pessimism About the United States

Spencer Brown

Department of Political Science, Boise State University

Report on the Media's Affect in Relation to the Creation of Optimism or Pessimism About the United States

Abstract

In recent years, the United States news media has grown more partisan and thus more biased. This has led some people not to trust the United States news media. Others have embraced the new partisan United States news media. However, by embracing a United States news media that is more partisan and in a way commercial has this led the American public to be exposed to more negative stories about the United States and thus to become more pessimistic about the United States? The United States media's impact as a source of information has an important affect on how United States citizens view their government and how well they understand the political process. It is important that it be determined that the United States' news media doesn't always lead Americans to be pessimistic about the United States, since this can led to a decline in voter turnout, political activism, and other behaviors. By examining how much trust the United States public places in the media, how well they understand politics, the employment status of Americans, the household income of Americans, and how much personal optimism the United States public has, we can better understand what impact the United States media has on optimism or pessimism about the United States. My research question was does the United States media increase optimism or pessimism about the United States? The unit of analysis was American citizens, who are exhibiting either optimism or pessimism about the United States. By performing regression analysis, it was shown that optimism and pessimism about the United States has more to do with household income and personal optimism rather than distrust in the media.

Keywords

pessimism, optimism, United States

Disciplines

American Politics

Does the United States Media Increase Optimism or Pessimism About the United States, or Have No Affect at All?

Spencer Brown

Faculty Sponsor: Richard Kinney

Prepared for POLS 398 Advanced Political Science Methods

10th Annual Undergraduate Research & Scholarship Conference, Boise State University, April 15, 2013



Introduction

- The U.S. media has an important impact as a source of information.
- However, does the U.S. media's reliance on partisanship and commercialism, which leads to a greater reporting of negative stories make the American public more pessimistic about the U.S.?
- Pessimism could lead to a decline in voter turnout, political activism, and other behaviors.
- Research Question: Does the United States media increase optimism or pessimism about the United States, or have no affect at all?

Variables

The independent variables that will be used for this study are “How Often Trust The Media To Report News Fairly”, “Internal Political Efficacy”, “Summary: Personal Optimism”, “Employment Status”, and “Household Income”, while the dependent variable is “Summary: Optimism/Pessimism About the U.S.”. All of these variable came from the National Election Study (NES) of 2008, which was conducted before the 2008 Presidential Election.

Hypotheses

- Distrust in the U.S. media increases pessimism about the U.S.
- That internal political efficacy increases optimism about the U.S.
- High personal optimism favors high optimism for the U.S. with Americans being optimistic about the U.S.
- Both independent economic variables (“Employment Status” and “Household Income”) increase pessimism about the U.S.

Results of Regression

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.502 ^a	.252	.249	1.617

a. Predictors: (Constant), Household income, How often trust the media to report news fairly, SUMMARY: PERSONAL OPTIMISM, Internal political efficacy, Employment status

The adjusted R-square of .249 means this model only explains about 25% of the variance, which means that a lot of the variance in this model is unexplained.

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.526	.273		5.592
	How often trust the media to report news fairly	-.072	.061	-.026	-1.175
	Internal political efficacy	.003	.026	.002	.100
	SUMMARY: PERSONAL OPTIMISM	.588	.027	.502	22.077
	Employment status	-.015	.019	-.018	-.783
	Household income	.018	.008	.053	2.288
					.022

a. Dependent Variable: SUMMARY: OPTIMISMPESSIMISM ABOUT THE U.S.

- The t-values are well above and below two or negative two for “Summary: Personal Optimism” (22.077), and “Household Income” (2.288), which means we reject the null hypothesis in these cases.
- These variables are the only variables that have a significance level that is less than or equal to .05, meaning we reject the null hypothesis on these grounds as well.
- Interestingly, “Summary: Personal Optimism” has a significance level of .000, which illustrates that there is a 100% chance that this relationship did not occur randomly.

Multicollinearity

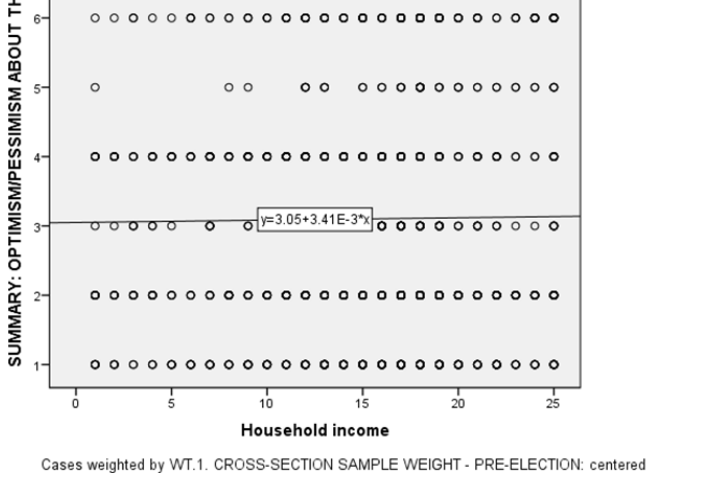
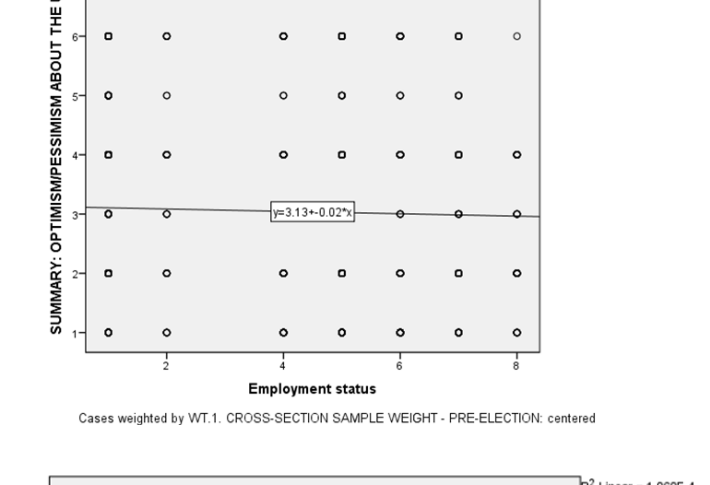
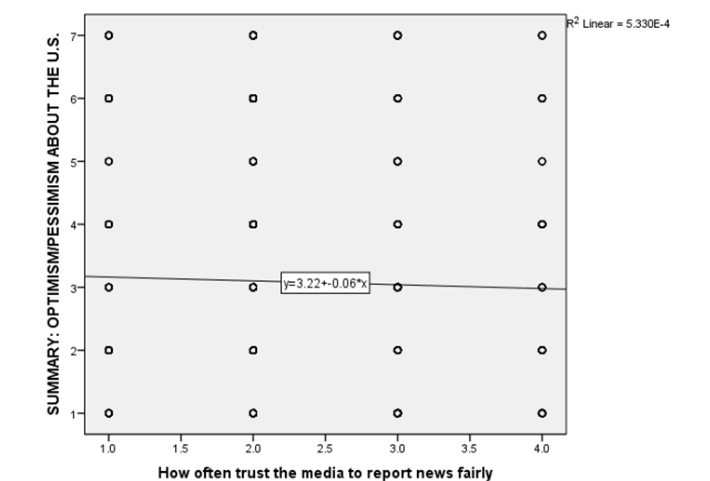
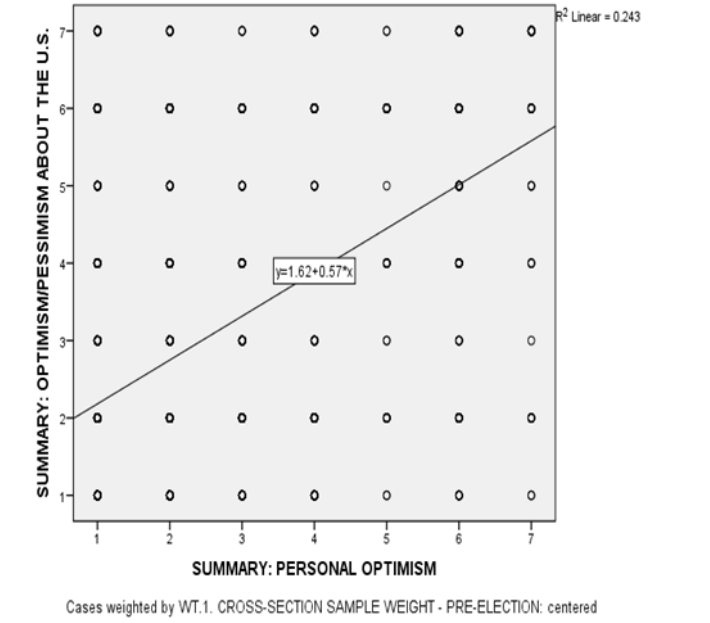
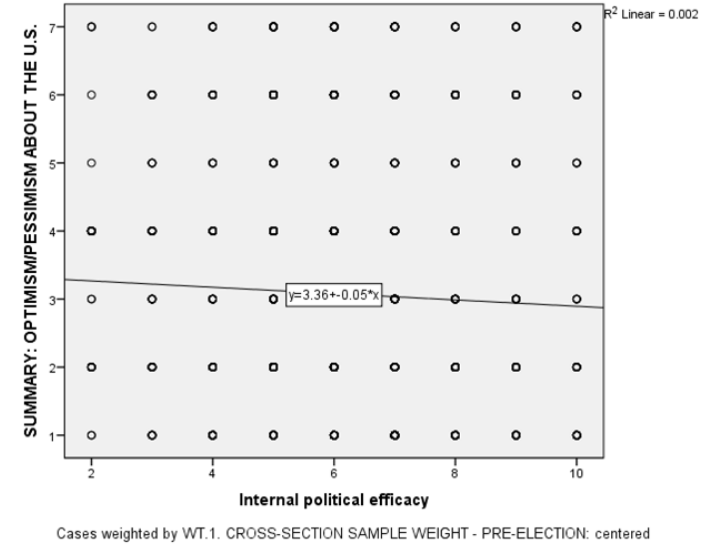
Correlation					
	Internal political efficacy	Employment status	Household income	SUMMARY: PERSONAL OPTIMISM	How often trust the media to report news fairly
Internal political efficacy	1				
	Pearson Correlation	-.003	.009	-.132	.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.984	.800	.000	.847
	N	2314	2305	1855	2310
Employment status	Pearson Correlation	-.002	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.804		.000	.859
	N	2310	2305	2105	2102
Household income	Pearson Correlation	.004	-.028	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.800	.000		.000
	N	1855	1838	1838	1845
SUMMARY: PERSONAL OPTIMISM	Pearson Correlation	-.132	.001	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.801		.000
	N	2105	2105	2100	2101
How often trust the media to report news fairly	Pearson Correlation	.004	-.005	.014	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.847	.800	.802	
	N	2310	2302	1845	2105

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Using the correlation table the Pearson correlations between the variables can be observed, and it is shown that the Pearson correlations all lie within -.75 and .75, thus based on this rule multicollinearity is not present between the variables.

Homoscedasticity

Using scatter-plots, it can be determined if a linear relationship exists between the variables, and if the variances remain similar as you move along the line, or homoscedasticity exists.

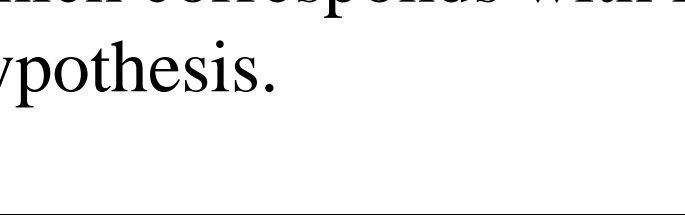
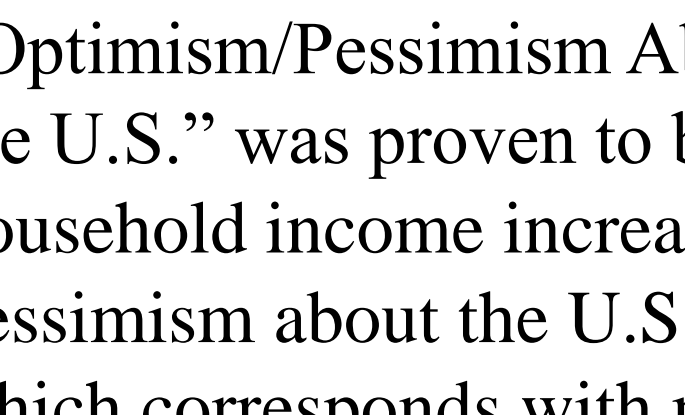
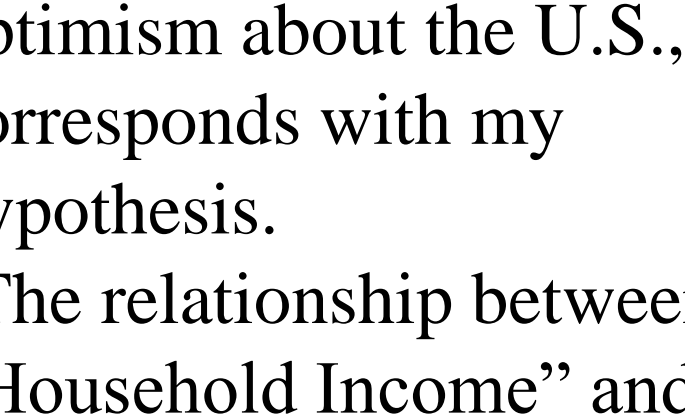
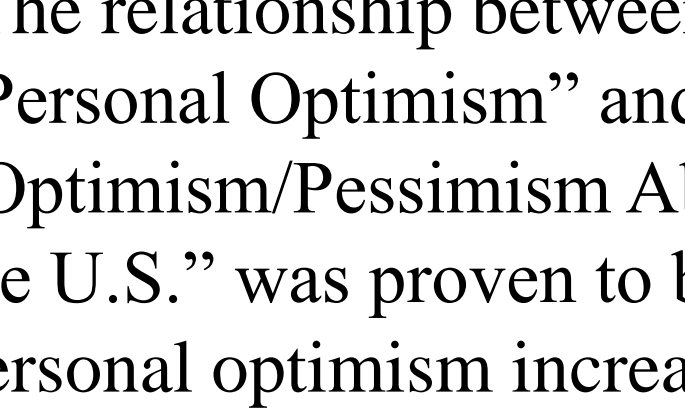
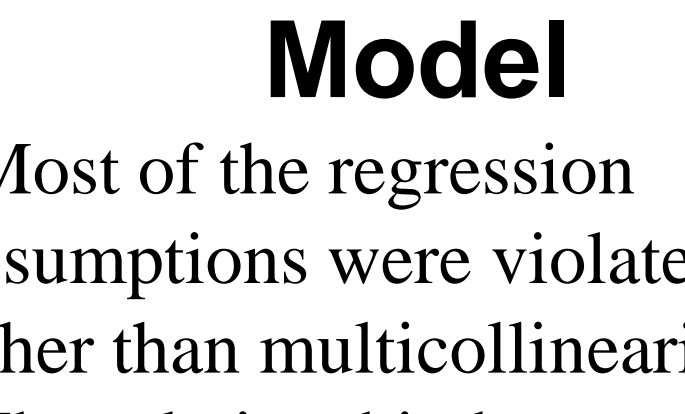
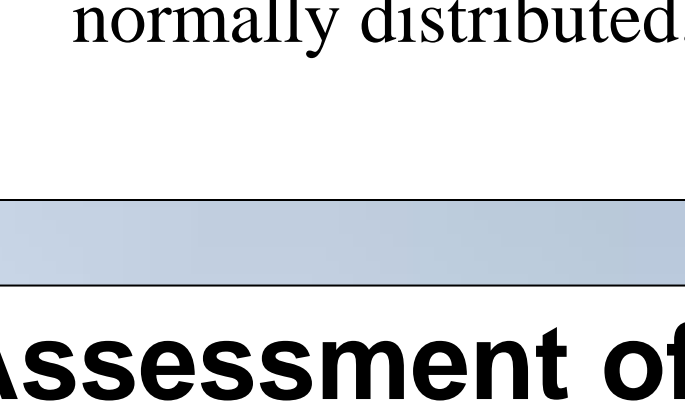
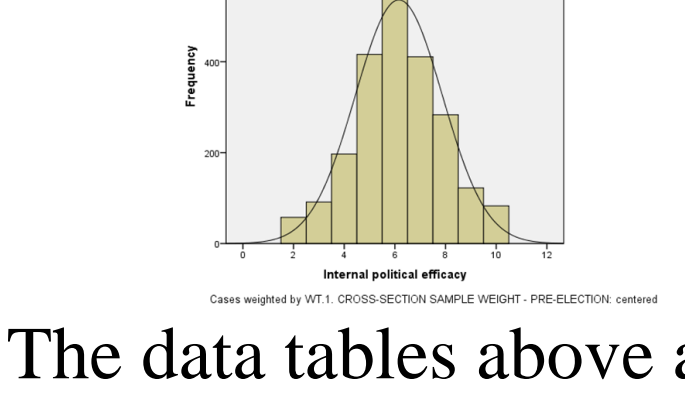
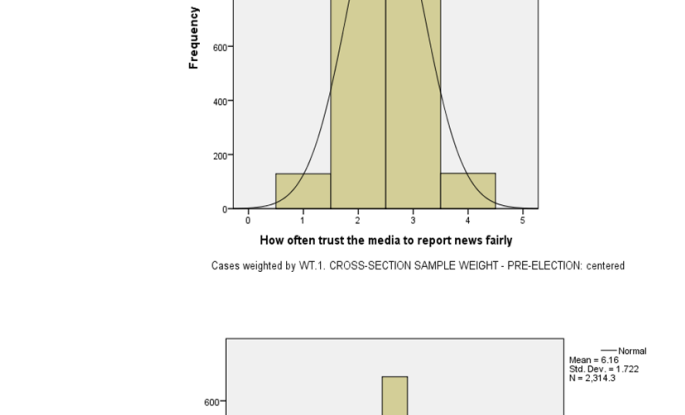
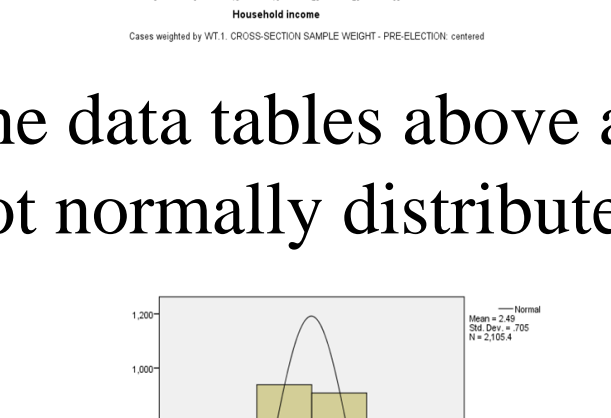
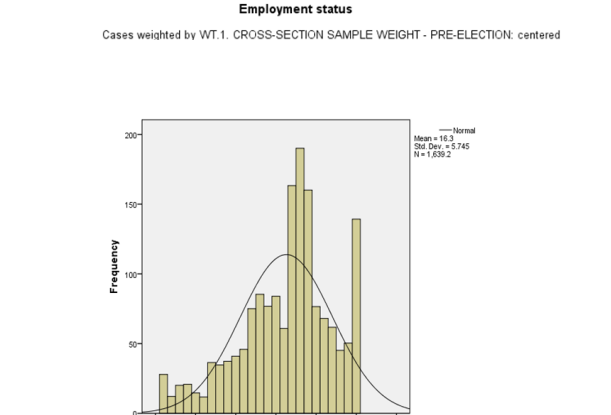
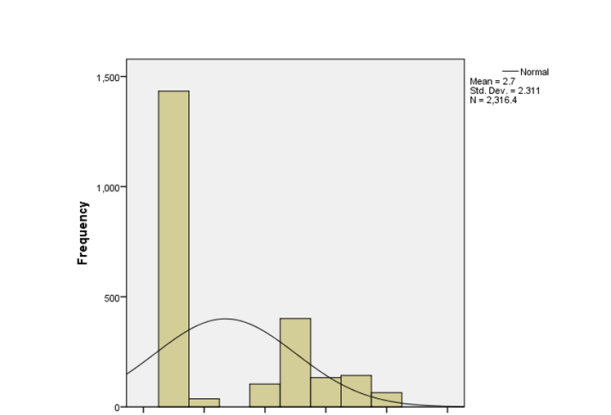
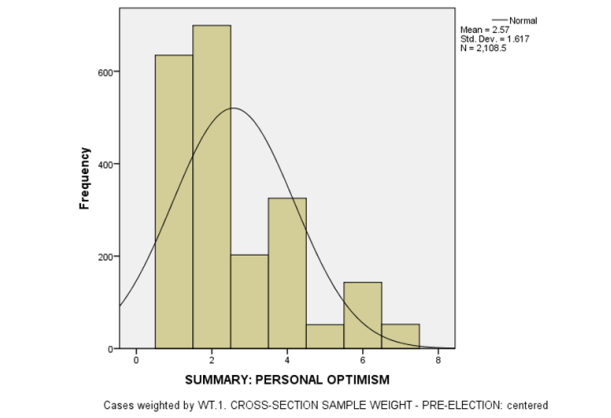
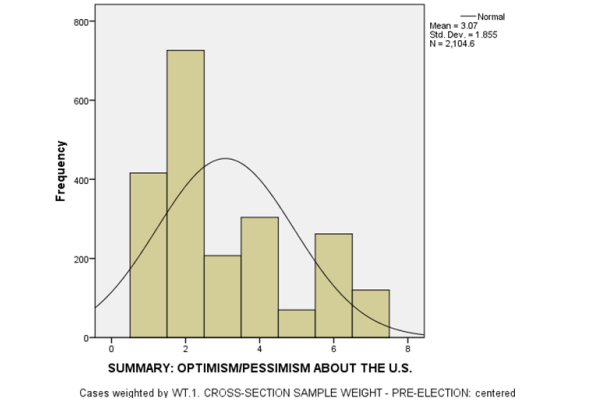


Presence of heteroskedasticity in all relationships violating the assumption of constant variance in all the data.

Crosstabs

The results of the cross-tabs indicate that the majority of people in each independent variable group are “Somewhat optimistic” about the United States.

Normal Distribution



Policy Recommendations

- Regression results show “Summary: Optimism/Pessimism About The U.S.” has more to do with household income and personal optimism rather than distrust in the media.
- In order to increase optimism about the U.S., create policies that benefit high income earners, since increases in household income lead to more pessimism about the U.S.
- Possible Reason for pessimism?
- Actual and perceived increase in taxes under President Obama.
- Lower taxes could be the solution
- The creation of policies that make people optimistic about their futures could help.
- Hard to decide what generates high personal optimism, so policy makers maybe should not consider it if they want to raise optimism about the U.S.

Conclusion

- Any policy recommendations presented here should be held suspect for the following reasons:
 - 75% of the variance in this model is left unexplained.
 - Difficult to explain why people are optimistic or pessimistic about the U.S.
- Further research is needed before we can fully understand the media's impact on optimism or pessimism about the U.S.

Sources and Acknowledgements

- Special thanks to Political Science Professor Mike Touchton
- National Election Study of 2008