

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC CONNECTION:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Media consumption matters. Media consumption (of old and new media) contributes importantly to people's possibilities for public connection and engagement in the democratic process. Yet important recent research gives limited emphasis to media consumption's specific contribution to democratic engagement. Our diaries illustrate the multiple ways in which media consumption contributes to public connection, while our survey shows news engagement contributes significantly to explaining political interest – itself a major predictor of voting. Encouraging a broad range of public-oriented media consumption, and the growth of related media literacy, should be central to wider strategies for reversing political disengagement.

Habits of news engagement. Habits of media consumption and news engagement are heavily stratified by age. The habits of an older generation (watching the evening TV news, reading a daily newspaper) remain important, although less prevalent among those under 30. While using the Internet for news is associated with being younger, it may not generate habits of news consumption as stable as those associated with traditional media; Internet use/access remains socially stratified. Yet traditional media's contribution is often ignored in favour of more recent developments. In considering media's role in reversing political disengagement, traditional media must be given as much weight as new media and habits of news-oriented internet use must be prioritized over general internet use.

Orientations away from public issues. While media consumption contributes to public connection, it does not ensure it, since many people's practices of media consumption are oriented away

