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Examining the implications of different news avoidance practices during elections in Greece and Brazil

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The news media is central to contemporary democracies, and its use is linked to good models of citizenship (Schudson, 1998). News use is associated with several normatively desirable outcomes. For instance, citizens use information they find on the news media to make informed decisions about voting and hold elected officials accountable (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). In a high-choice media environment, citizens are now surrounded by numerous opportunities to get information from various sources (Prior, 2005). Despite having more opportunities than ever to get information, recent studies have documented a rise in citizens saying they actively avoid news in many countries (Newman et al., 2017, 2025). This phenomenon has inspired a prolific research agenda examining different aspects of this behavior: scholars have investigated the profile of those who say they actively avoid news (e.g. Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020), the patterns and the drivers of intentional news avoidance (Villi et al., 2022) or the role of deliberate news avoidance as a wellbeing strategy during Covid-19 to mitigate information overload (de Bruin et al., 2021; Mannell & Meese, 2022; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021).

Given the recent interest and relative novelty of the concept, existing research has adopted different definitions and operationalizations of news avoidance. One key difference between

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concepts is whether news avoidance is selective, with regards to different topics and thus, intentional, based on survey questions that ask about actively avoiding news, or based on low frequency of news use (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2022). These differences matter: previous research has shown that, paradoxically, selective news avoidance can be correlated with high news use (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020; Palmer, Toff & Nielsen, 2023), suggesting that people who regularly consume news may actively avoid specific mediums (e.g. TV or social media), specific topics (e.g. Covid-19 or politics) and points of view. However, when news avoidance is conceptualized as low (or zero) news use, it can be the result of low interest in news, preference for entertainment media consumption, or lack of time (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2022; Toff et al., 2024).

Despite growing research about the reasons why people avoid the news, there has been less attention to the potential consequences of news avoidance, especially when crucial democratic processes are at stake, with a recent exception focused on knowledge or misperceptions about current affairs (Damstra et al., 2023). In this paper, we complement the scarce literature on the topic by investigating the democratic implications of news avoidance in the context of two recent national elections in Brazil and Greece. Specifically, we examine the relationships between news avoidance in these elections and a series of normatively positive democratic outcomes: a) lower propensity to believe in electoral misinformation, b) electoral participation, and c) higher levels of trust in elections. Considering two distinct behaviors, selectively avoiding news about politics and elections and maintaining generally low levels of news use, the latter measured both with a cut-off point and relative to other users, we examine how each correlates with democratic outcomes. By disentangling these behaviors, our study makes a distinctive empirical contribution to the ongoing

theoretical debate in the news avoidance literature regarding its normative implications (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020; Swart et al., 2022; Villi et al., 2022).

Elections are ideal for studying these dynamics as they heighten political awareness, especially among the less politically engaged (Haugsgjerd & Karlsen, 2022). While elections denote times when many citizens are more interested in getting political information, they also have the potential to increase news avoidance, particularly in contentious political contexts where people do not want to get involved with politics and feel fatigued from news (Mont'Alverne et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2023). News avoidance during elections can be consequential, as people who do not consume news may be less well-informed to choose their representatives, and may become more vulnerable to disinformation (Altay et al., 2023). News avoiders may, thus, be in a double-bind, as withdrawing from political news may leave them both uninformed and misinformed.

To examine these patterns, we employ two-wave panel surveys in Greece and Brazil around the latest parliamentary and presidential elections, respectively. Our results show that low news use is correlated with higher misinformation belief in both countries whereas selective avoidance is not. With respect to electoral participation, our findings show that while selective news avoidance is correlated with lower levels of voter turnout in both countries, this is not the case for low news use. We further find that low news use is correlated with lower levels of trust in the electoral process in both countries. Last, in Brazil, increases in selective news avoidance between the two rounds were associated with increases in trust in the electoral process, while there was no relationship between trust and low news use. This result highlights that selective news avoiders may have stopped following the results, but they did not lose faith in the reliability process.

Overall, our study sheds light on the potential detrimental effects of news avoidance, highlighting how different news avoidance behaviours are associated with distinctive normative outcomes. It also counters the notion that selective news avoidance—which is typically associated with wellbeing strategies— is not associated with normatively negative outcomes. We also note that our results were broadly similar in these two countries, despite their different political and media structures, which may indicate that the negative consequences of news avoidance during elections could go beyond a given country's specific context. More importantly, our findings were broadly different for different news avoidance practices, signaling that the most common conceptualizations of news avoidance may be quite distinct from each other.

Defining news avoidance

Scholars have adopted multiple approaches to conceptualize and measure news avoidance, causing conceptual ambiguity. Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020) reviewed academic literature examining news avoidance from different perspectives and identified two predominant approaches: The first refers to studies measuring to what extent people take an active and intentional choice to avoid news (or specific news topics). This type of news avoidance has also been called active, intentional or selective news avoidance (e.g. Schäfer et al. 2024). In this study we name this operationalization “selective”, given that we are focusing on avoidance of a specific topic, politics and elections. Selective (or active) news avoidance has been operationalized by asking survey respondents about whether and how frequently they actively avoid news or some news topics (Newman et al., 2025; Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). The selective element of this type of news avoidance is particularly evident in a recent study by Schäfer et al. (2024), analyzing how avoidance of different topics (e.g. politics or Covid-19) has different motivations, but also in

a longitudinal survey in Sweden that suggests that selective news avoidance is fluid and varies based on personal and broader societal circumstances (Andersen et al. 2024).

The second approach operationalizes news avoidance as little or no news use, often called consistent news avoidance if it takes place over time (Palmer et al. 2023). Studies using this approach have either determined a cut-off point relative to the average levels of news use—e.g. survey participants' news use being a standard deviation below the mean in each country (Strömbäck, 2017), or used an absolute cut-off point in determining news avoiders. For example, Shehata (2016) treats survey respondents as news avoiders if they claim they have used news less frequently than two days a week. In this study we use a cut-off point approach (but we also replicate our findings using a relative to the average cut-off point).

The distinction between these different news avoidance behaviours is important because it denotes potentially different motivations and, in turn, may have distinctive consequences. Selective news avoidance is intentional and can be specific to different contexts. For instance, citizens could be avoiding different topics, different points of view, specific mediums or specific devices (Volk et al., 2024). Low news use, instead, may capture unintentional behaviors that may be linked to other factors, such as work/life balance, algorithmic selection of news, and lack of interest. The differences between the two concepts become even clearer when looking at how strongly they are correlated with each other. A recent study across 46 media markets showed that selective news avoidance is only weakly correlated with how often people say they get news (Palmer, Toff & Nielsen, 2023). Betakova et al. (2024) also show that very few people intentionally avoid news and have low levels of news use, suggesting that the behaviours are distinct. To probe how these predominant definitions of news avoidance may have different consequences, this study examines whether selective news avoidance or low news use have

different normative implications on a series of democratically desirable outcomes in the context of elections.

The impact of news avoidance on democracies

Scholars have long been concerned with the effects of news consumption on normatively important outcomes for democracies, such as political participation, vulnerability to disinformation, and trust in (trustworthy) political institutions (Altay et al., 2023; Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Norris, 2000). Less is known about how different practices of news avoidance might impact these outcomes. Using a survey in Sweden, Damstra et al. (2023) found that intentional news avoidance is not related to knowledge of current affairs, but it is positively related to holding misinformation beliefs, while lack of news use is correlated with lower levels of knowledge about current affairs. In addition, Ohme et al. (2022) have found people who were selectively avoiding Covid-19 news were more likely to show higher civic engagement (e.g. volunteering or sharing public health messages) during the Covid-19 epidemic in the Netherlands. Taking inspiration from these studies, we systematically compare how selective news avoidance and low news use during electoral campaigns are correlated with important outcomes for democracy.

We focus on three particularly important outcomes during electoral periods: a) belief in misinformation about elections and current affairs, b) electoral participation, and c) trust in the electoral process. These aspects represent important preconditions for a healthy democratic process: an informed citizenry, high levels of political participation, and trust in electoral processes and its results (Norris, 2022). To build hypotheses and research questions, we mostly rely on the

effects and the correlates of news consumption on these outcomes, given the scarce literature on the potential impact of news avoidance.

There is an ongoing debate about the normative expectations of different news avoidance behaviours. Swart et al. (2022) argued that different news avoidance strategies can have positive outcomes for both individuals and society. This is particularly heightened in "news saturated" contexts such as the US or Israel, when news avoidance may become a strategy to reduce the negativity and toxicity that is often present in the news (Villi et al., 2022). However, low news use is a separate concept that involves "a distinctive set of normative assumptions" (Villi et al., 2022, p. 160) from news avoidance. Despite the ongoing theoretical debate around news avoidance, no empirical research has systematically examined how the different ways of measuring news avoidance contribute to explaining key democratically desirable outcomes historically associated models of 'good' citizenship (Schudson, 1998). This study aims to address this important research gap, advancing the debate about the normative assumptions underlying the work on news avoidance, as well as evaluating the need for potential solutions (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020).

Belief in Misinformation

The spread of mis- and disinformation through digital media has been a key concern in contemporary elections. Previous studies have shown that news consumption plays an important role in shielding citizens from misinformation. For instance, Altay and colleagues (2023) found a negative relationship between using news and belief in misinformation in a survey in Brazil, India and the UK, although the effects varied across countries and media outlets. In a similar vein, Nielsen et al. (2021)'s survey-based study showed that people across 8 countries that relied on mainstream or legacy news organizations for information about Covid-19 were less likely to believe in vaccine misinformation. Looking at the 2022 Brazilian elections, Mont'Alverne et al.

(2023) show that consuming news from legacy media organizations leads to lower levels of belief in electoral misinformation.

In some cases, the relationship between news consumption and lower vulnerability to misinformation is less straightforward. Examining the Indonesian electoral context, Neyazi and colleagues (2022) find that using TV and newspapers predicts misinformation exposure, but they do not investigate the effects on misinformed beliefs. Scholars have also highlighted the role of alternative, or partisan news use and misinformation, but there is limited evidence about how news avoidance impacts misinformation beliefs. Based on the evidence that mainstream news use tends to have an impact in reducing beliefs in misinformation, we hypothesize that low news users would be more likely to believe in electoral falsehoods. Therefore, we propose that:

H1) Low news use will be positively correlated with higher levels of belief in electoral misinformation.

Studies on selective (or active news avoidance) and misinformation are limited. In a recent study, Hasell and Halversen (2024) have found that perceptions of feeling misinformed are associated with higher levels of active news avoidance over time in the US. In addition, Damstra et al. (2023) did find a positive association between active news avoidance and misinformed beliefs about contested issues in Sweden. Given the limited number of findings of recent empirical studies looking at news avoidance on different outcomes related to misinformation, we pose a research question:

RQ1) What is the relationship between selective news avoidance and belief in electoral misinformation?

Political Participation

We are also concerned about the impact of news avoidance on political participation. Several studies have considered the role of news avoidance in relation to civic outcomes. Ksiazek et al. (2010), focused on the different levels of civic engagement between news seekers and news avoiders in the US: their study shows that those who use news more regularly are more likely to be engaged, but that a small increase in news exposure for avoiders increases their levels of civic participation in higher levels when compared to a similar increase for news seekers. In addition, Edgerly and colleagues (2018) find that young people who do not use news often have consistent lower levels of political participation in the US. However, other studies have showed a positive relationship between participation and avoidance: Ohme (2022) showed that selective news avoiders they have higher levels of civic participation in the Netherlands, during the pandemic. News avoidance has also been argued to enable people to participate more in public life and in politics since it allows people to be more optimistic and more energetic about civic affairs (Woodstock, 2014).

Looking at the relationship between news use and participation, a vast literature on the topic has shown a close link between news use and political participation across very different contexts. Some media habits, like listening to the radio and engaging with the news, predict likelihood of voting in the UK (Livingstone & Markham, 2008). In the American context, Dilliplane (2014) indicates that the slant of news people are exposed to makes them more or less

likely to show up to vote, while Hayes and Lawless (2015) demonstrate that American citizens who are less exposed to coverage about candidates for legislative elections are less likely to vote.

These effects may be particularly strong during elections, when citizens are paying more attention to news. Scholars have also warned that the type of news matters, with 'hard news' exposure being a strong predictor of participation (Andersen et al., 2016). However, in the German context, online incidental exposure to information about the election was shown to affect avoidance of information about the election (Marcinkowski and Došenović, 2021). Therefore, given our context, previous studies on news consumption and participation, and the lack of consensus in the limited empirical research on selective news avoidance and political participation, we propose the following hypothesis and research question:

H2) Low news use will be negatively correlated with electoral participation.

RQ2) What is the relationship between selective news avoidance and electoral participation?

To our knowledge, no research has examined the impact of news avoidance on electoral trust. Trust is especially relevant in Brazil due to former president Jair Bolsonaro's strategy to undermine the credibility of news organizations and attack journalists (Reporters Without Borders, 2021), aligned with the strategic use of 'fake news' as a label for any news that opposed the government (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). Due to the limited literature on the topic, we rely on studies about the impacts of news consumption on trust in the electoral process to inform our hypothesis. Levendusky (2013), for example, shows that Americans who consume partisan media would be more likely to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the winner when their party loses. Strömbäck et al. (2016) have also shown that there is a positive correlation between news use and broader political trust. Based on these findings, we hypothesize that low news use will have the opposite impact of news use on trust in the electoral process. Additionally, we propose a research

question asking about the relationship between selective news avoidance with trust in the electoral process.

H3) Low news use will be negatively correlated with trust in the electoral process.
RQ3) What is the relationship between selective news avoidance and trust in the electoral process?

To test our hypotheses and to answer our research questions, we focus on recent elections in Greece and Brazil. Both countries experienced very competitive electoral processes recently. Brazil held presidential elections in October 2022, electing Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva with the narrowest margin in the country's young democratic election history, 50,83% of the votes in the runoff election[5]. Greece held back-to-back parliamentary elections on 21 May and 25 June 2023, after no party secured a majority in the first election. The selection of these two countries enables us to address our research questions in contexts with substantive differences, but also some similarities in their political and media systems. Starting with their obvious differences, Brazil is a large (214m) and diverse country with a presidential political system located in the Global South, whereas Greece is a relatively small (11m) EU country with a more homogenous population and a parliamentary system. These differences give us the possibility to measure the effect of news avoidance in different socioeconomic (North versus South) and political setups, within the context of democracy, given that intentional news avoidance manifests in different ways in non-democratic environments (Lee, 2024).

[5] In Brazil, presidential elections and other major roles in the executive branch (e.g. governors, or mayors in medium and large cities) have two rounds of voting if none of the candidates receive more than 50% of the vote in the first round. Since the country's redemocratization, all presidential elections had two rounds of voting.

Despite their structural differences, both countries have high levels of selective news avoidance: 46% of Brazilians and 60% of Greeks say they often or sometimes actively avoid news, a higher proportion than an average of 48 countries (40%) covered by the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report, up from 29% in 2017 (Newman et al., 2017; 2025). In addition, both countries have faced large political or economic crises in which political divisions and a disrupted media system played an important role (Avritzer, 2017; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2021), and have high levels of reliance on social media for news: in Greece, 64% uses social media for news on a weekly basis (primarily Facebook), making it the largest source of news, and in Brazil that share is 54% (primarily YouTube and WhatsApp) (Newman et al., 2025). As a point of comparison, these shares are 33% in Germany and 39% in the UK (Newman et al., 2025).

With regards to our dependent variables, both Brazil and Greece are democracies that hold free and fair elections (The Electoral Integrity Project, 2023) so it is important that there is high participation and trust in the process. In both countries voting is mandatory, but the law is only enforced in Brazil[6]. While there has been no evidence of election fraud since the adoption of electronic voting in 1996, the electoral system was under attack by former President Bolsonaro and his supporters, culminating in an attack against the Supreme Court, the Presidency, and the Congress buildings in Brasília in January 2023 (Bastos & Recuero, 2023). In Greece no major political party has questioned the electoral results or the voting process.

Considering the similarities in their media use and levels of news avoidance despite the differences in their political and media systems, comparing these two countries provides valuable insights into the role of media consumption attitudes in understanding news avoidance and its potential consequences.

[6] In Greece, no one has been prosecuted for not voting since the restoration of democracy in 1974 (Xiros, 2023), and the country records high and increasing levels of electoral abstention.

Methods

This article draws upon original panel survey data collected in Greece and Brazil during their 2023 and 2022 electoral cycles, using 2-wave pre- and post-election panel surveys. In Brazil the surveys took place online right after the 1st (October 5-19, 2022) (n = 1,600) and 2nd round of the presidential election (November 8-23, 2022) (n = 1,328) by research company IPEC. In Greece, the surveys took place online and through telephone when the first election was called (3 - 10 April 2023) (n = 1,500), and right before the second election took place (20 - 24 June, 2023) (n = 1,014) by research company Kapa Research. In Greece, the surveys were representative of the population with a quota on age, gender, and vote in the 2019 election. In Brazil, quotas were determined considering the National Household Sampling Survey (PNAD) and Census data, updated by IPEC based on their monthly nationwide surveys using probabilistic face-to-face samples. Information about the descriptive statistics of the survey in relation to the census can be found in the Appendix (Table 12). As both surveys were conducted on a large non-probability online panel, AAPOR's standard response rate calculations do not apply. The surveys were approved by the [suppressed] Ethics Committees.

Measures

Selective news avoidance: selective news avoidance was measured in similar ways in both countries. In Brazil, we asked about active electoral news avoidance: "How often have you tried to avoid reading or receiving news about the 2022 elections?". Responses ranged on a 1-5 Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always" ($M_{w1} = 3.03$, $SD_{w1} = 1.24$; $M_{w2} = 3.08$, $SD_{w2} = 1.21$). The item was asked right after the news consumption battery at the start of the survey. In Greece the item was: "Do you find yourself avoiding news about politics these days?". The question was

asked right after the news consumption battery towards the end of the survey. The responses ranged on a 1-4 Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Often" (M_{w1} = 2.17, SD_{w1} = 1.14; M_{w2} = 2.20, SD_{w2} = 1.11). While in Greece the avoidance item asked about politics rather than exclusively elections, political news from April until July 2023 were dominated by the coverage of elections.

Low news use: We measured low news use using a cut-off point for news use, as it has been operationalised by other scholars in the past (e.g. Shehata, 2016, Fletcher et al. 2020)[7]. News use was calculated in both countries in similar ways. In Greece, we asked about frequency of news use during the week leading up to each survey, through different types of news outlets: TV, radio, print, legacy online outlets, and digital-born online outlets. The question was: "How often have you used ___ during the past week?". Possible answers were: Every day, 4-6 days, 1 - 3 days, not at all. Our aggregated news use variable ranged from 0-15 (M_{w1} = 7.13, SD_{w1} = 3.42; M_{w2} = 7.24, SD_{w2} = 3.41). In Brazil, the question was "in the past week how often did you use the following channels to get news?", asked at the first part of the survey. We asked about news from print newspapers, local newspapers, TV news, Cable TV news, and online news. Possible answers were: Many times a day, every day, a few days per week and not at all (M_{w1} = 5.54, SD_{w1} = 3.83; M_{w2} = 5.38, SD_{w2} = 3.62 on a scale from 0-15). We set the threshold of low news use to less than once a

[7] Given that low news use has also been measured relative to frequency of news use by other users (e.g. Strömbäck, 2017), we calculated an alternative measure. To measure low news use relative to other users, we identified individuals whose news consumption frequency was more than one standard deviation below the sample mean, following Strömbäck (2017). Again, we differentiated in both countries between those who did not consume any news at all (coded as 2), and those who consumed news but less frequently than one standard deviation from the mean (coded as 1). More frequent news users were coded as 0. Across both waves, 17% and 16% of news users in Greece were low news users relative to other news users in each survey wave. In Brazil, the share was 16% for wave 1 and 13% for wave 2. For simplicity, we exclude alternative measures of low news use from our main analysis. However, when included, they yielded results similar to those obtained using a cut-off point. These alternative models are included in the Appendix (Tables 8-11).

day following Fletcher et al. (2020). We coded those who claimed not to use any news at all as 2 and those who used news less than once per day (used news only through one or two types of outlets for 1 - 3 days or one for 4 - 6 days a week) as 1. Everyone else was coded as 0. Across both waves, 9% of news users in Greece were low news users, using news less than daily or not at all. In Brazil, the share was 36% in both waves, reflecting a large difference in both countries.

The measures of our dependent variables can be found in the Appendix (Section 1).

Analytic approach: To test our hypotheses and our first research question, we conducted multiple regressions analyses, including age, gender, education, and political interest as controls in each model. We incorporated each of our two independent variables measuring selective news avoidance and low news use into the same model. However, the results were similar when the independent variables were entered into separate models. In our analysis of misinformation, we rely on cross-sectional survey analysis, since it was only asked in wave 2 in both countries. For our panel analyses (where the independent and the dependent variables have been asked in both waves) we rely on within-between models. Within-between models allow us to combine the benefits of fixed effects with random effects models (Firebaugh et al., 2013). By looking at variation within the same participant and variation between participants in the sample, we can assess over-time changes while also accounting for variations among respondents. In our analysis of electoral participation, we rely on within-between models, since we have asked our dependent variables two times in both countries. In our analysis of electoral trust, we rely on within-between models in Brazil, since the question was asked two times, but in Greece we rely on a cross-sectional model, since the question was only asked in the second wave.

Results

Before we start testing our hypotheses and answering our research questions, we explore the correlation between our two main independent variables in both countries. Results of simple correlation analysis shows that selective news avoidance and low news use were positively and weakly correlated in both waves in Brazil ($r_{w1} = .13$, $p < .0001$, $r_{w2} = .14$, $p < .0001$) and in Greece ($r_{w1} = .08$, $p < .01$, $r_{w2} = .04$, $p < .15$), echoing the results by Palmer, Toff and Nielsen (2023).

Turning to our research questions and hypotheses we start with ones concerning misinformation. Our first set of results looks at belief in electoral misinformation (Figures 1a and 1b below - full models in Table 1 in the Appendix). In both countries, low news users are more likely to believe in misinformation ($b = 0.14$, $p < .01$, in Greece, $b = 0.14$, $p < .001$ in Brazil) confirming our first hypothesis. This is not the case among those who selectively avoid the news in either country.

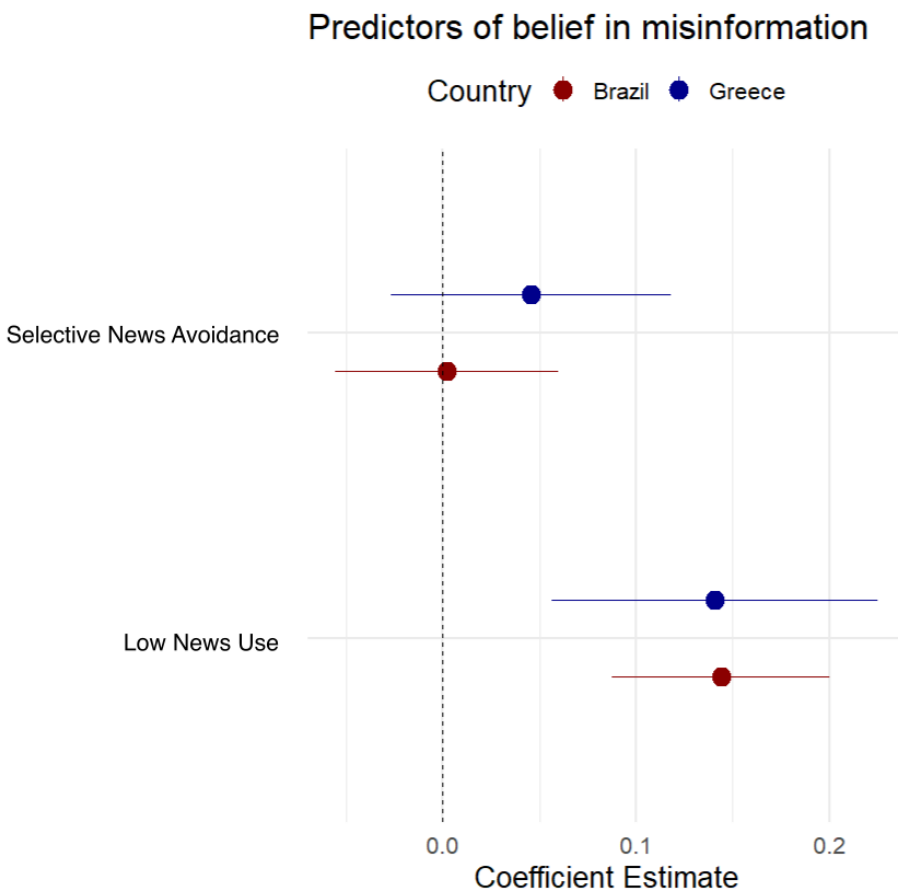

Figure 1. Standardised Coefficients of Selective News Avoidance and Low News Use Predicting Belief in Misinformation in Greece and in Brazil. Robust Standard Errors (Models 1 and 2 in the Appendix)

In the next section, we consider how selective and low news use are related to electoral participation: likelihood to vote in Greece and people voting for a candidate in Brazilian elections. In both countries we conducted within-between models and found that low news use does not correlate with electoral participation levels, failing to confirm our second hypothesis. However, when looking at selective news avoidance, we find negative and significant results in the between part of the models ($b = -.12$, $p < .001$ in Greece and $-.07$, $p < .05$ in Brazil, as seen in Figure 2 below) and no significant results for the within models (as seen in Table 2 in the Appendix). The

results suggest that selective news avoiders have lower levels of electoral participation in both countries. However, over time, across the two waves, changes in selective news avoidance were not correlated with changes in their participation.

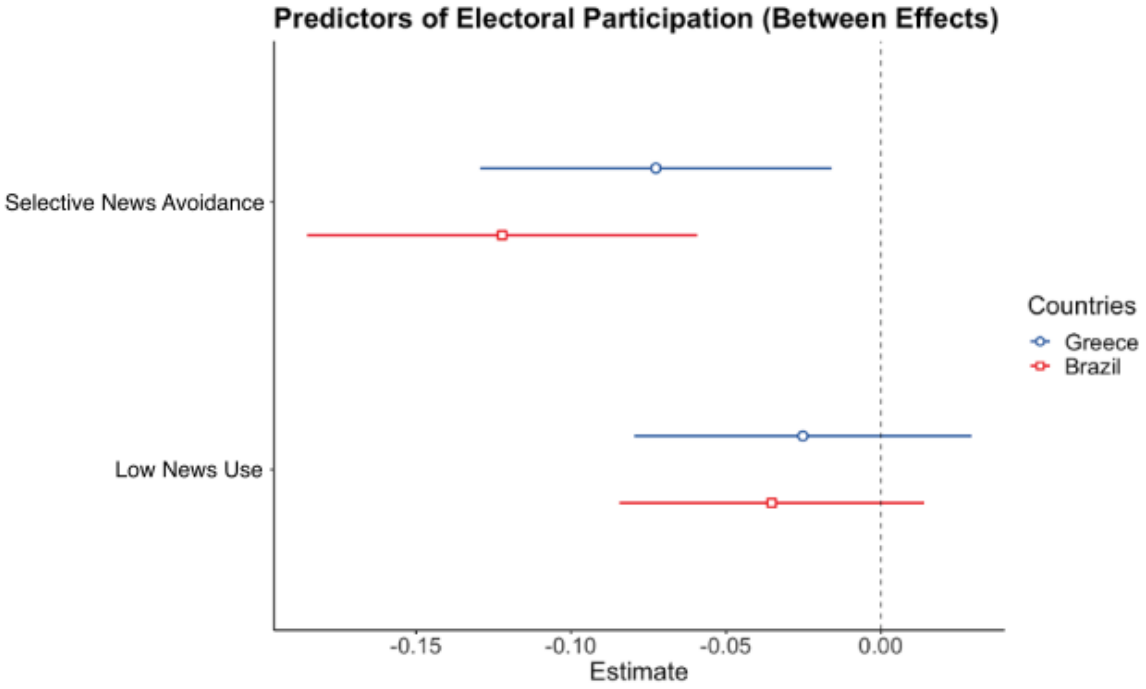

Figure 2. Standardized Coefficients of Selective and Low News Use Predicting Electoral Participation in Greece and in Brazil (Models 3 and 4 in the Appendix)

Last, we examine how news avoidance practices are correlated with trust in elections. In Greece, we ran an OLS regression with trust in the election process as the dependent variable. We found that both higher levels of selective news avoidance ($b = -.10$, $p < .01$) and lower levels of news use ($b = -.11$, $p < .05$) are correlated with lower levels of trust in elections, revealing similar relationships.

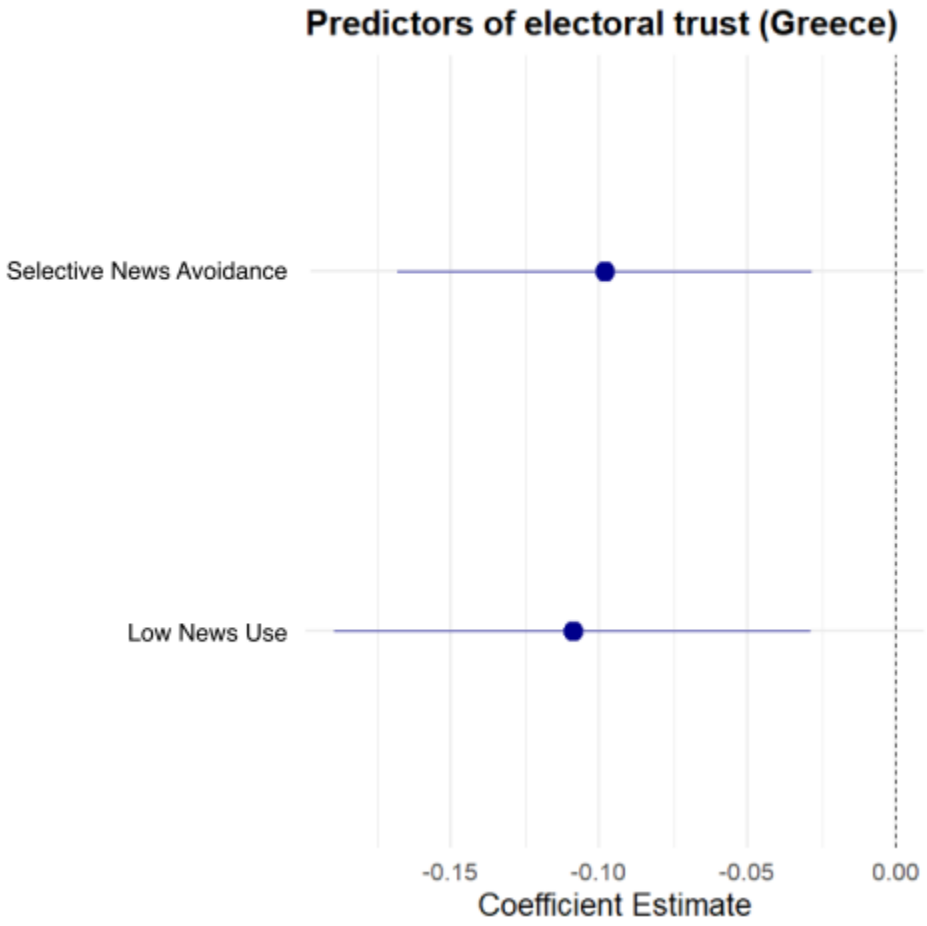

Figure 3. Standardized Coefficients of Selective and Low News Use Predicting Electoral Trust in Greece. Robust Standard Errors. (Model 5 in the Appendix)

In Brazil, we were able to investigate within and between effects of the different kinds of avoidance since the dependent variable was asked twice. Low news users are less likely to trust the election than those who do not, as demonstrated by between effects ($b = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$) - which are null for selective avoiders ($b = -0.02$, $p = 0.6$) (Figure 4). Our findings confirm H3.

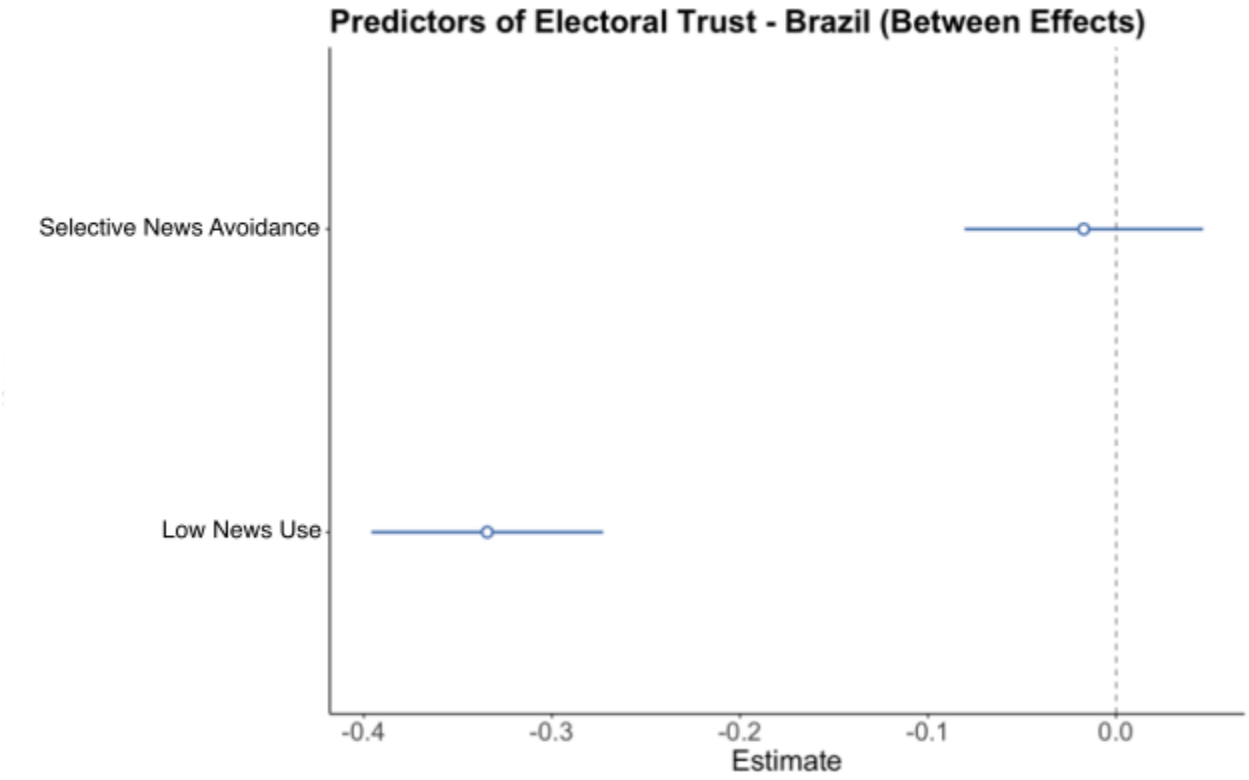

Figure 4. Standardized Coefficients of Selective and Low News Use Predicting Electoral Trust in Brazil (Between Effects - Model 6 in the Appendix)

When it comes to *within* effects in Brazil (Figure 5), we found that increasing selective avoidance over time was associated to higher trust in the election ($b = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), but low news use did not have significant effects over time. In practice, those who opted to avoid news consumption about the election had higher levels of electoral trust, which indicates they were likely exposed to discussions about the process's reliability, which intensified after the second round, even if they avoided news at certain stages of the campaign. Low news users did not show change in their (significantly low levels of) electoral trust over time.

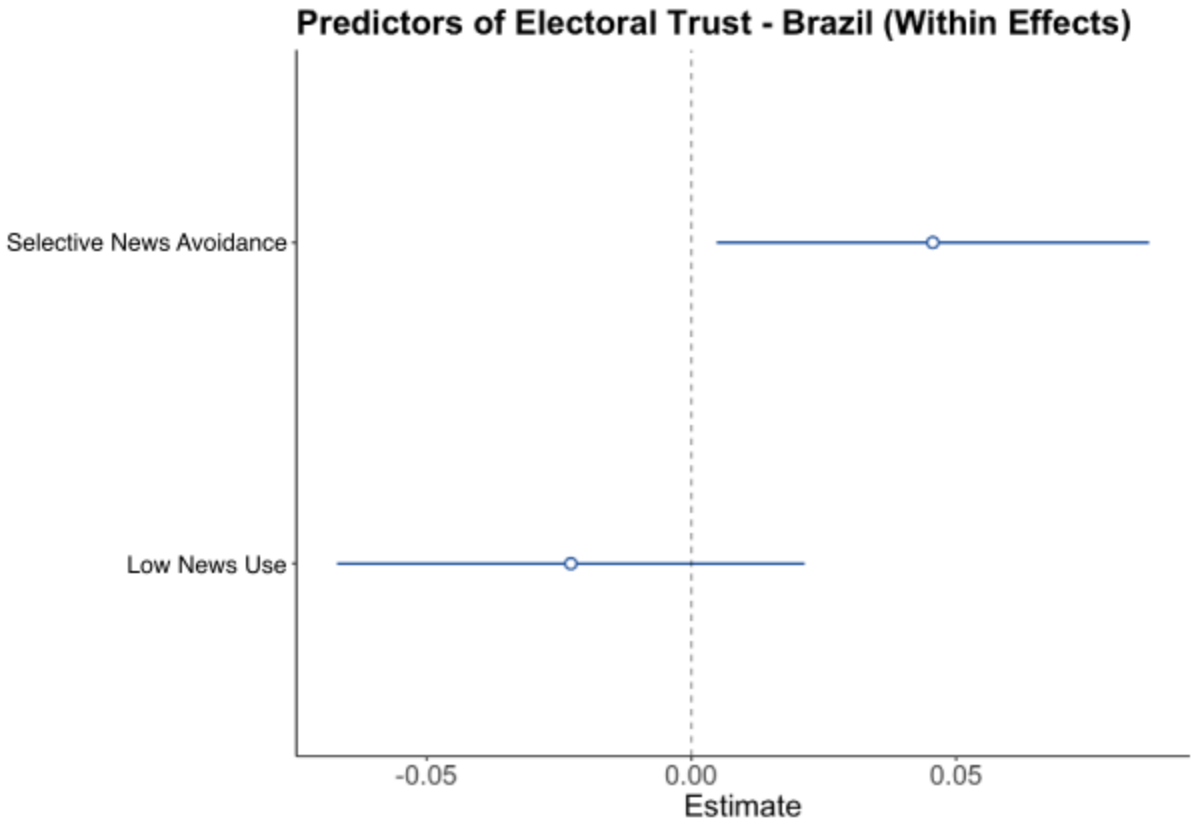

Figure 5. Standardized Coefficients of Selective and Low News Use Predicting Electoral Trust in Brazil (Within Effects - Model 6 in the Appendix)

Discussion

While there has been heightened scholarly attention to news avoidance, we still know very little about its societal consequences beyond the normative expectations that citizens are well-informed. Qualitative studies that have examined different forms of news avoidance suggest that low news use and news avoidance may have different normative consequences (Villi et al. 2022). Our results highlight that the distinction between low news use and selective news avoidance is important, as these behaviors have distinct implications for key outcomes, in line with the suggestions of Villi et al. (2022) and the findings of Damstra et al. (2023).

Our findings related to misinformation suggest that low news users are more likely to be misinformed both in Greece and in Brazil, echoing prior work on the relationship between news use and vulnerability to falsehoods (e.g. Altay et al., 2023), but selective news avoiders are not. The lack of association between selective news avoidance and misinformation suggests that people who actively opt to withdraw from the news are not necessarily more vulnerable to misinformation. This finding indicates that selective news avoidance may not necessarily limit people's ability to navigate the information environment and distinguish between facts and falsehoods. A potential explanation is that people deliberately limit their exposure to specific issues, viewpoints, topics, or mediums, but still get sufficient information about important topics. However, contrasting evidence from Sweden indicates a different dynamic, where active news avoidance was positively linked to misinformed belief (Damstra et al., 2023). The differences in our findings may be attributable to contextual differences across countries. Different contexts can shape prevailing motivations for selective news avoidance, including lack of interest, lack of trust, dissatisfaction with news coverage, or heightened cynicism. These motivations could shape different effects.

We further show that selective news avoidance and low news use have different relationships with electoral participation. While studies have pointed to a positive correlation between selective news avoidance and different forms of civic or political participation (e.g. Ohme et al., 2022; Woodstock, 2014) our findings reveal a potential downside: selective avoiders in both countries were less likely to vote in elections. Negative emotions from electoral information overload may drive news avoidance, which in turn lowers turnout. In Brazil, it is possible that citizens who chose to avoid election news also tuned out from politics more broadly, despite compulsory voting, to express their discontent with the political environment. However, this correlation was observed only *between* individuals; there were no significant *within-*

individual changes in selective news avoidance associated with voting. In other words, changes in selective news avoidance between the two waves, during the electoral period, were not correlated with changes in electoral participation. This result could mean that short-term avoidance of a topic that is very prominent in the news (as politics are in between election rounds), does not necessarily have consequences on outcomes like voting, but that selective avoiders are generally less likely to engage in politics than those who do not avoid news.

In contrast, low news use, which could be driven by lack of interest in news, but also partly by structural inequalities such as social class, work rhythms or gender (e.g. Toff & Palmer, 2019) was not associated with lower participation in the electoral process. One possible explanation for this unexpected result is that the highly polarized electoral context may have mobilized even low–news-use individuals. Our findings on political participation are consistent across both countries despite differences in the voting system. While voting is compulsory in both countries, only in Brazil voters may face a small fine for not voting, which may lead voters to express non-participation by voting blank or null. It is also possible that compulsory voting in Brazil plays the role of equalizer among disadvantaged voters, as previous studies report the importance of the electronic voting system for improving voting access, particularly for citizens with lower levels of education (Schneider, 2020).

These different effects are also relevant for perceptions of trustworthiness and reliability of election results. While low news users are less likely to believe in the integrity of the electoral results, selective news avoidance is correlated with lack of trust only in Greece. It is possible that those who do not consume news are less exposed to information countering false claims about the reliability of the electoral systems and become more vulnerable to discourses that attempt to weaken the electoral system. This could pose significant challenges for contemporary

democracies, as politicians and their supporters may try to undermine trust in the system for electoral gain—as highlighted by the recent examples of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Donald Trump in the United States. If an electoral misinformation nexus exists - where traditional news use and trust in news reduce belief in electoral misinformation, but belief in electoral misinformation, it turn, lowers trust in news (Mont'Alverne et al., 2023) – understanding the differential effects of news avoidance is crucial in this puzzle since those with low or no news consumption may become both less trusting and more misinformed.

Interestingly, our results were broadly similar across both countries, despite the many differences in their media and political structures (as reflected in Newman et al., 2025). A possible explanation may lie in their similarities in terms of digital media use and other news habits—for instance, the high use of social media for news across both countries, and their higher-than-average levels of news avoidance. In Brazil, we find these results in a scenario where relevant segments of the population violently contested the electoral results (Azevedo et al., 2025). Moreover, this comes in a context of severe declines in trust in news and increasing news avoidance in both countries over the last years (Newman et al., 2025), which has potential to produce enduring consequences for these democracies.

This study comes with limitations. Although we observe similar patterns in Brazil and Greece, slight differences in the wording of the measurement items mean that the measures are not completely proportional. However, the consistency of our findings across most model comparisons suggests that we captured similar attitudes and behaviors. Although our findings show remarkably similar associations between news avoidance and democratic outcomes, the study is limited to two countries with high news avoidance and disrupted media ecosystems. In addition, both countries feature compulsory voting; however, the law has not been enforced in Greece for several decades

(Xiros, 2023), where abstention is widespread, unlike in Brazil. As a result, these findings may not generalize to countries with different or non-democratic contexts, as also suggested by Lee (2024). Additionally, some models have limited predictive power for key variables like likelihood to vote or misinformation. Last, we should not rule out the potential for a bidirectional relationship between our variables. For example, it could be the case that distrust in the electoral process could influence higher levels of news avoidance, which in turn, could influence higher distrust[8]. Future research with more survey waves, could investigate the direction of relationships in further depth.

In spite of these limitations, our study makes important contributions to the understanding of news avoidance and its societal consequences. First, we advance the conceptual debate in the literature on news avoidance by providing robust evidence that selective news avoidance and low news use have distinct associations with important political attitudes and behaviors. Second, we advance the understanding of the broader consequences of news avoidance—however defined—in contemporary democracies by looking at its relationship with beliefs in misinformation, participation, and trust in elections—three key challenges in recent election processes amidst increasing polarization and the weaponization of disinformation and institutional distrust (Norris, 2022). Taken together, our study provides robust empirical evidence to inform important theoretical debates about news avoidance and its democratic outcomes, highlights the need for conceptual clarity when discussing news avoidance, and demonstrates that selective news avoidance may not be as normatively undesirable to democracy as low engagement with news, but it could also have detrimental effects.

[8] In our appendix we have included the reverse within-between models (Tables 5-7) that point to a potential bidirectional relationship.

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