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ANGRY AND WRONG

The Emotional Dynamics of Partisan Media and Political Misperceptions

Brian E. Weeks

University of Michigan



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Angry and Wrong

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Brian E. Weeks

University of Michigan

Author for correspondence: Brian E. Weeks, bewee@umich.edu

Abstract: Use of partisan media is often associated with political misperceptions but little research has investigated whether partisan media affect beliefs and, if so, the mechanism through which that process occurs. This Element argues that political anger provides one key theoretical link between partisan media use and political misperceptions. Using three-wave panel survey data collected in the United States during the 2020 election, I show that people who use more partisan media are more angry and misinformed than less frequent or nonusers. More importantly, consuming partisan media – particularly conservative media – can make people angrier about politics over time and this anger subsequently reduces the accuracy of political beliefs. While audiences for partisan media remain small, the findings indicate that these outlets play an important role in shaping political emotions and beliefs and offer one promising explanation for why their audiences are more likely to hold more inaccurate beliefs about politics.

Keywords: Partisan Media, Political Misperceptions, Political Misinformation, Anger, Emotion

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