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To cite this article: Sebastián Valenzuela & Angela S. Brandão (2015) Historical Dramas, Current Political Choices: Analyzing Partisan Selective Exposure With a Docudrama, Mass Communication and Society, 18:4, 449-470, DOI: [10.1080/15205436.2015.1016178](https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1016178)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1016178>



Accepted author version posted online: 20  
Apr 2015.  
Published online: 20 Apr 2015.



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# Historical Dramas, Current Political Choices: Analyzing Partisan Selective Exposure With a Docudrama

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This study investigates the docudrama hypothesis—the idea that fiction based on real stories can influence audience members’ perception of political reality—in the context of current debates on partisan selective exposure and reinforcement effects. It does so by analyzing the influence of an Oscar-nominated docudrama on viewers’ attitudes and behavioral intention using propensity score matching. By means of a representative survey, we find strong evidence of partisan selective exposure and avoidance. Furthermore, among respondents with a similar likelihood of film attendance, actual attendance has a strong association with positive retrospective evaluations of the political coalition glorified in the movie, and an indirect relationship—via retrospective evaluations—with voting intentions. Discussion of the findings shed light into potential real-world political effects of partisan selective exposure using content other than news.

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According to the so-called docudrama hypothesis, works that combine fiction and documentary can “powerfully influence viewer’s conceptions of social and political reality” (Adams et al., 1985, p. 330). It is well known, however, that this hybrid content triggers processes of selective exposure and selective avoidance, especially when it is clearly slanted in favor of (or against) a political group (Ball-Rokeach, Grube, & Rokeach, 1981; Butler, Koopman, & Zimbardo, 1995; Feldman & Sigelman, 1985; Lenart & McGraw, 1989). Because of selectivity, the most likely effect of political docudramas is to reinforce viewers’ political attitudes and behavioral intentions, such as strengthening partisans’ initial vote choice (Dilliplane, 2014). Although it is a matter of debate whether reinforcement is an important media effect (cf. W. L. Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010), it is clear that selectivity and media effects need not be regarded as mutually exclusive and, in fact, may operate in tandem (Slater, 2007; Stroud, 2010).

The purpose of the current study is to reassess the docudrama hypothesis in light of current debates on partisan selective exposure. More specifically, it seeks to expand the applicability of the literature on politically driven media selectivity to docudramas—a different genre than news that is becoming increasingly popular (Bignell, 2010; Ebbrecht, 2007; Lipkin, 2011)—by testing the ability of a docudrama to produce reinforcement effects. In doing so, we contribute to work on the political consequences of partisan selective exposure in several other ways. First, we expand on the range of possible effects considered, as we take into account not only the attitudinal impact of selective exposure but also its influence on behavioral intentions (i.e., vote choice). Second, we introduce propensity score matching as a useful technique for quantifying reinforcement effects with cross-sectional data. Finally, we conduct our study outside the United States, in Chile—a country with a different political and media system, where fewer people identify with political parties (Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006) and, like other Latin American countries (Straubhaar, 1999), has its own media culture. Thus, to include a Latin American country into the discussion of partisan selectivity effects means to test—and eventually expand—the generalization of selectivity effects.

Our case study is the Oscar-nominated, Cannes-award-winning docudrama *No* (Larraín & Larraín, 2012). The film refers to the true story of the 1988 Chilean plebiscite, organized by the military dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet to extend its rule for another 8 years, calling citizens to vote yes or no to the new presidential term. Contrary to initial expectations, the No campaign—led by the center-left parties under the banner Concertación—garnered 56% of the vote against 44% for the right-wing Yes campaign. The referendum put an end to the dictatorship that took power in the 1973

coup and marked the beginning of Concertación's 20 years as the ruling democratic political group of the country.

The release of *No* in Chilean theaters represented an ideal opportunity for studying partisan selective exposure and reinforcement effects. It garnered substantial controversy among Chilean political elites. Politicians on the left openly criticized its "caricature" and "oversimplification" of the 1988 campaign (Rohter, 2013). Right-wing politicians, many of which worked for Pinochet's government, also went public; they accused the film of intentionally biased against them. More important, *No* was released less than 2 months before the country-wide municipal elections of October 2012, which led commentators to wonder if the movie could affect voters by priming pro Concertación, anti-right-wing sentiment.

The article is organized as follows. We first cover prior research on partisan selective exposure and avoidance, docudramas, and media effects on political attitudes. The hypotheses that are tested are derived from the literature review. We then detail the methodology, with a particular focus on the advantages of using propensity score matching in this case. After presenting the results, we discuss the theoretical and methodological implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

## SELECTIVE EXPOSURE AND SELECTIVE AVOIDANCE

More than half a century ago, Klapper (1960) concluded that the media's greatest effect was to reinforce preexisting opinions because people tend to select media that coincide with their opinions and interests in the first place. Although earlier research cast serious doubts on the effectiveness of the theory (Sears & Freedman, 1967; Zaller, 1992), in the current postbroadcast environment, characterized by media choice, audience fragmentation, and media niches, selectivity seems to be on the rise. According to Stroud (2011), selective exposure is particularly prone to occur when it turns to politics, which explains the increasing focus of political communication scholars on partisan selective exposure (e.g., Garrett, 2009; Gil de Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012; Gvirzman, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012).

Selectivity is not only about people's preference for congenial information and opinions. It also has to do with someone's tendency to avoid dissonant points of view. As Garrett (2009) showed, preferences for congenial and uncongenial information are different and not necessarily associated with one another. Furthermore, from a normative perspective, challenging non-like-minded content is more harmful than seeking like-minded content (Dilliplane, 2014). Consequently, selectivity and avoidance processes need to be assessed separately. However, this task is complicated when studies

conflate seeking avoidance with nonseeking or seeking neutral information. As Jang (2014) argued, to provide convincing evidence that selective avoidance is different from selective exposure, studies must compare the effect of opposing views on partisan media consumption *relative to* neutral views. In the current study, because *No* is clearly against Pinochet and its right-wing political supporters, and quite favorable of the Concertación and its campaign, it is only logical that individuals who identify with Concertación should be more likely to seek out the film *No* compared to independents (H1). Conversely, individuals who identify with the political group that supported Pinochet—known currently as the parties of the Alianza—should more likely avoid the film compared to independents (H2).

Although like-minded and contradictory media exposure are hypothesized to work in tandem, they are not conceived as equivalent in terms of prevalence and/or effects. Prior research suggests that seeking opinion-reinforcing information is more common and powerful than avoiding opinion-challenging information (Garrett, 2009; Jang, 2014). In the current study, thus, it is hypothesized that the influence of political ideology on intention to attend and actual film attendance should be stronger for individuals who identify with the political parties that supported the *No* campaign (the Concertación parties) than for individuals who identify with the political parties that supported the *Yes* campaign in favor of the Pinochet dictatorship (the Alianza parties; H3).

The hypothesized relationships, of course, set the stage for the subsequent analysis on the potential effects of selective exposure, for in the absence of a relationship between political identification and film attendance, any political effects identified with watching the movie cannot be discussed in terms of reinforcement effects. Rather, as noted by Dilliplane (2014, p. 80), the findings would suggest conversion (motivating partisans to shift their attitudes and behavior to the opposing party) or activation effects (motivating initially disengaged partisans to align their attitudes and behavior with their party). As we argue next, evidence about reinforcement derived from exposure to partisan media seems quite substantial.

## PARTISAN SELECTIVITY WITH ENTERTAINMENT CONTENT

The diffusion of partisan media on the Internet and television has motivated scholars to study not only processes of content selectivity and avoidance but also their effects on audiences. Particular attention has been paid to the relationship between selective exposure and opinion reinforcement. For instance, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) analyzed survey data and found a significant correlation between ideology, selective exposure to cable news and

attitudes toward Mexican immigration in the United States. In this case, watching Fox News was predicted by having a conservative ideology, but conservatives who watched Fox News more frequently became even more conservative on their opinions on immigration.

Nevertheless, the causal connection between polarization and selective exposure to partisan news is still in question. Prior (2013) argued there is no firm evidence that partisan news media are making Americans more polarized, as this kind of content is restricted to small audiences. In other parts of the world, such as European countries with a tradition for partisan journalism, few would argue that media-driven polarization is on the rise, at least at the aggregate level. Nevertheless, several survey and experimental studies show the potential for ideological and affective polarization of users of newer media, such as online news, political blogs, and social media (e.g., Garrett et al., 2014; Stroud, 2011). Thus, existing evidence on the polarizing effects of partisan selective exposure is most convincing with individual-level analyses.

Another explanation for the seeming contradiction between increasing levels of selectivity (or avoidance) in the media environment and mixed evidence on the reinforcing effects of this process may be explained by the type of media stimuli considered. As has been pointed out elsewhere, current affairs content is not the most dominant content; entertainment is (Prior, 2013). Thus, so long as entertainment-oriented media does not become partisan, reinforcement and polarization will necessarily be a small-scale phenomenon, restricted to the strata of the electorate with a media diet heavy on news and political information.

Previous work is indicative of the potential for entertainment content for becoming an important ingredient of people's political opinions and attitudes. According to Mutz and Nir (2010), fictional programs can have as much influence as nonfictional ones because fictional narratives have no obligation to balance opposing voices, as they are usually absolved of responsibility for any potential impact. Furthermore, viewers process these programs differently: they watch fiction mainly as a source of entertainment, becoming "less resistant to this subtle form of persuasive influence" (Mutz & Nir, 2010, p. 202). Thus, just as has been noted with partisan news media, the power of political-oriented fiction lies in the fact it is "not about conveying facts; [it is] about helping people make sense of the world" (Levendusky, 2013, p. 612).

Prior research is consistent with the notion that non-news content can have significant political consequences at the individual level. In a study that resembles the current research—in a sense that it uses a national survey to investigate both partisan selective exposure to a movie and its effects on elections—Stroud (2007) examined the degree of partisan selective exposure

to Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* and its effects on evaluations of the 2004 U.S. presidential candidates. Her results showed that not only were those who selected themselves to watch the film motivated by a Democratic-leaning identification and a liberal ideology but actual film attendants had significantly more negative attitudes toward the then Republican, conservative President Bush compared to those who only intended to watch it. Nevertheless, it is an open question if these results are applicable to docudramas, a different genre—as we argue—than documentaries.

Another study by Lenart and McGraw (1989) analyzed the impact of the television miniseries *Amerika*, which portrayed life in the U.S. Midwest 10 years after a Soviet takeover of the country, on attitudes concerning political support for military policy. Their findings provide evidence that viewing *Amerika* made individuals less tolerant to Communism and more prone to support U.S. military strength. The authors also theorized about certain conditions that may govern the potential effect of a film on the individual, suggesting four moderating variables: the type of exposure (direct or indirect, as associated media coverage and interpersonal discussion), the perceived realism of the movie (the more believable the film, the larger influence it may have on the audience), the viewers' political ideology (that may govern the "desire" to believe), and knowledge (the better informed, the lower the degree of potential influence). Likewise, Bartsch and Schneider (2014) found that the power of content that has a strong entertainment component is contingent upon the type of motivations audiences bring to exposure. Nonescapist needs (e.g., gaining insight, seeking truth) may encourage cognitive elaboration, political interest, and information in a way that consuming entertainment content for purely escapist motivations does not. As we argue, several of these conditions may be applicable to the current study.

### CONCEPTUALIZING THE POLITICAL DOCUDRAMA

Based on the contingent conditions just discussed, it could be argued that the genre of political docudramas is particularly well suited for influencing audiences' attitudes and opinions. In contrast to pure fiction, docudramas have a higher level of perceived realism and are more likely to satisfy eudaimonic (rather than hedonistic) motivations, in part because they incorporate factual information and have a more evident connection with a real-world context. Unlike nonpartisan news, docudramas are not bound to balance different ideological perspectives. Hence, processes of partisan selective exposure and reinforcement are more likely to happen with political docudramas.

Unfortunately, the scholarly literature has not used the term *docudrama* in any consistent fashion, which complicates the empirical assessment of our expectations. The term is almost always associated with films and television series (e.g., B. Bennett, 2010; Bignell, 2010; Lenart & McGraw, 1989; Sturken, 1997). It is generally employed to describe audiovisual productions, which use both documentary and fictional narrative strategies (Fournier, 2013). However, there are still questions about the relevance of this distinction (Rosenstone, 1999). Indeed, both *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a film with no professional actors in it, and *Amerika*, a television series based on a fictional storyline, have been classified as docudramas (cf. Lenart & McGraw, 1989; Stroud, 2007).

In this study, we argue in favor of a narrower definition of docudrama. First, films and series are docudramas when they are based on real (i.e., historic) events and characters (Sturken, 1997). Moreover, they must partially “emulate the rhetorical register of serious social commitment” (B. Bennett, 2010, p. 210) of documentaries, although they do not intend to have the same respectability or impartiality. Third, they must acknowledge that, although they are a fictional re-creation of events, they claim a rather faithful presentation of the events and contexts (Lipkin, 1999). All in all, although their narratives are much similar to any other fictional content, they blend what is known to what is merely speculative, demanding from their audiences a particular kind of suspension of disbelief. And to do so, they usually mix real images with fictionalization as a persuasive strategy (Lipkin, 1999). The result is that docudramas have the “potential to reframe seemingly familiar events, by introducing affective ‘personal’ counterperspectives” (B. Bennett, 2010, p. 211). In that sense, the Adams et al. (1985) study of the motion picture *The Right Stuff* is a proper test of the “docudrama hypothesis,” and they found that individuals who saw it presented more favorable attitudes toward John Glenn, the former astronaut turned Democratic candidate for presidency, than those who did not watch the film.

Based on these considerations, *No* is the prototypical docudrama. In fact, nearly 30% of the film uses real, documentary footage (Rohter, 2013). In words of the film’s director, Pablo Larraín, “The way things happen in the movie is not exactly the way they were, but the facts are the same” (as cited in Rohter, 2013). Furthermore, because *No* takes a clear political stance against the Pinochet dictatorship and glorifies the campaign led by the democratic forces of Concertación, it can be conceived as partisan. Thus, it is expected that viewing the film *No* produces reinforcement effects, that is, it causes more favorable attitudes toward the Concertación parties and less favorable attitudes toward the Alianza parties among those already inclined to watch it (H4).

REINFORCEMENT EFFECTS THROUGH  
RETROSPECTIVE ATTITUDES

Because the story of *No* refers to political events that took place nearly 25 years before the film was released, it is possible that the attitudinal effects triggered by exposure to it are circumscribed to retrospective, rather than current, political evaluations. Nevertheless, the fact that the opposing political camps portrayed in the film are, to this date, the main political groups competing in Chilean elections, make way for the possibility that *No* also affects current evaluations of both Concertación and Alianza. Whereas Nimmo and Combs (1983) pointed that “our political knowledge of the past and present is partially formed by the dramatic fantasies of popular media” (p. 71), previous research has not delved into the types of attitudes most likely to be affected by historical docudramas.

The only work addressing the temporal dimensions of attitudes in the study of fictional media effects is Butler et al.’s (1995) research on Oliver Stone’s *JFK*. In our view, it highlights the different effects a film can produce on retrospective and current political evaluations. Released in 1991, *JFK* championed the hypothesis that president John Kennedy was assassinated as a consequence of a broad-based conspiracy. Butler et al. (1995) measured audience members’ emotions, beliefs, and political behavioral intentions after seeing the film. They found that *JFK* aroused feelings of anger and hopelessness and that it succeeded at persuading viewers of a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy. Although their data showed no significant direct effect of the film on the audience’s general political views, it revealed a significant indirect effect in political behavioral intentions: watching *JFK* led to a negative impact on the predisposition to engage in several political activities, such as voting or making electoral contributions. Although Butler et al. did not organize their analysis in categories related to media effects on past and current evaluations, their findings can, indeed, be reinterpreted in light of this distinction. Viewers’ attitudes toward Kennedy’s assassination (retrospective evaluation) are predictive, but independent, of their willingness to participate (current behavioral intention).

Therefore, the attitudinal effects predicted by H4 should, in the case of the Concertación, be further qualified by distinguishing between retrospective and current political evaluations. The viewers of *No* in 2012 were confronted with a story that took place in 1988, and at the time of the film’s release, more than 2 years had passed since the last Concertación administration was in power. Thus, the effects of viewing the film *No* on attitudes toward the Concertación parties should be stronger for retrospective evaluations than for current evaluations (H5).

Considering that reinforcement is the most likely outcome of partisan selective exposure (Holbert et al., 2010; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948), it is only logical to test the possible effects of watching *No* on vote choice. In this sense, the timing of the study—the 2012 Chilean municipal elections—was optimal. According to Dilliplane (2014), there are two routes—one cognitive, another affective—to explain why exposure to like-minded media content produces reinforcement effects. On one hand, partisan media may produce attitude polarization through biased information. On the other, like-minded political content may spark feelings of enthusiasm for the political party of choice, further strengthening the connection between political identification and vote choice. Although it is not clear which route is more prevalent, in both instances the reinforcement effect of exposure to congenial media on vote choice is indirect, working through opinions, attitudes, and/or emotions.

Because of H5, it is expected that reinforcement effects on vote choice should operate indirectly through retrospective evaluations. Political science has long demonstrated the impact of historic assessments on current political choices, that is, when people decide for whom to vote, they rely on judgments of past performance rather than on prospective performance (Fiorina, 1981). On the other hand, positive attitudes have been found to be causally prior and necessary for the intention to perform a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988). For these reasons, it is expected that viewing the film *No* has an indirect effect on the likelihood of voting for the political parties that opposed the Pinochet dictatorship (the Concertación parties) by influencing retrospective political attitudes (H6). Because of H3, we do not predict such an effect for the Alianza parties.

## METHOD

### Survey

To test the hypotheses, a survey by means of computer-assisted telephone interviews was conducted. The survey was fielded from August 6 (3 days before the release of the movie) to September 6, 2012 ( $N=1,827$ ), by the office of survey research at the Sociology Institute of Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The sample included the 60 largest municipalities in the country, which together represent 65% of Chile's total population. The number of cases drawn inside each municipality was proportional to the population. Within each municipality, and based on the telephone directory as the sampling frame, landline numbers were selected via random digit

dialing. Individual respondents, who were age 18 and older, were chosen using gender and age quotas. The sample recruited is representative of Chile's urban population in terms of gender (51.5% female), age ( $M = 42.5$ ,  $SD = 17.2$ ), city of residence (Santiago = 40.7%), educational attainment (high school or less = 56.3%), and socioeconomic status (high = 10.9%, medium = 44.5%, low = 44.6%).

## Measures

The variables intention to attend and attending the film *No* were constructed from responses to the following question: "Have you planned to watch the movie *No* about the 1988 plebiscite, have you not planned to watch it, or have you watched it already?" Among respondents who reported that they had not seen the film, a dummy variable was created identifying respondents who had the intention from those who did not have the intention to see the movie. Watching the film, on the other hand, was also a dummy variable (coded 1 = watching, 0 = not watching). Of the total sample (excluding missing values), 48.5% reported that they intended to see the film, 48.3% did not intend to, and 3.2% had seen it.

Retrospective evaluation of Concertación was measured with the following question: "Regardless of your political orientation, do you approve or disapprove the way in which Concertación led the country's government after 1989?" Response choices were approve (42.1% of the sample), disapprove (39.6%), and neither approve nor disapprove (18.3%). Current evaluation of Concertación, in turn, was measured with the item, "Regardless of your political orientation, do you approve or disapprove the way in which Concertación is performing its job?" In this case, 21.7% of respondents approved, 63.1% disapproved, and 15.2% neither approved nor approved. The same question and response scale was employed to measure current evaluation of the Alianza-led government (30.5% approved, 56.8% disapproved, and 12.7% neither approved nor disapproved).

Behavioral intention was gauged with a trial-heat question asking the respondent about his or her vote choice in the then upcoming municipal elections of October 28, 2012: "If the municipal elections were held next Sunday, would you vote for a mayoral candidate of Alianza or Concertación?" Responses were dummy-coded (1 = Concertación [27.1%]; 0 = Alianza [26.5%], neither of the two coalitions [38.6%], or other political group [7.8%]).

In addition, the survey asked respondents about their political identification, from which three binary variables were computed: identifies with the Alianza (18.2%), identifies with the Concertación (20.6%), and identifies with Communist coalition (6.7%). The remaining categories (i.e., other

political group [4.7%] and none [49.8%]) were combined into the reference category (for a discussion on why independents predominate in Chile, see Bargsted & Somma, 2013; Luna & Altman, 2011). Our choice of reference category was based on two considerations. First, to test for partisan selective exposure and avoidance separately, we need separate coefficients estimating the effects of identifying with Concertación or Alianza to appear simultaneously in the regression equation. Second, following standard statistical practice (Hardy, 1993, p. 10), the reference group is the most common category.

Finally, variables that previous research has found are related to attendance of political films, political attitudes, and electoral behavior in Chile were included as covariates (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1981; Carlin, 2011; Stroud, 2007): age group ( $Mdn = 2$  [35–54 years],  $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), education ( $Mdn = 1$  [completed high school or less],  $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), socioeconomic status ( $Mdn = 3$  [middle class],  $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), city of residence (42.4% in Santiago), religion (60.7% Roman Catholic), and turnout in the last presidential election of 2009 (65.6% voted). To facilitate achieving balance in the matching analysis, all continuous control variables were recoded into either two or three categories, roughly splitting them into equal groups.

### Statistical Analysis

To test the selective exposure and selective avoidance hypotheses (H1 and H2), including the relative strength of these hypotheses (H3), we performed two logistic regression analyses, with the first one predicting intentions to view the film and the second predicting film attendance. For both instances, the key predictor variable is respondents' political identification. Because of the small proportion of respondents who attended the film, predicted probabilities of watching were corrected using the methods discussed by King and Zeng (2001), prior correction and weighting, using box office figures for *No* and total urban population (see notes of Table 2). For H3, the magnitudes of the effects associated to Concertación and Alianza identifiers on likelihood of film attendance were compared using a *t* test for differences between coefficients. For the hypotheses about the political effects of attending *No* (H4, H5, and H6), the data were preprocessed using propensity score matching, which is better equipped for causal inferences than standard regression models when dealing with observational data and nonrandomized treatments (Ho, Imai, King, & Stuart, 2007; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). On one hand, it reduces the estimation bias caused by self-selection on observable characteristics, which in this study is of central interest as we argue that the decision to attend the film *No* is based on political identification—a major determinant of political attitudes and behavior.

On the other hand, it reduces the model dependency of the estimated effects, making estimates more robust to alterations in model specification.

Considering that seeing *No* is the treatment condition and not seeing the film is the control group, we approximated randomization by calculating via logistic regression the conditional probability of receiving the treatment given the observed covariates (i.e., the propensity score of being in the treatment group). Subsequently, we matched this group to a group of similar others who had a similar propensity to see the movie but had not seen it. The covariates, in this case, are the three political identification variables, the remaining six control variables explained earlier, and—following recommendations by Rubin and Thomas (1996, p. 253)—all two-way interactions between these nine variables (55 multiplicative terms in total). Thus, two relatively similar groups—one exposed to the film, another not, but both virtually identical on covariate distribution—were produced, and then their difference in outcomes (i.e., retrospective/current evaluations and vote choice) were examined via regression. In this sense, matching is used to pre-process the data before estimating the typical regression models encountered in the partisan selective exposure literature.

Because in the current study there are more control than treated individuals and the hypotheses posit an effect of *No* on those who have seen the film, we relied on the guidelines set forth by Stuart (2010) and employed 5:1 nearest neighbor matching without replacement. This means that each treated individual was matched to five different control individuals. Furthermore, to ensure a good matching, a caliper of 0.20 was applied, that is, individuals in the treatment group were matched only to individuals in the control group with propensity scores within one fifth of the average standard deviation of the logit of the propensity score (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1984). Because nonmatched respondents have to be discarded from the analysis, the sample size for the matching analysis was 289 (watching group,  $N=51$ ; nonwatching group,  $N=238$ ; excluding missing values,  $N=265$ ). Although dropping observations is generally undesirable in standard regression modeling, in matching analysis there are substantial gains in efficiency and precision associated to the use of matched samples (for a vivid example, see Smith, as cited by Stuart, 2010).

Diagnostic tests for assessing the quality of the matched samples revealed that covariate balance was achieved. The relative multivariate imbalance measure L1 (Iacus, King, & Porro, 2009) decreased from 0.92 before matching to 0.81 after matching, resulting in an 11.15% imbalance reduction. No covariate exhibited an absolute standardized mean difference larger than 0.25, the typical cutoff value (Thoemmes, 2012). Furthermore, the median absolute standardized mean difference for all covariates decreased from 0.26 before matching to 0.03 after matching. In any case, as a form of

double-check, the final estimation proceeded with regression adjustment, including all control variables in the effects models. Last, the indirect effect of seeing *No* on vote choice predicted by H5 was tested with a mediation model using bootstrapping (i.e., 5,000 bootstrapped bias corrected resamples), a more robust technique than the typical causal steps mediation tests (Hayes, 2009).

Initial analyses were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 18. The propensity score matching procedure was conducted with the PSMATCHING macro (version 3.0) developed by Thoemmes (2012) for SPSS. The indirect relationship was tested on Mplus 7.

## RESULTS

The results of the logistic regression models reported in Table 1 suggest the existence of both politically driven selective exposure and selective avoidance. Relative to independents, respondents identifying with the Concertación were significantly more likely to intend to see the film *No*, whereas those identifying with the Alianza were less likely to seek exposure to the film. When predicting film attendance, in turn, identifying with Concertación was the only significant predictor in addition to age.

The predicted probabilities shown in Table 2 make it readily apparent that Concertación identifiers were 2 to 3 times more likely to intend to view

TABLE 1  
Predictors of Intending to Attend and Attending the Film *No* (Full Sample)

	<i>Intending to attend:</i> Odds ratio [95% CI]	<i>Attending:</i> Odds ratio [95% CI]
ID Concertación	2.50* [1.88, 3.32]	2.29* [1.10, 4.74]
ID Communist	2.24* [1.42, 3.51]	2.44 [0.94, 6.30]
ID Alianza	0.35* [0.26, 0.49]	0.60 [0.19, 1.92]
Age group	0.63* [0.53, 0.74]	0.58* [0.35, 0.96]
Education	1.10 [0.92, 1.30]	0.99 [0.62, 1.58]
Socioeconomic status	1.11 [0.99, 1.25]	1.31 [0.94, 1.81]
Resident of Santiago	0.76* [0.61, 0.96]	1.59 [0.85, 2.95]
Catholic	0.70* [0.56, 0.88]	0.58 [0.31, 1.08]
Voted in 2010 election	1.28 [0.98, 1.66]	0.88 [0.44, 1.78]
Constant	1.49	0.03*
Nagelkerke $R^2$	0.17	0.08
<i>N</i>	1,488	1,488

Note. CI = confidence interval.

\* $p < .05$ .

TABLE 2  
 Predicted Probabilities of Intending to Attend and Attending the Film *No* (Full Sample)

	Intending to attend (No correction) %	Attending		
		(No correction) %	(Prior correction) %	(Weighting method) %
ID Concertación	68.2	4.1	1.8	1.8
ID Communist	65.7	4.3	1.9	1.9
ID Alianza	23.2	1.1	0.5	0.5

*Note.* Predicted probabilities reported in columns labeled “(no correction)” were calculated directly from the results in **Table 1**, holding all variables constant and varying only political identification. Predicted probabilities reported in columns labeled “(prior correction)” and “(weighting method)” present corrected estimates for rare events using the two methods advanced by King and Zeng (2000), using official box office figures of the film *No* when the survey was fielded and census estimates of Chile’s urban population age 18 and older.

the film and 4 times more likely to actually view it compared to Alianza identifiers. Thus, the data provide support for both H1 and H2.

On the other hand, H3 predicted that the role of political identification on intending to watch the film and actually attending the film is not equivalent across Concertación and Alianza identifiers. This expectation was not supported, as the relationships between coalition identification and each of the dependent variables was remarkably similar, with no statistical differences in the size of the coefficients,  $t(478) = -0.58$ , *ns*, for intention to watch, and  $t(478) = 0.45$ , *ns*, for watching. Thus, both selective exposure and selective avoidance were equally likely. We elaborate on this unexpected result in the Discussion section.

To assess if *No* had any effects on political attitudes, we now turn to the analyses conducted over the matched samples. Table 3 shows that watching *No* increases the odds of approving the performance of Concertación and decreases the odds of approving the performance of Alianza. Nevertheless, the only statistically significant effect was on retrospective job evaluation of Concertación. More specifically, respondents who watched the film were more than twice more likely to approve the way in which Concertación led Chile’s government in the 20 years after the Pinochet dictatorship than respondents who did not watch the film.

Of importance, this effect cannot be explained by self-selection, as the matched samples differ only in terms of exposure to the film and, furthermore, the analysis adjusts for political identification—the main confounding variable. According to this model, the predicted probabilities of retrospective approval of Concertación are 56.6% for those who attended

TABLE 3  
 Predictors of Current and Retrospective Evaluations of Concertación and Alianza  
 (Matched Sample)

	<i>Approves current performance of concertación: Odds ratio [95% CI]</i>	<i>Approves retrospective performance of concertación: Odds ratio [95% CI]</i>	<i>Approves current performance of alianza: Odds ratio [95% CI]</i>
Watched the film <i>No</i>	2.02 [0.92, 4.45]	2.13* [1.01, 4.49]	0.42 [0.15, 1.22]
ID Concertación	3.91* [1.81, 8.45]	4.82* [2.53, 9.19]	0.22* [0.09, 0.54]
ID Communist	1.52 [0.55, 4.19]	0.87 [0.37, 2.07]	0.73 [0.27, 1.94]
ID Alianza	1.78 [0.36, 8.79]	1.34 [0.40, 4.54]	6.38* [1.65, 24.62]
Age group	0.93 [0.54, 1.59]	1.02 [0.64, 1.64]	1.12 [0.62, 2.02]
Education	0.77 [0.46, 1.17]	1.07 [0.70, 1.65]	1.54 [0.93, 2.55]
Socioeconomic status	0.88 [0.62, 1.24]	1.13 [0.84, 1.53]	1.40 [0.97, 2.04]
Resident of Santiago	0.88 [0.45, 1.70]	1.06 [0.60, 1.87]	0.69 [0.35, 1.37]
Catholic	1.69 [0.89, 3.23]	1.52 [0.87, 2.65]	3.47* [1.72, 7.01]
Voted in 2010 election	0.88 [0.41, 1.90]	2.44* [1.25, 4.78]	1.13 [0.52, 2.48]
Constant	0.28	0.09	0.03
Nagelkerke $R^2$	0.15	0.25	0.29
<i>N</i> (matched sample only)	265	265	265

Note. CI = confidence interval.

\* $p < .05$ .

the film and 38.0% for those who did not attend the film. Therefore, although the results provide some support for H4, they are quite supportive of H5, as only retrospective Concertación judgments were significantly influenced by film attendance and not current evaluations of Concertación and Alianza.

Considering the previous findings, the test of H6 was restricted to the indirect effect of seeing the film *No* on the intention to vote for Concertación through retrospective evaluations. The estimation of this mediation model showed that there was a statistically significant association of retrospective evaluation on vote choice, odds ratio = 1.23, 95% confidence interval [1.01, 1.49], and a significant indirect effect of watching *No* on vote choice = 1.09, 95% confidence interval [1.01, 1.29]. Thus, respondents who watched the film *No* were 9% more likely to intend to vote for Concertación than respondents who did not watch the film. As a form of double-check, we estimated a model with current and retrospective evaluations operating as simultaneous, parallel mediators, but the results (not shown but available) remained unchanged; there was no direct effect of current evaluations on vote intention and no indirect effect from attending the film to vote choice through current evaluation. Therefore, the data support H6.

## DISCUSSION

This study addresses Mutz and Nir's (2010) call to study the political impact of fictional content by examining the potential influence of docudramas—a genre that combines fiction with facts—in the context of current debates on partisan selective exposure. By analyzing the 2012 release of the award-winning docudrama *No* about the 1988 Chilean plebiscite campaign that marked the beginning of the end of the military regime and, subsequently, put the center-left Concertación in government, it employed survey data and propensity score matching to examine who watched the film and with what effects.

There was strong evidence that intention to watch the film and actually watching it were governed by partisan selective exposure, with Concertación identifiers 2 to 3 times more likely to attend than nonidentifiers. Although evidence of partisan selectivity is abundant in studies using news and public affairs programming, the evidence is scant for other genres, particularly when it comes to media content that incorporates fiction. In this sense, the findings show that a political docudrama with a clear ideological stance such as *No* can trigger processes of selective exposure similar to partisan nonfictional content. Why is this? We can think of two possibilities. On one hand, the study was designed to fulfill several of Lenart and McGraw's (1989) conditions governing the effects of docudramas, as we measured direct exposure to *No*, the film strived for a realistic account of a major historical event, and the story was ideologically slanted toward (and against) clearly identified political groups that are relevant in Chilean politics at the time of writing. On the other hand, contextual effects may be at work. The film was released in the midst of an electoral campaign, when political identity becomes a more salient consideration for individuals' behavior. Furthermore, the release was timed for the 25th anniversary of the 1988 plebiscite, a fact not lost on journalists and news media. To the degree that news coverage “tuned in” audiences to the history of the plebiscite's campaign, film attendants could more easily engage with the plotline and characters (we come back to the notion of narrative engagement shortly).

More surprising are the results showing strong evidence of selective avoidance, with Alianza identifiers much less likely to attend *No* than Concertación identifiers and independents—all the more important because it demonstrates that we are dealing with avoidance rather than nonseeking behavior (Jang, 2014). Furthermore, selective approach and selective avoidance were equally likely to occur, in that the magnitude of the effects of political identification on the decision to watch the film was nearly identical for Concertación and Alianza identifiers. We say surprising because early work on selective exposure (Sears & Freedman, 1967), as well as more recent

research (Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2011), agrees that avoiding exposure to attitude-challenging content is far less frequent than seeking attitude-consistent content. Certainly this is not the first study to document that selectivity and avoidance can be equally prevalent (see, e.g., Garrett et al., 2014), but it is the first to test this similarity with a docudrama. One explanation for this finding derives from prior work showing that selective avoidance is more likely to occur when messages are harder to refute, because viewers may anticipate higher levels of cognitive dissonance (Kleinhesselink & Edwards, 1975). Unfortunately, we leave this for future research, as we do not have direct measures of refutability or source credibility and, hence, cannot put this explanation to test.

Of course, processes of partisan selective exposure and avoidance are interesting to document but somewhat inconsequential per se. What matters is the effect of selectivity on attitudes and political behavior. In the current study, we explore the possibility that viewing a historical docudrama may strengthen partisans' current vote choice through retrospective evaluations of political performance. The results provide evidence that is consistent with the notion of reinforcement effects. This result is important on both theoretical and methodological accounts. To date, there is inconclusive evidence about the possibility that exposure to congenial media polarizes audiences at the individual level (cf. Dilliplane, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012; Stroud, 2010), in part because the mechanisms by which exposure to like-minded content reinforces attitudes and behaviors have not been clearly delineated or directly tested. To this theoretical limitation, add the methodological hurdle of testing for reinforcement effects only when experimental or longitudinal data are available. In the current research, we posit and test the mechanisms by which like-minded media may strengthen individual's vote choice and, in addition, take advantage of propensity score matching's ability to identify effects in the presence of selection bias. Thus, we first show that for respondents with a similar likelihood of attending the film, actual attendance had a strong association with more positive retrospective evaluations of Concertación—the probability of approving past performance of the center-left group was nearly 17 percentage points higher in the watching group compared to the nonwatching group. Subsequently, we demonstrate that this attitudinal media effect had an indirect influence on behavioral intentions, such that viewing *No* increased indirectly the likelihood of reporting a preference of voting Concertación for the then upcoming mayoral elections—respondents who watched the film were 9% more likely to intend to vote for Concertación than respondents who did not watch the film.

These findings, however, are not without limitations. We measured only direct exposure to the film, but it may well be that some of the attitudinal

and behavioral intentions we estimate are due to indirect exposure, such as interpersonal discussion triggered by the film as well as press coverage of the movie that may influence the interpretation of the story portrayed by *No*. In fact, mediator variables such as informal political discussion and information seeking might be especially relevant for studying the effects of docudramas on viewers. Recall that docudramas blend fact and fiction. For viewers who experienced the real-world events portrayed in a docudrama, they have more information at their disposal to engage with the film's plot and characters. For viewers of pure fiction, instead, the connection with the real world may be more remote. And heightened narrative engagement, we know, makes discussion more likely (Landreville & LaMarre, 2011). At the same time, docudramas may lend themselves for more fact-checking activities than, say, documentaries, precisely because they represent a confusing mix of reality and fiction. Also, measuring previous knowledge of viewers about the historical facts portrayed on screen could be particularly illuminating, considering that *No* is situated in the recent past and, thus, it is possible that personal experience and generational effects may moderate these effects. As a consequence, future research could explore if the effects of docudrama viewing on attitudes and behaviors is explained by discussion, information seeking, prior experience and learning.

From a methodological perspective, there is always the possibility that the inclusion of additional covariates in the propensity score model as well as in the standard regression analyses could alter some of the results reported. For instance, there is evidence that psychological engagement with politics (as measured with well-known variables, including efficacy, interest, and knowledge) is a moderator of the effects of political media use (Valenzuela, 2009). Perhaps when controlling for engagement the effects reported here could change. Unfortunately, such a measure was not available in the current survey. Also, the perceived realism of the movie was presumed, not directly measured. And although propensity score matching may provide a more conservative estimate of media effects than typical regression models when dealing with observational data, it is not a cure-all (see, e.g., Arceneaux, Gerber, & Green, 2006). Another limitation refers to the test of indirect relationships. Strictly speaking, a test of mediation requires demonstrating first that there is a causal connection between the independent variable and the mediator, followed by a causal connection between the mediator and the dependent variable. In this sense, with the current data being a cross-sectional survey, we are limited in our ability to test for causality. Although voting intention is a relevant outcome, future research could replicate and extend the current study by investigating other types of political behavior. In fact, considering the mixed evidence on the behavioral effect of selective exposure and attitude polarization, as well as the distance between

intentions and actual behavior, it would be desirable to measure actual behavior, such as vote choice.

Limitations notwithstanding, the study contributes to existing literature on partisan selective exposure in several ways. First, we expand the range of relationships considered, moving beyond attitudinal reinforcement to behavioral intention. Second, we strike a balance between the external validity of employing a large representative survey with the internal validity of analyzing observational data in the form of a quasi-experiment, employing propensity score matching as a method for estimating average treatment effects of media exposure. Third, we break free from the two settings in which most current research on partisan selective exposure takes place—the United States and the news media—and opt for conducting our study in Chile with an Oscar-nominated film that combines fiction and reality in the form of a docudrama. Fourth, we explore intervening mechanisms in the study of partisan selective exposure, thus presenting a more complex picture of media-driven, reinforcement effects. On one hand, we apply the distinction between retrospective and current political attitudes, and on the other we posit that a docudrama can exert an influence on voting intention but indirectly, through attitudes. Moreover, we make quite clear that dramas about the past can indirectly change the electoral future, as they affect people's political behavioral intentions. Thus, future research may find worth exploring processes of partisan selective exposure with docudramas and fictional content.

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