

Laughing Through the News:

Comedy News and Political Behavior in Young Americans

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Over the past 20 years the number of people age 18-24 who watch conventional television news has steadily decreased, while the number who watch comedy news has gone up.

- Is comedy news a good source of political news?
- How does news format impact opinion forming and information retention in young people?
- Does watching comedy news have an impact on the likelihood of a person to vote?



Key Findings

Content vs. Comedy

- An analysis of *The Daily Show* found that the show included the same amount of substantive political coverage as broadcast news programming.
- Where *The Daily Show* includes "comedy" content, television news includes "hype" or "horserace" coverage of politics.
- *The Daily Show* tends to be the exception, not the rule in terms of substantive news coverage.

Learning from Laughing

- The way a viewer orients themselves towards the show impacts how much they learn from a comedy news program. If they view it as news, they learn more than if they view it as comedy.

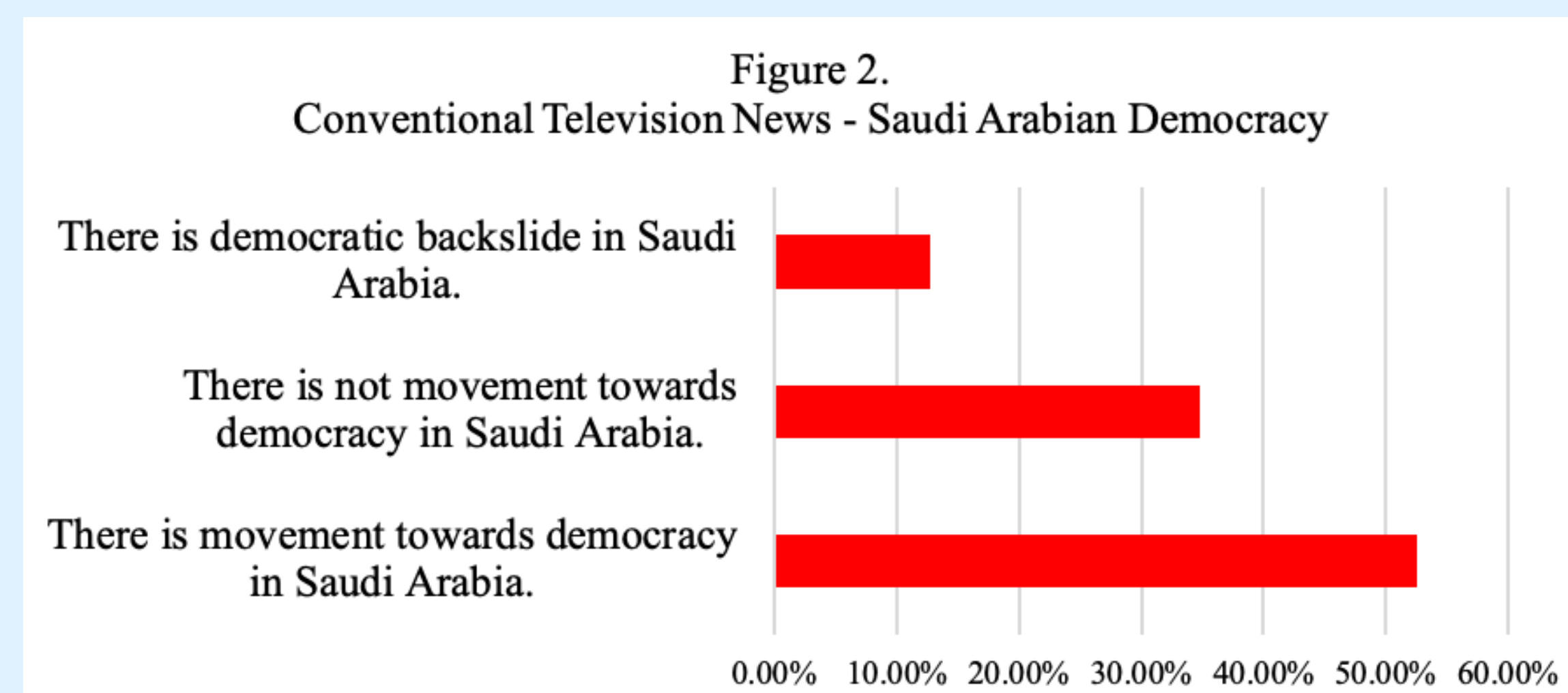
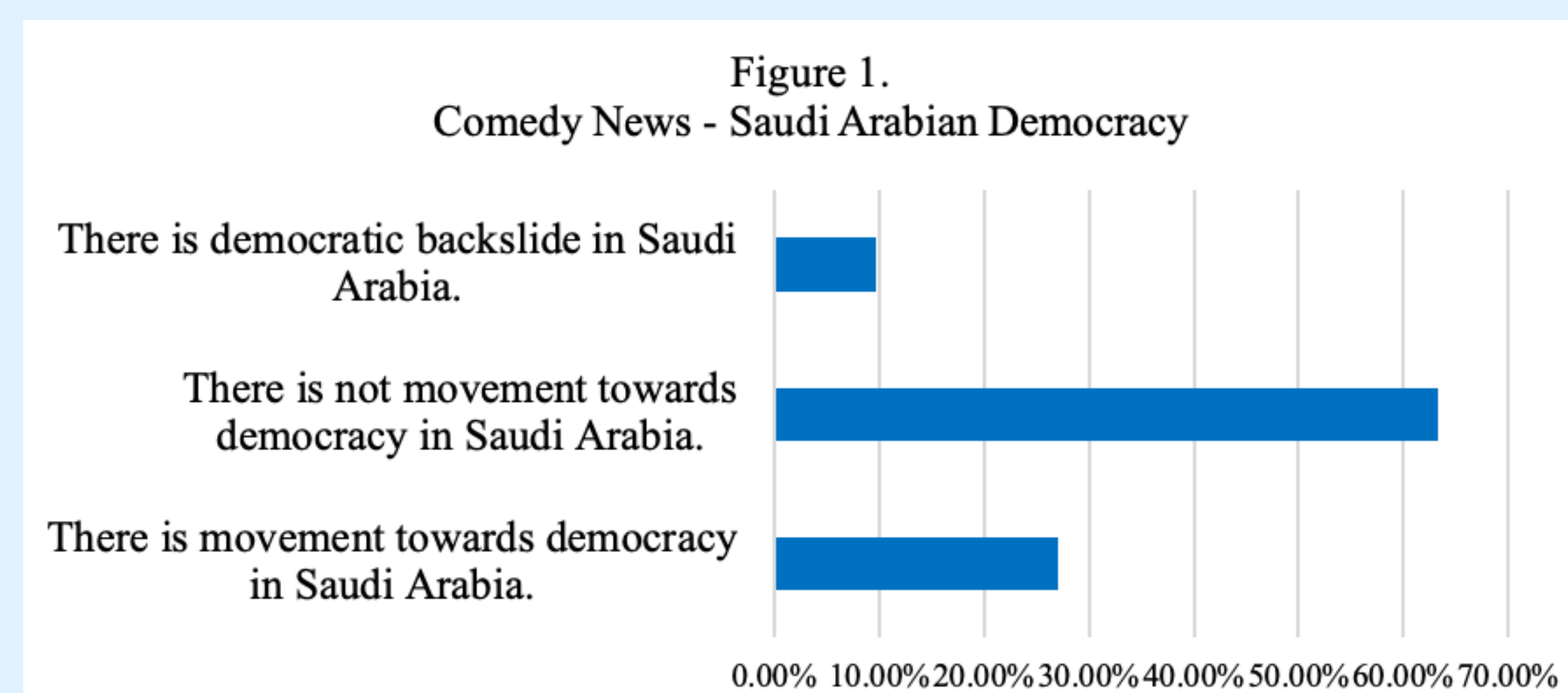
Gateway Effect

- By “piggybacking” political information on top of entertainment, comedy news gives politically unengaged viewers some exposure to news topics.
- Comedy news makes information more accessible to people without prior political knowledge and more likely to seek out other additional news sources.

Original Survey Results

A survey of 307 American Government students at MU was conducted to learn about the impact of comedy news on opinion forming and information retention.

Participants were more likely to answer opinion questions in ways that agreed with the commentary of the news clip they viewed, regardless of the type of news.



“Nothing says democracy like a royal decree”

Comedy News programs like *The Daily Show* use humor to emphasize parts of a news story that conventional television news hosts cannot.

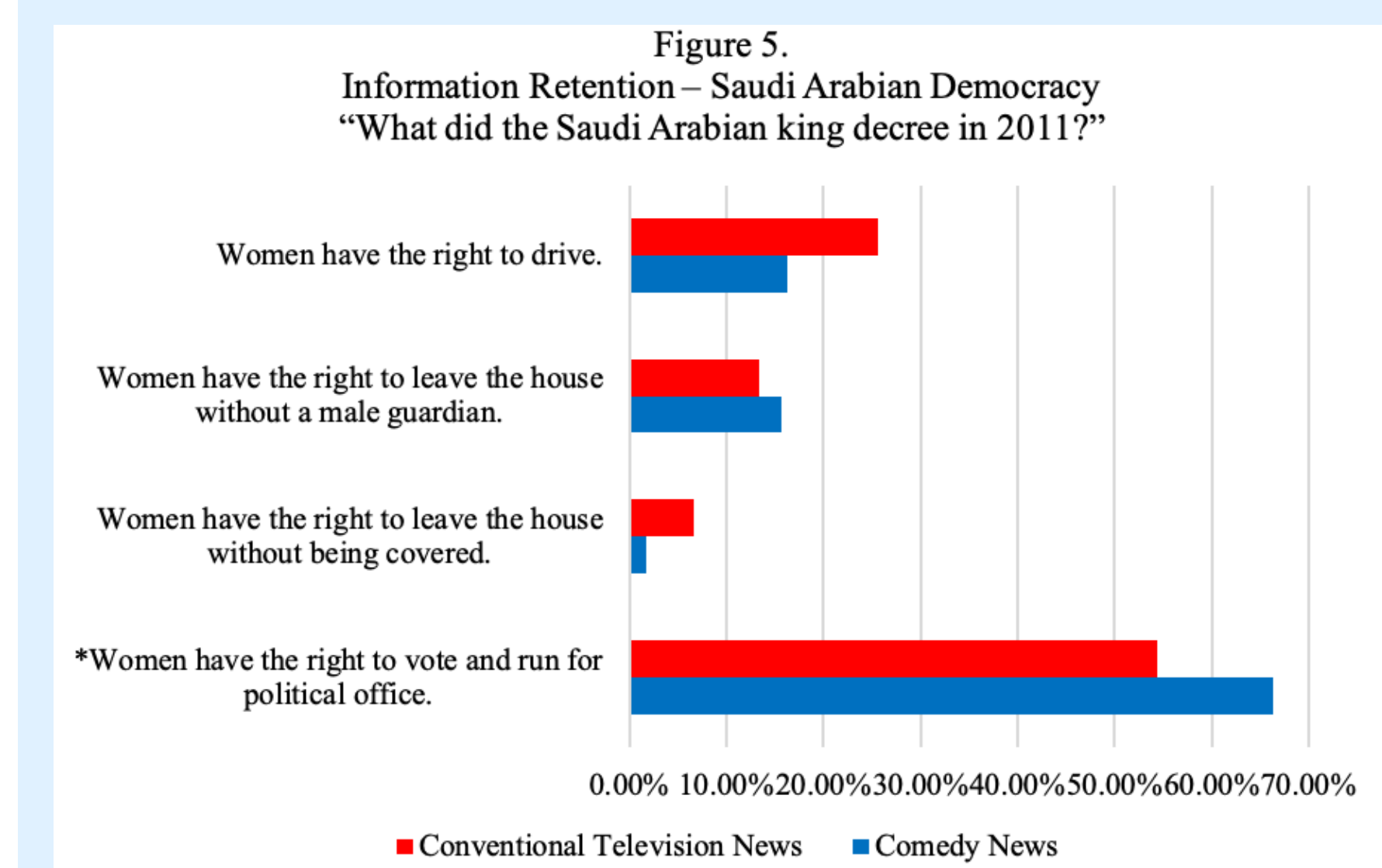
Stewart made jokes about the poor state of women's rights and democracy in Saudi Arabia, which emphasized those aspects of the story in ways *NBC News* did not.



News & Information Retention

Hypothesis... People who viewed comedy news would be more likely to recall information a week after viewing.

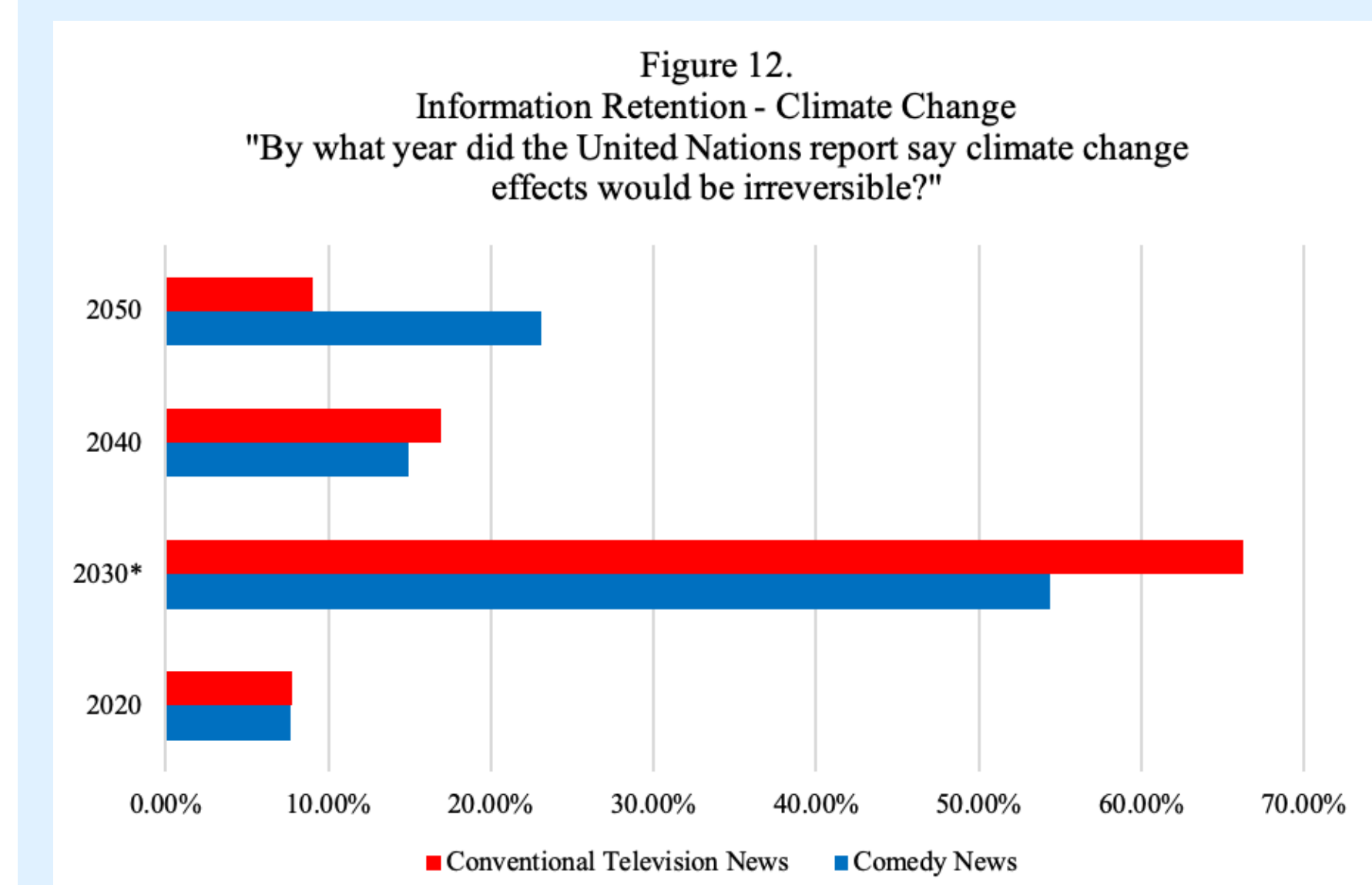
Result... Factors such as visual and auditory queues have a greater impact on information retention. But, jokes can serve as an auditory queue to recall information.



Daily Show viewers were able to recall details from the news headline better than *NBC News* viewers in the study.



SNL's news segment *Weekend Update* tends to lack the visual queues that help viewers retain information.



SNL viewers did not recall details from the news headline as well as *Daily Show* viewers in the study.

Future Research

This research shows the potential for comedy news to be a gateway to political information and to inform viewers of the news. More research should analyze real world comedy news viewers and the content of current comedy news programs.