

Reports from the Field:
Earned Local Media in Presidential Campaigns

Joshua P. Darr

Assistant Professor
Louisiana State University
Manship School of Mass Communication
Department of Political Science

jdarr@lsu.edu

September 4, 2017

Accepted, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

Presidential campaigns that understand the behaviors and interests of media organizations are rewarded with increased exposure in the news. Campaigns attract attention from local media by appealing to the news values of proximity and conflict. I compare campaign coverage in areas with and without a local campaign presence using an original, nationwide dataset from three recent U.S. presidential elections, and find that candidates receive more stories in the local press in areas where they establish a presence. By subsidizing locally framed content, campaigns can increase their local earned media, with larger effects in competitive states and areas without investments in previous elections.

The political information that voters receive before an election is, in a sense, the outcome of a power struggle between politicians and the media. Recently, political observers have grown concerned that the balance of power is tilting too far towards politicians, culminating in a debate about whether the media “created” Donald Trump’s candidacy by giving him disproportionate coverage.¹ Can presidential campaigns exploit the propensities of news organizations to increase their media coverage, thereby distorting the quantity of information accessible to voters?

Presidential campaigns are increasingly contested within a small, strategically determined set of “battleground states,” rewarding candidates for focusing narrowly on those voters and local issues. Voters in areas that campaigns choose to contest receive disproportionate amounts of information on the campaign, while those in “safe” or “spectator” states receive hardly any attention. While previous studies found evidence that voters in competitive and contested areas have higher levels of political participation, interest, and engagement, they focus on exposure to advertisements and campaign contact: no nationwide study has examined whether increased attention from local media contributes to these discrepancies (Gimpel et al. 2007; Lipsitz 2009). If campaigns can influence their coverage in the local newspaper, voters may be more likely to be influenced by that coverage than by advertisements (Druckman and Parkin 2005; Kahn and

¹ Confessore, Nick, and Youniss, Karen. 2016, March 15. “\$2 billion worth of free media for Donald Trump,” *The New York Times*, retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/jgo7tkq>; Sides, John, 2015, July 20, “Why is Trump surging? Blame the media,” *The Washington Post*, retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/hkz7yf7>; Silver, Nate, 2016, March 30, “How Trump hacked the media,” *FiveThirtyEight*, retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/hdopz66>.

Kenney 2002). Increased coverage of the campaign is a necessary first step towards that mechanism, and such a phenomenon has not been demonstrated in research.

In this article, I show that campaigns can earn additional coverage through their local investment strategies. In previous research, I used a single-state case study to show that campaigns could use a local presence to earn positive coverage in resource-poor local newspapers (Author). I expand upon that study here by testing for the impact of campaign investments on quantity of news coverage nationwide, and offer the appeal of locally constructed campaign stories as a mechanism. Campaigns ease local media's translation of national campaigns into local stories when they choose to compete in an area. Non-local campaigns that integrate an understanding of the behaviors and interests of news producers into their communications efforts receive the reward of increased exposure.

Using an original dataset from the U.S. presidential election cycles of 2004, 2008, and 2012, I find that candidates receive more attention from the press in areas where they invest in a durable local presence—particularly in areas of intense or novel competition. I use robustness checks and placebo tests to demonstrate that this effect is not explained by reverse causality, sample bias, or campaign investment in areas of opportunity. I also exploit an instance of uncommon campaign investment—the Obama campaign's (successful) decision to contest Indiana in 2008—to provide additional evidence that campaign activity explains variations in coverage. I conclude by exploring the implications of campaigns' strategic leverage over the media on the information environment encountered by voters in U.S. elections.

News Incentives and Campaign Strategy

The media and politicians each have goals for their appeals to their intended audiences, and benefit from cooperating to achieve them (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995). Reporters and the organizations that employ them want to inform their consumers with newsworthy material while reducing reporting and production costs, while political campaigns simultaneously allocate their limited resources in order to influence the media and the public (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; Stromback and Kioussis 2011). Just as politicians do not have unlimited resources to spend on voter outreach and political public relations, media organizations are constrained by lack of time, money, and staff. Politicians and their campaigns, surrogates, and volunteers must account for these constraints if they wish to reap benefits from their inevitable interactions with the press.

Politicians' relationship with media is "strategic" in the game theoretic sense: their actions, and those of their associated campaigns and staff, depend upon their expectations of how news organizations will respond (Dixit, Skeath and Reiley 2014). Politicians and their staff structure their communications strategy around the propensities and practices of the media, a process known as the "mediatization" of politics (Altheide and Snow 1979; Esser 2013; Esser and Stromback 2014; Stromback 2011). Which side holds the upper hand in this "negotiation of newsworthiness" depends upon the goals of the media and candidates and their relative power to achieve them (Cook 2005). Today's media are an independent institution whose logic other actors must accommodate in order to achieve their goals (Hjarvard 2008).

From a nearly infinite universe of possible stories, news is selected and produced according to media firms' assessments of the types of stories that will maintain credibility, maximize readership and advertising revenues, and minimize costs (Hamilton 2006; Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004). Despite professing objective reporting and quality coverage as their

primary motivations, local news producers adopt norms that hold audiences' attention and please their advertisers (McManus 1994). Media norms and reporting practices are adopted to make producing the news cost-effective and produce coverage that reporters and editors believe will be appealing to readers (Altheide and Snow 1979; McManus 1994). For instance, media organizations may conduct market research to better know their readers' consumption preferences, emphasize coverage of publicly available polls to appear unbiased, and accept easily accessible sources of political information such as press releases and interviews (Sparrow 2006).

These common practices and routines address fundamental constraints facing news producers, such as access to newsworthy figures, budget limitations restricting travel and data access, and publication deadlines (Sparrow 1999; Harcup and O'Neill 2016). Journalists conform and comply with standards and practices such as these not in response to managerial decrees, but rather to minimize conflict with their peers, satisfy diverse constituencies (including audiences, investors, advertisers, and news sources), and increase the efficiency of their workplace (Breed 1955; McManus 1994; Sigelman 1973). As such, journalistic standards and practices tend to be uniform across media firms of varying sizes across the U.S. and internationally (Breed 1955; Cook 2006; Shoemaker and Cohen 2006; Sparrow 1999). Sensationalism and horse-race style campaign reporting dominate on local television and in local newspapers because editors believe that type of coverage will retain viewers (Rosenstiel et al. 2007). Politicians can achieve a strategic advantage by adapting their communications strategies to these aspects of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Esser 2013; Esser and Stromback 2014).

This remarkable consistency in journalistic practices across organizational ownership, market size, and even state and national borders makes the media's behavior predictable and vulnerable to management by politicians (Breed 1955; Cook 2005). Costlier stories to pursue

tend not to make it to press as often, which incentivizes politicians to subsidize the creation of their preferred stories through supplying access and information (Allern 2002; Gandy 1982). Stories with a perceived appeal to target audiences are often prized by journalists and editors, a propensity campaigns may exploit through press releases and other targeted communications (Flowers et al. 2003; Niblock and Machin 2007; Stromback et al. 2012).

News values are the judgments of journalists regarding the qualities in a story that influence the selection of that story for publication (Harcup and O'Neill 2016; Donsbach 2004). Taxonomies of news values provide “a shared shorthand operational understanding of what working journalists are required to produce to deadlines” (Harcup and O'Neill 2001, 2016). Though it is difficult to issue a complete explanation of what news organizations will value in a story (Brighton and Foy 2007; Schultz 2007), studies of these news values are valuable for revealing the processes behind news selection (Galtung and Ruge 1965). There are many potential criteria for judging the newsworthiness of a story, such as celebrity; prominence; surprise; good or bad news; conflict; and proximity (or relevance) to intended readers (Harcup and O'Neill 2001; Schultz 2007). Campaigns wishing to manage their news will benefit from accounting for these standardized norms of newsworthiness as a part of their earned media strategy, creating stories that appeal to these values and conveying them to media outlets (Gandy, 1982). News values impact campaign coverage regardless of campaign influence (Iyengar et al. 2004), but campaigns can leverage those values through their investments and emphasis.

Local media aim to produce more original, locally framed news about exciting and broadly relevant political contests. Given the choice, the media will devote more attention to politicians who are competing for, or who currently hold, more powerful offices such as the U.S. presidency (Cohen 2010; Cook 1986; Sellers and Schaffner 2007; Sheafer 2001; Vos 2014). The

well-known personalities of national politicians appeal to media's propensity to cover politics through personalizing issues and conflicts (Bennett 2012). Local media also prefer to cover national politicians, given that over seventy percent of local news consumers report an interest in national politics (Cohen 2010; Kaniss 1991; Miller et al. 2012; Mitchell 2016). Presidential candidates are also, by definition, on the ballot for all consumers in the market, unlike many lower-level races (Arnold 2004; Snyder and Stromberg 2010). These attractive aspects of campaign coverage, when combined with the most attractive attribute of local news to consumers—a comprehensive local focus on stories of significance (Rosenstiel et al. 2007)—make local presidential campaign stories irresistible to the local press.

In this instance, the interests of campaigns and local media intersect—campaigns want to increase candidate name recognition and earn volunteer support, and local media want to produce broadly relevant, locally-framed content. Local newspapers, by definition, will primarily publish stories from within their market, which are easiest to report and most attractive to their readers and potential advertisers (Kaniss 1991; Rosenstiel et al. 2007). I predict that presidential campaigns, the source of incredible media attention every four years, will be attractive subjects of coverage for newspapers when they are locally available and competitive. U.S. presidential elections are nominally national contests that are contested mostly in strategically determined battleground states and counties within those states (Shaw 2006; Coffey et al. 2011). In the interaction between presidential campaigns and local newspapers, I expect the news values of proximity and conflict to be most susceptible to campaign manipulation.

Proximity. In recent years, presidential campaigns in the United States have increasingly made localized investments in staff and office space. When a campaign invests in an area, voters are more likely to participate in that campaign (Cho and Gimpel 2010; Gimpel et al. 2007).

Presidential campaigns make it easier for local newspapers to cover their activities when they invest in a local campaign presence. Locally placed staffers can form relationships with reporters in the area, becoming sources for news about the candidate and the national election (Harber 2011; LaPotin 2011). When the campaign holds “pseudo-events” such as rallies, house parties, or volunteering “days of action” in an area, those staffers can contact the reporters to make sure the events are covered (Boorstin 1962).

Influencing coverage in the local press may not be the primary purpose of campaigns’ local investments, but is a worthwhile goal to help achieve more efficient voter contact and mobilization. A deputy state field director for the 2008 campaign described their process in an interview with the author: though field staffers themselves were instructed not to speak with media, surrogate visits and “days of action” were publicized to local media through dedicated communications teams in the state.² The high priority placed on connecting field activities with local press was reflected in the campaign’s staffing. The Obama operation in Ohio employed four Regional Communications Directors (one for each corner of the state), while the Florida campaign combined regional communications with outreach to specific groups through the hiring of Deputy Communications Directors for the Miami region (focusing on Hispanic media), the Tampa region (African-American media), south Florida (Jewish media), in addition to north

² This staffer did not wish to be named. Also, see Enos and Hersh (2015) for more on why campaigns may be reticent for field staff and volunteers to speak directly with the media.

Florida and a Regional Press Secretary in central Florida.³ Earning local media coverage is a clear goal of campaigns, and is considered a worthy investment of staffing resources.

Increased exposure among local newspaper consumers allows campaigns to attract volunteers from an active and engaged constituency. Local news consumers are more likely to participate in activities and politics in their community, giving them civic skills that make them more valuable campaign volunteers (McLeod et al. 1999; Moy et al. 2004; Nicodemus 2004; Verba et al. 1995). Reading local newspapers is associated with higher levels of political participation than local television viewing, and local television stations rarely convey meaningful amounts of local political information (Rosenstiel et al. 2007). Coverage of mobilization efforts may attract these engaged consumers. The 2008 election featured more coverage of voter mobilization than any election since 1960 (Jarvis and Han 2011), and field office openings in particular earned substantial local coverage (Walls, 2008). Volunteers are necessary for large-scale, in-person mobilization, and local coverage may serve as an invaluable recruiting tool.

Familiarity with voters is also crucial to electoral success, and media exposure leads to higher name recognition (Bartels 1988; Campbell et al. 1984; Goldenberg and Traugott 1980; Panagopoulos and Green 2008; Zajonc 1968). Incidental or even subliminal exposure to candidate names can lead to significant effects on vote choice, feelings about candidates and inferences about the viability of candidates (Kam and Zechmeister 2013; Gaissmaier and Marewski 2011). Given the potential benefits of subsidizing stories and access, campaigns should attempt influence over their press coverage by appealing to those powerful news values.

³ Alejandro Miyar, Adora Andy, Bobby Gravitz, Kevin Cate, and Laura McGinnis, respectively.

These data can be found at <http://p2008.org/obama/obamagenoh.html> and <http://p2008.org/obama/obamagenfl.html>.

A campaign's decision to compete in a given region subsidizes the comparative cost of producing news stories about the election for local reporters and editors (Dunaway and Stein 2013; Gandy 1982). By encouraging the production of locally framed content in local newspapers, campaigns should stimulate the publication of more stories about the election while leading newspapers to shift more of their resources towards presidential coverage.

H1: Newspapers in areas with a campaign presence will publish more stories about the election than newspapers in areas without a campaign presence.

Conflict. Presidential campaigns spend the most money and resources in winnable states that will help them exceed 270 electoral votes (Shaw 2006), and the majority of candidate appearances, advertisement purchases from local television stations, and get-out-the-vote activities occur within these battleground states (Gimpel et al. 2007). Voters' levels of interest, knowledge, familiarity, and turnout are significantly higher in battleground states than in states that campaigns ignore (Lipsitz 2009; Gimpel et al. 2007). Readers in battleground states want more coverage of the national election, and their local news organizations stand to profit from it. These hotly contested states are the sites of electoral uncertainty and drama, a combination of appealing attributes that should lead to increased coverage in the local news (Bennett 2012).

Local news organizations, however, often lack the resources to cover presidential politics regularly (Cohen 2010). The cost of covering prominent politicians is lowered when political activity comes to them (Barrett and Peake 2007). In these instances, reporters fill their stories with the logistics of the event and interviews with local residents, demonstrating their commitment to imbuing national political stories with a local angle (Eshbaugh-Soha 2010; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2006). States with longer periods of high-intensity campaigning

experience a greater volume of campaign news stories per day—particularly articles discussing the competitive context of the election (Dunaway and Stein 2013).

When elections are competitive, the media's supply of horserace and strategy coverage increase to meet perceived demand from consumers, insulate reporters from claims of bias, and supply cheaply produced content (Belt and Just 2008; Hayes 2010; Iyengar et al. 2004; Rosenstiel et al. 2007; Sparrow 1999).⁴ In the small subset of states experiencing intense investment from a presidential campaign, local media outlets may be even more inclined to cover presidential politics and should be particularly susceptible to the ability of a local campaign presence to lower the cost of producing that coverage.

H2: Newspapers in areas of battleground states with a campaign presence will publish more stories about the election than those in areas of battleground states without a campaign presence.

Data and Measures

Testing these hypotheses requires accounting for the dispersion of campaign investments, differences in newspaper resources and locations, and variations between elections. To address these concerns, I assembled samples from the 2004, 2008, and 2012 U.S. presidential elections from the Newsbank database of American newspapers, combined with an original dataset of county-level variation in local campaign presence. I use newspapers as my example of local

⁴ Though there is substantial evidence that horserace coverage does not actually lead to higher ratings and marketplace success (see Belt and Just 2008; Rosenstiel et al. 2007), the idea that it does has been shown to be common among news producers in qualitative and quantitative studies (McManus 1994). I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting these points.

media content because newspapers contain the most trusted and extensive coverage of politics at the local level (Druckman 2005; Dunaway 2008; Just et al. 1999).

Campaign presence. Presidential races attract widespread attention in the news because every region of the country can vote in the election. This national scope provides useful variation in areas of campaign investment for my analysis. I use the county-level location of Democratic presidential campaign field offices to represent local campaign presence.⁵ Field offices are only one way campaigns can invest in local areas: they can air advertisements in those markets, send the candidate to hold rallies, and/or send surrogates and endorsers to speak on the candidates' behalf. For my purposes, however, field offices are the most durable measure of campaign presence in an area, since they are often established several months before Election Day (Nielsen 2012). Field offices function as coordination points for the get-out-the-vote efforts that have become increasingly prominent in recent years (Author; Masket 2009; Masket et al. 2015). Field offices, therefore, are a good measure of campaign investment: they engage voters, persist for several months, and conduct regular activities on behalf of the campaign. They are the site of many events for attracting local support and host such events in the community, making them a sufficient proxy for local campaign activities as well.

⁵ Having field offices from only one party is a limitation, but other studies have demonstrated that findings are not significantly different when analyzing the effects of field offices from both parties. For examples in the 2012 election, see Masket, Sides and Vavreck (2016). Using only one party should only weaken my estimates of the effects of local presence. Future research could use 2012 or 2016 data from both parties to examine questions concerning competition and party-specific effects. Data on field office locations come from GWU's Democracy in Action website: <http://www.gwu.edu/~action/>.

Sample of newspapers. The 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections represent a confluence of useful data and trends for testing these hypotheses. Although having a longer cross-section of elections for testing would be optimal, there are benefits to using these three. The 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections were distinguished by campaigns' increasing investment in field presence (Panagopoulos and Wielhouwer 2008). Online, full-text availability of newspapers also began to increase around this time. There are several options for online full-text newspapers, including Lexis-Nexis, Newsbank (also known as Access World News), and ProQuest. There is little variability between these sources in the amount or quality of the content that they archive: all three locate between 79% and 91% of print articles on local, state, and national news (Ridout et al. 2011). Given these similarities in thoroughness, I utilized Newsbank, the most thorough online full-text newspaper resource available to me, to construct my nationwide sample.

Newsbank's sample includes an extensive sample of newspapers in the three years and the states sampled,⁶ but newspaper headquarters themselves may reflect a geographic bias. As Figure 1 shows, though there are around 1,400 daily newspapers in the United States, vast areas of the nation—indeed, the majority of the nation's counties—do not contain a daily newspaper headquarters (Editor & Publisher 2008). Though newspapers likely circulate in these counties, the focus of these newspapers will tend to remain in their home city or town (Kaniss 1991).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Rural areas are particularly underserved by daily newspapers, as are less populated counties. Many of the counties in Idaho, Maine, Utah, and Nevada, for instance, do not have daily newspapers and must rely upon larger cities nearby. Recognizing this uneven county distribution, any valid online sample of newspapers should reflect a similar geographic bias. Table 1

⁶ Alaska is not included in my analysis because of inconsistencies in their electoral reporting.

compares several critical demographics of the areas containing newspapers in the Newsbank sample in 2008 to areas with a newspaper in the *Editor & Publisher* census of daily newspapers.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The largest differences between counties with and without newspapers are their urban/rural scores and their total population.⁷ On average, counties with newspapers are larger and closer to metropolitan areas than counties without newspapers. This is particularly noticeable in the differences in average population: counties with newspapers contain more than 150,000 more residents than those without, though a few outliers (such as Los Angeles County, California or Cook County, Illinois) undoubtedly skew these means upwards. Newspapers find more potential customers in these larger, more urban counties. Those customers are also better equipped to spend money on the news, as they earn (on average) \$5,000 more per year than Americans in counties without newspapers. Newspapers' locations are biased towards metropolitan, wealthy areas.

The locations of newspapers within Newsbank's sample matches the bias of American newspapers. The gap between urban/rural scores of counties in Newsbank is nearly identical to that of all national newspapers (~ 2.2), while the difference in population is slightly larger. The gap in median income is also nearly the same (~ \$5,000). Though Newsbank's sample does not include all American newspapers, the demographic differences between the two samples are in the expected directions and approximately the same magnitude, making Newsbank a valid and geographically representative database for testing my hypotheses.

⁷ The Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture determines urban/rural scores. Scores of 1-3 corresponding to metropolitan areas, while scores 4-9 classify non-metropolitan areas. Data comes from the U.S. Census, 2003.

Newspaper content. I include stories from the entirety of Newsbank’s Database of American Newspapers for one day in 2004, one day in 2008, and one day in 2012. Practically, a nationwide study of local newspaper coverage of the entire post-Labor Day period of the campaign is not feasible, as the data collection process would be too time-consuming.⁸ I selected these three Tuesdays—October 22, 2004, October 24, 2008, and October 26, 2012—based on their identical distance from Election Day (two weeks out) and their relative insulation from major campaign events or exogenous shocks from world events. On these days, candidates were travelling in different states, the final debate was at least a week in the past, and the stock market was quiet compared to surrounding days.⁹

I conducted two searches for these selected days: one search for campaign-relevant stories and one “blank” search, containing no terms, that returned all stories published in Newsbank’s database. The political search contained three components: the last names of the two

⁸ Given the time-consuming nature of collecting data on the entirety of American newspapers’ published content for a given day, I chose to include three days from three different elections, rather than multiple days in the same election. This decision bolsters the generalizability of the findings beyond one election and the consistency of my estimates between elections.

⁹ The final weeks of October 2008 were a period of great upheaval in the markets: though the Dow Jones rose 171.48 points the day before, this change was actually the smallest change in the week from 10/20 to 10/28, when the average daily movement of the Dow Jones (in either direction) was 388 points. Stories in the news regarding the major events of 2004’s pre-election period—notably the Iraq War and Abu Ghraib—were consistent across the days surrounding October 22nd. In 2012, October 26 fell several days before the landfall of Hurricane Sandy, and no major market fluctuations occurred.

major candidates (i.e., “Kerry OR Bush”); the date; and an exclusion term for letters to the editor.¹⁰ Letters to the editor are interesting in their own right, but because they do not require any expenditure of resources by a newspaper, they are inappropriate subjects for this study.¹¹ I used the blank search to measure the number of articles included in each paper that day as a way to scale the number of articles devoted to the campaign (Galvis et al. 2016). The amount of total content in a given newspaper is a reasonable proxy for newspaper resources, which should be accounted for in any analysis of newspaper output (Schaffner and Sellers 2003). By using the number of stories returned by Newsbank, I capture this critical control variable within Newsbank’s sample and account for any sample biases inherent to that database.¹²

I used a program I developed in the computer language Python that extracted text from the HTML code of downloaded Newsbank search result pages. This script created a dataset of newspaper stories containing the name of the newspaper, the city and state in which it was

¹⁰ The search term used was [Not “Letter* NEAR3 editor”] in Newsbank’s search engine, accounting for any time “Letter” or “Letters” appeared within three words of the word “editor” in a headline. I recognize that newspapers may refer to letters to the editor under different titles (or no title), but such a thorough set of exclusion terms was not feasible in a nationwide sample.

¹¹ Opinions, editorials, and wire stories are included because newspaper editors subscribe to those services to provide content, and due to the excessive complexity of removing them from the dataset. Wire stories and national editorials are included inconsistently in Newsbank, an admitted limitation of this study.

¹² Newsbank provides a list of available newspapers for a variety of date ranges. I have narrowed each year’s sample to those date ranges and cross-checked that list with the actual newspapers returned by a blank search.

located, the words per story, and the headline of each story. I then summed stories within each newspaper to generate observations representing each newspaper's content on the day in question, producing the fundamental unit of my analysis: the "newspaper-day." I matched the newspaper data to relevant county-level political and demographic variables, including the location of Democratic campaign field offices, to create the final dataset for analysis. This process required matching each newspaper's listed city and state to its county, which I accomplished by merging with a dataset containing all place names in the United States and correcting the minimal number of errors by hand. The resulting datasets provide a representative picture of newspaper coverage on the presidential election, and its proportion to all other news, on each of these three days across a substantial sample of the nation's newspapers.

Methods and Analysis

The statistical models I chose account for the strategic nature of campaign resource allocation and the variation between newspapers and locations. Previous studies on the effect of field offices on partisan turnout have dealt with the strategic nature of campaign field investment by utilizing fixed effects and a battery of significant political and demographic variables that may affect campaign investment strategies (Masket 2009). The fact that multiple newspapers may exist within any given county precludes the use of county-level fixed effects for single-election analysis. Additionally, campaign resources are allocated strategically to accumulate at least 270 electoral votes, making methods that assume random assignment inappropriate. Given my nationwide sample and a search string including both candidates' names, the bias of individual newspapers is less of a concern for this analysis and should balance in the aggregated analysis.

Newspapers vary in their capacity for content and in the amount of content they report to Newsbank, which could lead to biased estimates. I utilize measures for total campaign-relevant stories in each subsequent analysis to capture these factors. Figure 2 displays the summary statistics for campaign content and non-campaign content across years and campaign investment.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Newspapers in areas with campaign presence publish more stories and more campaign-related stories than newspapers in counties where campaigns do not invest. The 2012 data closely resembled 2008 across the entries in Figure 2, including the total number of newspapers, but there was considerably less content per newspaper-day produced in 2012 and 2008 than in 2004. Areas with campaign presence clearly contain more stories about the campaign, according to several metrics, than areas without a campaign presence.

The differences in campaign coverage between areas with and without campaign presence are roughly similar in all three elections. This proportional difference exists for both campaign stories and for overall stories in the Newsbank sample for each newspaper. Across all three elections, places with campaign presence generated over two percent more campaign stories. The consistency of these descriptive statistics in different election cycles gives me confidence that any observed differences in campaign content cannot be explained simply by quirks of the sample, though I will subject this possibility to further scrutiny in several later tests.

My model also includes factors that contribute to differences in the amount of news content that could mistakenly be attributed to the influence of the independent variable: Democratic vote share in 2000, population, median income, percent African-American, and percent of residents with a Bachelor's degree.¹³ These variables address the role of partisan

¹³ For a table of covariates by year and campaign presence, see Table A1 in the Appendix.

motivation and preference in news production, consumption, and targeting by campaigns. Partisan factors can influence the production of news separate from campaign activity (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010). Newspapers in heavily Democratic areas cover Democrats more frequently (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010), and Democrats target African-American areas for more voter contact.¹⁴ Areas with more people provide a larger customer base for newspapers, particularly if those customers are wealthy and highly educated (Hamilton 2006). Finally, as discussed earlier, I include a measure of the total content in Newsbank in each newspaper.

I use a negative binomial count model with state-level fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered at the county level, to account for the unevenly dispersed variance of the data and unobserved differences between counties and states. The state-level fixed effects absorb the impact of contemporaneous state elections and other variation between states. This specification strategy controls for several possible correlates of news production and minimizes confounding from geographic variation.

The negative binomial count model used is specified by Equation 1, below:

$$\log(y_i) = \alpha + \beta_1 Presence_i + \Gamma_1 Demographics_i + \beta_1 TotalStories_i + \delta_{s(i)} + \varepsilon_{i(c)} \quad (1)$$

where y_i represents the number of stories returned by a search of candidate names, α represents the intercept, $Presence_i$ denotes my binary variable measuring campaign presence, $\Gamma_1 Demographics_i$ denotes the vector of demographic variables described in the preceding paragraph, $TotalStories_i$ represents the total amount of all content per newspaper in the

¹⁴ Demissie, Addisu, 2012, October 26, “A super-close look at Ohio, the state that could decide it all.” *The Grio*, retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/cke8rm8>.

Newsbank sample, $\delta_{s(i)}$ is a set of state-specific fixed effects, and $\varepsilon_{i(c)}$ is a stochastic disturbance term clustered at the county level.¹⁵

I employ joint hypothesis tests of coefficients to test for effects across elections. The null hypothesis for the joint significance test is constructed according to a simple average of the constituent parts of a null hypothesis test, $H_0: \frac{\beta_1}{\sqrt{(se_1^2)}} = 0$, as represented in Equation 2 below:

$$H_0: \left[\frac{(\beta_{Presence_{2004}} + \beta_{Presence_{2008}} + \beta_{Presence_{2012}})}{\sqrt{(se_{Presence_{2004}}^2 + se_{Presence_{2008}}^2 + se_{Presence_{2012}}^2)}} \div 3 \right] = 0 \quad (2)$$

The results of this statistical significance test ($p < 0.05$) apply to the estimate of an average of the coefficients on campaign presence in each year. The joint test of my primary coefficients in each analysis provides an estimate of the statistical significance of my hypothesized effects.

Results

Results are displayed as incidence rate ratios, providing an interpretation of the effect size of the coefficients generated by negative binomial regression.¹⁶ The incident rate ratio for each independent variable denotes the change in the probability of an event (the dependent variable)

¹⁵ Though there is a test for effects of field offices on quantity of coverage in Author (Year), those tests—a two-election sample of eight newspapers within one state, assessed with a simple t-test that does not determine effect size—bear little resemblance to the nationwide regression analyses of story counts in 2004, 2008, and 2012 presented here. Accounting for various factors described above—the uneven dispersion of my count variable, contemporaneous statewide elections and state-specific factors, and differences between counties—I provide a robust estimate of the influence of a local campaign presence on quantity of local coverage.

¹⁶ Standard errors are similarly transformed.

given a one-unit change in the independent variable, and standard errors are adjusted to reflect this shift in interpretation. Incident rate ratios greater than one indicate the percent increase in the count of dependent variable, while incident rate ratios below one represent the percent decrease in the count of the dependent variable. Using these specifications, I can determine the impact of campaign presence on newspaper output while accounting for variation between regions.

Story counts. My nationwide sample of newspapers allows me to test H1, addressing the impact of a local campaign presence only, on the full national sample of newspapers. For my tests of H2, I restricted the sample to battleground states only, according to the mutually contested states in each given election.¹⁷ The results from my analyses of story counts are presented in Figure 3. The analysis of H1 on the nationwide sample of newspapers appear in Columns 1-3; results from the analysis of H2, using the battleground state sample restriction, appear in Columns 4-6.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

National sample (H1). Newspapers in areas with a campaign presence publish higher quantities of campaign news content than newspapers in areas without a campaign presence.

Joint hypothesis tests across all three cycles show that campaigns can encourage significantly

¹⁷ The following were battleground states in each of the elections. 2004: Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin (Shaw 2007). 2008: Nevada, Montana, Colorado, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Florida (Kenski et al. 2010). 2012: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Wisconsin (from Cooper, Michael. 2012, May 5, "9 swing states, critical to presidential race, are mixed lot," *The New York Times*, retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/zr9qpum>)

more stories ($p = 0.032$) about the election in areas where they choose to invest their resources. In areas with a campaign presence, newspapers produce an average (across all three elections) of 18.3% more stories [IRR = 1.183; SE = 0.078] about the election than newspapers in areas that campaigns ignore. This effect varies in size and significance between elections, but these results support H1 in tests across these three election cycles, including most placebo tests of reverse causality (see Appendix Tables).¹⁸ Local newspapers in areas where campaigns invest include more election-relevant stories.

Battleground states only (H2). There is an even larger effect of local campaign presence on the quantity of published newspaper campaign content in the most competitive states. In joint hypothesis tests across all three elections, there are significantly more stories ($p = 0.002$) in

¹⁸ It is important to account for the possibility of reverse causality, i.e. the possibility that campaigns place offices in areas where newspapers are more favorable. If this were the case, campaign presence in future elections would predict past publication of campaign stories. I tested for this possibility by conducting a placebo test, the results of which are presented in Table A5 in the Appendix. Placebo tests identify when selection bias might be affecting the results by exploiting temporal variation: using campaign presence at time t to predict outcomes at time $t-1$. Since a future event cannot predict a past one, a significant coefficient would suggest that perhaps an omitted variable may be driving the findings: campaign presence in 2012, for example, should not significantly predict the number of stories published in an area in 2008. These tests reveal that, unfortunately, future campaign presence significantly predicts 2004 content production. This could be a function of the Kerry campaign's relatively smaller scope, or the reduced number of newspapers in the 2004 sample. Encouragingly, there are no placebo effects of 2012 campaign presence on 2008 local newspaper content, across similar samples.

counties within battleground states where campaigns establish a local presence. In areas where campaigns invested, there were 51.9% more campaign stories [IRR = 1.519; SE = 0.124] published compared to areas they ignore across all three elections. This effect is noticeably higher in 2008 and 2012 (78.3% [IRR = 1.783; SE = 0.312]), when there was a more aggressive and comprehensive field effort by Obama's campaigns in 2008 and 2012 than by Kerry's campaign in 2004 (Author).¹⁹ In places where the election is contested, local newspapers are susceptible to campaign influence on their election coverage.

Percent of total stories devoted to the campaign. Count-based models may not fully account for newspaper resources or the available news space in each newspaper, and cannot address whether newspapers shifted more resources towards campaign coverage or merely increased the number of all stories. I address this issue by using the percentage of total stories relevant to the campaign as my dependent variable and re-estimating Equation 1 utilizing ordinary least squares (OLS) regression instead of a negative binomial count model. These regression coefficients are presented in Figure 4.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

National sample (H1). There is a positive and significant effect of a local campaign presence on the proportion of newspaper space devoted to campaign news in joint significance

¹⁹ I conducted a similar analysis for field offices in non-battleground states in each of the three election cycles, presented in Table A4 in the Online Appendix. Campaign-relevant stories did not increase significantly in joint hypothesis tests across all three samples. Interestingly, local campaign presence had a significant and positive effect on stories in 2004, but not 2008 or 2012. Non-battleground state field offices may conduct different activities than those in contested states (Author), and future research should try to understand them better.

tests across all three elections. Newspapers in areas with a campaign presence devoted, on average, 1.3% more stories [SE = 0.006] to campaign coverage than newspapers in areas lacking campaign investment. This total amount of coverage includes not only political news, but also sports, arts, obituaries, and all other newspaper content. A 1.3% increase in campaign stories per day, though not particularly substantial, represents a shift in the allocation of news space that corresponds to campaign investment.

Battleground states (H2). Similar to the results for story counts, newspapers in areas with a campaign presence in 2008 and 2012 devoted more space to stories about the presidential campaign: 2.5% [SE = 0.009] and 3.2% [SE = 0.013], respectively. Across all three elections, there was an average of 2.2% [SE = 0.012] more space devoted to the presidential campaign in areas with a campaign presence, a weakly significant ($p < 0.1$) effect. Within battleground states, where competition is fierce, the media may moderately shift their resources to cover the election when campaigns make that decision easier for them.

Assessing Newspaper Expectations: Indiana in 2008

These findings show that newspapers in areas where campaigns invest resources publish more about the campaign. However, these results do not describe the type of coverage or eliminate alternative explanations regarding newspaper strategies. Addressing these questions require micro-level testing at the state or local level with samples from specific newspapers.

One possible confounder deserves additional investigation: newspapers' *expectations* about political coverage. Newspapers in areas with frequent campaign activity—the battleground states of Florida and Ohio, for instance—may hire more political reporters and invest more space

in the election, and vice versa in areas often ignored by campaigns.²⁰ If newspapers in areas without frequent campaign activity do not regularly hire political journalists and devote more space to campaign coverage, a campaign may not earn local coverage. This dynamic could provide a powerful alternative explanation for the preceding results.

Unfortunately, since the same areas tend to receive campaign attention in most presidential elections (Gimpel et al. 2007), it is difficult to assess this proposition with a national sample.²¹ Since battleground states rarely cease to be at least somewhat competitive, the ideal situation would involve a previously uncontested state becoming contested in only one election. If newspapers barely respond to increased local campaign presence because of their lack of capacity or interest, it would call the impact of campaign investments into question. Similarly, if those same newspapers publish more stories in the election following the contested election—even though the state returned to uncompetitive status—that would imply that newspapers hired more reporters, meaning that newspaper resources and editorial decisions influenced coverage levels more strongly than campaign investment.

The Obama campaign's uncommon investment in Indiana in 2008 provides a context for further examination of these trends. In the modern election cycles preceding 2008, Indiana's newspapers had little local presidential campaign news on which to report. From 1968 to 2004, Democrats averaged below 40 percent in presidential elections in the state (39.07%). Obama

²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising these concerns.

²¹ I conducted one test of a similar dynamic in the national sample, in which I restricted the sample to only those areas without a 2004 field presence. The effect remains positive and significant (IRR=1.289, $p = 0.008$), indicating that areas with habitual campaign presence do not fully explain the main results. This full table is found in Table A6 of the Online Appendix.

nonetheless invested heavily in the state, setting up offices in 33 Indiana counties, and eventually won the state with just under 50 percent of the total vote. In 2012, Obama opened no offices in the state and lost by double-digits. These changing strategic considerations left Indiana's local media with far less to cover in the 2012 campaign than in 2008.

Newspaper articles were downloaded from four Indiana newspapers over the two months preceding election day in 2004, 2008, and 2012 from Newsbank.²² The four sampled newspapers were the *Evansville Courier & Press* (circulation: 65,981), the *Herald-Times* of Bloomington (circulation: 26,433), the *Chronicle-Tribune* of Marion (circulation: 16,286), and the *La Porte County Herald-Argus* (circulation: 12,538).²³ As Figure 5 shows, the sampled newspapers are geographically dispersed across the state and unlikely to cover the same events.

[Insert Figure 5 here]

Focusing on one state made it practical to examine a longer time period and classify stories into categories of original reported news (defined as non-opinion content produced by employees of the newspaper) and opinion-editorial content. Letters to the editor and syndicated content were excluded from the sample, given the focus on content produced by the newspapers themselves. Story counts by year and story type (reported news or op-eds) are presented in Figure 6, below.

²² The search terms used were “Kerry OR Bush” in 2004, “Obama OR McCain” in 2008, and “Obama OR Romney” in 2012, and the dates searched are September 2, 2004 – November 2, 2004; September 4, 2008 – November 4, 2008; September 6, 2012 – November 6, 2012.

²³ Each of these newspapers is available in Newsbank in 2004, 2008, and 2012. The average Indiana newspaper circulation in 2008 was 18,396 (Editor & Publisher, 2008), and the average circulation of newspapers available in Newsbank in 2008 was 22,163, resulting in a sample with two newspapers above and two newspapers below the average circulation.

[Insert Figure 6 here]

The total amount of presidential campaign coverage clearly increased in 2008, the only election in which there was campaign activity in Indiana, and this increase is explained entirely by a rise in reported news. Across all four newspapers, there were 114 reported stories about the presidential election in 2004, 155 in 2008, and only 71 in 2012. The steep decline from 2008 to 2012 suggests that newspapers did not respond to the attention in 2008 by expanding their political coverage: with no campaign activity in the state in 2012, there was less to cover. There were roughly the same number of op-eds about the campaign in 2004 and 2008, with another dropoff in 2012. Local campaign activity, therefore, did not stimulate more opinion pieces and editorial attention, even as it led to an increase in reported campaign news.

This state-level test, exploiting a rare shift in campaign strategies, bolsters the conclusion that campaign activity leads to more newspaper coverage. These Indiana newspapers covered the campaign far less in the two elections without campaign attention than in 2008, when the Obama campaign made the state competitive. Reporting on the campaign seems to respond more strongly to the campaign itself than to the political history and preferences of local newspapers.

Conclusion

Campaigns “coproduce” their coverage on the local level by navigating the biases and vulnerabilities of the media they hope to influence (Cook, 2005). Candidates may view the media as subject of manipulation to their benefit. The local press should serve as a check on rhetoric and promises made by candidates, by making issues relevant to their audiences through localization and translating a national campaign into its expected impact on nearby businesses

and voters. If candidates can increase the quantity of their coverage without even having to visit a community in person, they will necessarily exert more control over their exposure in local media.

Campaign strategy influences not only the information environment, but also the local media environment that voters encounter through the media before elections. Local news about campaigns informs consumers of the contextual implications of the election in their community, and the amount of political information available to citizens has important downstream consequences for interpersonal communication, knowledge, and participation (Gershtenson 2003; McLeod et al. 1999; Mondak 1995). Citizens become more informed about politics if they have higher opportunity to learn, and increased campaign coverage in an area may contribute to that opportunity (Delli Carpini et al. 1994). Candidates who appear more often in the news enjoy higher name recognition and warmer feelings from voters, and voters may be more likely to participate in their campaigns (Kam and Zechmeister 2013). These benefits to participation may balance out some of the normative concerns about the independence of the local press.

Future research should explore other dynamics of earned media in local markets. Data from both Democratic and Republican campaigns in 2012 could be used to address the effects of partisan competition. A textual analysis of local stories could also provide insights into campaigns' relative ability to influence the tone and content of their coverage in local newspapers. It is also possible that these dynamics may differ in statewide elections, such as gubernatorial or senate contests. In these more inherently local contexts, candidates may have an easier time crafting their arguments to particular areas and earn coverage. Tracking the earned media effectiveness of localized campaign messages is an important topic for future research.

Trends in the circulation of newspapers, as well as their endorsements, should be examined in subsequent research on this topic. Though my lack of data on these attributes of

newspapers is a limitation, data on the year-by-year circulation and endorsement decisions of more than 1,000 newspapers over three election cycles was beyond the scope of this article. Data on the resources of newspapers, and the decline of this medium over the past decade, could be combined with story counts to determine whether the observed effects are worsening over time. Endorsements may lead to more coverage or merely to better coverage, and may work in combination with a local campaign presence, and future research should aim to disentangle these effects using more comprehensive data.

Campaigns' ability to earn media coverage shapes the information that Americans use to make their participatory decisions. Though it may seem unsurprising that campaigns receive more coverage in the local news in areas where they invest, this has not been shown empirically, and these information asymmetries may have important effects on knowledge and participation (Gimpel et al. 2007). Local media are responsive to specific decisions by campaigns that cater to their professional values and routines. Media organizations depend upon campaigns to supply them with newsworthy events, opening them up to management by strategic candidates and their staff. The structure and strategy of campaign organization wields growing influence over not only voter mobilization, but also the media coverage received by candidates. The ability of local media to report objectively on national elections in their local context is compromised by the strategic investments of campaigns, and as the local press weakens and national campaigns raise record amounts of money, these dynamics should only strengthen.

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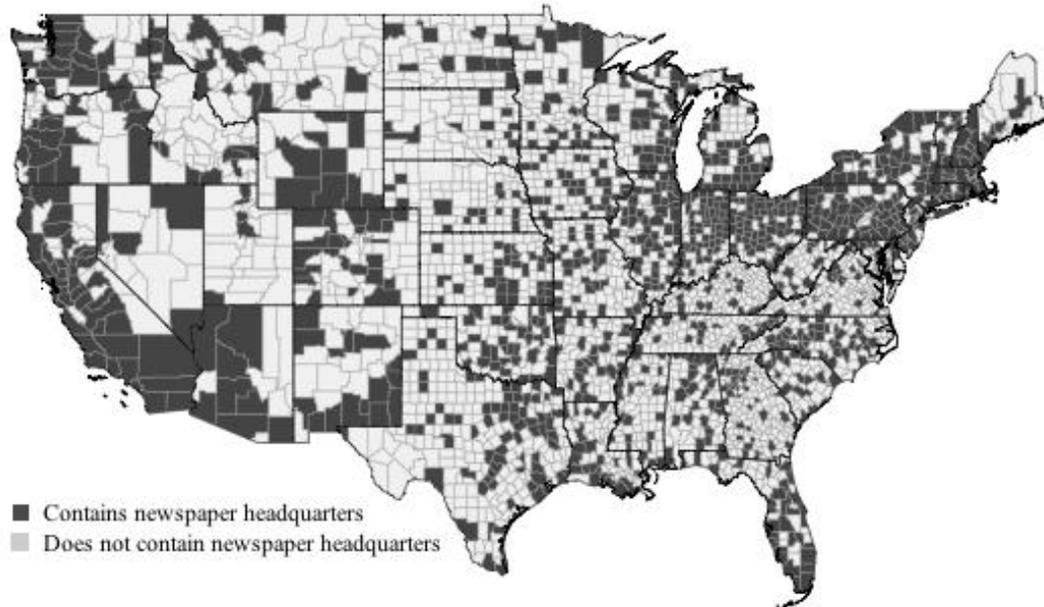
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Table 1. Qualities of areas with newspapers, 2008.

	(1) Urban/rural score (1-9; higher = more rural)	(2) Mean population	(3) Median income by county	(4) N of counties (total = 3,113)
Newspaper located in county	3.75	205,939	\$47,218.81	1,171
No newspaper in county	5.93	32,200	\$42,167.86	1,942
Newsbank newspaper in county	3.47	260,654	\$47,820.32	790
No Newsbank newspaper in county	5.66	42,088	\$42,791.71	2,323

Data from Editor & Publisher International Yearbook, 2008.

Figure 1. Counties with and without a daily newspaper headquarters, 2008.



Note: Data from Editor and Publisher International Yearbook, 2008.

Figure 2. Campaign-relevant content and other content per newspaper-day by year and campaign presence.

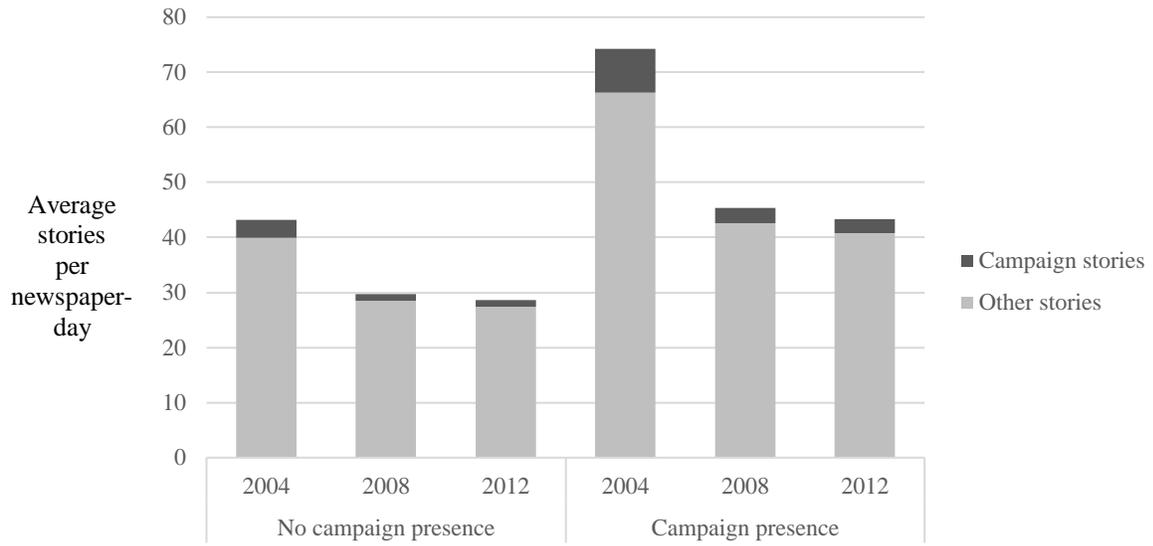
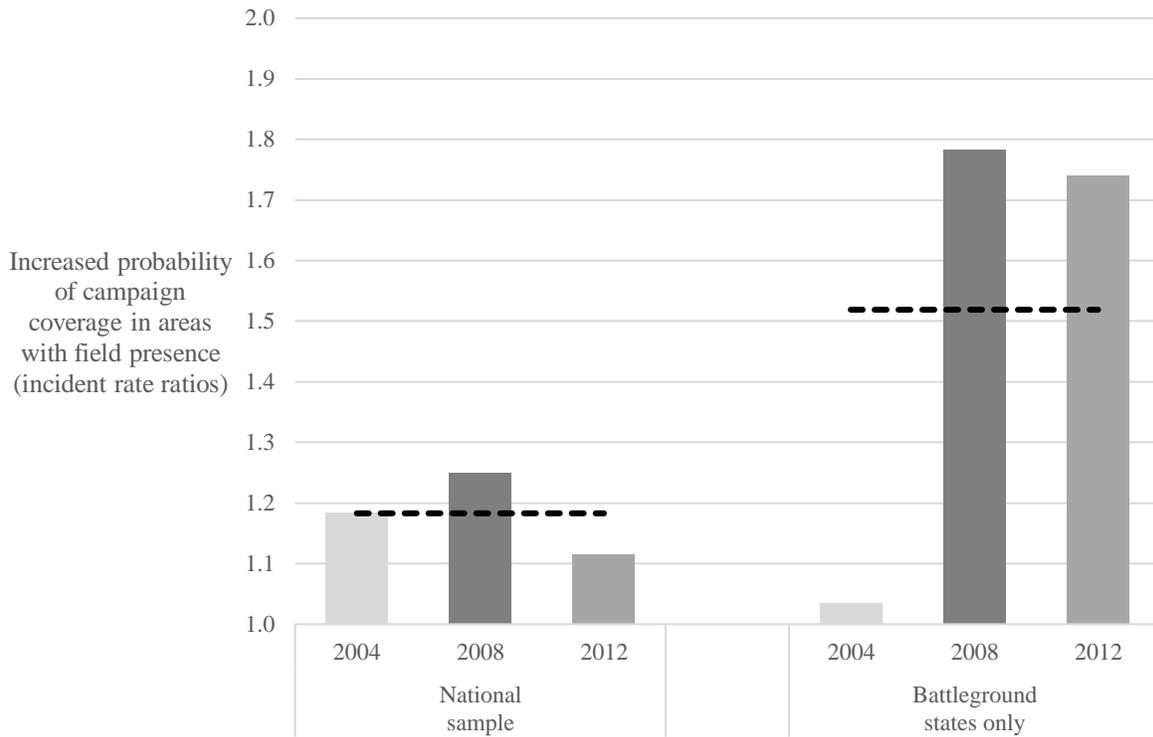
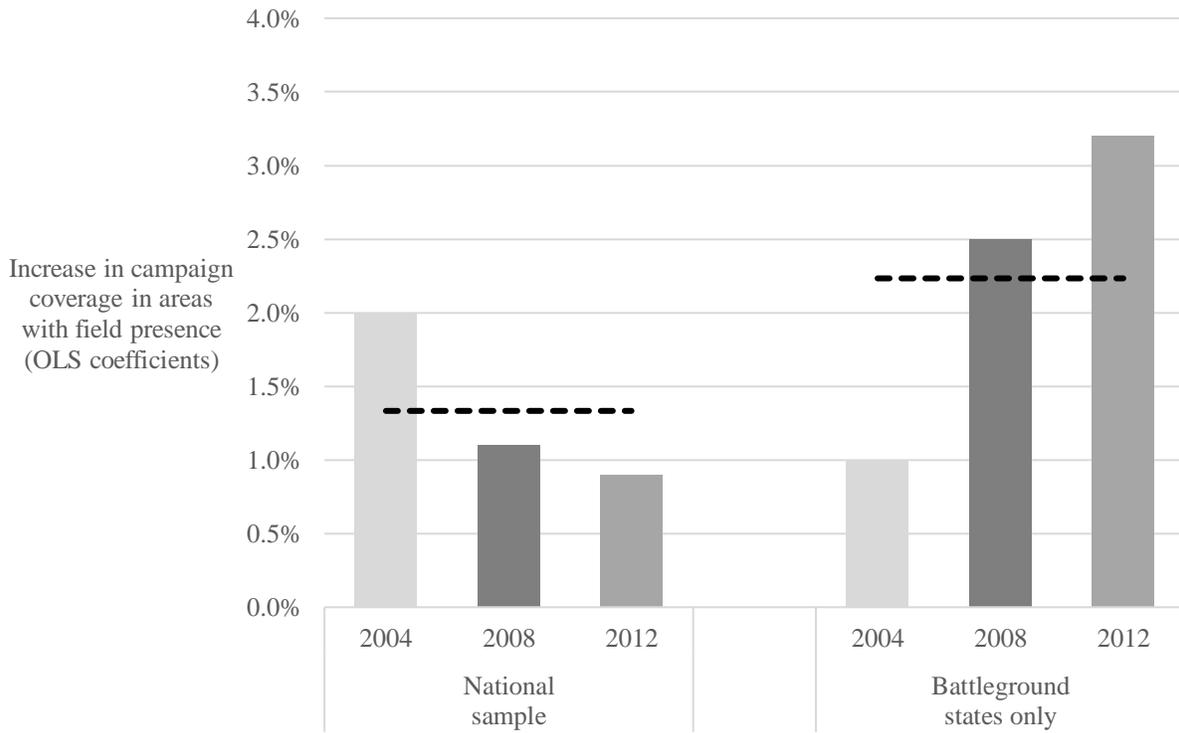


Figure 3. Incident rate ratios of the publication of campaign-relevant stories in areas with a local campaign presence.



Note: Dotted lines represent mean probability increase across all three election cycles. Full results found in Table A2 of the Online Appendix.

Figure 4. Increased proportion of campaign-related stories in newspapers in areas with a campaign presence.



Note: OLS coefficients. Dotted lines represent mean coefficient across three election cycles. Full results found in Table A3 of the Online Appendix.

Figure 5. Newspapers included in Indiana state-level analysis.



Figure 6. Total reported stories and op-eds by presidential election year, selected sample of Indiana newspapers.

