

**DO DIFFERENT MEDIA MATTER? HOW NEWSPAPERS VARY IN THEIR COVERAGE  
OF CAMPAIGNS FOR STATE LEGISLATURES.**

JESSE FORMAN

UNDERGRADUATE HONORS THESIS

SANFORD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

DUKE UNIVERSITY

DURHAM, NC

PROFESSOR ROGERSON

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To my mom, dad, sister, and friends who encouraged me to set far-reaching goals and challenge myself.

And

To the Sanford School of Public Policy, who makes it possible for students to perform independent research and pushes them to think outside the box.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Research Question</b> .....	3
<b>Theoretical Framework</b> .....	4
<i>Campaign and Election Factors</i> .....	6
<i>Incumbent Status</i> .....	6
<i>Political Party</i> .....	7
<b>Media Factors</b> .....	9
<i>Journalist's Preferences/Tone</i> .....	9
<i>Name Placement/Article Location</i> .....	10
<b>A Multi Factor Framework</b> .....	11
<b>Hypothesis and Observable Implications</b> .....	12
<b>Method</b> .....	14
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	15
<i>Study Measures</i> .....	17
<b>Findings</b> .....	19
<i>Preliminary Information</i> .....	19
<i>Presidential Coverage</i> .....	20
<i>Incumbency</i> .....	25
<i>Political Party</i> .....	25
<i>Tone</i> .....	27
<i>Name Placement</i> .....	28
<i>Time Series Data</i> .....	30
<b>Discussion of Results</b> .....	32
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	39
<b>References</b> .....	45
<b>Appendix 1</b> .....	46
<b>Appendix 2</b> .....	48

**Abstract:**

This research serves to shed light on a topic that has received little to no prior attention: the ways in which local media report state legislative campaigns. Previous research has tested the relationship between federal elections and the media, but the same cannot be said at the state level. Using a content analysis of *The Austin-American Statesman*, *The Sacramento Bee*, and *The Columbus Dispatch*, the differences and similarities in media reporting between states of different political affinities were tested. A study of newspaper output for six months before Election Day on November 6<sup>th</sup> found that state legislators are rarely reported in the news at all. In a total of 360 politically relevant articles found in this time span for the three newspapers, only 26 articles contained information about state legislators. This shows that newspapers provide very little coverage of these figures. Although the conclusions drawn from these results were forcibly limited in scope, this research found supporting evidence that incumbency, political party, tone, name placement, and federal coverage all contribute to the explanation of how newspapers cover state legislative campaigns. In the case of *The Columbus Dispatch*, a swing state newspaper, federal legislators received a much higher degree of attention than the comparative coverage in the other two newspapers.

## **Introduction**

On June 10, 2012, *The Austin-American Statesman* printed an article titled “Return of Political Force Still Dream of State Party.” The article is about the Republican dominance in Texas and asks the rhetorical question: When will the Democrats take a stand against the right wing conservatives? Talking points of the piece include general Texas politics as well as federal politics. On the federal level, the mentions of President Obama were mostly in the context of campaign contributions. Although Texas is largely Republican, some residents of the states supported Obama and wanted to raise money for his campaign. When referencing local politicians, however, little to no context was given. The article states, “Senator Kirk Watson, D-Austin, said he stopped worrying about the party’s future.” Come November of the same year, Watson would be running for a political seat of his own. But when the opportunity arose for reporters to use him as a meaningful source and talk about the Texas political scene, the only campaign coverage he received was a paraphrased quote. Watson, like other legislators in the state, couldn’t get newspaper coverage. How can this phenomenon be explained?

Without a doubt, a strong relationship exists between media and politics. Especially during campaign season, political candidates use the media to establish a positive image with the public whenever possible. While many politicians use public relations teams or press releases to influence the flow of information to the media, the news coverage these figures receive is not always in their control. Newspapers have an obligation to write stories that their readership will enjoy. Sometimes, intrinsic factors of a candidate such as incumbency and political party affect reporting trends. Incumbents usually have higher name recognition than challengers and people often follow political news based on party alignments. Both of these factors should be discussed when qualifying the relationship between the media and state legislative elections.

Additionally, journalists and editors will always have some degree of influence over media output. Writers have the freedom of word choice, tone, article structure, sourcing, and lead writing. Editors carry influence over which topics receive attention and what information published. Sometimes, editors may even selectively organize the newspaper in a certain way to incorporate a desired effect of structural imbalance (Fico and Freedman 2008).

Although professional journalists are supposed to uphold ethical values of objectivity and fairness, there are numerous ways in which bias can make it into the news. As Graber states, journalists may help “build the public agenda when they create the political context that shapes public opinions,” but the ultimate say in the political process lies with the politicians themselves (Graber 1989, page 169).

So far, different possible factors have been discussed that may affect political news coverage. The extent to which these factors actually play a role in the news still remains to be seen. This paper intends to both characterize the specific relationship between legislative elections and the media and compare these newspaper behaviors in regions with different political tendencies.

**Research Question:**

My central (general) question is: How does the media compare in their coverage of campaigns for state legislature?

My research (specific) question is: How does local coverage of state level campaigns for political office vary across politically diverse newspapers? Conclusions for this research are based off the measured effect that certain variables, such as incumbency, political party, and word choice have

on newspaper output. Specifically, these factors will be analyzed in the largest daily newspapers from Austin, Texas; Sacramento, California; and Columbus, Ohio.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The first step in analyzing the differences in newspaper reporting and elucidating the media trends in state-level election news coverage is proving that the media have an element of choice in reporting politics. This element of choice leaves room for newspaper discretion and bias. The purpose of this experiment is to gauge how strongly and in what ways these biases emerge in local newspapers. Without the proven existence of personal choice, there would presumably be no differences in media reporting.

Research by Tan and Weaver tested first-level agenda setting for state politics. First-level agenda setting relates to issue salience; it emphasizes the media's role in telling consumers what to think about. The findings show the existence of positively correlated relationships between newspaper agendas, the public agenda, and the policy agenda in varying strengths (moderate, strong, and weak, respectively). The fact that the newspaper itself has an agenda supports the idea that media have some independence in choosing how to report politics. Since newspapers have different goals, their patterns of reporting will vary. Also, this research showed, "a strong positive relationship between the newspaper agenda and the policy agenda in fifteen U.S. states from 1989 to 2006," indicating that external factors may affect newsroom and journalistic decision making in news coverage of politics (Tan and Weaver 2009, page 454). Further research is needed to determine what exactly these factors are and how they affect newspaper outputs.

Prior studies have shown evidence that two separate categories of relationships exist to explain how the media report governmental elections. The first relationship draws on the

political factors of a candidate including incumbency and political party. The second relationship analyzes the non-candidate centered variables, including journalistic tone and politician name placement within the article. A look at prior research will help further elucidate the importance of these variables on campaign coverage.

Before beginning the theoretical framework on which this research is based, it is important to mention that the current discussion about the media's effects on state legislative elections exists only to a very limited degree. Studies of similar topics have often been performed in the context of public opinions or election outcomes, but little to no existing literature compares how different newspapers report legislative election news coverage. I have searched for examples of research examining this relationship within the United States, but have come up short in my results. This has forced the following literature review to turn elsewhere for supporting evidence on the subject.

Similar media topics of political reporting have been analyzed outside the realm of local politics, including federal and international cases. This research acknowledges that the political and media structures in foreign countries are different than the current systems operating within the United States, but the proven existence of these relationships in other countries will further guide this research. These examples are helpful to conceptually understand which relationships may be applicable in the United States. Although this framework is atypical, it served its purpose by clarifying the concepts that were used to study media coverage in the United States.

## ***Campaign and Election Factors***

### ***Incumbent Status***

Prior research has shown that it is important to consider the effect of tone when analyzing reporting trends for state legislators. A study by Deacon, Wring and Golding provided an analysis of the British 2005 general election. Their research focused on the different ways in which national and local broadcasters and newspapers reported the campaign. The results concluded, “comparisons with elections since 1992 show that the incumbent political party has consistently commanded higher levels of media attention (Deacon et al. 2005, page 3).” Without a doubt, incumbency in British elections affects the frequency of media coverage, lending credence to the idea that incumbency status influences news output.

Another study completed in the United Kingdom regarding the role of local press in constituency campaigns yielded results similar to those above. The study acknowledges that representatives use the media to create a sense of presence and leadership in society. Since incumbents have the most access to the media, they can receive coverage more easily than challenging candidates (Negrine 2005).

Further support for the relevance of the incumbency variable can be found by turning to the Far East. A study of the 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan explains the importance of incumbency during a campaign. The research showed the direct relationship between public broadcast television and political incumbents. State owned broadcast television was much more likely to give a greater amount of coverage to the ruling party and its candidates (Lo, Neilan and King 1998). State owned television in Taiwan gave positive coverage to political candidates of the current ruling party, thus increasing the saliency of this politician come voting time.

Although state owned broadcasting is unpopular in the United States, this study also supports the hypothesis that local media may give more attention to incumbents.

Ruling parties in Taiwan benefited from state ownership of the media, and seated politicians in the United Kingdom received more opportunities to be in public eye. Political incumbents in both countries were given the political advantage of receiving coverage more easily and frequently than their opponents. Incumbents in Taiwan received more face-time with the public because they were more frequently chosen as spokespeople for news programming. In Great Britain, “Incumbents [also] have a much higher profile in the local press in the run-up to a general election compared with challengers (Negrine 2005, page 106).”

This framework returns to the U.S. for the last supporting evidence of incumbency. In an article titled “Biasing Influences on Balance in Election News Coverage: An Assessment of Newspaper Coverage of the 2006 U.S. Senate Election,” data supports the hypothesis that less imbalance can be found in articles about challengers, compared to the average articles about incumbents. Although this research does not clarify if incumbency imbalance is positive or negative, the acknowledgement of the existing bias is fundamentally important (Fico and Freedman 2008). Here, the hypothesis that incumbency impacts the public’s perception of a state legislative candidate is reinforced. In other words, incumbency matters.

### *Political Party*

Does the political ideology of a candidate make a difference in news reporting? By looking at the partisan nature of politics and a particular political party of a candidate, trends between the choice of who receives coverage and political affiliations will become much more clear. According to research by Fico, Freedman and Durisin Of the 2006 U.S. Senate elections,

bias can be reflected in the amount of coverage one candidate receives as compared to his/her challenger (Fico and Freedman 2008). If a candidate has the same political party as the state and appears in the news more frequently, it may be appropriate to acknowledge the importance of political affiliations when analyzing news trends. Likewise, if a candidate who is a member of the minority party receives less frequent news coverage, similar conclusions can be drawn.

Researchers Cook (Cook 1998) and Kendrowski (Kendrowski 1996) found that legislators use the media by creating informal channels of communication between themselves and their constituents. Since members of these networks will likely be affiliated with the same political party, this information shows the importance of politics in creating a news presence. If any politician in this study was able to secure a newspaper as a consistent communication channel with the public, this relationship will be reflected by the quantity of newspaper output as well as the political congruency of a politician and newspaper. Additionally, a study of the 2006 U.S. Senate elections also provided evidence for the meaningfulness of political affiliations. According to the research, national coverage of the 2006 U.S. Senate election heavily favored the Democratic Party (Fico and Freedman 2008). This provides evidence that political party is one of the ways a news outlet may incorporate bias into their reporting.

Conversely, some current literature on political party affiliation in the media opposes these findings. A study titled “Media Tactics in the State Legislature” examined the media use and strategies of state legislative representatives for policy implications. This research hypothesized that state legislators who are members of the minority party are more likely to use the media than their majority party counterparts to influence public policy. The reasoning is that minority party members are forced to use these less conventional outlets when trying to make a splash in a policy debate because they have less access, respect, or effectiveness when using

formal outlets. In this study, formal outlets constitute direct political communication such as representation on capital hill. Informal outlets are open forums for political discussion such as newspapers. However, empirical results from this study were unable to prove the existence of this relationship, indicating that political party may have less relevance for newspaper output than expected (Cooper 2002). This contradicts some of the findings above, but supports the notion that political party is a research variable worthy of attention.

### ***Media Factors***

#### *Journalist's Preferences/Tone*

Researchers Folwer and Ridout studied the effects of political advertising on the media. They were trying to understand the extent to which politicians use campaigns as either a news outlet or a media market. The conclusions of their research found that the majority of all campaign coverage focused on the tone of the candidate and the candidate's campaign as whole (Fowler and Ridout 2009). From this conclusion, it is clear that tone is a relevant factor in all-political based coverage.

By varying tone, journalists have some control over how they want to report factual information. Tone is defined as the general character or attitude of an entity. Specific word choice or organizations of an article may impact the way in which an article affects a reader. For example, using the word "championed" in-place of "supported" may indicate a positive journalistic tone because the adjective increases the likeness of the subject. Likewise, if an article is about new legislation and all the cons of that legislation are listed before the pros, there may be an instance of structural, journalistic bias. Paying close attention to specific phrasing and word choice is important when trying to identify journalistic preferences.

A study of moderator bias in Norway in 2010 found that members of the media chain incorporate bias into journalism. The study proves that moderators of television shows can, intentionally or not, impose their own bias on public opinion via their tone, presentation or questioning of political candidates (Haug, Koppang and Svennevig 2010). From this study, it is learned that legislators do not always exert the tightest control over their public image; uncontrollable media factors also play a role in shaping the public's opinion. The case study of Norway focuses on the influencing factors located within the television industry, but it is possible that these factors can also be present within newspaper or other written news accounts. These variables identified by Haug, Koppang and Svennevig of tone and article structure cannot be overlooked when examining newspaper coverage.

#### *Name Placement/Article Location*

In addition to tone, the amount and location of politically relevant converge is important in analyzing media effects on campaigns. In "Setting the News Story Agenda: Candidates and Commentators in News Coverage of a Governor's Race" by Fico and Freeman, a content analysis of the nine largest daily newspapers in Michigan was used to analyze the main assertions in several articles. These researchers noted the presence of state legislator coverage, as well as what these assertions were and where in the piece they were located. The results showed that partisan news sourcing is common. When this type of source was used, candidates themselves were the ones most likely to be mentioned in leads or ensuing paragraphs. Fico and Freeman state, "If leads are considered to be the major influence on the story agenda, then partisan sources-indeed, the candidates themselves, were much more likely than experts or other sources to be setting that agenda (Fico and Freeman 2001, page 444)."

In 2008, Fico and Freeman conducted another experiment in which the authors analyzed bias by exploring the location of specific assertions within an article. They looked at four factors: how many assertions were made about the candidate, whether or not points about a candidate were made in the lead, whether or not they appeared between the second and fifth paragraphs, and whether or not the assertions appeared within the sixth to tenth paragraph (Fico and Freedman 2008). This experimental design emphasized the importance of name placement with regard to the level of biasing influences and the ensuing impact on public opinion. By looking at varying name placement and sourcing, this research made comparisons between newspapers for structural and partisan imbalance. The varying location and choice to use a candidate's name in an article are potential examples of the way local media vary in their reporting of state legislatures.

Lastly, Researchers Fico, Freedman and Durisin have discovered that the media maintain the independent ability to influence public opinion. Their results suggested the media are the principal factor impacting political coverage. Ways in which the media exert this influence include reporter attitude and allocation of resources. These media factors can impact how the public will perceive a candidate (Fico, Freedman and Durisin, 2011). As mentioned earlier, reporter attitude relates to the tone of an article. Allocation of resources may influence the amount of coverage a political candidate receives, or the sourcing used to acquire information.

### ***A Multi-Factor Framework***

There are several factors of influence on the media reporting for political candidates. Previous research has identified the most relevant variables to be incumbency, political party, tone, and name placement. Although these prior studies do not directly relate to local newspapers

or local elections, it is reasonable to assume that these factors might play a similar role at the local level.

These four factors have proven to be relevant, but they are not an exhaustive list of variables that influence news output. Prior research, such as the article “Press Secretaries, Journalists and Editors: Shaping Local Congressional News Coverage,” demonstrated that political representatives influence the coverage they receive by controlling the release of information or choosing to actively engage with the media (Gershon, 2012). Furthermore, a study of the 2002 Michigan Governor race determined that direct candidate interaction with the public, such as press releases, affects what is said about them in the news (Lancendorfer and Lee, 2010). While these factors are just as politically relevant as the ones mentioned previously, they are much more difficult to measure and analyze from a research standpoint and will not be analyzed in this research. In both of the aforementioned articles, the authors are careful to note that independent journalistic decisions may be an ultimate determinant of how legislators are covered in the news.

### **Hypothesis and Observable Implications**

Based on previous studies, there are many factors that alter the relationship between the media and public opinion of political candidates.

**H1 – Political Incumbency Hypothesis:** Incumbents have more name recognition with the public and are more likely to be covered in the media.

**Observable Implications:** Newspapers will discriminate between incumbents and challengers in their coverage. The quantity and length of news articles about incumbents will be greater than that of challengers, resulting in an increased popularity of the incumbent among voters. To test

this hypothesis, this research will look at the percentage of articles written about incumbents and challengers.

**H2 – Political Party Theory:** A republican candidate is more likely to receive coverage from a conservative newspaper. A democratic candidate is more likely to receive coverage from a liberal newspaper.

**Observable Implications:** This study hypothesizes that newspapers will discriminate coverage of candidates based on political ideology. If political preferences between the two entities match, the expected result is positive and frequent coverage for that politician. This hypothesis can be checked by examining the number of articles written about political candidates whom share the same ideology as the state. The number of articles for candidates with a matching ideology is expected to be higher than candidates with different political preferences. On Election Day, this will increase the public's saliency for these legislators (McCombs and Shaw).

**H3 – Political Perception Theory:** Members of the media chain, such as talk show hosts, debate moderators, or staff reporters, try to influence public opinion via their reporting of a political candidate.

**Observable Implications:** Even though they are supposed to be objective, the media fail to remain non-partisan in their reporting. An author's tone can be measured to determine what the reporter, or the media organization as a whole, thinks about the candidate. The criteria for measuring tone are discussed in the methods section of this paper. In addition to tone, journalistic influence within an article stems from stylistic decisions. The number of times a

reporter mention a specific candidate or the percentage of words in an article relevant to the politician are two ways in which this journalistic influence can be quantified.

These arguments were not the only ones made when trying to decipher this complicated relationship between the media and politicians. Other subjects that received attention included if and how advertising affects coverage (Fowler and Ridout 2009), the role that entertainment or talk show hosts play in media coverage of a political candidate (Haug, Koppang and Svennevig 2010), and how the current political situation, such as a threat to change the status quo, changes the overall coverage (Schuck and de Vreese 2009). In the existing literature for legislative elections on either federal or state level, another topic receiving a lot of attention is the availability of resources. Prior research has demonstrated the positive correlation between resources and media coverage. A politician with more funds for campaigning will likely receive more media attention (Cooper 2002). This variable is important for later research and will be discussed further in the conclusions section. A visual summary of all arguments from theoretical background research can be seen in Appendix 1.

## **Method:**

### ***Data Collection***

This research attempts to answer the following question: How do newspapers compare in their coverage of campaigns for state legislatures? Specifically, the purpose of this research is to compare how newspaper outlets — from states of varying political dominance — choose to report the state level campaigns for senate and assembly. The above theoretical framework showed

evidence that factors such as political party, incumbency status, and tone may serve as a measure of differences in the reporting of campaigns for state legislatures.

This research consisted of a content analysis from the largest newspapers in Austin, Sacramento, and Columbus. The papers used were *The Austin Statesman*, *The Sacramento Bee* and *The Columbus Dispatch*. These three cities are the capitals of their respective states. Located in the state capitals, these newspapers have proximity to legislative offices. For that reason, it was expected that more legislative campaign coverage would come from these cities

The purpose of choosing three cities was to represent states with different political preferences. Respectively, Texas, California, and Ohio are a red state, a blue state, and a swing state. In other words, Texas is largely republican, California is largely democratic, and Ohio has no political leaning. At this point, it should be noted Austin is not representative of the state of Texas. In fact, Austin is sometimes referred to as an island of blue in a sea of red . Regardless, the city was chosen as a location of interest for this research because Texas as a whole is very Republican. Even though the city is Democratic, the state legislature located within the city reflects the right-leaning tendencies of the state. Austin's liberal mindset is a factor for this research, but not a catastrophic for this research. Lastly, keeping the medium of coverage consistent in each city, while simultaneously choosing three states with different ideologies, will allow for a comparison to be made in news coverage both within and across information outlets.

To determine which cases to focus on, this study first looked at the entire field of political races. The district maps for the 2012 state governments in the aforementioned cities revealed the following results: a total of 8 districts in Austin (2 Senate, 6 House), a total of 9 districts in Sacramento (3 in Senate, 6 in House), and a total of 11 districts in Columbus (3 Senate, 8 House). Any district partially located within city limits was included. Senate district 4 in

California had to be removed from this study since the seat remained vacant after September 1, 2012, when incumbent and then current Republican legislator Doug LaMalfa resigned from office to run for Congress. It would be nearly impossible to compare the media coverage for this district race to other races in the study, since mid-election changes affect election winners as well as patterns of coverage.

Using a random number generator, this field was narrowed down to 4 races in each city. The selection of candidates was intended to incorporate a mix of incumbents and challengers running for both the state senate and the state assembly. The information about the randomly selected races can be found in the three tables below. Table 1 shows the candidates from Austin, Texas; Table 2 shows the candidates from Sacramento, California; and Table 3 shows the candidates from Columbus, Ohio.

Table 1: Austin, Texas

<b>Branch</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Democratic Candidate</b>	<b>Republican Candidate</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Incumbent or Open race</b>
House	47	Chris Frandsen	Paul Workman (i)	Nick Tanner	Incumbent
House	49	Donna Howard (i)	Kent Phillips		Incumbent
Senate	14	Kirk Watson (i)	Ryan Dixon		Incumbent
Senate	18	Glenn Hegar (i)			Incumbent

(i) indicates incumbency

Table 2: Sacramento, California

<b>Branch</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Democratic Candidate</b>	<b>Republican Candidate</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Incumbent or Open race</b>
House	6		Beth Gaines (i)	* Andy Pugno (Republican)	Incumbent
House	7	Roger Dickinson (i)	Jonathan Zachariou		Incumbent
House	8	Ken Cooley	Peter Tateishi		Open Seat
Senate	3	Lois Wolk (i)	Frank Miranda		Incumbent

(i) indicates incumbency

\*Due to the California voting system that allows the top two candidates of the primaries to advance to the general election regardless of party affiliations, Republicans Beth Gaines and Andy Pugno faced one another in the 2012 general election.

Table 3: Columbus, Ohio

Branch	District	Democratic Candidate	Republican Candidate	Other	Incumbent or Open race
House	18	Michael Stinziano (i)	Bill Colgan		Incumbent
House	24	Maureen Reedy	Stephanie Kunze		Open Seat
Senate	3	Mark Pfeifer	Kevin Bacon (i)		Incumbent
Senate	16		Jim Hughes (i)		Incumbent

(i) indicates incumbency

Despite the varying political preferences in California, Texas, and Ohio, each newspaper in this study is known to be slightly liberal. Austin, as stated above, is a small, progressive part of a very conservative state. I hypothesize that editorials related to political candidates would be more favorable to liberal opinions. To compensate for this fact, the editorial sections of each newspaper have been removed from the content analysis. Because of its unimportance to this study, the sports section of each print issue was also removed entirely.

### ***Study Measures***

The dailies mentioned above were studied beginning May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, exactly six months before the 2012 state legislative election. Articles were analyzed every 5<sup>th</sup> day from the start of the study. A content analysis of these articles will allow behavior comparisons in reporting of state legislatures to be made between different newspapers.

The variables being tested here are the factors that effect how the media reports information. A look at the media trends in the theoretical framework from prior studies shows that a myriad of these factors exist. While many of these variables have been identified in

correlation with federal level and international studies, this research will further explain how, if at all, these similar factors can be applied to news coverage of state government campaigns.

*Factual Information:* The first thing recorded for an article was general information. This includes the article's source (which publication, the date, and the byline or author(s)), which candidate the article refers to, what was being reported (press conference, photo op, policy initiative, debate or a conflict), and in what section of the newspaper the article is located.

*Political Party:* The political party of each candidate plays a key factor in analyzing the relationship between a candidate and the media. I hypothesize that the media will favorably report a candidate with the same ideology as the paper, especially if those ideologies agree with the state's political preference as a whole.

*Incumbent Status:* This variable is important because it impacts the outcome of an election. Having been in the political scene for longer periods of time, incumbents usually have the advantage of name recognition over their challengers who, comparatively, may be less well-known to the public. I hypothesize that since incumbents win elections fairly easily, reporters will be more neutral in their reporting of these figures. Newspapers may also choose to allocate fewer of its resources to these uncontested close races.

*Tone:* The tone of an article was measured as positive, neutral or negative because it provides insight into what the media think of a specific legislator. Tone is a way in which a journalist can influence public opinion. Readers may be swayed by reading opinionated or biased journalism. In this research, tone was measured by looking at adjectives or descriptive words. For example, the term "radical" carries more weight than does the term "liberal." A read-through of the first two to three paragraphs as well as the language used to directly discuss a candidate will elucidate the presence of a tone, if any exists.

*Name Placement:* This variable will help us analyze what exactly was said in an article. Was a politician the main subject? Was more than one representative being reported? Name placement can be measured by looking at what percentage of words is about a candidate. This variable will be most helpful when using it in conjunction with tone because the percentage of words written about a certain candidate is unhelpful without knowing whether the words are positive or negative.

*Other Campaign Coverage:* This variable looks at whether or not federal coverage also appears in the paper. This trait clarifies trends associated with value choice. If, for example, the local paper in one of these cities chooses to cover the presidential race more frequently than local legislative race, this information could indicate a specific newspaper trend.

## **Findings**

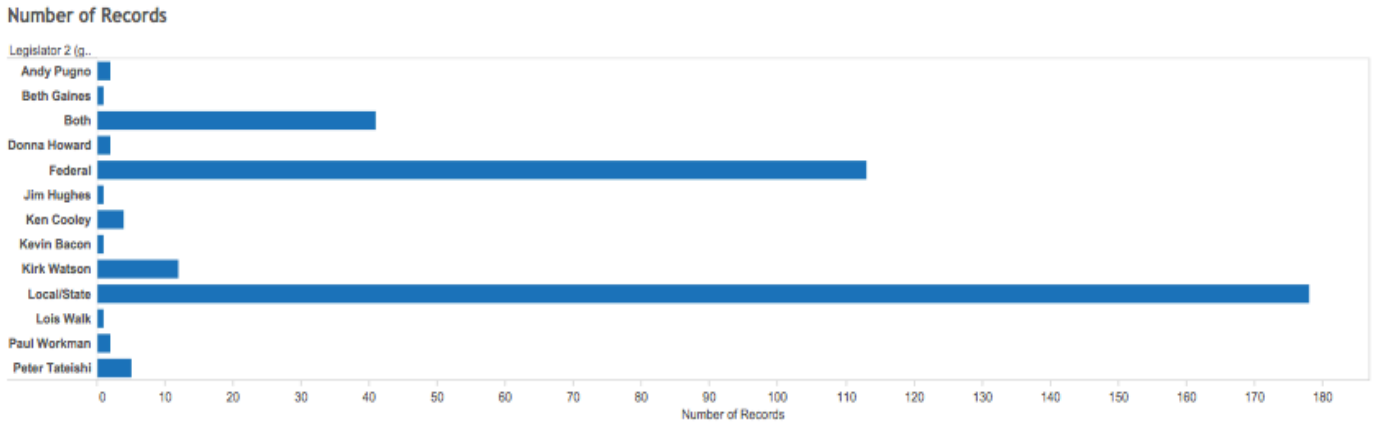
### ***Preliminary Information***

This research used a content analysis for 18 months worth of articles to elucidate trends within media coverage of state legislative elections. Six months worth of articles each from *The Austin-American Statesman*, *The Sacramento Bee*, and *The Columbus Dispatch* were coded every fifth day starting on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2012. Within these issues, a total of 360 articles were found to have some politically relevant news coverage. These articles were either political in nature, referenced one or more of the designated local candidates from Tables 1, 2 and 3, and/or referenced another politically relevant figure such as a state governor or presidential candidate. A total of 68 articles were located within *The Austin-American Statesman*, 146 articles were located within *The Sacramento Bee*, and 149 articles were located within *The Columbus Dispatch*. Of the 360 articles located, only a total of 26 contained a reference to the legislative candidates

identified as the cases for this study. Five of these articles mentioned two different state legislatures, resulting in a total of 31 cases to be used to compare reporting trends between newspapers.

Chart 1 shows a visualization of this breakdown. If a legislator’s name from Tables 1, 2 and 3 does not appear in the chart, this indicates the candidate was never mentioned during the entire six months of coverage. In addition, the federal and local/state tabs indicate that an article contained political content, but did not mention any of the local candidates specifically.

Chart 1



Sum of Number of Records for each Legislator 2 (group). The data is filtered on Legislator 2, which keeps 13 of 14 members.

***Presidential Coverage***

The content analysis of the 360 articles included a categorization of local/state or federal coverage. The articles were coded as yes or no, depending on if they contained either type of information. Federal news was defined as any information about U.S. Senators or Representatives, presidential candidates, or general federal-branch issues such as the U.S. budget or U.S. healthcare/Obamacare. All other articles contained political information for the state or

local level of government. Chart 2 below shows the breakdown of articles by these two categorizations.

Chart 2

### Number of Records for Local and State Coverage

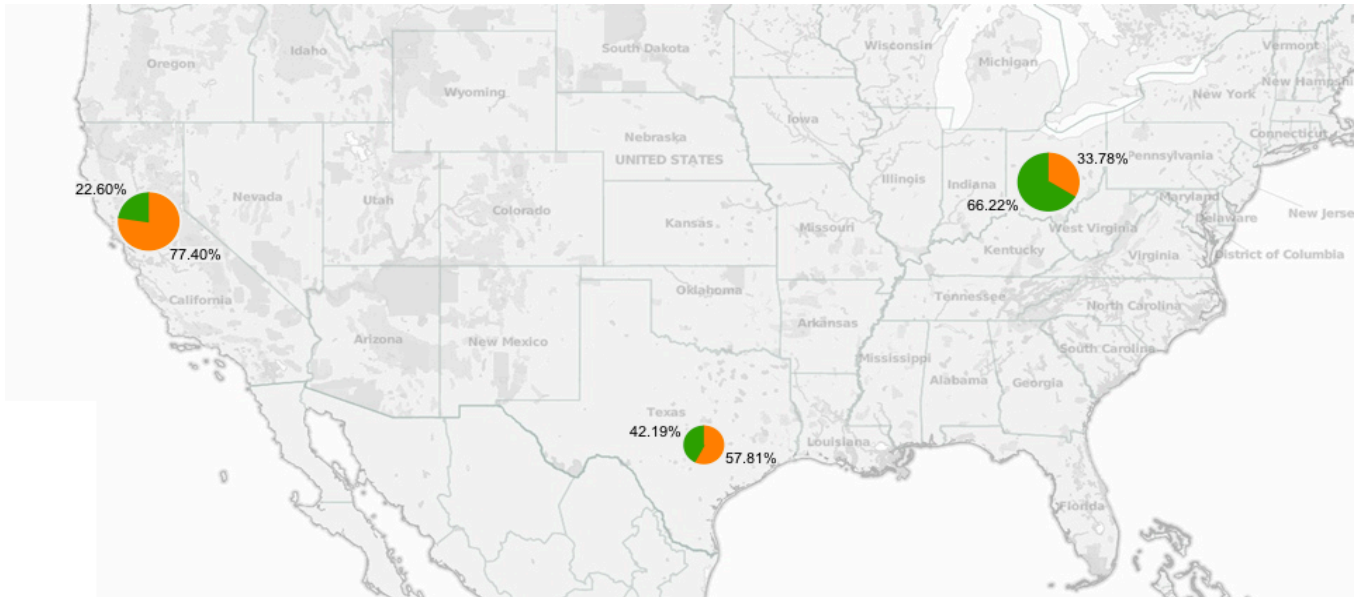
Federal Coverage (Y/N)	Local/State Coverage (Y/N)	Newspaper		
		The Austin-American Statesman	The Columbus Dispatch	The Sacramento Bee
No	Yes	37	50	113
Yes	No	17	71	25
	Yes	10	27	8

Sum of Number of Records broken down by Newspaper vs. Federal Coverage (Y/N) and Local/State Coverage (Y/N). The view is filtered on Local/State Coverage (Y/N), which keeps No and Yes.

In *The Columbus Dispatch*, 80 articles out of the 149 total mentioned a presidential candidate. As shown by Chart 2, this indicates that 80 articles of the 98 that contained federal coverage specifically mentioned the presidential race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. In Ohio, the local reporting was largely concerned with the presidential election much more than it was concerned with local governmental races. Only 18 articles in 6 months of coverage contained federal branch news that excluded the presidential candidates. The visualization of this information is present in Chart 3 below. This map shows the percentage of articles within each geographic region that contained presidential coverage. The most federal coverage from any one city came from *The Columbus Dispatch*. A total of 66.22 percent of the articles in this newspaper contained federally relevant information. As previously determined, most of these articles were about the 2012 presidential race.

Chart 3

## Percentage of Articles Containing Federal Coverage

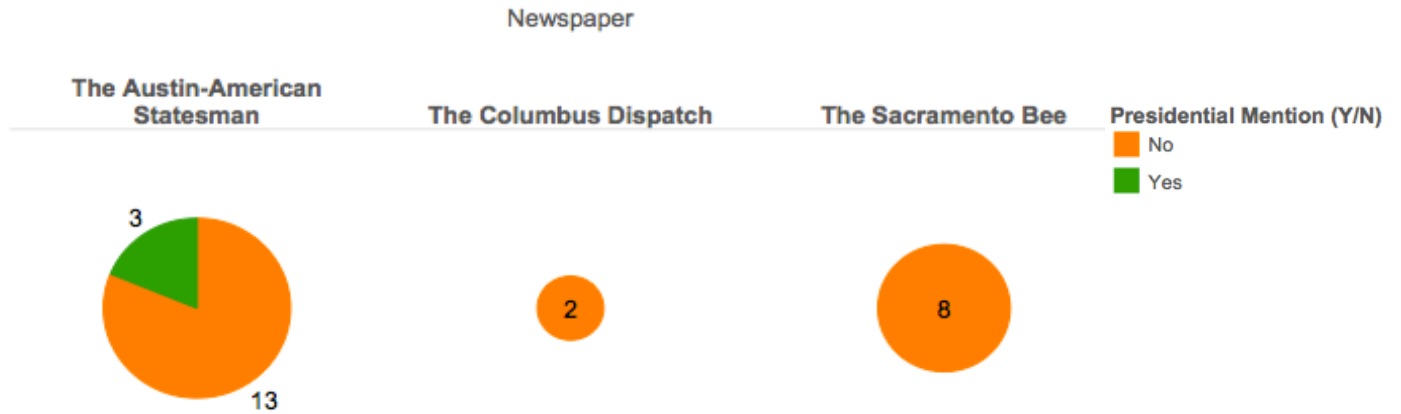


**Federal Coverage (Y/N)**  
No Yes

The results of this study also reveal a direct relationship between local coverage of politicians and media coverage of presidential candidates. As stated earlier, a total of 26 articles contained names of the legislators specified in the cases for the study. Chart 4 below shows a breakdown by newspaper of whether or not presidential coverage was found within these reports. Only three of the 26 articles contained non-coverage of presidential candidates. The remaining 23 articles either had references to Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, or both. This trend is consistent along each newspaper outlet.

Chart 4

## Presidential Mention Within Articles About Local Candidates

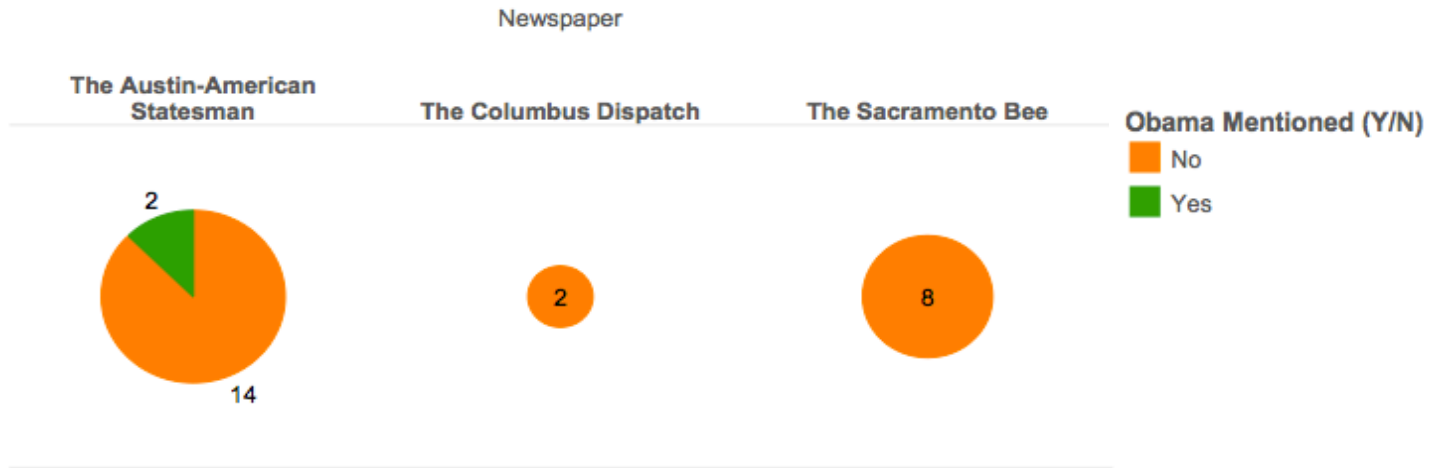


Presidential Mention (Y/N) (color) and sum of Number of Records (size) broken down by Newspaper. The data is filtered on Local/State Coverage (Y/N) and Legislator. The Local/State Coverage (Y/N) filter keeps Yes. The Legislator filter excludes Null and Other. The view is filtered on Presidential Mention (Y/N), which keeps No and Yes.

Chart 4 is important because it comments on the element of newspaper choice. It illustrates whether or not any presidential news coverage was written in articles that also mentioned state legislatures. *The Austin-American Statesman* was the only newspaper that overlapped federal and state coverage. It did so in only three of 16 articles. Charts 5 and 6 below contain the same information present in Chart 4, only they display information about the individual presidential candidates. All three charts are strikingly similar to each other. In *The Columbus Dispatch* and *The Sacramento Bee*, Obama and Romney are not mentioned in any article containing the name of a local legislator. Although newspapers generally choose to focus reporting on federal events rather than state/local campaigns, this information shows that newspaper give their full attention to state representatives when they decide to write articles about them.

Chart 5

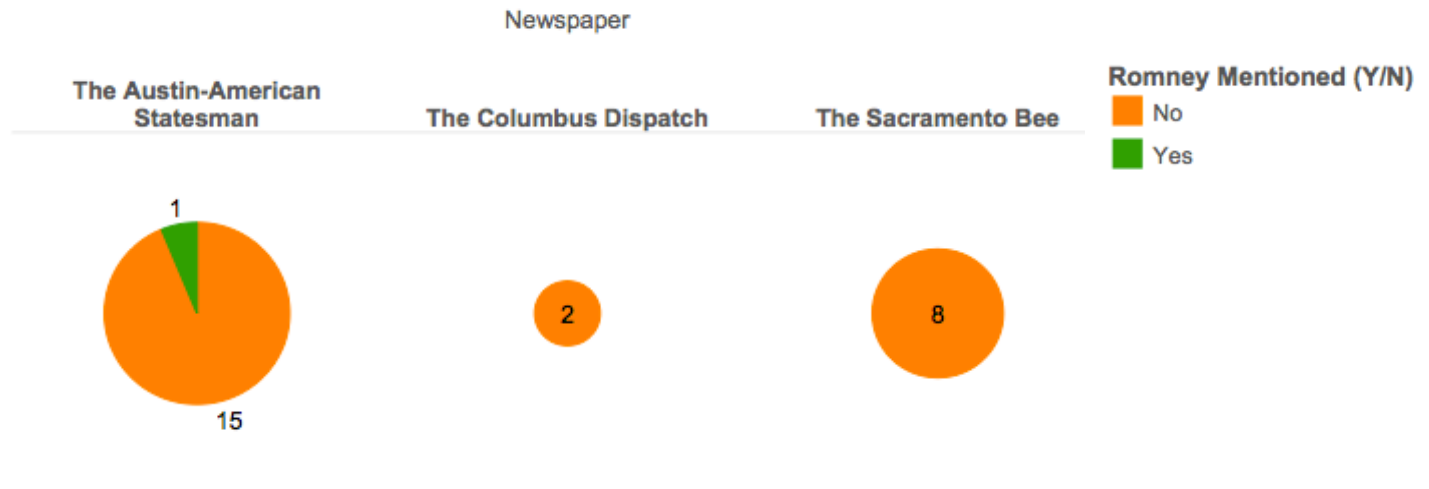
### Obama Mention Within Articles About Local Candidates



Obama Mentioned (Y/N) (color) and sum of Number of Records (size) broken down by Newspaper. The data is filtered on Legislator, which excludes Null and Other. The view is filtered on Obama Mentioned (Y/N), which keeps No and Yes.

Chart 6

### Romney Mention Within Articles About Local Candidates



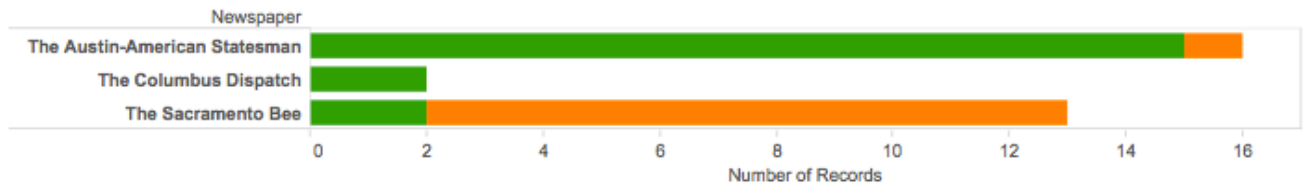
Romney Mentioned (Y/N) (color) and sum of Number of Records (size) broken down by Newspaper. The data is filtered on Legislator, which excludes Null and Other. The view is filtered on Romney Mentioned (Y/N), which keeps No and Yes.

## Incumbency

In the 31 cases where local legislators were mentioned, 19 were about incumbents and 12 mentioned political challengers. Chart 7 shows this visualization of incumbency by newspaper. Each time a legislative candidate from this study was mentioned, he or she was an incumbent 15 out of 16 times for *The Austin-American Statesman*, 2 out of 2 times for *The Columbus Dispatch*, and 2 out of 13 times for *The Sacramento Bee*.

Chart 7

### Incumbency Status for State Legislators



Sum of Number of Records for each Newspaper. Color shows details about Incumbency (Y/N). The view is filtered on Newspaper and Incumbency (Y/N). The Newspaper filter keeps The Austin-American Statesman, The Columbus Dispatch and The Sacramento Bee. The Incumbency (Y/N) filter keeps No and Yes.

### Incumbency (Y/N)



## Political Party

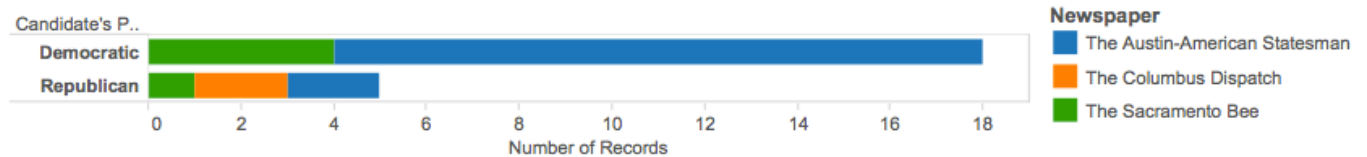
Political party was anticipated to be a leading factor for qualifying newspaper decision-making tendencies. Based on prior research, it was expected that newspapers with like-minded political leanings of a legislative candidate would provide more coverage of that candidate. For example, a Democratic legislator would be more frequently covered in a Democratic state.

Chart 8 below shows the patterns of news coverage for republicans and democrats within each news publication. *The Austin-American Statesman*, which was believed to be a slightly Democratic paper within a much more powerful Republican state, showed a strong left leaning in

its reporting. Fourteen stories about Democratic local legislatures were published between May 6<sup>th</sup> 2012 and November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Only two were published about Republicans. *The Columbus Dispatch* focused its coverage on Republican candidates. Although only two articles total were written about relevant local candidates, both of these articles used Republican legislatures as the subjects. Finally, *The Sacramento Bee* diversified its attention to legislative candidates. Four articles for this publication contained Democrats and one article mentioned Republicans.

Chart 8

**Political Party References of Local Candidates**



Sum of Number of Records for each Candidate's Political Party. Color shows details about Newspaper. The view is filtered on Candidate's Political Party, which keeps Democratic and Republican.

***Tone***

Once a journalist is assigned a story to cover, they have the freedom to use their writing style to influence readers. While journalists are supposed to remain objective and ethical, they do not always do so. Journalists can sway their readership via several factors, such as their tone and word choice. This aspect of the research tested the frequency to which journalists write in non-neutral tones (Chart 9).

Chart 9

## Journalistic Tone, By Political Party

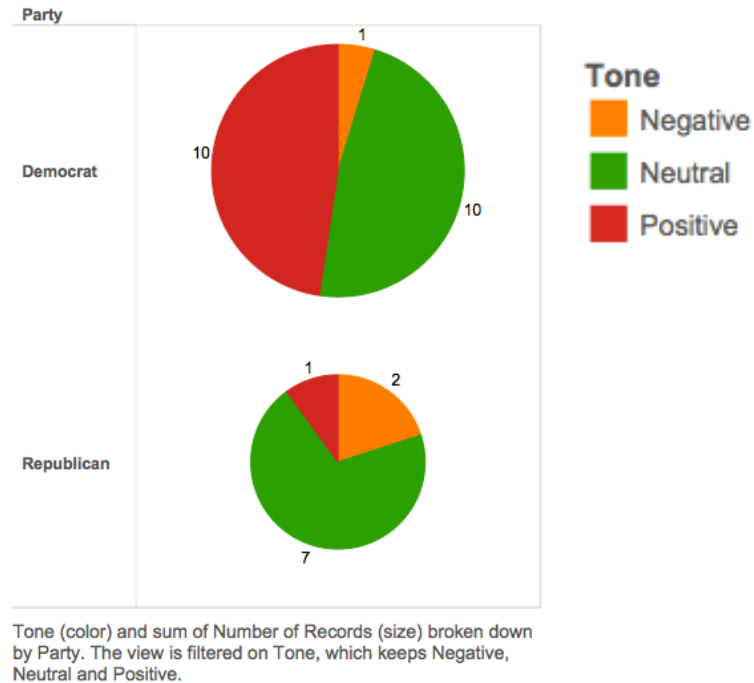
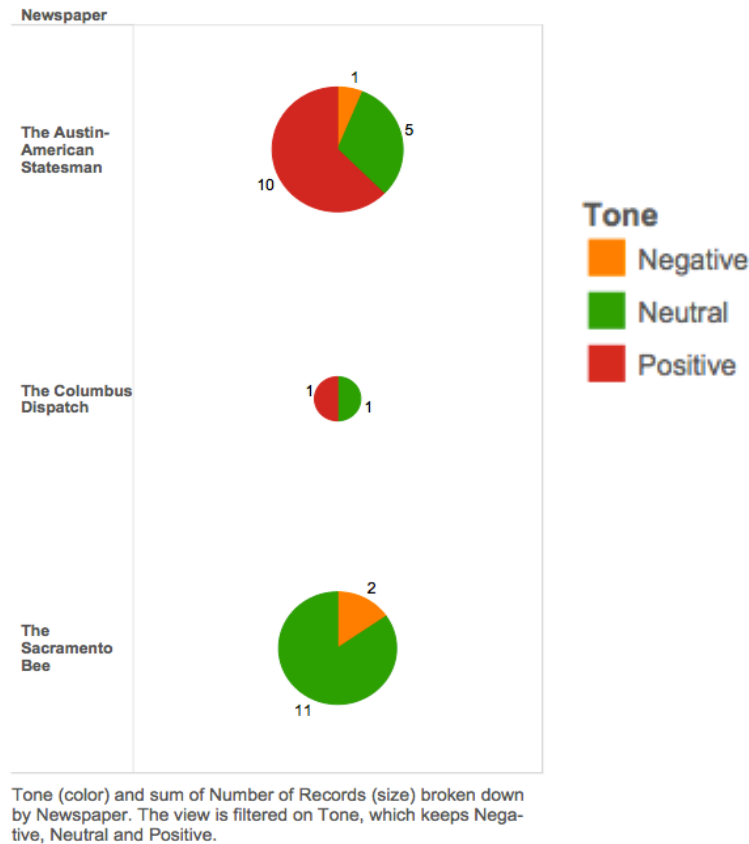


Chart 9 above shows how journalists used tone throughout their reporting. A total of ten Republican and 21 Democrats overall were reported in the news. In 17 of these 31 cases, the author reported information with a neutral tone. In the remaining 15 cases, the authors used a positive in 12 articles and negative tone in three.

The journalistic use of tone varied across the different media outlets. Research showed that *The Austin-American Statesman* is most likely newspaper of this study to write articles with a non-neutral tone. Eleven of 16 references to local candidates in this newspaper incorporated either a positive or negative underpinning. *The Columbus Dispatch* and *The Sacramento Bee* incorporated bias more rarely. Only one article from the former and two articles from the latter were non-neutral. The remaining 12 articles of these publications all reported local candidates with neutral tones. The visualization for this information is shown in Chart 10 below.

Chart 10

## Journalistic Tone, By Newspaper



### *Name Placement*

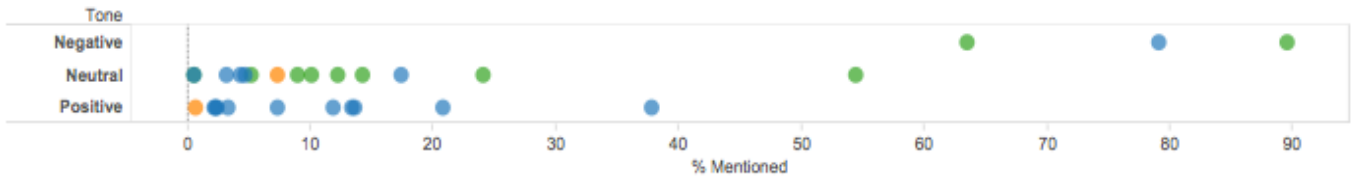
The effect of tone on newspaper reporting can be better understood when this variable is coupled with name placement. For the purposes of this research, name placement means the percentage of words within an individual article that relate to the candidate in question. Sometimes a state legislator is simply mentioned. Other times, he or she is made the subject of a lengthy article. This variable will help show which newspapers incorporate strong biases in the news. An opinionated tone used throughout an article will have more of a biasing affect than if a tone is used for only a handful of words.

Illustrated below, Chart 11 shows the tone and name placement variables grouped by newspaper. Chart 10 has already shown that few articles are written with a negative tone, and about 10-15 articles each have a neutral and negative tone. What's valuable in this chart is not the quantity of articles, but rather the tight knit grouping of name placement and tone. For the three articles written with a negative tone, each had a name placement of over 60 percent. In the remaining articles, not a single case occurred where more than 55 percent of the words about a candidate in an article were either positive or neutral. For the neutral and positive tone categorizations, newspapers mostly used 20 percent of the words or less to discuss a state legislator.

From this chart, it can be concluded that a negative tone is more likely to be present throughout the majority of the article. Because such a high percentage of words are written with this negative underpinning, it can also be inferred that these biases were not unintentional. It is unlikely that about two-thirds of an article is written in a non-neutral way by accident. A possible explanation for this trend is that an author, perhaps strategically, is more likely to use an entire article to criticize a politician than he would be to use the whole piece to praise him. In other words, the author is intentionally incorporating his opinion. Additionally, authors are likely to use fewer words when writing in a neutral or positive style. This raises the question of the effectiveness of negative and positive word choice. If negative articles are more effective than positive ones in influencing a reader, do journalists intentionally use a greater percentage of negative words when trying to get a particular message to consumers?

Chart 11

### Tone and Name Placement, by Newspaper



Sum of % Mentioned for each Tone. Color shows details about Newspaper. Details are shown for Article Title. The view is filtered on Tone, which keeps Negative, Neutral and Positive.

#### Newspaper

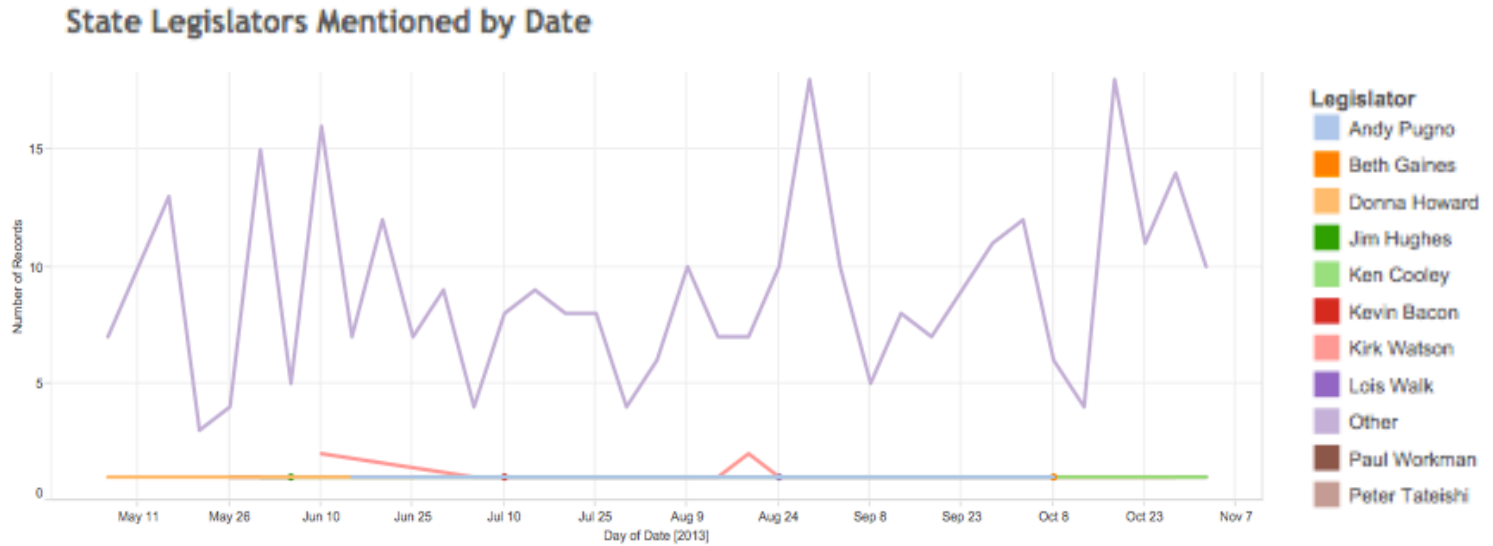
- The Austin-American Statesman
- The Columbus Dispatch
- The Sacramento Bee

### *Time Series Data*

This research focused on articles reported as early as six months before the presidential election. As proven by this research’s findings, non-federal legislatures are of little importance to news organizations. By using the logic that newspapers filter their reporting based on the interests of consumers, it can be assumed that readers also care fairly little about these figures. It makes sense that little attention is given to state legislatures so far in advance of the election. However, it remains to be seen whether or not local candidate coverage picks up as election time draws near.

According to Chart 12, a time series analysis of articles written about state legislators, the amount of coverage does not substantially change as Election Day approaches. The total amount of political articles varies with time, but there is no direct correlation between local candidate coverage and the amount of time until Election Day. Chart 12 is shown below.

Chart 12

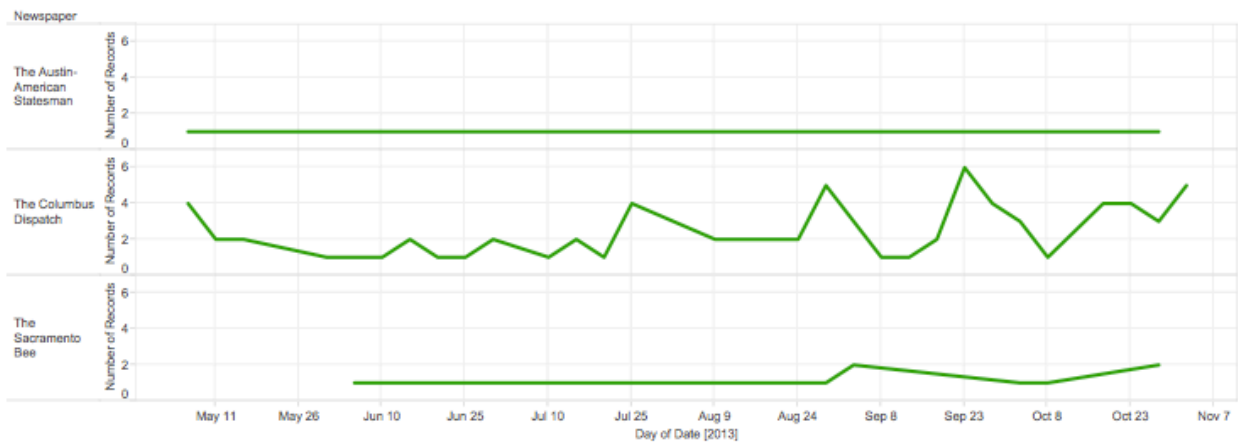


The trend of sum of Number of Records for Date Day. Color shows details about Legislator. The view is filtered on Legislator, which keeps 11 of 12 members.

Charts 13 and 14 show a time series graph for the number of references to presidential candidates. Plotting the number of articles about Obama against time shows that as the election drew nearer, some newspapers concentrated their coverage around presidential candidates. Charts 13 and 14 both show that *The Austin-American Statesman* and *The Sacramento Bee* did not alter their patterns of coverage as the presidential elections approached. References to Obama and Romney continued at the same pace, with small variation, from May to November. In *The Columbus Dispatch*, the rate of coverage of presidential candidates increased as time before Election Day decreased.

Chart 13

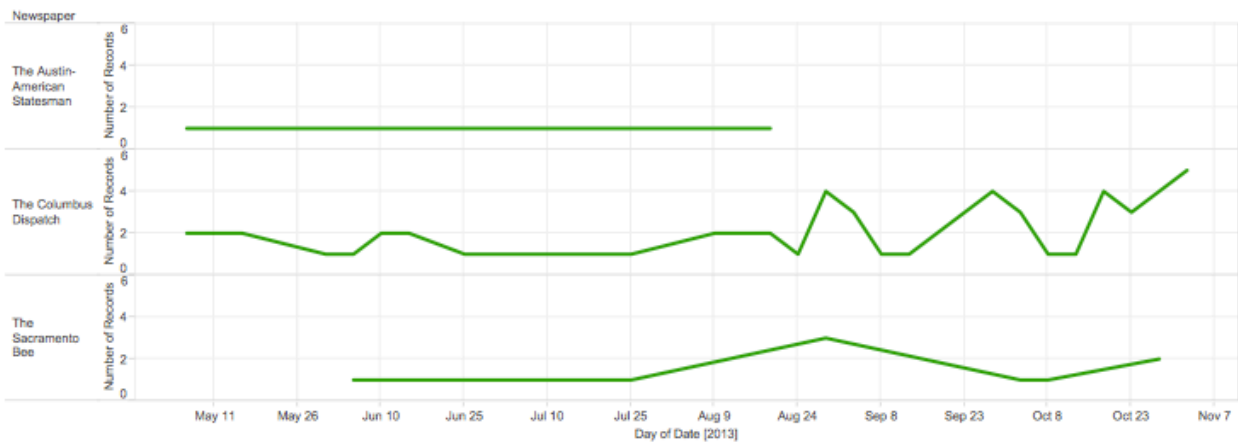
### Obama References, Over Time



The trend of sum of Number of Records for Date Day broken down by Newspaper. Color shows details about Obama Mentioned (Y/N). The view is filtered on Obama Mentioned (Y/N), which keeps Yes.

Chart 14

### Romney References, Over Time



The trend of sum of Number of Records for Date Day broken down by Newspaper. Color shows details about Romney Mentioned (Y/N). The view is filtered on Romney Mentioned (Y/N), which keeps Yes.

## Discussion of Results

The first conclusion drawn from the results was the lack of cases relevant to the study. Over the entire time span of 18 months and search for 23 different names of state legislatures, only a total of 26 articles were found to contain the desired information. While this offers great

insight into media coverage of state legislatures as a whole, it also presents some challenges for this research. Since the number of cases is so small, the results of this study will have to be explained with descriptive statistics, as opposed to regressions or other statistical tools. These conclusions should also be approached cautiously since there are too few cases to extrapolate data and declare the same trends of media coverage will be found in other newspapers.

As Chart 1 shows, the most articles for any one categorization came from local/state coverage, indicating that newspapers most often chose to use their resources for coverage of local politics. On the chart, this categorization excluded the 23 specific state legislators made the focus of this study. This shows that newspaper organizations placed less importance on writing stories about state legislators. Subjects in these local/state stories mostly included mayors or attorney generals. A possible explanation for this trend is that these figures were of more public interest than state legislators.

After such a small number of records were returned in this study, the accuracy of this methodology was called into question. A control group was used to determine its validity. The control consisted of similar coding techniques for *The Austin-American Statesman*, *The Sacramento Bee*, and, *The Columbus Dispatch* as the original methodology. The purpose of the control was to see how many articles were written about these state legislative candidates for a one-month period before the election. If the time frame for the original research was too broad and could be used to explain why so few candidates were found in the news, the number of articles found in the control would be much higher than the number found during the experiment. The first day of coding was October 6<sup>th</sup>, exactly 30 days before the November 6<sup>th</sup> election. To examine the functionality of the methodology, information about the control group and experimental group, respectively, is presented below.

Chart 13: Control Group

	Austin-American Sts.	Sacramento Bee	Columbus Dispatch
Number of Articles	22	9	5

Chart 14: Experimental Group

	Austin-American Sts.	Sacramento Bee	Columbus Dispatch
Number of Articles	16	8	2

This information validates the methodology used in this research. An increase in article totals was expected when comparing the results with the control group because the prominence of current events is related news output; it is logical to assume that political coverage will receive more attention as Election Day draws near. The results show this increase, but marginally

Furthermore, this research is the first of its kind to suggest that state legislative election coverage does not receive significant attention in local newspapers. The theoretical framework at the beginning of this paper was used to determine the factors that might influence coverage, but none of those articles mentioned the limitations that may result while conducting this sort of research. There is no current discussion about the lack of media coverage for state legislatures despite it being proven in this research.

The findings from this study contradict Cooper's results. Cooper claims that, "California legislators are more likely to engage in media tactics, even though they are no more likely than legislators in Georgia and Iowa to believe that these tactics are effective (page 365)." The reasoning for this conclusion is that California legislators have more staff, are in session longer, and have more funds to spend on media activities (Cooper 2002). Cooper failed to address an entire dimension of the argument. While it may be true that politicians financially well off command more of a media presence, newspapers generally write few stories about local

legislators. As this research proves, local legislators make up a miniscule portion of politically relevant news. Coverage was so minimal that the amount of money spent by these legislators on media coverage could not possibly influence election outcomes.

Once it was known that these newspapers reported a significant amount about politics, but a minimal amount on state legislative campaigns, it became curious to understand what subjects were receiving higher priority in newspaper coverage. For both *The Austin-American Statesman* and *The Sacramento Bee*, newspapers from states with politically leaning ideologies, output was focused on a local coverage excluding many state legislators listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The case of *The Columbus Dispatch* concluded with different results. This publication focused on the federal election. A total 98 articles out of the 148 total were about federal campaigns – the highest proportion of the three newspapers. Ohio, a swing state, does not have any political leaning either way. Since the only swing-state in the study focuses its new output on federal coverage, it is worth exploring this discovery further.

In *The Columbus Dispatch*, 80 articles out of the 149 total mentioned a presidential candidate. Chart 2 from above shows that 80 articles of the 98 that contained federal coverage specifically focused on the presidential race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. From these results, it can be concluded that Ohio's status as swing state played a significant role in the direction of local newspapers. Editors and affiliates of *The Columbus Dispatch* used their space and resources to write stories related to the presidential race, indicating that the decision makers of the newspaper felt the aforementioned topic of the presidency was more important or relevant to readers.

In addition, charts 13 and 14 show a time series analysis of political coverage of presidential candidates. As the election drew near, *The Columbus Dispatch* referenced Obama

and/or Romney more frequently. For the other two newspapers, their tendencies to report presidential candidates did not change. Even for local newspapers, presidential coverage trumps coverage of local and state level politicians.

In the rare cases that newspapers cover state legislative campaigns, they give their full attention to these politicians. Although federal coverage was popular throughout the six months of newspaper issues, all three local newspapers did not to overlap the presidential race with local candidates. Charts 4, 5 and 6 present a visualization of this information. Only three of the 26 articles regarding local candidates mentioned a presidential candidate. To a limited degree, the local newspapers for this study were structurally balanced and fair toward state legislators.

Hypothesis **H1** said that incumbents, who have more name recognition with the public, are more likely to be covered in the media. Both *The Austin-American Statesman* and *The Columbus Dispatch* follow trends that support hypothesis **H1**. In the former publication, 93.75 percent of the state legislators mentioned were incumbents. In the latter paper, 100 percent of the references made were about incumbents. However, it is again important to recognize the limited number of cases used in this analysis and understand that these conclusions may be a function of coincidence. *The Sacramento Bee* showed the reverse trend. Eleven mentions were made of non-incumbent legislators and only two references of incumbents were found in the news, suggesting that the initial hypothesis may be partially true. It is unknown why *The Sacramento Bee*, a publication located within a very liberal state, does not follow these same trends.

From prior media research in the cases of the United Kingdom and Taiwan, it was hypothesized that a news outlet would allocate more resources to like-minded politicians and therefore write more articles about those very same subjects. The political party theory, or hypothesis **H2**, proved difficult to either confirm or deny. The visualization for this test is shown

in Chart 8 above. Originally, it was anticipated that *The Sacramento Bee* would report more stories about Democratic candidates. It did so by only a small ratio of 4:1. It was also anticipated that *The Columbus Dispatch*, not having a political leaning either way, would be balanced in its attention to Republican and Democratic candidates. The data showed that two republicans but zero democrats were mentioned throughout six months of Columbus newspaper publications. The small data sets make these two cases difficult to assess. The test for **H2** is inconclusive. It is unknown whether these results are instances of larger trends in the newspaper, or simple coincidences.

The most interesting newspaper in this study is *The Austin-American Statesman*. Although the newspaper is printed in a right-leaning state, Chart 8 showed that 14 of 16 total state legislators mentioned in the newspaper were Democrats. It is difficult to determine whether this case supports or rejects **H2**. Perhaps the initial assumption that *The Austin-American Statesman* is a right leaning paper was incorrect. Although the paper is located with close proximity to the capital of a red state, the left-leaning priority of this paper was possibly underestimated. If *The Austin-American Statesman* were known to be liberal, the earlier choice to remove the editorial section of the paper for bias purposes would not have made much of a difference for this research. Additionally, if it is assumed that this paper does lean left politically, it would mean that *The Austin-American Statesman*'s reporting tendencies actually support the Political Party Theory hypothesis. For these reasons, further investigation is needed to either support or reject hypothesis **H2**.

Hypothesis **H3** is the political perception theory. This theory states that journalists will use tone to incorporate biases and opinions into their reporting. Since journalists are supposed to remain neutral, the presence of bias in the news is a reflection of individual, journalistic

decisions. Sometimes, these biases are subconscious and present themselves in non-conspicuous ways. The results of this research supported hypothesis **H3**. This study showed that journalists hold some influence over political coverage. In approximately half of all articles containing information on local legislatures, journalists incorporated tone into the piece. This fact alone indicates that the political perception theory is a relevant factor for news reporting. Had more articles been written with a neutral tone, **H3** would have been more difficult to definitively reject or support.

While this research discussed a lot about the limitations of news coverage for state legislators, it is important to remember that these figures were not completely neglected. Organizing the 25 cases of state legislators mentioned within this study's timeframe might help reveal patterns in news output, if any exist. The chart for these categorizations can be found in Appendix 2. Nine of these 25 articles contained horse race coverage. The rest were about substantive issues including healthcare, energy, the budget, immigration, environmental resources, education, and taxation. Of the substantive issues, the topic of healthcare was covered five times, more than any other category. A possible explanation is the effect that this subject has on large numbers of people. While most of these issues affect all persons, health care is often a high priority of constituents. Other topics received only one or two mentions. These trends indicate the media attempted to touch on a wide range of policy issues in its reporting. This would give their readership a healthy overview of public policy going on in the state. Once all policy issues are discussed briefly, these results indicate that in order to receive increased coverage, state legislators need to comment or take a stance on more widespread issues.

## **Conclusion**

The limited number of cases for this research restricted the ability to draw meaningful conclusions. This was the most constrictive factor throughout this experiment. With such few mentions of state legislators in the news, all hypothesis testing and data analysis must be approached cautiously. It is unknown whether the findings discussed here are circumstantial or representative of larger media trends.

This difficulty in analyzing the data was an unexpected problem in this research. Prior studies about media trends and state representatives failed to acknowledge this limitation in their research. Both the research design and the control group proved that there is minimal newspaper coverage on this topic. One possible explanation for this includes consumer choice. If readers have little to no affinity for state legislative campaigns, newspapers would choose to eliminate a majority of this coverage and look elsewhere for news stories. A second possible reason for this trend is 2012 was a presidential election year. The presidential race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney affected news coverage, as it was more likely to focus on this topic. Since it was a crucial swing state during the 2012 election, this trend is especially true in the case of Ohio. A third explanation for this trend is media prominence. According to Graber, the three most important factors in choosing whether to print a story are conflict, proximity and timeliness (Graber 1989). State legislative election news coverage lacks a majority of these traits, forcing journalists to focus their political scope on other public figures.

To gain some further perspective on these findings, I ran these results by Fred Zipp, the former editor of *The Austin-American Statesman*. Although he left the paper in 2011, the year before the time frame of this research, Zipp was able to give his opinions on these results to the best of his knowledge. According to him, there are two major frameworks that serve to explain

the limited number of cases for state legislators found in the news. The first applies to all newspapers across the country. It is the economic framework of the media and the phenomenon of a shrinking news hole. In general, the amount of space that newspapers have to devote to any sort of content has gone down during recent years. The size of the news hole is determined by the amount of advertising. For the last 12-14 years, advertising support in terms of volume and yield has declined. A consequence is newspapers have less space to write stories and fewer people to write stories. Editorial boards are forcibly more selective on how to approach assignments. As a result, the quantity of articles about state legislators has declined.

The second influencing factor is the editorial framework. Zipp's conclusions here can only be applied to *The Austin-American Statesman*. It is mostly likely the case that *The Columbus Dispatch* and *The Sacramento Bee* have their own, different editorial frameworks to explain newspaper trends. For *The Austin-American Statesman*, newspaper coverage is correlated with popular, current events, and the competitiveness of races. In the Austin metro area, there are multiple legislative districts. In 2010, district maps were redrawn to concentrate Democrats into fewer districts. Because the left is so vastly outnumbered by the right in the state as a whole, this redistricting was necessary for Democrats to gain any sort of political leverage. Instead of being spread out throughout the state, the Democratic Party strategically cut its loses. News district maps of 2010 resulted in high concentrations of this group living in specific areas, and next to none residing in other parts of the state. As a result, races became less competitive and therefore less interesting. In their respective districts, Democrats and Republicans won rather easily.

Furthermore, the results of this research showed that Kirk Watson, a Democratic Senator, was mentioned much more than any other Texas politician. Zipp suggested two possible reasons for this. The first is that during 2012, Watson was in the middle of a large campaign to acquire

funding for the construction of a new hospital. This large and important project, which happened to be taking place immediately preceding election season, received a lot of news coverage.

Watson was a source used in many articles talking about this event. Second, Zipp suggested that Watson's lengthy political experience and former position as the head of the Democratic Caucus makes him a good source for all reporters to use when trying to gain insight on any political issue. He may either serve as the point man representing the democratic perspective, or may be used as a source to discuss other hard news issues.

The editorial board of *The Austin-American Statesman* consciously leans to a particular political ideology. From 2001 – 2008, the publication consciously tried to position itself as centrist because in the 20-year period before that, the paper was decisively liberal. But, when Zipp became editor in 2008, he wanted to push the newspaper back toward a left-of-center, liberal ideology. He believed that in order to be a meaningful political actor in Austin, the paper had to be Democratic. The gerrymandering and demographics of the districts call for it. Part of the reason he resigned from the job in 2011 was pressure from higher-ups to get back to a middle-of-the-road position. Interestingly enough, the results of his research which show this newspaper printed more articles about Democrats than Republicans, which is opposite of its editorial board's interests. Regardless, these combined factors offer some insight into the reporting trends of *The Austin-American Statesman*.

Despite its limitations, this research will be of future help to better understand the general relationships between media coverage and state legislative elections. It is useful because this relationship has only previously been analyzed only to a limited degree. In the future, state legislators should look to this study to learn that local newspapers are not the best way for these figures to make an impact with the public. Infrequent print coverage of these figures means that

politicians should perhaps look to television, social media, or online platforms to make an impact in the political scene. In many ways, newspapers are, as proven, a dead end.

Although an analysis of existing literature was successful in helping elucidate which variables are important for political newspaper coverage, there are several ways this methodology can be improved. First, *The Austin-American Statesman* should not have been chosen as to represent Texas in this study. Selecting newspapers closest to the state capitol in California and Ohio made sense, but the same cannot be said for Texas. Austin is a highly democratic city in a very republican state. Its proximity to the capitol was not as significant for newspaper trends as originally anticipated. A better choice would have been Houston or San Antonio. These right-leaning cities would have been more appropriate when trying to analyze the relationship between bias or newspaper trends with respect to political ideologies. Some solace that can come from the existing research is, regardless of newspaper choice, state legislators were not mentioned frequently enough to draw any significant conclusions. The lack of cases in the data helped mask this flaw in methodology. Had more state legislator articles been published, this error in the methodology would have affected results much more significantly.

Given more time and more access to information, this methodology can be improved. There are better ways in which the variables for this study can be used to analyze relationships. First, the word choice variable is not overwhelmingly important for analyzing the results. Another way in which the name location variable could have been used is looking at prominence in an article. Researchers Frederick and Fico used this technique in their research (Fico and Frederick 2001). By measuring the location of an assertion about a candidate, such as the lead or intro paragraphs, the results could have painted a larger picture of potential biases and preferences by newspapers. The higher up a candidate is mentioned, the more likely a reader will

see his or her name. Using the name placement variable in this way would have better shown the stylistic choices of different media.

Another variable untouched in this research is resources. Quite possibly, the amount of working capital for both politicians and newspapers affected reporting tendencies. As Cooper suggested, politicians with larger budgets have better access to the media (Cooper 2002). Deep-pocketed state legislators may have the necessary means to gain more frequent newspaper access. Although he did not make this claim, newspaper with larger budgets also have more resources to allocate for reporting. The availability of financial resources can potentially alter coverage patterns in a drastic way.

Future research is needed to not only test the affect of resources of reporting trends, but also to perform further analysis on this topic in other realms. In the *Other Campaign Coverage* subsection under study measures, this research addressed other possible factors that might impact the relationship between newspaper coverage and reporting of state legislators. One way to study how federal and local coverage interact in news reporting of this kind is to test whether federal coverage deliberately trumps local election coverage. A possible way to test this question is looking at the interplay between local and federal coverage. If, for example, an outlet chooses to run a story on a federal politician in the same issue that a state legislator is also written about, or an editorial board puts more federal election stories on the front page than they put stories of local government figures, this may be an indication of media's intention to focus on federal coverage and push other political coverage to the weigh-side. Unfortunately, this information was not made available through the Duke University Library. If it was, learning the physical location of articles in a print issue would help identify structural imbalances.

The element of human error is an important factor to discuss in this work as well. Since variables such as tone are subjective, it is possible that my own biases worked their way into the results of the study. There is no textbook rule for how to measure the tone of an article. There is only a best guess. Also, since the aggregations of information from online data sources was performed by the meticulous task of looking through hundreds of articles for references to state representatives, it is possible that minor errors exist in the paper. The use of the word finder function on the computer insures that there is little possibility for more than a few errors in this research.

Lastly, this study only scratches the surface of the relationship between the local media and state legislative elections. This research is performed on a small scale, taking into account only the cities of Columbus, Sacramento, and Austin. Further research will have to be completed to broaden this paper's conclusion. If it is discovered that the same relationships identified in this research exist in other cities and publications across the country, a more generalized conclusion can be drawn about the local media and its impact on state legislative elections. Future research should consider using more cities, and more polarizing cities, to gauge the effect of media trends. Additionally, if this research were performed in a non-presidential election year, it would be interesting to see if swing state newspapers would have behaved differently. In this research, the swing state newspaper focused so vehemently on the presidential race. What would the focus of these outlets be if presidential coverage were less relevant to current events?

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## Appendix 1:

Article Title	Research Question	Methods	Conclusion	Categorization/Relationships
Press Secretaries, Journalists and Editors: Shaping Local Congressional News Coverage	Do congressional press secretaries and members of new media have a direct impact on news coverage of congressional elections?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content analysis of 1148 articles, covering 100 U.S. House members</li> <li>- In-depth interviews with rep. press secretaries, interviews with press designed to determine what resources they devoted to coverage</li> <li>- 45 local papers analyzed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- representatives influence coverage they receive (release of information, actively engage with media)</li> <li>- personal interactions between members of the press and elected officials are critical in shaping media coverage</li> <li>- editorial board influence coverage (amount and tone)</li> <li>- Media is free to make its own choices and act independently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Federal Coverage</li> <li>- The candidates and their staff wield limited influence over the information flows in campaigns and elections</li> <li>- Media bias can influence coverage</li> <li>- Dynamic Relationship</li> </ul>
Television Coverage of the 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan: Rise of Cable Television as a Force for Balance in Media Coverage	How did television report the campaign, parties, and candidates during the 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content analysis of 6 stations [public; TTV, CTV, CTS and private; TNN, CTN, TVBS]</li> <li>- Stories coded based on length, candidate, political party and favorableness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State owned broadcast television were more likely to give greater coverage to the ruling party and its candidates as opposed to the privately owned networks, which were more balanced</li> <li>- Cable TV allows for balanced coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Coverage</li> <li>- Television Coverage</li> <li>- Direct, positive relationship between state owned outlet and current government official</li> </ul>
The Role of the UK local press in the local constituency campaign	What role does the local media (press) play in local constituency campaign in the UK elections?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualitative: Interviews with reporters of local newspapers. Interviews with random parliamentary members.</li> <li>Quantitative: research on specific newspapers (number of political references in 3 papers).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Somewhat inconclusive</li> <li>- Representatives can create a sense of presence with frequent appearances, but limited evidence that this translates into votes</li> <li>- local press is only small part of campaigning</li> <li>- Incumbents can get coverage more easily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Coverage</li> <li>- Local Coverage</li> <li>- No evidence that coverage effects <i>outcomes</i></li> <li>- Coverage does have some effect on image/sense of presence</li> </ul>
Local Television and Newspaper Coverage of Political Advertising	How often do the news media cover advertising? What effects candidates' use of campaigns (news outlet, media market and race themselves).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyze 9 different races (4 senate and 5 gubernational)</li> <li>- Used largest newspapers and tracked local coverage from 4 major news networks</li> <li>- Articles were coded with no content, ad related or ad focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentions of advertising in news coverage was substantial</li> <li>- Majority of coverage concerns personalities of candidates or tone of campaign</li> <li>- Newspapers are no more likely to mention advertising than TV news</li> <li>- News less sensitive to negative coverage than television is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local Coverage and Federal</li> <li>- Advertising, which may be a reflection of a political candidate, occurs on both TV and newspapers</li> <li>- There is a relationship between coverage of advertisements and the public image of the candidates being covered</li> </ul>
Coverage of Governor Races Balanced While Senate Races Reflect Some Bias	Does coverage of election in states with simultaneous statewide races for governor and senate result in imbalanced coverage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine largest daily newspapers in 8 states with simultaneous coverage in 2006</li> <li>- Looked at number of references made to candidate in lead, first paragraph, 2-5, and 6 – 10.</li> <li>- examine partisan and structural imbalance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governor articles no less structurally imbalanced than Senate articles</li> <li>- Governor races have less partisan imbalance</li> <li>- Committing more resources to one race leads to less structural imbalance</li> <li>- Gubernational races more evenly reported while Senate races reflect Democratic Bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local Coverage and Federal</li> <li>- Suggests that the media are the ones responsible for impacting coverage (based on reporter attitude, allocation of resources)</li> <li>- Media wield influence over coverage</li> </ul>
Who Influences Whom? The Agenda-Building Relationship Between Political Candidates and the Media in the 2002 Michigan Governor Race.	Are there differences between the ways a candidate portrayed themselves in press releases and their subsequent portrayal in the media? How correlated are the issue agendas of the candidates and the news media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- examined election issues surrounding the election</li> <li>- content analysis of press releases from candidates and corresponding news coverage (analyzed in largest 9 dailies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- partial support that the issues candidates focus on in press releases will subsequently be picked up by the media</li> <li>- reporting of a candidates character was more common than a discussion of issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local Coverage</li> <li>- Candidates and newspapers can exert mutual influence on each other.</li> <li>- Media wield influence over coverage (can focus on personality of candidate)</li> <li>- Candidate interaction with media (PR) can shape media coverage.</li> <li>- DYNAMIC</li> </ul>
Setting the News Story Agenda: Candidates and Commentators in News Coverage of a Governor's Race.	What types of sources are used most often, most extensively, and most prominently in election coverage? What characteristics of reporters and their organizations influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- content analysis of stories from 9 largest daily newspapers in Michigan</li> <li>- analyzed location of assertions by candidates or figures</li> <li>- Quantitative analysis – measures space and story paragraph position.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Candidates and supporters dominated the media as opposed to “experts” on issues (leads and earliest paragraphs)</li> <li>- Candidates themselves most likely to be in leads, suggesting that they have the most power to set the public agenda on campaign issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local Coverage</li> <li>- About sourcing choice, not election outcomes</li> <li>- Candidates themselves often chosen as the main sources</li> <li>- Candidates have the most power in shaping public agenda and thus influence the media coverage.</li> </ul>

	the choice of sources			
Biasing Influences on Balance in Election News Coverage: An assessment of newspaper coverage of the 2006 U.S. Senate Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What was the partisan and structural imbalance in political stories?</li> <li>- Was this imbalance related</li> <li>- Does journalistic bias influence the gather, processing and transmission of information?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examined U.S. senate races in 11 states using largest dailies in each state</li> <li>- Largest circulation papers chosen because had the most resources to allocate</li> <li>- Partisan bias measured based on prominence/space given to an argument (lead, first paragraph, 2-5, 6-10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coverage of the 2006 elections heavily favored Democratic party or other liberal candidates</li> <li>- Differed from 2004 where Senate was given more positive coverage of Republicans</li> <li>- General structural imbalance consistent year to year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Federal</li> <li>- Journalistic bias influences reporting in the media (This says nothing about election outcomes)</li> <li>- Journalists (creativity, choice of lead)</li> <li>- editor plays role too</li> <li>- gender had negligent effect on bias/imbalance</li> </ul>
Moderator Bias in Television Coverage of an Election Campaign with no Political Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do TV moderators ask politicians the same questions to different parties or do they focus on different issues?</li> <li>- IS moderator treatment biased (introduction/tone)? If the bias exists, it is observed in state owned NRK and not in private TV2?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examined 14 moderate cross-examined programs aired on NRK and TV2 during last four weeks of election coverage.</li> <li>- A list of all content was analyzed and compared on a scale of -1 to 1 (negative to positive)</li> <li>- Analyzed average voter segment as well to see if there was bias in questioning, how the voters' everyday activities hindered values and other features identifiable with view public.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moderators focused on different issues for different parties (voters given limited chance to see conflicting points from politicians)</li> <li>- Tried to ask questions that would highlight differences between parties</li> <li>- Overall bias in favor of the political left</li> <li>- Norway elections, politicians not given any direct access to television campaigning, ads or appearances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Coverage</li> <li>- Television bias can influence public opinion and can effect an election outcome</li> <li>- Moderators on television shows can influence their bias (tone, presentation, questions asked).</li> <li>* <i>Are moderators journalists?</i></li> <li>- Journalistic bias may have a decisive influence on election outcomes</li> <li>- What role does entertainment/talks show hosts play in media coverage?</li> </ul>
Media Matter: How Newspapers and Television News Cover Campaigns and Influence Voters	Do newspapers matter when it comes to politics? Do newspapers outperform television (and other media) in political coverage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content analysis of how two local newspapers and four local television stations covered 2000 Minnesota Senate Campaign (Star Tribune, St. Paul Pioneer</li> <li>- Exit poll: voter knowledge about relevant information, newspaper/TV habits, and individual attributes that affect learning and access to information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TV and newspapers differ in the quantity of coverage, but not the content</li> <li>- Newspapers play a more significant role for spreading information to voters with limitation that newspaper have more sources to compete with. (Media will work hard to attract a larger audience and will try to fill a specific niche by covering most relevant local information).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Federal Election</li> <li>- Newspapers are the best means of spreading political information to the public</li> <li>- No mention of bias/outcomes</li> <li>* <i>Newspapers responsible for spread of information → door open for infusion of bias of editors into their articles OR PR people of politicians influence what information the media spreads.</i></li> </ul>
Reversed Mobilization in Referendum Campaigns: How Positive News Framing Can Mobilize the Skeptics	What is the degree of positive and negative framing in news coverage about the Dutch EU Constitution referendum?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content analysis of articles and relevant information from TV. Used 6 national dailies including tabloid press. Coded as framing positively or negatively</li> <li>- Experiment to have an individual give their opinions on the issue before and after reading press that was either skewed positively or negatively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Constitution framed more positive than negative</li> <li>- Positive bias across all outlets</li> <li>- Vote choice intention not effected by experiment</li> <li>- Turnout intention was affected (positive framing condition expressed significantly higher turnout intention)</li> <li>- In EU supporters, no change in intention from any articles. No effect of negative framing for supporters. Reason has to do with a change in <i>status (Schuck and de Vreese)</i> and people more likely to mobilize when something will change rather than then trying to defend what already exists. Even if against, positive coverage will make you want to avoid those new changes.</li> <li>- Those against it were significantly more mobilized by articles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International</li> <li>- Federal Election</li> <li>- National Media</li> <li>- The framing of a news article affects the opinions of individuals receiving that news → journalists have power over public opinion → journalists can effect/impact election by framing stories</li> <li>- Framing an issue as a matter of changing the status quo can mobilize voters/voter intent.</li> <li>- <i>No mention that this will change a voters opinion, only that it will encourage a voting initiative.</i></li> </ul>

**Appendix 2:**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
Horseshoe	9
Healthcare	5
Energy	3
Budget	2
Taxation	2
Education	1
Hospital Funding	1
Immigration	1
Natural Resources/Water Protection	1
Prison System	1