

Engaged Journalism, Democratic Engagement? The Impact of Newsroom Listening Sessions on Political Participation

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“When one carries out an ethnography, one observes what people do, and then tries to tease out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions; one tries to get at the way people’s habits and actions makes sense in ways that they are not themselves completely aware of. One obvious role for a radical intellectual is to do precisely that: to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts”

— Dave Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*

Dedication

This master's project is dedicated to Peter I. Kenmore and Mark T. Kenmore, both of whom fought for more people to participate fully in democracy.

I have many people to whom I owe this master's project. I am particularly grateful to my advisor, Philip Napoli, who has been unfailing encouraging and helpful throughout this process. I would also like to thank Ken Rogerson, who served as my second reader, as well as John Quintero, Tyler Dukes, the county clerks who provided records, Reddit users who talked me through complex R problems, and the good people at the Center for Data and Visualization Sciences, all of whom helped me in various ways to collect, clean and analyze this data. I also want to thank my wonderful cohort of fellow MPP candidates, the faculty and staff of Sanford, my union siblings at the Duke Graduate Student Union, Mario Ayoub, who introduced me to Sanford, and the political science and English faculty at Guilford college who set me on this path — especially Maria Rosales and Jeff Jeske. Finally, I am, as ever, grateful for my mother, Sue Tannehill, without whom none of this would be possible.

Abstract

This paper explores whether regional engaged journalism impacts democratic engagement in local government. Carolina Public Press, a non-profit newsroom in Western North Carolina, carried out a number of community listening sessions in 2014 and 2015. This paper uses a difference in difference model to see if these listening sessions resulted in changes to voting, political donations or testimony at county budget hearings in the counties where these listening sessions were held. Across several statistical models the presence of a listening session in a county does not appear to have any statistically significant impact on any of the markers of democratic engagement.

Introduction

In the 1970's, welfare mothers, led by Ruby Duncan, a Black woman with a ninth-grade education born in 1930's Louisiana, shut down gambling in Las Vegas's biggest casinos to force a repeal of cuts to their aid. Even with limited formal education, Duncan learned how to navigate local, state and federal politics to win material improvements for herself and other welfare mothers, eventually advising President Jimmy Carter as she advocated for welfare reform (Orleck 2005). Duncan and her fellow organizers proved that ordinary citizens can become incredibly effective actors in local politics, even with limited initial access to the key resources—time, money and political skills (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995) — of political engagement.

This master's project is an oblique answer to the question "Is Your Journalism a Luxury or a Necessity?" (Backlund 2019). It both accepts the challenge of, and pushes back on, the main point of Backlund: that most journalistic resources go to meeting the informational needs of people relatively high on Maslow's hierarchy (Backlund 2019). Arguing for a focus on community information needs, Backlund argues that journalism should provide information that

helps people obtain necessities like food and shelter. “Yes, Democracy dies in darkness,” Backlund writes. “But so do people. Which are we prioritizing?” (Backlund). It is a good argument — journalists should attempt to meet vital information needs with actionable information — but engagement and advocacy like Duncan’s is also a way to remedy the structural inequalities Backlund wants to help people navigate. That, too, requires actionable information.

At its best, journalism, like Graeber’s anarchist ethnography, reflects back contributions and possibilities that help people engage in self-governance, building a society that meets their needs. It not only covers people-power as the power that drives democracy (Hinton 2021), it works to increase that power. This masters project explores whether there are better ways for journalists to provide this kind of information, specifically the relationship between engaged journalism models and local political participation.

What Is Engagement?

Studying the interaction between journalism and engagement is a complex proposal, not least because measuring democratic engagement is difficult to measure. Voting is easily documented, but protesting, contacting public officials, attending and participating in government meetings, belonging to civic organizations and donating to campaigns (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995) are much more difficult to quantify. They are also important to study. If a vote is a blunt instrument for expressing policy choices, testimony at a hearing can convey a very specific preference (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Trying to gauge changes in political participation through media adds a layer of complexity. The networks between media and local governance are interwoven and rapidly evolving (“Local News and Participation Systems Map”).

Verba, Schlozman & Brady in their monumental “Voice and Equality” examine a broad range of kinds of political participation, including voting, campaign work, campaign contributions, contacting officials, protesting, attending local board meetings, serving on a board, and affiliating or attending meetings of a political organization (1995). Engagement in these activities ranges from common — voting, at 71 percent — to rare — board membership, at three percent. They also take varying levels of different kinds of political resources (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Examining just one aspect of participation is insufficient when considering the impact of something like a change in the kind or quality of information.

Russel Dalton argues that there are two competing models of citizenship — citizen duty, which involves activities like voting but little advocacy outside; and engaged citizenship which is less likely to involve voting but more likely to involve direct action such as boycotts or internet activism (Dalton 2008). This kind of engaged citizenship is not only increasingly popular, he argues, it is also more focused than elections — “it is difficult to treat elections as mandates on specific policies because they assess relative support for broad programs and not specific policies” (Dalton 2008). Indeed, even independent voters increasingly vote like hard core partisans, with fewer switching parties between elections regardless of levels of political information (Smidt 2015) and party identity seems to be a deep part of self-identity (Theodoridis 2017). These voters may be voting based on a slate of ideological positions or one issue, but discerning a specific issue is particularly hard when people tend to vote for the same party regardless of candidates or specific policy positions.

If Dalton is correct, models of political citizenship that focus on voting tend to treat it as a democratic duty rather than an engagement with a specific issue. The emerging model of engaged citizenship is more specifically policy oriented, and requires higher levels of

information than voting, while voters can and often do take part with only limited information. This means that a change in the kind of political information should be examined across several metrics of participation, including low information, high participation actions, and high-information, issue specific engagement.

There is also far less literature on how these models of media and political engagement work on the local level, even though most government entities are local and the information needed to follow local politics is quite high (Friedland et al. 2012). Because of this, this master's project focusses on a local treatment (engaged journalism meetings in specific NC counties) and local political engagement (donations to local political campaigns, testimony at county budget hearings, and voter turnout in local as well as federal elections).

Information

The role of information, and in particular the media, in democratic engagement has been the subject of debate by scholars for at least 100 years, reaching back at least to Walter Lippman's "Public Opinion." Lippman thought that the world was far too complicated to be understood by any one person, and so people made their political decisions based on filtered and stereotyped views. "There is no prospect, in any time which we can conceive, that the whole invisible environment will be so clear to all men that they will spontaneously arrive at sound public opinions And even if there were a prospect, it is extremely doubtful whether many of us would wish to be bothered." (Lippman 1922).

John Zaller picks this theme up in his work on mass opinion, pointing to compelling evidence that people have widely different awareness of political issues, and most people do not know very much (Zaller 1992). This leads to, for example, huge incumbent advantages in Congressional elections when people can fasten on the name of a candidate that they know

(Zaller 1992).

Attention and Engagement

Why people do not engage with political information, and how concerning the general lack of attention to formal politics should be, is the subject of wide debate. James Fishkin explains this lack of information as rational ignorance — one vote out of a million is not worth spending excessive time researching (Fishkin 2010). At the same time, when presented with time and space to consider facts, people are able to hold to discuss and come to clear opinions about matters of public importance (Fishkin 2010).

Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro point out, in contrast to Zaller, that being able to name political figures is little more than trivia, and does not necessarily mean people are incapable of political action — overtime, they argue, people tend to form fairly stable political opinions even out of low levels of information (Page and Shapiro 1992). Michael Schudson argues Lippman is right that democracy based on people competent in all things will inevitably fail. But soundbites, however maligned, allow people to monitor news and focus on it when it concerns them (Schudson 2010). Other scholars argue that this excusing of inattention can lead to less than ideal results in terms of engagement (Couldry 2010). Lewis et al. write that the monitorial citizen takes in only what they need to for survival; “when taken to this extreme, the citizen of elitist political approaches is a profoundly apolitical being” (Lewis et al. 2010).

There are also arguments that people may have good information but remain disengaged because they feel unable to make a change. This is the finding of a 2010 book examining media consumption in Britain — the subjects were generally well informed but felt powerless to change local decisions (Couldry 2010). In 1992 the Wichita Eagle conducted 192 two-hour interviews

with Wichita residents on this issue and found interviewees to be alienated from the political processes, which they felt did little to resolve real issues, and so disengaged (Rosen 1996).

Citizens may be unable to monitor politics because politics is obscured. Suzanne Mettler argues that many Americans do not fully understand how they benefit from government policy because many of the policy tools are used indirectly, through private actors in a “submerged state” (Mettler 2011). This ignorance about the details and extent of a policy can cause people to either disregard or even oppose it when it would directly benefit them (Mettler 2011).

It may be that people are simply distracted with non-political concerns (Lewis 2005). This indifference is different from being mistrustful of politics — feeling that action is useless or too hard; and some scholars find indifference to be predominate among the disengaged (Dahlgren 2009). These models are also not mutually exclusive. A citizen can be indifferent because they feel like policy does not impact them directly, because they are distracted, and because they feel like there is little they can do to change political structures, all of which might broadly fall under rational ignorance. Verba, Schlozman & Brady found that when asking people who were not politically engaged what factors led them to avoid politics, 39 percent said a lack of time was important, 34 said taking care of their family took precedent, 20 percent said important things in their life did not involve politics, and just under 20 percent answered they never considered it, it was uninteresting, or it wouldn't help with their problems (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995).

Regardless of which model of information and engagement is correct, without information on politics, the possibility of any kind of effective participation is diminished (Friedland et al. 2012). The above theories posit that people can get the information they need when they feel they need it but otherwise do not care to, or that people misunderstand the issues,

do not have time to engage, do not believe politics is relevant to them, do not feel they can take meaningful action, or some combination of all of those factors. Some of these theories are more optimistic than others, but all suggest that Backlund is broadly correct — political news is seen as a luxury, not a necessity. This suggests that journalism which seeks to increase democratic engagement must make a case for why the issues covered matter to the readers, how people can take action to engage with those issues, and that their taking action can have actual consequences. Whether that is a case that can be made, and how it can be made by journalists, is a matter of longstanding debate.

The Role of the Media

It should be noted that political participation is not, on the whole, a matter largely of more information. Most people who do participate in politics do so in different ways, as previously noted, and are more likely to do so if they have access to time, money and civic skills. There is, however, ample evidence that political information does increase engagement. People who are better informed on politics are more likely to participate in some kinds of political activities, all else being equal (Verba, Scholzman & Brady 1995). Multiple papers have shown that attention to local news increases political engagement (Moy et al. 2004) while access to newspapers in particular increases voting (Filla and Johnson 2010). A 2014 paper found that the loss of newspapers in Seattle and Denver saw declines in democratic engagement (Shaker 2014) across both of Dalton's categories — citizen duty (voting) and engaged citizenship (contacting officials, boycotting goods). A 2018 paper by Darr, Hitt and Dunaway found that loss of local newspapers decreases cross-ballot voting between presidential and senate candidates at a federal level, without a falloff of down ballot votes (Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018). The authors argue that a reliance on more national news is increasing partisanship as local news sources vanish

(Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018). A 2019 paper found that staffing at local newspapers has a positive and significant impact on turnout, as well as a positive correlation with the number of candidates running in mayoral races and a negative correlation with margin of victory for the winner (Rubado and Jennings 2019).

There is far less information about whether better journalism, not just more journalism, can also increase democratic engagement, although the issue has been hotly debated for the last 30 years. One theory for how the press causes this increase in participation is mobilizing information — locations of events, identifying information that allows readers to recognize the subjects, and tactical information that provides how to guides (which includes everything from recipes to political organizing) (Lemert 1985). Journalists may be hesitant to includes such information based on a feeling it is overly partisan (or simply unnecessary), but at least anecdotally it can be a powerful motivator (Lemert 1985). This suggests that not only the quantity of reporting, but also the quantity of mobilizing information within that reporting, can change political engagement. The opposite may also happen — Lewis et al. note that journalism itself can sometimes marginalize the interest of citizens. Citizens interviewed on news shows are rarely shown actively proposing policies, far more often they are shown reacting to policies or simply commenting on events without commenting on policy (Lewis et. al 2010).

If the way for journalism to increase democratic engagement is to make a case for why the issues it covers matters and inform people how they become involved, one obvious method to try is to ask people what they do not know but want to — flipping from using citizens to provide reactions to elite decision making and instead placing them at the heart of the coverage of democracy. Jay Rosen, one of the early proponents of re-thinking political journalism to be explicitly pro-engagement, rejects coverage that frames the citizenry as solely responsive. He

proposes new baseline beliefs for journalism — politics is for everyone, democracy requires both information and participants, and journalism should treat people as responsible citizens instead of passive consumers (Rosen 1996). Rosen pushed back on the cynicism of journalists as “amused bystanders” and instead advocate for more and better political participation (Rosen 1996), he is still arguing for journalist to be pro-participation — which remains a controversial argument among some journalists (Rosen 2020).

How Rosen proposes to engage more people — a citizen’s agenda, which uses polling to determine what people care about and frame coverage of a political campaign around how and when politicians address these subjects (Rosen 1996) — is deserving of more study. The scholarship around engagement with consumers of news, now known as engaged journalism, have included an emphasis on a structural reform of journalism, a shift from an industry that has perceived itself as being an elite speaking to an elite to active partnership with news consumers, particularly marginalized groups (Ferrucci et al. 2020).

Case studies of the more civically minded engaged journalism show the possibility of journalists and residents working together to create stronger communities — especially when reporters take the time to listen to the questions people have about their neighborhoods and then try to find answer (Miller 2019). What kind of stories get produced, and their effect, is more difficult to measure. A paper examining stories from the engaged journalism consultant Hearken found that resident suggested stories tended to focus on history, while reporter driven stories covered more “hard news” (Cox and Poepsel 2020), but whether such engaged journalism leads to more democratic engagement is ripe for further exploration.

Methodology

There are a number of different ways to measure the interaction between media and outcomes — there is a distinction between media effects, which are the changes for the individual users, and media impact, which is change at the organizational or institutional level (Napoli 2014). Because this study examines civic engagement at the communal level, a media impact lens is appropriate. There are several models for engaging with media impact, including a coalition model which involves interviews, content analysis and a mix of other methods (Napoli 2014). While probably the most informative, such a model is beyond the scope of this paper. Another way to measure impact, however, is to observe effects in the area that presumably consumes the media. That was the model of a 2011 paper that measured carbon offsets purchased in zip codes within 10 miles of a theater showing the climate change documentary “An Inconvenient Truth” with zip codes that were not near a theater showing the film (Jacobsen 2011). The paper found spikes in carbon offset purchases in areas near the theaters and not in zip codes that were farther away. Like Jacobsen, this paper uses a difference in difference model, comparing counties where an engaged journalism intervention has taken place to nearby counties where no such intervention has taken place.

This paper used the 2014 News Exchange events held by Carolina Public Press in the 19 westernmost counties of North Carolina (which spilled into 2015 and, in one case, 2017). These involved conversations with communities about under covered issues and how Carolina Public Press could best serve them (Newsome). The hypothesis is that by involving the community in the news making decision, journalists may produce more relevant local political coverage and mobilizing information, which will in turn increase democratic engagement with local politics. It should be noted that these conversations did not have any explicit goal of increasing democratic

engagement — any impact on engagement would be incidental to the stated goals of Carolina Public Press in running the News Exchange (Newsome), and should not reflect on the effectiveness of the events for the news outlet.

Data & Mathematical Models

A difference in difference model tracks two similar variables that correspond over a given time period, one set exposed to treatment and one set not. Using an indicator variable to indicate time periods after the intervention and indicator variable for the intervention, variations from the intervention can be determined by interacting the two indicator variables (creating a variable for “treated areas post treatment”) in a regression analysis.

Data were collected for 19 counties, as well as at least an equal number of control counties, starting from when Carolina Public Press was founded — 2011 — and going until 2018, when Carolina Public Press went statewide (“Carolina Public Press Mission”). The control counties were selected from the remaining 82 counties in North Carolina using Mahalanobis distance, which measures distance between data sets while controlling for variance in the data. The data set compared all counties in North Carolina on area, total population, median age, median income, racial makeup in percentages, Hispanic population, and percentage of the population over 25 with a high school or bachelor’s degree using data from the 2007 – 2011 five-year average for the American Community Survey.

The Mahalanobis distance is the distance from a mean of all counties on these metrics, so to select control counties, all counties were ordered based on this Mahalanobis score. Then each treatment county was paired with the non-treated county with the closest Mahalanobis score. In some cases two treatment counties had the same closest non-treatment county, so the next closest county was used for one county. The treatment county with the smaller difference between its

next closest potential control county was paired with that county, and the treatment county with a larger difference between its next closest potential control was paired with its closest match. In practice, this was only necessary in one case.

Political engagement is the dependent variable in this study, and was measured across three factors — voting, giving testimony at a public budget hearing, and campaign contributions. Campaign contributions were then measured in three different ways. As measures of political engagement, these have the advantage of being publicly recorded and quantifiable, unlike other metrics such as campaign work, protest, and affiliation with a political organization. These three factors also capture unique facets of political engagement. Voting is almost unique in that political resources (education, job level, civic skills, etc.) have little impact on participation, while political interest and information have an unusually strong influence — “what matters most for going to the polls is not the resources at voter’s disposal but, rather, their civic orientations, especially their interest in politics” (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). It is also, as Dalton would point out, an activity one can take part in without any specific policy that one advocates for (Dalton 2008). In contrast to voting, political contribution is largely based on family income and little else, including political interest (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Public testimony is the kind of information high, policy specific issue that Dalton associates with engaged citizenship (Dalton 2008). A county budget hearing is specifically local and open to all regardless of income, but presumably has a high knowledge requirement — residents likely have to know enough about the budget process to know when the hearing is and to decide they have something to say. It is also significantly less common than the other two forms of participation — while Verba, Schlozman & Brady find 71 percent of respondents vote and 24

percent donate to campaigns, just 14 percent even attend a local board meeting, without indicating how many speak at these meetings (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995).

Because of these factors, it is possible that a public hearing might capture an aspect of participation not fully accounted for by voting or donations and one uniquely impacted by information. Anecdotally, the testimony collected for data entry included many references from residents to local news articles that brought them out to the hearing. County budget hearings have some practical advantages for the researcher, as well. It is far easier to document publicly delivered testimony that to, for example, submit records requests for public communications to various officials, and all counties are required to hold such a hearing annually by state law, giving consistency across the state.

To collect data on counties board minutes, minutes were retrieved from 38 county websites. If the records online were unavailable or incomplete, requests were emailed county officials, generally the clerk to the board. In most circumstances they quickly provided the minutes, or did so after a follow up email or phone call. In cases where counties did not provide minutes online or after multiple phone calls or emails, open record law requests were filed for the documents in question. Even so, some counties failed to provide complete and accurate copies of the records. In other cases, no hearing was recorded in the minutes, or the minutes were so vague as to be impossible to code. In one case, the relevant minutes for the year 2012 went missing and were unrecoverable by the county. These missing data points were coded as NA's in the data.

The general principle on coding speakers was to count how many people cared enough, and had good enough information about the issues, to attend the budget meeting and offer some comment on it. Any public comment was tallied during the hearing, relevant or otherwise. Only

unique comments were counted – people who spoke more than once were only counted once. If there were multiple hearings no effort was made to determine whether someone spoke once at each meeting. Comments from county legislators, manager, attorney or clerk were excluded, as were budget presentations by any staff members, including announcements about the nature of the meeting that did not address any specific point of the budget.

Officials and others invited to speak by commissioners during the official public hearing were counted if they did not fall within the above categories, as were people who spoke in response to questions from the board not among the officials listed above. Letters to the board presented during the open hearing were counted, with each letter counting for one comment regardless of the number of authors or signatures. Handouts were not counted, but if someone brought forward a letter from others and gave testimony separately it counted as two comments. If more than one person from the same organization delivered a comment together, it was counted as multiple people. People who yielded time were counted, as they cared enough about the hearing to reserve time to speak and to show up, people called upon to speak who were not present were not counted. “Comments from the public were received, and discussion was held from the Commissioners” was treated as NA as there was no way to ascertain whether or how many comments were received (McDowell county 2016).

If the hearing was opened and closed without any mention of a member of the public giving testimony it was coded as 0. If some people were named and then it mentioned other comments were made, only the named people were counted. If there was no note that a budget hearing was concluded, only the testimony given within the given heading on the agenda/minutes was considered as part of the hearing. There was no cross-check of the count, and the methodology had to be updated and specified as unique cases came up across the minutes. While

every attempt was made to keep scoring consistent across all counties, some small irregularities may have slipped in across the 200+ documents reviewed.

Donations were collected from the North Carolina Board of Elections website (NCSBE). Donations were collected for each county for alderman, council member, county commissioner, county treasurer, district attorney, mayor, N.C. Senate, N.C. House, school board county, school board municipal, sheriff and town/city commissioner for each year. Because some of the data sets included large numbers of donations to and from residents outside the county in question, the researcher matched ZIP codes for each county to that county's donation and excluded all donations from outside the ZIP code (North Carolina Zip Codes). Then the donations were coded, once for aggregate dollars, once for number of separate donations, and once for unique donations by matching names.

Voter participation was calculated by calculating how many people in each county cast a ballot as a percentage of the voter registration for that county, using the total number of registered voters reported on the election that year, or the next closest date to the election when a report was filed. Both data sets were downloaded from the North Carolina Board of Elections website (NCSBE).

This model also requires two indicator variables for the interaction term— whether the year being observed is after the intervention (1) or before (0), and whether the area received the treatment (1) or not (0). To do consistent analysis across the data, a third indicator variable of before 2014 (0) or after 2014 (1) was included. This would likely under-estimate the effect of any treatment, as some counties did not have meetings, and none had second meetings, until after 2015, but it allowed for a consistent and conservative before-and-after indicator to run analysis across all the counties.

Finally, the model requires control variables. In this case, normal predictors of political participation — race, age, income, ethnicity, level of education — will presumably be captured in the differing levels of participation between participating and non-participatory counties in the years before the intervention, so long as they run parallel to each other. However, changes to treatment or control counties over time could trigger changes in political participation rates over a span of ten years. Control variables included the total population, a percentage measure of how many Asian, American Indian, Black, white and other residents lived in the county, the percentage of the population of any race who are Hispanic, the percentage of the population with a high school diploma, percentage of the population with a bachelors, the median age and the per-capita personal income. Voter turnout varies widely based on race, ethnicity, education, age and income (“Voter Turnout”), additionally as the donation metrics are measured in absolute, not relative terms, it is important to control for the number of people in the county and their income. Also race, ethnicity, education and income all correlate significantly with overall political participation across a wide range of variables (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995).

Data on race, age and Hispanic ethnicity were downloaded from the North Carolina OSBM State Demographer (Datasets). Income data was obtained from the Bureau of Economics (Bureau of Economics). Education data was not available year by year, so the measures given by the five year American Community Survey — percentage of residents over 25 with a high school and percent of the population over 25 with a bachelor’s degree — were used. The ACS aggregate from 2010 to 2014 was used for the first half of the data set and the measure from the 2015-2019 survey was used for the second.

Other controls include a binary variable for even numbered years (Congressional and state legislative elections) to account for varying levels of engagement. The model also included

the number stories published by Carolina Public Press, which was obtained by scraping the publication dates on all articles posted on their website, and which may have included some non-news articles. Total number of journalists working state-wide was used as a rough control for amount of news, given the research into more news leading to more democratic engagement (Napoli and Morgan 2019), and data were retrieved from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Employment Statistics). A state-wide metric was used to avoid potential issues with obtaining accurate county-by-county numbers and because some stories could have an impact across multiple counties or even the whole state. Data for this estimate is not available prior to 2012, so the 2012 data is used as a best estimate for 2011 as well. The total employment number used selected for North Carolina on line 27-3022, “reporters and correspondents.” The possibly more comprehensive 27-3023, “news analysts, reporters and journalists” was not included. Given the connection between volume of coverage and engagement, failing to control for volume of coverage might indicate too strong of an association between engaged journalism and any democratic engagement effects. The total number of journalists state wide and the number of stories published by Carolina Public Press should control for any such effects.

Formula for the regression:

$$\textit{outcome} = \textit{intercept} + \textit{“intervention location”} * \textit{“treatment year or later”} + \textit{“intervention location”} + \textit{“treatment year or later”} + \textit{other controls}$$

Where outcome is either voting, testimony at a budget hearing or donations, intercept is the intercept, intervention is the treatment indicator variable, treatment year is the indicator variable for years after the intervention, and other controls are as outlined above.

Below is a table of the control variables collected and used in the regression analysis:

binary_2014	Indicator variable for time before/after treatment, with 0 being years 2011 - 2013, and 1 being 2014-2018.
binary_treated	Indicator variable for treated counties, with 0 being control counties and 1 being treated counties
binary_congress	Indicator variable for even years (midterm or Presidential elections) to control for spikes in political activity, 1 for even, 0 for odd.
journos	Total number of journalists working in the state of North Carolina
stories	Number of articles posted by Carolina Public Press that year
pop	Total population of the county
perc_aian	Percent of the county population that is American Indian or Alaska Native
perc_asian	Percent of the county population that is Asian
perc_black	Percent of the county population that is Black
perc_white	Percent of the county population that is white
median_age	Median age of the county
perc_hispanic	Percent of county residents of any race who are Hispanic
perc_hs	Percent of residents 25 and older with a high school diploma
perc_bach	Percent of residents 25 and older with a bachelors degree
per_cap_income	Per-capita personal income for residents of the county
binary_2014:binary_treated	Interaction variable between the indicator for post treatment and the indicator variable for treated

Figure 1

Map of the counties analyzed (treated counties are dark blue and control counties are light blue):

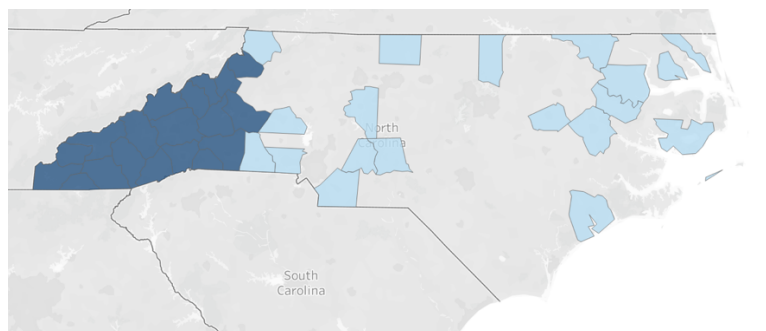


Figure 2

Results

The summary table in Figure 3 shows the range of outcome variables across treated and untreated counties. There is a wide amount of variation, which is likely due in part to the dramatic drop offs in participation in odd years, when only local elections — or perhaps even no elections — are held. For comments, it may be related to local issues such as proposed tax increases or shuttering of certain local institutions like fire departments or libraries.

	Number of Donations	Sum of Donations	Unique Donations	Number of Comments	Voter Participation
Minimum	2	285	2	0	0
Maximum	7904	1337423.72	3401	40	73.60
Median	1034.43	92731.85	313.58	4.22	31.56

Figure 3

Figure 4 shows a simple regression between the variable of interest for democratic engagement and the interaction term of the difference and difference model (whether the year was before 2014 and whether the county was treated or control). It shows no statistically significant differences in the post-treatment counties.

	Number of Donations	Sum of Donations	Unique Donations	Number of Comments	Voter Participation
(Intercept)	1199.43 *** (138.50)	80628.58 *** (16841.13)	277.97 *** (44.30)	4.53 *** (0.69)	31.15 *** (3.22)
binary_2014	128.21 (195.87)	45859.27 (23896.21)	85.05 (62.65)	-1.09 (0.97)	1.71 (4.55)
binary_treated	-514.20 ** (195.87)	-22104.57 (23816.95)	-38.28 (62.65)	0.54 (0.98)	-1.54 (4.55)
binary_2014:binary_treated	111.97 (277.01)	1347.86 (33738.34)	48.87 (88.61)	-0.10 (1.38)	1.29 (6.43)
N	304	303	304	292	304
R2	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.00

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

Figure 4

In Figure 6, all of the controls are included (the variable “other” under the racial categories is excluded to give the model a baseline for the regression). With this more precise model controlling for a variety of politically salient characteristics of both treatment and control counties, there is still no statistically significant effects from the interaction term of “binary_2014:binary_treated” on any of the measures of political engagement. Running the regression with the control variables also lead to no statistically significant results for the interaction term. The R2 values are very low for the simple regressions, but spike considerably when considering all the possible control variables. For voter participation it is .95, which makes sense given many of the control variables were selected because of evidence in the literature that they impacted control variables. The three donation factors all had R2 of over .6, suggesting that many of the factors that impacted donations were captured in the model, while the comments has the lowest R2 at .23, suggesting there are a number of factors outside the model that impact the number of comments. Things like property tax changes and motivating information in local media were not included in the model, which may have had an outside impact on county budget hearing testimony.

The treated counties saw a statistically significant smaller number of donations and voter participation across all years, but more unique donations and larger sums of total donations. Unsurprisingly a binary variable for even years (to represent midterm and presidential elections) showed significant increases in engagement across all categories except comments. Percent of the population with a high school diploma had a strongly negative correlation with all variables except voter participation, which runs counter to expectations in the literature, while bachelor’s degrees had significant correlations with increased engagement (again, with the exception of

Examining the correlation matrix in Figure 5, it appears that some factors do correlate strongly with each other. The number of stories negatively correlates with years, for example, and there is a strong negative correlation between the percent of the population who is black and the treated counties (which are all in Western North Carolina). The percentage of the population that is white also strongly and negatively correlates with the percentage of the population that is black, unsurprisingly. The outcome factors for donations all correlate strongly with each other, which is to be expected, and `binary_post_treatment` correlates strongly with `binary_2014`, which makes sense as there is a strong overlap. There is also a strong correlation between the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree and that with a high school diploma. Population was also strongly correlated with the outcome variables of donations, which makes sense as they are raw number measures, not proportional. Voter participation has almost perfect correlation with even numbered year elections. There is little in the matrix that is surprising, as most of the factors either have an inherent connection — such as treated years and post-2014 years — or a logical one — more people in a county leads to more dollars being donated to local races and more people with high school diplomas correlates to more people with bachelors degrees.

Checking the full regressions for variance inflation factor showed strong multicollinearity for several of the racial makeup measures and for the number of stories. To reduce this, the regression was run again without the control variables “white” and “stories.” The “`perc_bach`” was also excluded to see if it would correct the unexpected negative correlation in the high school measures, even though neither the bachelors or high school measure had a particularly high VIF measure. These new regressions (which are included in Appendix III) reduced the VIF significantly (to under 5, the generally accepted cutoff for issues with collinearity) and did not

create statistically significant results for any of the outcome variables. Per capita income became statistically significant, although not practically significant, across all outcome variables except for comments. High school degrees lost any statistical significance, and the percent of Asians, Native American and Black residents became significant for some outcomes, including a strong statistically significant correlation between the percent of the population that is black and the total sum of donations made to local races. The R2 dropped somewhat across all the models, although not by much. In this model, too, there are no statistically significant effects from the interaction term of “binary_2014:binary_treated” on any of the measures of political engagement.

	Number of Donations	Sum of Donations	Unique Donations	Number of Comments	Voter Participation
(Intercept)	10006.36 (8766.08)	-294782.11 (1311972.97)	2929.97 (2683.53)	69.91 (74.11)	-138.78 (91.55)
binary_2014	66.42 (308.36)	47006.29 (46522.79)	-4.16 (94.40)	3.38 (2.62)	-3.04 (3.22)
binary_treated	-422.72 ** (157.06)	50982.92 * (23505.99)	147.44 ** (48.08)	1.32 (1.34)	-4.50 ** (1.64)
binary_congress	240.76 ** (85.41)	52939.22 *** (12829.38)	115.12 *** (26.15)	-1.17 (0.73)	55.76 *** (0.89)
journos	-0.19 (0.43)	-111.59 (65.13)	-0.14 (0.13)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.02 *** (0.00)
stories	-0.27 (1.32)	-6.78 (198.85)	-0.30 (0.40)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.05 *** (0.01)
pop	0.01 *** (0.00)	1.32 *** (0.13)	0.00 *** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 ** (0.00)
perc_aian	-56.62 (93.48)	7551.91 (13991.26)	-25.97 (28.62)	-0.59 (0.79)	1.85 (0.98)
perc_asian	-208.39 * (101.90)	8710.84 (15252.06)	-39.95 (31.19)	-1.55 (0.86)	2.17 * (1.06)
perc_black	-51.04 (82.65)	7360.53 (12369.42)	-16.58 (25.30)	-0.31 (0.70)	1.66 (0.86)
perc_white	-41.00 (82.68)	6022.22 (12374.84)	-18.42 (25.31)	-0.32 (0.70)	1.64 (0.86)
median_age	13.04 (10.68)	1022.92 (1598.29)	-0.15 (3.27)	-0.25 ** (0.09)	0.30 ** (0.11)
perc_hispanic	-2.58 (14.01)	-2196.94 (2097.88)	-5.64 (4.29)	-0.05 (0.12)	0.07 (0.15)
perc_hs	-101.71 *** (20.95)	-7823.36 * (3137.83)	-24.02 *** (6.41)	-0.43 * (0.18)	0.17 (0.22)
perc_bach	84.35 *** (11.17)	6891.80 *** (1673.68)	21.52 *** (3.42)	0.39 *** (0.09)	0.20 (0.12)
per_cap_income	0.03 * (0.02)	5.86 * (2.29)	0.02 *** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 *** (0.00)
binary_2014:binary_treated	32.93 (146.57)	-8714.24 (21967.92)	22.99 (44.87)	-0.52 (1.25)	1.67 (1.53)
N	304	303	304	292	304
R2	0.75	0.61	0.76	0.23	0.95

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

Figure 6

Simple regressions between each of the treatment counties and its control county match showed similar results. Two of the pairs (Watauga-Pott and Graham-Hyde) were eliminated due to NA results, the rest are reported in Appendix II. Henderson-Wilson shows significant and statistically significant positive post-treatment effects for both the number of donations and the number of unique donations, but it is the only county pair that does. Three county pairs show significant negative impacts on the number of comments delivered at county budget hearings in post-treatment treated counties, one shows a statistically significant positive results. Given the small number of comments, the matched pairs are particularly prone to potentially spurious results from just a few more or less comments across a few years, so the significant effects are likely the result of error terms, not treatments — particularly given that they are positive in some cases and negative in others.

Across all the potential statistical models, there is no compelling evidence that the Carolina Public Press News Exchange events had any positive or negative result on the metrics of democratic engagement examined in this study.

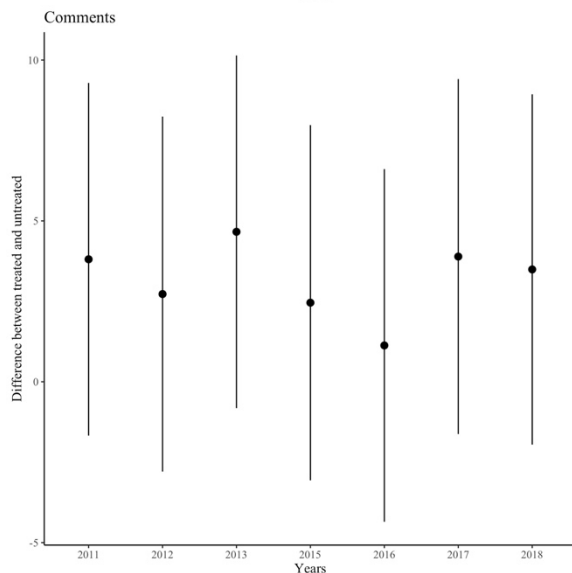
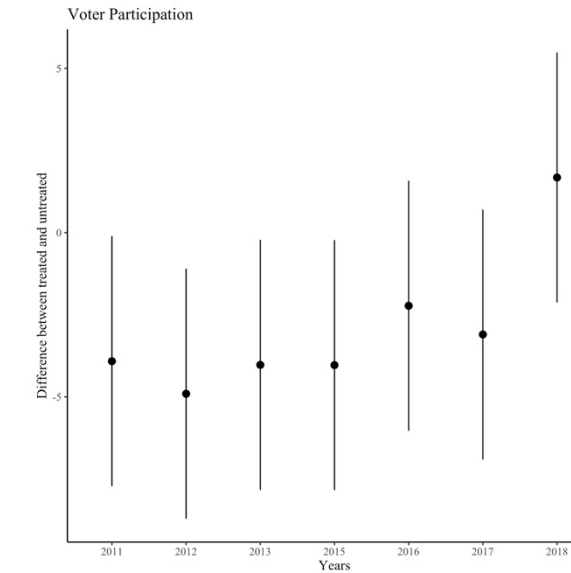
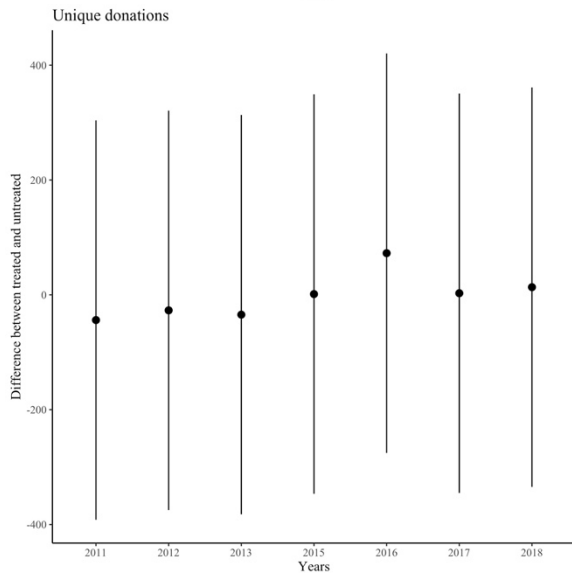
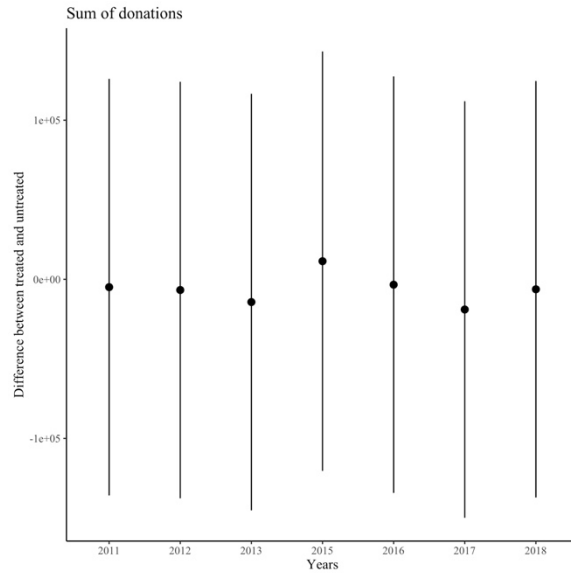
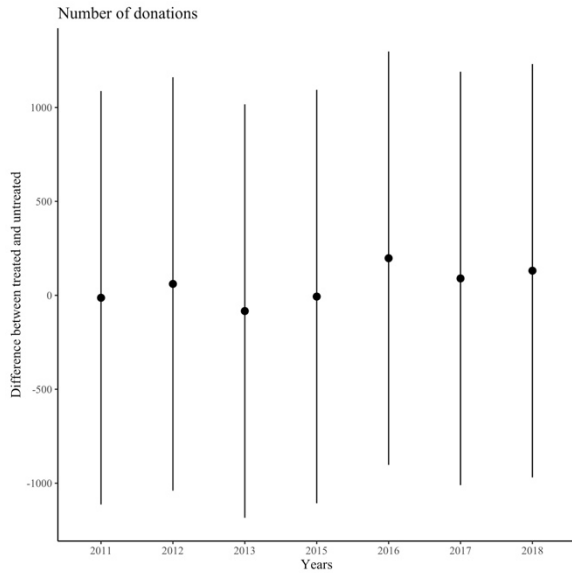


Figure 7

These graphs show the interaction between the treated variable and each given year in relation to the baseline year 2014 (when the treatments began). They capture, year by year, the average difference between treated and non-treated counties for each of the measures of political engagement. They show that while treatment and control counties ran parallel to each other before treatment — necessary for the model to work — there is also no statistically significant difference in the treated counties post treatment.

Conclusions

There are a number of possible reasons why the hypothesized relationship did not emerge in the data. Carolina Public Press is a small, online non-profit newsroom that, at the time of the study, was regional. It is possible that they lacked resources to make substantive changes to their coverage, or that the issues that they did focus on following the news exchange sessions had little to do with county politics or local elections. They may have made significant changes, but as a new organization, their reach may not have been broad enough to have an impact. It may also be that how political issues are covered — engaged versus traditional journalism — is less important than the quantity of information available in changing democratic engagement. In reviewing the comments from residents at county board meetings, there is certainly anecdotal evidence that people showed up at particular meetings based on coverage in local news outlets, although Carolina Public Press did not appear to be among the outlets mentioned.

The methodology is also limited by being unable to schedule an interview with anyone at Carolina Public Press about the specifics of the feedback they received at the listening sessions. This feedback might have led to specific stories that arose from the listening sessions which one could theorize had particular outcomes — coverage of a particular state agency, for example, that might have led to a greater volume of communications sent to the agency, or otherwise triggered some specific democratic engagement.

As it is, the study only uses relatively broad measures of democratic engagement — a vote is, after all, a blunt instrument to communicate preference on a given policy, a donation is a slightly less blunt instrument, and testimony is a particularly pointed way to communicate a policy preference. One can imagine a single story that leads to greater vote turnout — for example, uncovering a scandal about an incumbent local official might spark an increased

turnout to oust that politician in what would normally be a low-turnout race, and such a revelation might also increase donations to an opponent. Outside of an example like this, however, there may be too many factors that go into turnout for singular stories to do much. On the other hand, with something as specific as testimony at a budget hearing it is easy to imagine how a single story might dramatically increase turnout, but only if the story happened to be about an issue the county was considering in its budget that year and not state agencies, town policies or any of the number of other official organizations who might receive public feedback. It is difficult to judge whether this study, despite granular detail on a variety of metrics of democratic engagement, missed the impact of the Carolina Public Press News Exchange, or whether there simply were no results to find. Because of this, this study does not provide any conclusive evidence, positive or negative, about the potential of engaged journalism to increase political engagement.

This conclusion does highlight the lack of research on whether the way local news is reported can increase local political engagement. The promise of engaged journalism is that it can better meet the informational needs of the news consumers, the promise of democratic engagement is that people can create the kind of government and communities that they want to live in. Perhaps asking people what they want to know will allow newsrooms to move away from covering news as a luxury and focusing more on informational necessities, including necessities for this kind of engagement. Perhaps it will instead focus further on luxurious information, such as historical questions, and have no impact — or even a negative impact — on democratic engagement. Regardless of the answer, the question of whether engaged journalism can increase democratic engagement — helping residents not only learn about, but engage with and shape the communities they live in — merits further study.

The model used in this paper produces too little information to even posit any theories about the larger philosophical questions of whether engaged journalism at large has an impact on democratic engagement, so eliminating some of the uncertainties in this model would be important for future research. The difference in difference model used in this paper has strengths in identifying correlations between particular interventions across a range of participatory democratic outcomes, but the research might be strengthened by a coalition model (Napoli 2014). The model used here can only show whether or not there is correlation, while a qualitative aspect to the research might have teased out what kinds of stories something like the News Exchange inspired, which aspects of democratic participation might be most likely to be impacted by an engaged journalism intervention and who actually consumed the media. An interview or survey targeting readers of the Carolina Public Press might have identified ways in which the people who consumed the stories after the News Exchange might or might not have changed their behaviors in a way that county-level demographics cannot capture. That kind of research is more resource intensive, however, than the quantitative approach used in this paper.

Another approach might be to narrow the geographic scope, looking at towns or even neighborhoods where engaged journalism interventions were held against adjacent geographies. By focusing in on as specific an area as possible, other potential statistical noise might be eliminated. For example, a newsroom listening session in one town might produce stories on a local sewer problem that prompts a few more people to attend a county hearing, but could be outweighed by an unrelated decision to shutter a library two towns over. Focusing on the difference in turnout between the towns, instead of the county overall, might be more likely to pick up such a change. Small adjacent geographic locations are also likely subject to the same economic, political and even media conditions, which allows a relatively small impact from a

treatment to stand out as other conditions are more likely to remain constant. Hopefully using mixed methods and more focused models will allow for greater specificity discerning the relationship, if any, between engaged journalism and democratic engagement.

Appendix I: Treatment Counties and Date of Intervention

Counties	Month	Year	Second meeting	
Watauga County	May	2014	Oct.	2015
Avery County	May	2014	Oct.	2015
Yancey County	June	2014	Oct.	2015
Mitchell County	June	2014	Oct.	2015
Graham County	Sept.	2014		
Cherokee County	Sept.	2014		
Swain County	Sept.	2014		
Buncombe County	Oct.	2014		
Henderson County	March	2015		
Haywood County	March	2015		
Rutherford County	March	2015		
Polk County	March	2015		
Madison County	June	2015		
McDowell County	June	2015		
Clay County	Aug.	2015		
Macon County	Aug.	2015		
Jackson County	Aug.	2015		
Transylvania County	Aug.	2015		
Burke County	Aug.	2017		

Appendix II

Difference in difference regression with controls for variance inflation factors and multicollinearity.

	Number of Donations	Sum of Donations	Unique Donations	Number of Comments	Voter Participation
(Intercept)	-163.92 (1554.79)	-185426.07 (218149.12)	-484.25 (460.52)	12.25 (12.36)	5.18 (15.17)
binary_2014	8.54 (136.73)	38526.29 * (19164.53)	29.83 (40.50)	-1.25 (1.08)	6.96 *** (1.33)
binary_treated	42.36 (161.22)	89527.97 *** (22565.70)	266.53 *** (47.75)	3.32 * (1.29)	-3.07 (1.57)
binary_congress	225.62 ** (82.96)	52233.44 *** (11618.26)	104.23 *** (24.57)	-0.62 (0.66)	54.23 *** (0.81)
journalos	-0.22 (0.38)	-114.12 * (53.75)	-0.19 (0.11)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.03 *** (0.00)
pop	0.01 *** (0.00)	1.44 *** (0.13)	0.00 *** (0.00)	0.00 * (0.00)	0.00 ** (0.00)
perc_aian	-16.31 (10.76)	254.03 (1506.21)	-6.74 * (3.19)	-0.25 ** (0.09)	-0.02 (0.10)
perc_asian	-181.20 ** (60.31)	980.62 (8445.52)	-24.76 (17.86)	-1.27 ** (0.47)	0.38 (0.59)
perc_black	-4.68 (4.21)	1816.81 ** (590.76)	3.14 * (1.25)	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)
median_age	-5.97 (10.81)	-204.18 (1513.26)	-5.29 (3.20)	-0.33 *** (0.09)	0.31 ** (0.11)
perc_hispanic	8.68 (15.37)	-1011.85 (2151.73)	-3.01 (4.55)	0.01 (0.12)	0.14 (0.15)
perc_hs	-7.06 (18.23)	-245.17 (2562.58)	0.04 (5.40)	0.02 (0.15)	0.34 (0.18)
per_cap_income	0.04 * (0.02)	6.13 ** (2.25)	0.02 *** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 *** (0.00)
binary_2014:binary_treated	88.97 (162.34)	-3645.52 (22747.24)	36.92 (48.08)	-0.18 (1.29)	1.78 (1.58)
N	304	303	304	292	304
R2	0.68	0.58	0.72	0.17	0.94

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

Appendix III

Table of simple difference in difference regressions for each pair of treatment/control county

Number of Donations	Burke - Cleveland	McDowell - Granville	Jackson - Rockingham	Cherokee - Stanly	Haywood - Martin	Rutherford - Montgomery
(Intercept)	811.83 *** (93.52)	470.25 *** (53.18)	885.00 *** (95.71)	430.67 *** (84.84)	94.75 (120.01)	233.00 (110.39)
binary_post_treat	333.67 (187.04)	73.75 (75.20)	104.00 (135.35)	161.53 (107.31)	47.50 (169.72)	17.00 (156.11)
binary_treated	-141.00 (132.25)	-279.75 ** (75.20)	-492.00 ** (135.35)	-331.67 * (119.98)	1023.75 *** (169.72)	444.75 * (156.11)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	373.50 (264.51)	35.00 (106.35)	408.25 (191.42)	-163.33 (151.76)	115.75 (240.02)	163.50 (220.77)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.60	0.70	0.67	0.76	0.87	0.67
Sum of Donations						
(Intercept)	66105.00 *** (14135.09)	36817.25 *** (7949.64)	93706.24 *** (17194.86)	38629.92 * (14822.74)	8637.14 (26315.80)	20301.14 (14752.03)
binary_post_treat	46703.39 (28270.17)	-1880.55 (11242.48)	12185.21 (24317.21)	39162.72 (18749.45)	10407.81 (37216.16)	2614.76 (20862.53)
binary_treated	2567.66 (19990.03)	-25753.87 * (11242.48)	-60876.37 * (24317.21)	-24354.29 (20962.52)	54277.48 (37216.16)	24647.78 (20862.53)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	29952.26 (39980.06)	11765.48 (15899.27)	18348.08 (34389.73)	-42650.29 (26515.73)	89913.37 (52631.59)	14866.08 (29504.07)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.46	0.37	0.48	0.63	0.64	0.31
Unique Donations						
(Intercept)	257.17 *** (44.41)	150.75 *** (25.63)	329.00 *** (43.77)	168.00 *** (31.69)	35.50 (39.98)	68.75 * (26.62)
binary_post_treat	150.83 (88.83)	4.25 (36.24)	-8.50 (61.91)	56.60 (40.08)	45.00 (56.55)	11.25 (37.65)
binary_treated	25.67 (62.81)	-78.25 (36.24)	-157.00 * (61.91)	-106.33 * (44.81)	300.50 *** (56.55)	106.00 * (37.65)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	95.33 (125.62)	51.75 (51.25)	123.25 (87.55)	-48.07 (56.68)	169.00 (79.97)	81.25 (53.25)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.49	0.35	0.41	0.69	0.90	0.75
Number of Comments						
(Intercept)	1.50 (0.87)	0.25 (1.54)	6.25 ** (1.87)	1.00 (1.66)	1.25 (1.10)	0.25 (0.66)
binary_post_treat	-1.50 (1.75)	10.50 *** (2.18)	-0.50 (2.64)	5.00 * (2.10)	1.50 (1.55)	0.00 (0.94)
binary_treated	1.83 (1.23)	0.50 (2.18)	-4.00 (2.64)	1.00 (2.35)	3.75 * (1.68)	5.00 *** (0.94)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	-0.83 (2.47)	-8.92 * (3.21)	-0.25 (3.73)	-6.40 (2.97)	-6.17 * (2.37)	-3.50 * (1.32)
N	16	15	16	16	14	16
R2	0.29	0.73	0.29	0.47	0.45	0.76
Voter Participation						
(Intercept)	38.29 ** (11.05)	33.00 (15.96)	32.16 (15.96)	29.51 (18.18)	32.27 (16.38)	35.80 * (15.77)
binary_post_treat	-5.01 (22.10)	2.25 (22.57)	1.84 (22.57)	7.17 (23.00)	1.57 (23.17)	-1.75 (22.31)
binary_treated	-4.60 (15.63)	-6.11 (22.57)	-6.29 (22.57)	-8.94 (25.72)	-2.62 (23.17)	-5.67 (22.31)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	0.96 (31.26)	1.29 (31.92)	2.22 (31.92)	3.14 (32.53)	2.30 (32.76)	3.45 (31.55)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.00	0.01

Number of Donations	Macon - Ashe	Madison - Davidson	Henderson - Wilson	Transylvania - Northampton	Swain - Catawba	Yancey - Union
(Intercept)	2610.50 *** (157.10)	1087.00 *** (63.96)	3336.75 *** (270.95)	86.25 (140.40)	2363.33 *** (271.28)	2055.67 *** (319.50)
binary_post_treat	215.75 (222.17)	152.25 (90.46)	-1414.25 ** (383.18)	72.00 (198.56)	206.47 (343.15)	1160.53 * (404.14)
binary_treated	-2207.25 *** (222.17)	-835.50 *** (90.46)	-1765.25 *** (383.18)	920.25 *** (198.56)	-2275.67 *** (383.65)	-1878.00 ** (451.85)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	-134.00 (314.20)	-175.25 (127.93)	2169.25 ** (541.90)	28.25 (280.80)	-185.33 (485.29)	-1008.60 (571.55)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.95	0.95	0.66	0.79	0.90	0.88

Sum of Donations	Macon - Ashe	Madison - Davidson	Henderson - Wilson	Transylvania - Northampton	Swain - Catawba	Yancey - Union
(Intercept)	22573.58 (53188.01)	72375.31 (64974.51)	146388.26 * (53714.35)	14302.00 (13782.29)	219925.15 *** (46863.75)	110392.64 * (42383.40)
binary_post_treat	20564.86 (75219.21)	145795.82 (91887.84)	99234.20 (75963.56)	8648.57 (19491.10)	120117.98 (59278.47)	93134.12 (53611.24)
binary_treated	101696.13 (75219.21)	-51582.13 (91887.84)	-37960.67 (75963.56)	32771.78 (19491.10)	-175310.98 * (66275.34)	-93242.54 (59939.19)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	-14200.19 (106376.03)	-145287.52 (129949.02)	-15352.05 (107428.70)	20606.16 (27564.58)	-118667.48 (83832.42)	-68971.96 (75817.74)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.21	0.34	0.23	0.50	0.78	0.59

Unique Donations	Macon - Ashe	Madison - Davidson	Henderson - Wilson	Transylvania - Northampton	Swain - Catawba	Yancey - Union
(Intercept)	192.75 ** (46.50)	318.75 *** (40.04)	551.75 *** (80.91)	36.25 (45.15)	593.00 *** (100.78)	444.00 ** (123.03)
binary_post_treat	87.50 (65.76)	114.50 (56.63)	-77.00 (114.42)	28.50 (63.85)	223.40 (127.48)	353.60 ** (155.62)
binary_treated	-33.75 (65.76)	-220.00 ** (56.63)	-33.75 (114.42)	286.50 *** (63.85)	-553.33 ** (142.53)	-370.67 (173.99)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	-2.25 (92.99)	-101.00 (80.08)	360.00 * (161.82)	60.00 (90.30)	-208.47 (180.29)	-251.13 (220.08)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.25	0.81	0.45	0.81	0.84	0.72

Number of Comments	Macon - Ashe	Madison - Davidson	Henderson - Wilson	Transylvania - Northampton	Swain - Catawba	Yancey - Union
(Intercept)	2.50 (1.36)	3.75 *** (0.73)	8.50 * (3.21)	2.25 (4.72)	1.00 (0.67)	10.67 *** (1.28)
binary_post_treat	-2.50 (1.92)	2.25 (1.03)	0.50 (4.54)	0.25 (6.67)	0.80 (0.84)	-8.87 *** (1.62)
binary_treated	-0.75 (1.92)	-2.25 (1.26)	4.50 (4.54)	4.75 (6.67)	0.00 (0.94)	-8.33 *** (1.81)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	4.00 (2.72)	-2.75 (1.63)	-6.25 (6.41)	5.75 (9.43)	-1.40 (1.19)	7.33 ** (2.29)
N	16	14	16	16	16	16
R2	0.21	0.73	0.13	0.22	0.24	0.78

Voter Participation	Macon - Ashe	Madison - Davidson	Henderson - Wilson	Transylvania - Northampton	Swain - Catawba	Yancey - Union
(Intercept)	30.47 (17.75)	29.62 (16.26)	30.21 (16.63)	30.44 (16.55)	26.17 (17.17)	27.83 (19.34)
binary_post_treat	3.31 (25.10)	2.83 (22.99)	2.67 (23.52)	1.97 (23.41)	9.20 (21.72)	8.45 (24.46)
binary_treated	-0.14 (25.10)	-0.45 (22.99)	-0.01 (23.52)	3.63 (23.41)	-5.95 (24.29)	-3.73 (27.35)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	-0.62 (35.49)	-0.05 (32.52)	0.61 (33.27)	-1.66 (33.11)	2.18 (30.72)	8.40 (34.59)
N	16	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.05

Number of Donations	Buncombe - Gaston	Avery - Perquimans	Polk - Camden	Mitchell - Bertie	Clay - Onslow
(Intercept)	3293.33 *** (612.15)	76.67 (54.05)	50.75 (77.45)	106.00 * (35.38)	1504.33 *** (317.78)
binary_post_treat	722.27 (774.32)	61.73 (68.37)	-8.75 (109.53)	11.80 (44.75)	845.87 (401.97)
binary_treated	99.67 (865.71)	-17.00 (76.44)	781.75 *** (109.53)	-28.67 (50.03)	-1342.67 * (449.41)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	1143.93 (1095.05)	-11.60 (96.69)	-335.50 (154.89)	104.87 (63.29)	-805.33 (568.47)
N	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.43	0.12	0.86	0.41	0.80

Sum of Donations	Buncombe - Gaston	Avery - Perquimans	Polk - Camden	Mitchell - Bertie	Clay - Onslow
(Intercept)	161603.74 (125012.24)	3210.19 (8596.57)	5249.46 (5500.50)	6991.45 (4239.71)	129414.20 *** (28439.38)
binary_post_treat	53521.75 (158129.37)	14151.90 (10873.90)	-340.76 (7778.89)	3042.65 (5362.85)	23934.03 (35973.28)
binary_treated	131652.78 (176794.01)	449.82 (12157.39)	30745.72 ** (7778.89)	949.24 (5995.85)	-119457.27 * (40219.35)
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	408215.59 (223628.69)	-12249.80 (15378.02)	-6485.17 (11001.01)	7015.10 (7584.22)	-20215.50 (50873.91)
N	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.64	0.18	0.68	0.33	0.71

Unique Donations	Buncombe - Gaston	Avery - Perquimans	Polk - Camden	Mitchell - Bertie	Clay - Onslow
(Intercept)	562.00 -306.14	26.67 -24.67	25.50 -20.84	59.67 ** -17.68	629.67 *** -67.88
binary_post_treat	242.20 -387.24	39.13 -31.21	3.00 -29.47	22.33 -22.36	71.73 -85.86
binary_treated	536.67 -432.95	-10.67 -34.89	181.50 *** -29.47	-8.00 -25.00	-499.67 *** -96.00
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	867.13 -547.64	-17.13 -44.13	-27.25 -41.68	13.20 -31.63	-84.53 -121.43
N	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.68	0.20	0.85	0.23	0.88

Number of Comments	Buncombe - Gaston	Avery - Perquimans	Polk - Camden	Mitchell - Bertie	Clay - Onslow
(Intercept)	20.00 ** -5.23	1.67 -2.19	0.00 -1.96	4.00 -2.03	5.33 -2.81
binary_post_treat	-13.40 -6.61	-0.87 -2.78	0.50 -2.59	-0.67 -2.87	-1.73 -3.56
binary_treated	-13.33 -7.39	7.00 * -3.10	7.75 * -2.59	-4.00 -3.21	-3.33 -3.98
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	13.13 -9.35	-1.40 -3.93	-7.75 -3.53	0.67 -4.31	4.53 -5.03
N	16	16	15	11	16
R2	0.31	0.48	0.56	0.30	0.07

Voter Participation	Buncombe - Gaston	Avery - Perquimans	Polk - Camden	Mitchell - Bertie	Clay - Onslow
(Intercept)	27.66 -16.99	26.17 -18.32	27.09 -16.69	25.39 -18.76	21.42 -17.04
binary_post_treat	7.27 -21.49	7.94 -23.18	2.34 -23.60	8.53 -23.73	3.95 -21.55
binary_treated	4.41 -24.03	-3.23 -25.91	4.65 -23.60	-2.15 -26.53	-0.49 -24.10
binary_post_treat:binary_treated	-0.23 -30.40	4.12 -32.77	-0.32 -33.38	4.57 -33.55	11.26 -30.48
N	16	16	16	16	16
R2	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.06

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

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