Silent News, Silent Ballots: The Effect of Local Journalism's Decline on Midterm Election Turnout

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have been conducted in the past assessing local news' impact on local election turnout. However, the effect of local reporting on turnout for national elections is less understood.

This study examines the relationship between changes in local newspaper availability and voter turnout across U.S. midterms from 2014 to 2022. Descriptive statistics indicate a steady decline in the number of newspapers, with a notable increase in voter turnout from 2014 to 2018, followed by a slight decline from 2018 to 2022. Simple comparisons between consecutive midterms reveal that counties transitioning from multiple newspapers to none exhibited a near significant decrease in voter turnout between 2018 and 2022. Conversely, counties losing their last newspaper from 2014 to 2018 experienced an unexpected increase in voter turnout.

Multiple linear regressions corroborated these results: while reductions in newspaper availability were associated with a positive change on voter turnout from 2014 to 2018, these changes negatively influenced turnout between 2018 and 2022. These contradictory findings suggest a possible Simpson's paradox.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Local news is critical to community (Park et al. 2019). It has long been a cornerstone of governmental accountability, and its rapid decline over the past few decades has posed a significant threat to the democratic health of many communities (Waldman 2011). This decline raises urgent concerns, making it essential to study the broader impact of diminishing local reporting on democracy.

Assessing the health of a democracy is inherently complex due to the numerous factors involved, such as election integrity, civic engagement, and civil liberties, among others (The Center for High Impact Philanthropy 2024). Despite the multifaceted nature of democratic health, voter turnout has consistently been identified as a key indicator of both democratic vitality and electoral integrity (MIT Election Data and Science Lab 2021). Previous research has demonstrated a clear link between declining local news and reduced voter participation in local elections (Schulhofer-Wohl et al. 2009). However, the effects of this decline on voter turnout in larger-scale elections remain less understood.

This study seeks to explore the impact of declining local news on voter turnout in larger elections, recognizing that the outcomes of these elections have a profound impact on American policy making. Understanding this relationship is crucial, as a decline in voter engagement could lead to governments and policies that are less representative of the electorate's desires. By highlighting the broader consequences of the erosion of local news, this research attempts to underscore the need for strategies to preserve local journalism and the health of our democracy.

2 LITERATURE

Prior research suggests local news availability has an impact on civic engagement. Barthel et al. (2016) conducted a survey of 4654 US adults and found that the individuals who feel much more attached to their communities had a much stronger tie to their local news than those who did not. Additionally, people who had a strong tie to their local news demonstrated higher likelihoods of voting in their local elections. Schulhofer-Wohl et al. (2009) corroborated this by showing voter turnout decreased through multiple local election years in the Kentucky suburbs after the *Cincinnati Post* closed in 2007. Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel (2009) suggested that local news in Spanish boosted the Hispanic vote in local elections. Similar findings were seen when observing municipal elections in Switzerland (Kübler and Goodman 2019).

The story becomes less clear when observing local journalism's impact on turnout for larger elections. The aforementioned survey found that regularly voting in national elections did not necessarily indicate a higher likelihood of paying attention to local news (Barthel et al. 2016). However, a recent study of all 93 counties in Nebraska revealed an association between drops in newspaper circulation and decreased turnout rates in midterm and presidential elections using a multiple linear regression model that included age, gender, and race demographics (Penington 2024). Another study showed that dominance by large newspapers rather than localized newspapers resulted in reduced media coverage of the U.S. House elections, which negatively impacted citizen political engagement and turnout in House elections (Hayes and Lawless 2015). This illustrates some ambiguity in regard to local news' impact on national elections.

Our study specifically focuses on House races during midterm elections. These races are particularly valuable for analysis because they are standardized nationwide, involve more localized candidates compared to presidential elections, and offer a wealth of accessible

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Table 1: Aspects of Each Study

Study	Studies Nation	Studies Differences	Midterm Elections
Schulhofer-Wohl		x	
Pennington		x	x
Hayes and Lawless	x		x
Our study	x	x	x

and reliable data. By concentrating on these elections, we can more accurately assess the impact of declining local news coverage on voter participation in larger contexts while local concerns still remain present to a degree. We also study differences in turnout and local news presence. We believe this is an important step to building the study's internal validity because other demographic and economic factors play a role into each counties resting turnout rate and local news presence. Studying the differences of these variables remove these confounding variables and strengthen the results of the study. A graphical representation of our contributions to the literature can be seen in Table 1.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this study is to deepen our understanding of the relationship between the decline in local reporting and shifts in voter turnout in larger-scale elections that retain local elements. By examining this association, we aim to shed light on how the erosion of local news impacts electoral engagement in races where local issues still play a significant role.

3.1 Data

For the demographic data, we use the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates provided by the Census Bureau through its API. The key demographic variables considered for our modeling approach include median age, median income, proportions of Black population, and proportion of Hispanic population. For voter turnout data, we draw from Dave Leip's Election Database, which contains county-level returns for House races during midterm election years. To assess changes in local news health at the county level, we analyze the differences in newspaper counts for each county across the years 2014, 2018, and 2022, corresponding to the midterm election years (Medill Local News Initiative 2024).

Certain counties are excluded from this study due to data inconsistencies. All counties in Alaska and Connecticut are omitted because of geographical subdivision mismatches between election returns and census data. Pasco and Kalawao counties are excluded due to the absence of voter data. Additionally, counties with apparent data entry errors, such as those reporting zero votes in an election, are also excluded. Finally, Washington, D.C. is not included, as it is not classified as a county.

3.2 Model

We use two models to assess whether turnout in midterm elections is associated with local news presence.

3.2.1 Difference in differences. The first is a simple, yet robust test. Of the nearly every county used in the study, we subdivide them into 6 categories based on the change of their newspaper (NP) availability between the studied midterms:

$$\begin{aligned}
&\geq 2\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{pre-measure}} \rightarrow \geq 2\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{post-measure}}\\
&\geq 2\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{pre-measure}} \rightarrow 1\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{post-measure}}\\
&\geq 2\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{pre-measure}} \rightarrow 0\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{post-measure}}\\
&1\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{pre-measure}} \rightarrow 1\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{post-measure}}\\
&1\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{pre-measure}} \rightarrow 0\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{post-measure}}\\
&0\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{pre-measure}} \rightarrow 0\ \mathrm{NP}_{\text{post-measure}}
\end{aligned}$$

For example, when studying changes in turnout between 2014 and 2018, the amount of newspapers in 2014 would be the pre-measure and amount of papers in 2018 would be the post-measure.

We use a difference-in-differences (DID) approach to assess declining local news' impact on turnout, meaning we took the average of each groups difference in turnout between two midterm elections and assessed if their differences held any statistical significance. See an illustration of this concept on Table 2.

Conceptual Table		
Groups	Pre Measure	Post Measure
Healthy to Healthy	Observation 1	Observation 2
Healthy to Desert	Observation 3	Observation 4

Table 2: Observations of Newspaper Changes and Voter Turnout

$$\begin{aligned}
H_0: &\quad O_2 - O_1 = O_4 - O_3\\
H_1: &\quad O_2 - O_1 > O_4 - O_3
\end{aligned}$$

Hypotheses for Observations Analysis

In this straightforward approach, we conduct a Welch's t-test to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in voter turnout between the groups we are studying. The Welch's t-test is particularly suited for our analysis because it accounts for the possibility of unequal variances in turnout changes between the six groups.

3.2.2 Multiple Linear Regression. The second model in our analysis employs linear regressions to evaluate the impact of changing local news presence as a predictor for shifts in voter turnout. This model is an important addition to our study because it builds upon and refines the work presented by Pennington, who previously explored similar dynamics. By incorporating additional variables that reflect the demographic and socioeconomic changes in the population, we

aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing voter engagement.

In this model, we include not only the change in local news presence but also consider the change in the proportion of Hispanic and Black populations, along with changes in median income and age. These variables are crucial because they represent significant demographic and economic shifts that can affect both voter turnout and changes in newspaper availability (Malthouse et al. 2023). For instance, changes in the racial composition of a county could influence political engagement, while variations in median income might reflect economic conditions that either encourage or discourage voting. Similarly, changes in the median age of the population can capture generational shifts in voter behavior.

The formula for this model is structured as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta \mathrm{VT}(Y) = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 \Delta \mathrm{NP} \\ &+ \beta_2 \Delta \mathrm{BlackProp} + \beta_3 \Delta \mathrm{HispanicProp} \\ &+ \beta_4 \Delta \mathrm{Income} + \beta_5 \Delta \mathrm{Age}\end{aligned}$$

Additionally we have illustrated a directed acyclic graph (DAG) to better show our conceptual framework for the regression models as seen in Figure 1.

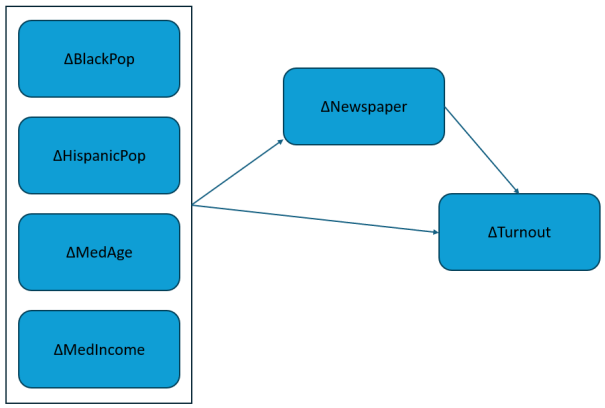

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for regression

4 RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for 2022 (n = 3103)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Variance	Min	Max
Turnout	0.4685	0.4665	0.1039	0.0108	0.0913	0.9957
Newspapers	2.0435	1	2.9748	8.8494	0	84
Black proportion	0.0884	0.0223	0.1426	0.0203	0	0.8584
Hispanic proportion	0.0994	0.0468	0.1397	0.0195	0	0.9624
Median income	32925.4	32344	6911.2	47764769	12509	83215
Median age	41.6588	41.4	5.3787	28.9300	21.6	68.3

Summary statistics for all variables were calculated, which can be seen in Tables 3, 4, 5. Two important things to note from these

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for 2018 (n = 3103)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Variance	Min	Max
Turnout	0.4944	0.4875	0.0957	0.0092	0.1321	0.9621
Newspapers	2.2652	1	3.6717	13.4816	0	107
Black proportion	0.0914	0.0231	0.1459	0.0213	0	0.8741
Hispanic proportion	0.0926	0.0406	0.1379	0.0190	0	0.9907
Median income	32885.01	32307	6922.153	47916203	12509	83215
Median age	41.3131	41.2	5.3726	28.8650	21.7	67

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for 2014 (n = 3103)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Variance	Min	Max
Turnout	0.3872	0.3772	0.1042	0.0109	0.0853	0.9558
Newspapers	2.5443	2	4.0890	16.7202	0	108
Black proportion	0.0907	0.0218	0.1456	0.0212	0	0.8591
Hispanic proportion	0.0866	0.0354	0.1344	0.0181	0	0.9568
Median income	32879.17	32297	6926.085	47970656	12509	83215
Median age	40.7489	40.8	5.2037	27.0783	21.6	64.5

tables is the turnout and newspaper trends. Average newspapers across counties steadily decline over this eight year period, which is what we expected. Additionally, we see more than a 10% increase in national voter turnout between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections. From 2018 to 2022, there was around a 2.5% decrease in turnout.

4.2 Difference-in-differences

We examined differences between two consecutive midterm elections: 2014 to 2018 and 2018 to 2022. By focusing on back-to-back midterms, we aim to minimize the impact of long-term political changes. Given the significant shifts in the U.S. political climate from 2014 to 2022, analyzing shorter time frames allows for a more accurate comparison.

We collected the mean change in voter turnout, sample sizes for each group, and the variance of changes for the periods 2014–2018 and 2018–2022 as shown in Tables 6 and 7. As expected, the 2018–2022 change was negative across the board while the 2014–2018 change was positive.

A particular point of interest is the deviation of the greater than or equal to 2 newspapers to 0 newspaper category from the other categories from 2018 to 2022. As for the other categories in 2018–2022, they all seem to lack any significant deviation. We conducted a test of significance between the greater than 2 NP to 0 NP and the greater than 2 NP to greater than 2 NP group to reveal if this is a noteworthy difference in voter turnout as shown in Table 8. Observing the results, we see a borderline significant result of these news desert counties have a more negative change in turnout as opposed to the healthy counties (p = .13).

As for the 2014-2018 differences, there was another strong outlying group. The group of counties that went from 1 newspaper to 0 in this time frame averaged a greater positive change in voter turnout than any other group. We conducted a test of significance between the 1 NP to 0 NP and the 1 NP to 1 NP group as seen in Table 9 to reveal if this is a noteworthy difference in voter turnout. Observing the results, we see a significant difference in voting turnout between these groups ($p = 4.79e-6$). Unexpectedly, it's in the opposite direction we would have expected since the news

desert counties significantly increased their turnout in comparison to the counties with a more healthy news environment.

4.3 Multiple Linear Regressions

Observing the multiple regressions, we see that the change in newspapers has a near-significant positive impact on voting change in the 2018–2022 elections ($p = .2$), with every one newspaper lost corresponding to a 0.1561% decrease in voter turnout as seen in Table 11. This aligns with our expectation that declining local news would negatively influence voter turnout. However, analyzing the 2014–2018 elections, we find that a decrease in newspapers leads to a statistically significant increase in voting, with every one newspaper lost corresponding to a 0.887% increase in voter turnout with a p-value of $1.17e-13$ as seen in Table 10. This result contradicts the other result and suggests that the effect of newspapers on voter turnout depends on the election periods studied.

4.4 Model Interpretations

The two models put out an interesting observation: fewer newspapers predicted less turnout when it came to the 2018–2022 midterms, but fewer newspapers predicted more voting when it came to the 2014–2018 midterms. These results may differ due to Simpson's paradox, where an unaccounted for confounding variable influences the result.

A potential confounding variable could be county party affiliation. The political climate during midterm elections often leads to significant shifts in voter turnout, with red or blue waves indicating that certain demographics are more motivated to vote.

Another contributing factor may be the changing political climate between elections. The 2018 midterm was marked by heightened political polarization and significant events that might have influenced voter behavior regardless of changes in local news presence. This can be seen simply by the fact the national turnout increased by almost 10% between 2014 and 2018. When we look at the 2018 to 2022 elections, however, we observed almost a 3% drop in national turnout. This could indicate weaker voter attitudes and a less polarized climate within this time frame. Thus, local news may have had a greater opportunity to impact voter attitudes rather than national media.

5 CONTROLLED STUDIES

5.1 Party Affiliation Control

To account for party affiliation, we categorized the counties as either predominantly Democratic or Republican based on the percentage of the population that voted for each party. The party with the higher percentage determined the county's classification, and we then conducted separate analyses for each group.

This approach revealed interesting patterns, particularly during the 2018 and 2022 elections. In predominantly Republican counties, we saw for every one newspaper lost corresponded to a 0.2897% decrease in voter turnout for every additional newspaper at a borderline significant level ($p = .08$) as seen in Table 13 . This suggests a potential link between reduced local news and lower voter participation in these areas. Conversely, in Democratic counties, the data indicated an opposite trend, where a decrease in newspapers corresponded to a slight increase in voter turnout; however, this effect was not statistically significant, with a p-value of .46 Table 12.

When examining the 2014–2018 election period, the results aligned closely with our earlier findings in section 4.3. In predominantly Republican counties, we saw for every one newspaper lost corresponded to a 0.1179% increase in voter turnout at a significant level with a p-value of $5.27e-9$ as seen in Table 15. A similar, though less pronounced, trend was observed in Democratic counties, we saw that for every one newspaper lost corresponded to a 0.3936% increase in voter turnout at a significant level with a p-value of .021 as seen in Table 14.

These findings indicate that while local newspapers appear to be a negative predictor for voter turnout in all counties during the 2014 and 2018 midterms, their role shifts in the 2018 and 2022 midterms, where they become a near-significant positive predictor in Republican counties. This change suggests that party affiliation probably isn't the confounding variable influencing the overall results. Instead, other factors may be at play.

5.2 Polarization Control

Various methods can be used to control for polarization. One approach is to study elections with roughly equal national turnouts. This allows us to more confidently assume that voter attitudes were similar between the elections.

Potential midterm elections for this analysis are the 2006 and 2010 midterms. With only a 1.8% decrease in national turnout and many newspapers disappearing due to the 2008 recession, these elections could provide valuable insights into the association between local news and voter turnout. Unfortunately, data for 2010 newspaper counts is not available, and the Census Bureau does not have 5-year estimates for 2006 or earlier. Future research could explore these elections using alternative data sources.

To at least test if this hypothesis holds true with the data we have, we can examine the 2014 and 2022 midterms. With an 8% increase in national turnout during this period, we would expect that the loss of local news might have either no significant effect on midterm turnout or lead to increased turnout. These results would be consistent with the changes observed between 2014 and 2018.

Studying the 2010 to 2014 midterm turnout changes would also provide additional insights. However, the lack of data for 2010 newspaper counts limits our ability to analyze this period thoroughly.

5.2.1 Results. With the data available, we looked at the 2014 and 2022 midterm elections and ran the same multiple linear regression as we did for all other elections. As expected, we saw for every one newspaper lost corresponded to a 0.253% increase in voting at a significant level ($p = 0.01036$) as seen in Table 16. This agrees with the trend we saw for the 2014 and 2018 elections. This means it would be helpful to observe if this trend holds for other election years as well.

4.2 Tables: Summary Statistics and Welsch's T test

Table 6: 2018-22 Turnout Changes

Mean	n	Variance	Condition
-0.0297	1262	0.0031	NP2018 ≥ 2 & NP2022 ≥ 2
-0.0250	1368	0.0033	NP2018 == 1 & NP2022 == 1
-0.0110	133	0.0097	NP2018 == 0 & NP2022 == 0
-0.0277	172	0.0021	NP2018 ≥ 2 & NP2022 == 1
-0.0572	5	0.0011	NP2018 ≥ 2 & NP2022 == 0
-0.0281	48	0.0026	NP2018 == 1 & NP2022 == 0

Table 7: 2014-18 Turnout Changes

Mean	n	Variance	Condition
0.1120	1410	0.0039	NP2014 ≥ 2 & NP2018 ≥ 2
0.1010	1272	0.0042	NP2014 == 1 & NP2018 == 1
0.0977	143	0.0120	NP2014 == 0 & NP2018 == 0
0.1199	161	0.0042	NP2014 ≥ 2 & NP2018 == 1
0.1277	9	0.0032	NP2014 ≥ 2 & NP2018 == 0
0.1461	54	0.0041	NP2014 == 1 & NP2018 == 0

Table 8: 2018-22 significance test

Description	Value
Test Statistic	$t = 1.8738$
Degrees of Freedom	$df = 4.0918$
P-value	$p = 0.1326$
Alternative Hypothesis	True difference in means is not equal to 0
95% Confidence Interval	$[-0.01293096, 0.06811108]$
Mean of Group X	-0.02965446
Mean of Group Y	-0.05724452

Table 9: 2014-18 significance test

Description	Value
Test Statistic	$t = -5.0466$
Degrees of Freedom	$df = 57.689$
P-value	$p = 4.792 \times 10^{-6}$
Alternative Hypothesis	True difference in means is not equal to 0
95% Confidence Interval	$[-0.06298308, -0.02720604]$
Mean of Group X	0.1010460
Mean of Group Y	0.1461406

4.3 Tables: Regression Coefficients

Table 10: 2014-18 Regression

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	0.09357	0.00236	39.624	$< 2e^{-16}$ ***
changeNP	-0.00887	0.00123	-7.194	7.88×10^{-13} ***
changeBlack	-0.02951	0.1205	-0.245	0.806
changeHisp	0.1997	0.1046	1.908	0.0564
changeAge	0.00277	0.000855	3.235	0.00123 **
changeIncome	3.116×10^{-6}	6.592×10^{-7}	4.727	2.38×10^{-6} ***

Table 11: 2018-22 Regression

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	-0.02062	0.002766	-7.454	1.17×10^{-13} ***
changeNP	0.001561	0.001222	1.277	0.2016
changeBlack	-0.3477	0.07603	-4.573	5.00×10^{-6} ***
changeHisp	-0.04006	0.07193	-0.557	0.5776
changeAge	-0.0006985	0.0006268	-1.114	0.2652
changeIncome	-8.723×10^{-7}	4.046×10^{-7}	-2.156	0.0312 *

6 DISCUSSION

We conducted a rigorous analysis to quantify the impact of changes in local newspaper availability on voter participation in larger-scale elections. Our approach, while straightforward, was designed to capture the nuances of this relationship across different midterm years. The results indicate some near-significant evidence suggesting a correlation between diminishing local newspapers and a decline in voter turnout during the 2018 and 2022 election years. However, this pattern does not hold consistently across all time periods. Specifically, our analysis of the 2014 and 2018 election years revealed opposing results, where no similar decline in voter turnout was observed despite changes in local newspaper circulation.

The inconsistency between these two sets of election years highlights the potential influence of one or more confounding variables that were not accounted for in our study. These variables could be interacting with general voter attitudes, which would certainly have an impact on the conclusions we can take away from the study.

For instance, factors such as national political climate, changes in voter mobilization efforts, or shifts in alternative sources of local information, like social media or online news, could play significant roles in shaping voter behavior. The contrasting results between the two election years suggest that further research is needed to identify and control for these confounding factors. Only then can we draw more definitive conclusions about the true impact of local newspaper changes on voter turnout across different electoral contexts.

6.1 Future Research

Future research should aim to build upon the findings of this study by addressing potential limitations and exploring additional variables that may influence the relationship between local news and voter turnout.

An possible approach is to control for polarization by studying elections with relatively similar national turnout rates. This would help control for the significant changes in voter attitudes observed between the 2014 and 2018 midterms. By controlling for these variations, we could obtain more robust evidence of the association between local news and national election turnout, especially considering that national media outlets have had a significant role in influencing voter behavior and, by extension, national election turnout.

Going along these lines, further investigation is the role of national media in shaping election outcomes is important. While this

5.1 Tables: Midterms Grouped by Party

Table 12: 2018-2022 Democrat

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	-0.03078	0.009043	-3.403	0.000727 ***
changeNP	-0.001436	0.001946	-0.738	0.460763
changeBlack	-0.1649	0.1706	-0.966	0.334370
changeHisp	-0.6047	0.2354	-2.569	0.010545 *
changeAge	-0.002794	0.002710	-1.031	0.303026
changeIncome	-4.955e-07	1.094e-06	-0.453	0.650964

Table 13: 2018-2022 Republican

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	-0.02186	0.002930	-7.460	1.17e-13 ***
changeNP	0.002897	0.001673	1.731	0.0836
changeBlack	-0.4474	0.08646	-5.175	2.45e-07 ***
changeHisp	0.05043	0.07482	0.674	0.5004
changeAge	-0.000334	0.000635	-0.525	0.5994
changeIncome	-4.738e-07	4.418e-07	-1.072	0.2837

Table 14: 2014-2018 Democrat

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	0.09696	0.008107	11.961	$< 2 \times 10^{-16}$ ***
changeNP	-0.003936	0.001700	-2.315	0.0211 *
changeBlack	0.5053	0.3004	1.682	0.0933
changeHisp	0.4283	0.3286	1.304	0.1930
changeAge	-0.002100	0.003750	-0.560	0.5757
changeIncome	8.125e-06	1.863e-06	4.362	1.6e-05 ***

Table 15: 2014-2018 Republican

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	0.09537	0.002486	38.368	$< 2 \times 10^{-16}$ ***
changeNP	-0.01179	0.002012	-5.858	5.27e-09 ***
changeBlack	-0.2051	0.1313	-1.563	0.11827
changeHisp	0.1318	0.1095	1.203	0.22891
changeAge	0.002529	0.000869	2.912	0.00362 **
changeIncome	1.799e-06	7.026e-07	2.560	0.01053 *

Table 16: 2014-22 Regression

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> |t|)
(Intercept)	0.05941	0.00417	14.250	$< 2 \times 10^{-16}$ ***
changeNP	-0.00253	0.00098	-2.565	0.01036 *
changeBlack	-0.26540	0.09202	-2.884	0.00395 **
changeHisp	0.35990	0.07535	4.776	1.87×10^{-6} ***
changeAge	0.00337	0.00063	5.365	8.72×10^{-8} ***
changeIncome	1.398×10^{-6}	4.307×10^{-7}	3.246	0.00118 **

study focused primarily on local news, it's essential to consider how national media coverage might interact with or overshadow local news influences, especially in highly polarized or high-profile elections.

A valuable direction for future research could involve examining different types of elections to understand the effects of local media on voter turnout. For instance, analyzing turnout in statewide elections—such as those for Governor, Attorney General, or Secretary of State—might reveal more pronounced associations with local media coverage compared to house elections. This approach could help determine whether local media has a more significant impact on smaller yet wider scale elections.

Additionally, future research could explore alternative independent variables to better capture the complexity of local news presence and engagement. The current study's focus on changes in newspaper count as the primary variable offers insights into local news dynamics, but it may not fully encapsulate the broader spectrum of local media consumption. For example, Pennington's research in Nebraska factored in changes in newspaper circulation in Nebraska, which provides a more comprehensive view of how shifts in local news availability might affect voter behavior. Expanding this approach to include other forms of local media, such as digital news platforms, community radio, and local television, could yield a more robust model for understanding the relationship between local news presence and civic engagement. Additionally, data on broadband access is currently becoming more refined with the help of Northwestern Medill's Local News Initiative, so its effect on civic engagement can be better understood.

In summary, future research should continue to refine and expand upon the current study's findings by considering the broader media environment, enhancing the granularity of political affiliation metrics, and exploring a wider array of independent variables. By doing so, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of how local news influences voter turnout in larger elections and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of media in democratic processes.

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