

# Locating the Local

## An Audit of Google News

Sean Fischer, Kokil Jaidka, and Yphtach Lelkes

PaCSS | 2019



1. Motivation

2. Method

3. Outlets

4. Maps

5. Modeling

6. Discussion

# Motivation

# Central Questions

1. Does Google News produce *de facto* selective exposure?
2. If so, to which features is the Google News platform responding?

# Theoretical Model



# Methods

# Project Steps

1. Identify county seats and associated coordinates
2. Set search parameters
3. Run searches and scrape results
4. Extract sources from results
5. Code sources
6. Combine datasets
7. Perform analyses

# Search Terms

National terms: abortion, caravan, climate, conservative, corruption, election, fbi, gun, immigration, liberal, politics, president, scandal, shutdown, syria, and taxes

Local terms: accident, college, crime, death, emergency services, governor, high school, hospital, mayor, obituary, police, school board, traffic, transit, university, and weather

# Example Search Results

Joe Walsh Says Trump Is 'Unfit' to Be President. Some Say the Same About Him.

The New York Times · Yesterday



**Rank = 1**

Brazil's President Says He Won't Accept \$20 Million From G-7 Without An Apology

NPR · Yesterday

**Rank = 2**

Brazilian president demands apology before accepting \$20M to help fight Amazon fires

NBC News · Yesterday

**Rank = 3**

[View full coverage](#)

Former Vice President Doesn't Know What Pence Is Doing in the White

House

Newsweek · 2 hours ago



**Rank = 4**

Philippine President Duterte says he'll stand up to China – he might not deliver

CNBC · 10 hours ago



**Rank = 5**

# Other Data Sources

US Census Bureau's American Community Survey

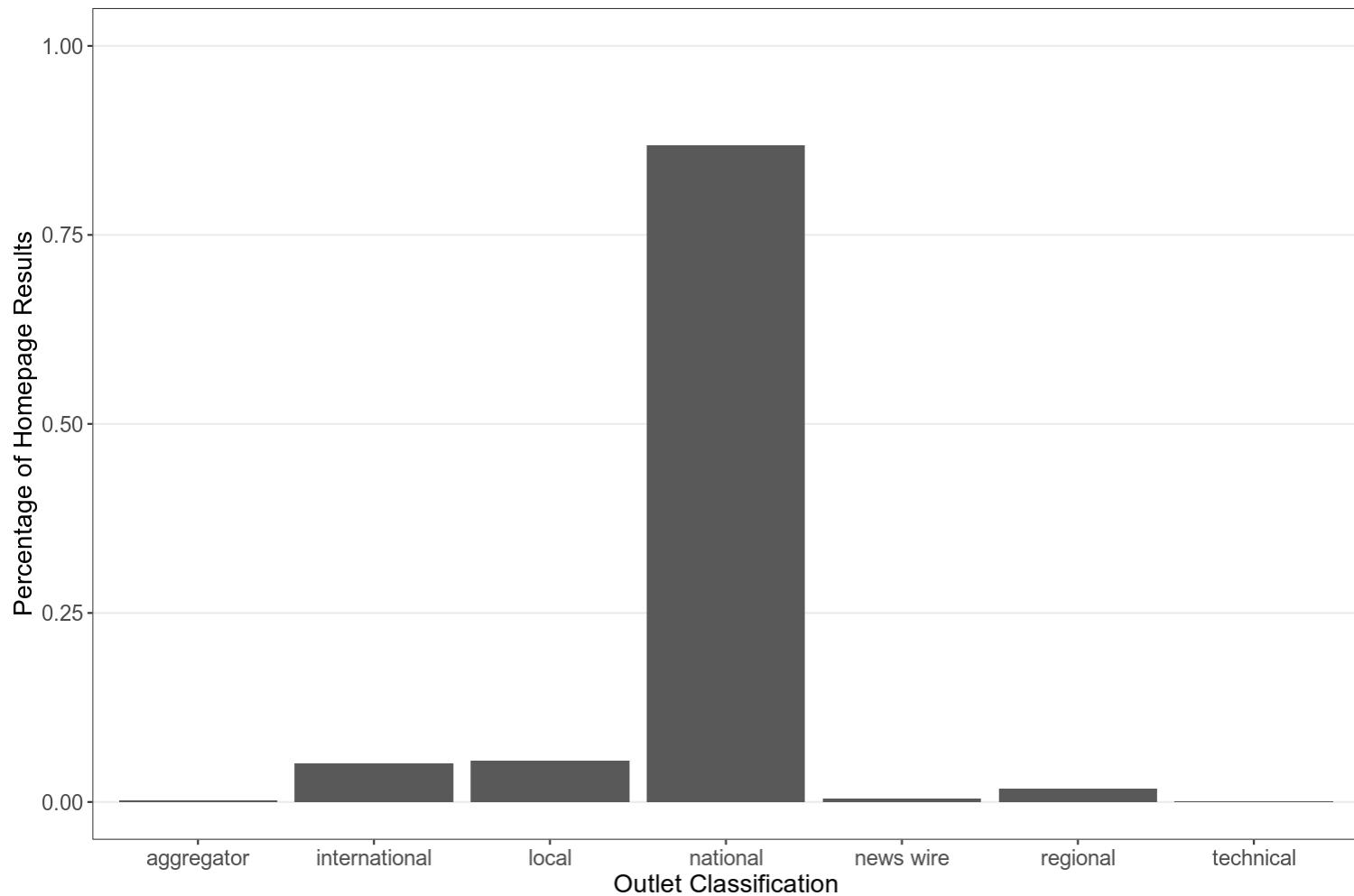
Accessed using tidy\_census

UNC's Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media's Database of Newspapers

Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy (Napoli, Weber, McCollough, and Wang, 2018)

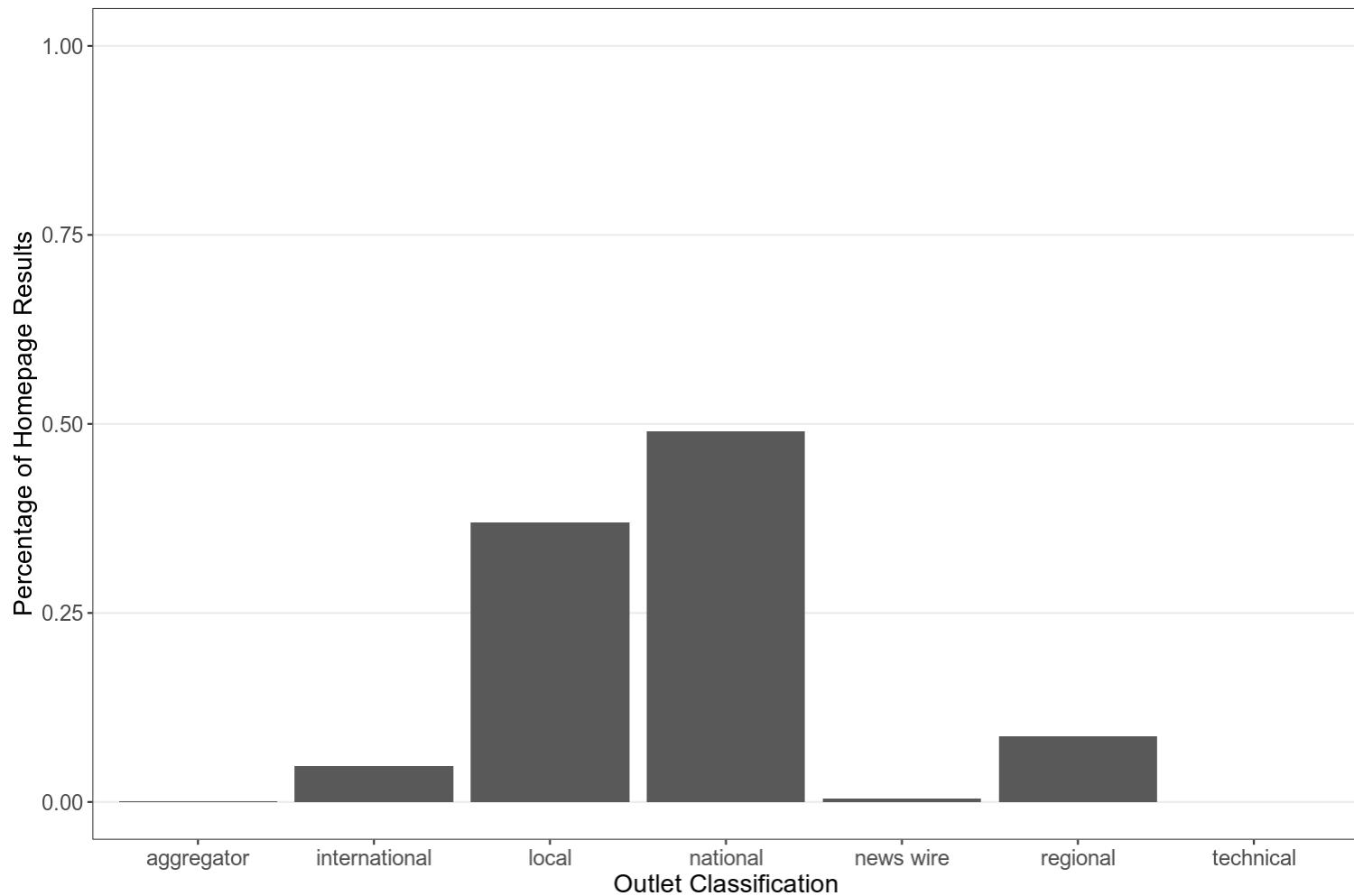
# Google News Homepage

# Local/National Divide

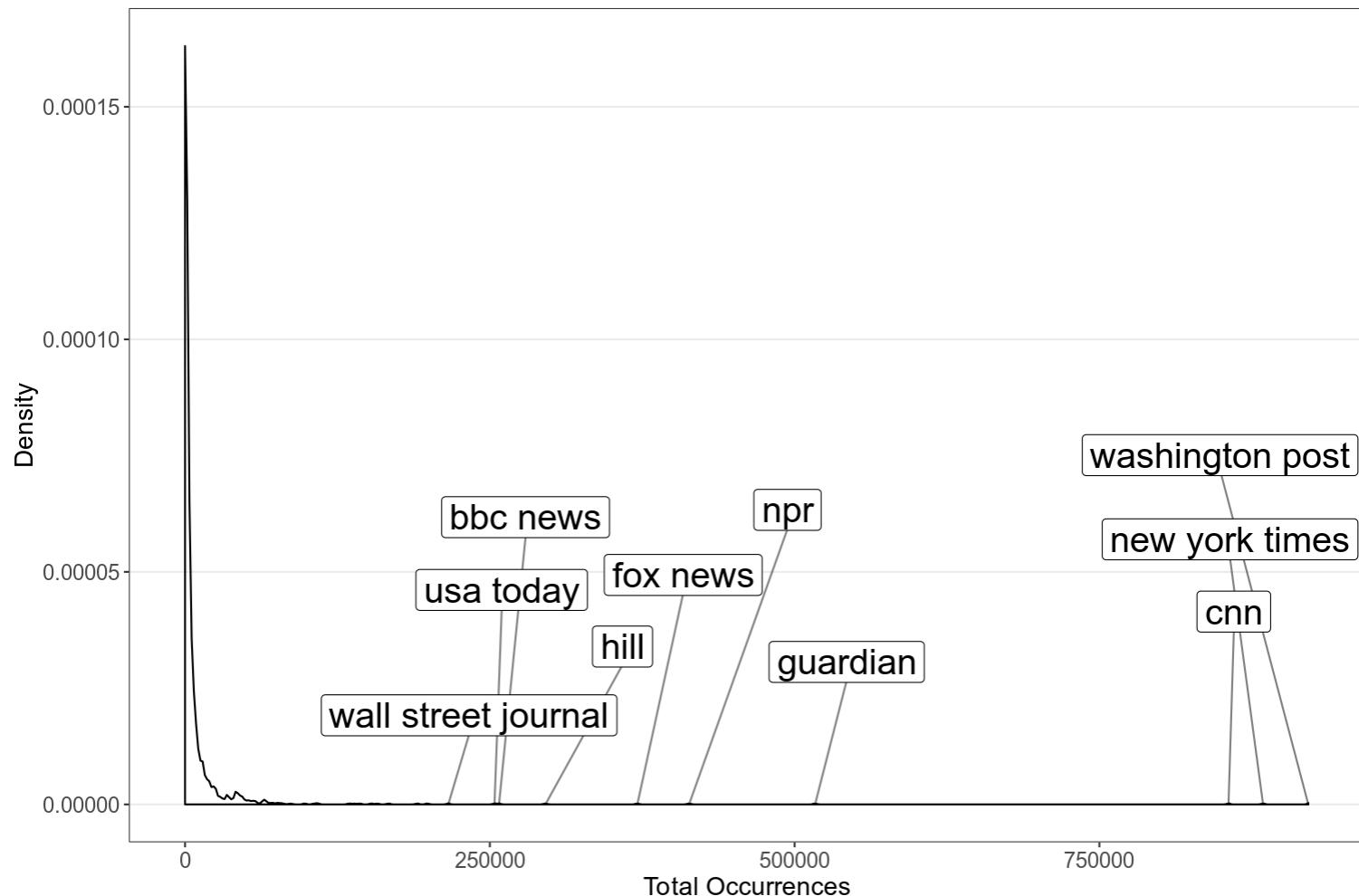


# Searches

# Local/National Divide



# Source Frequency



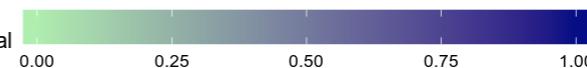
# Spatial Variation

# National Map

All Terms



Weighted Percent Local



# Modeling

# Model Building

## Model:

$$Pr(Class = LocalNews | CountyFeatures, LocalNewsFeatures, SearchTerm)$$

## County and Local News Features:

Rank on the page

Total papers in county

County population (logged)

Median age

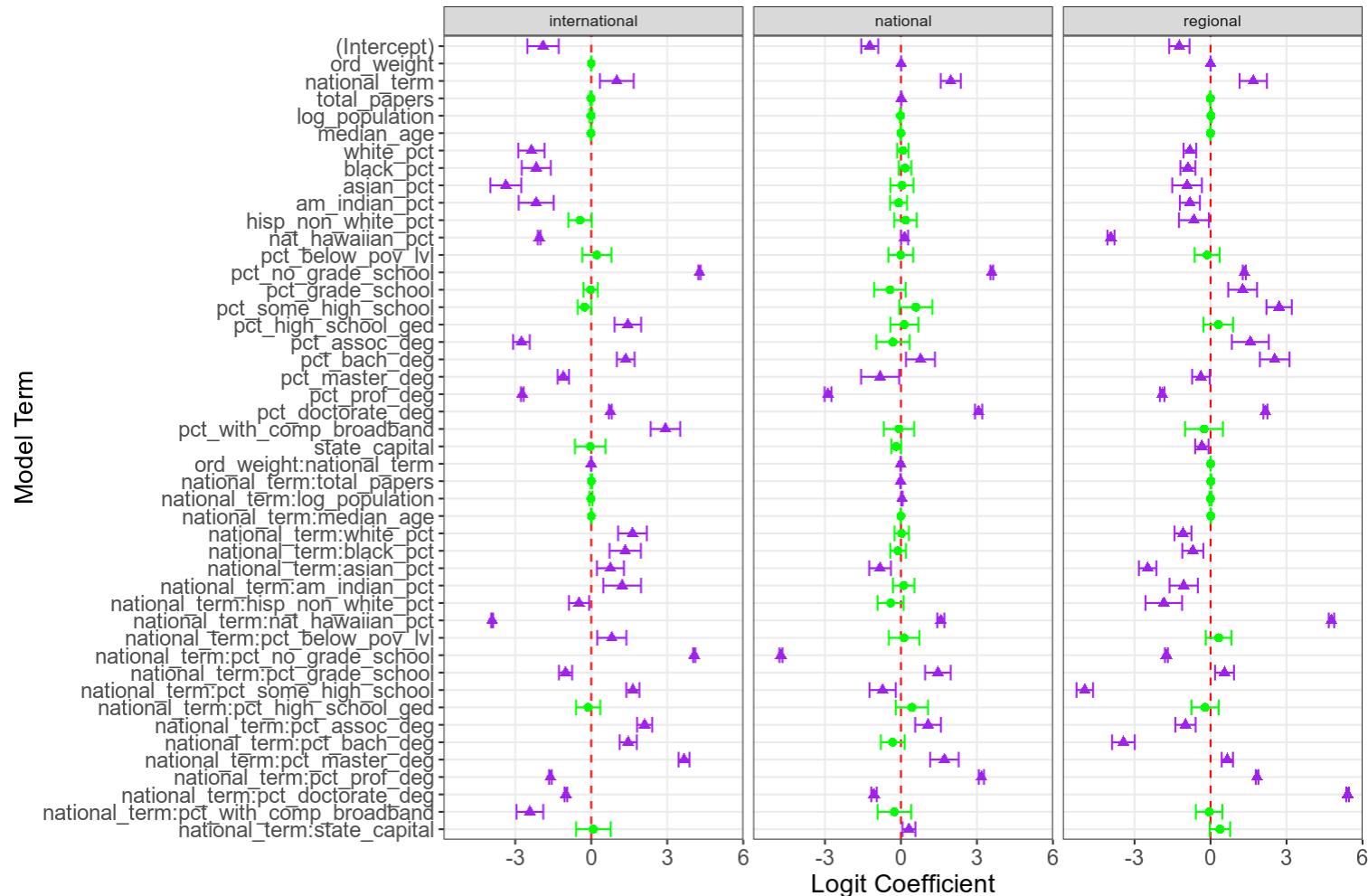
Percentage of population that is: white, Black, Asian, American Indian, Hispanic (not white), native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Percentage of the population below the poverty level

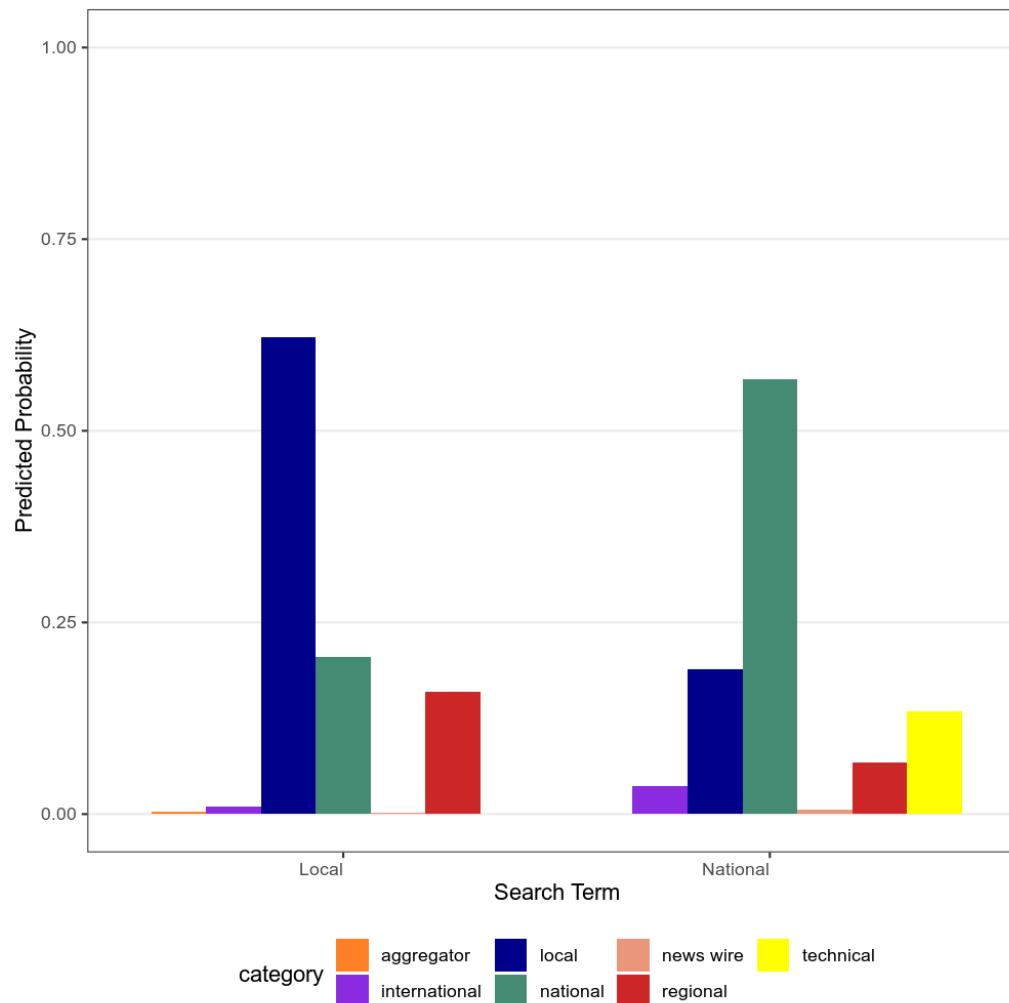
Percentage of the population that at most: did not complete grade school, completed grade school, completed some high school, completed high school or an equivalent, completed an associate's degree, completed a bachelor's degree, completed a master's degree, completed a professional degree, completed a doctoral degree

Percentage with home broadband and a computer

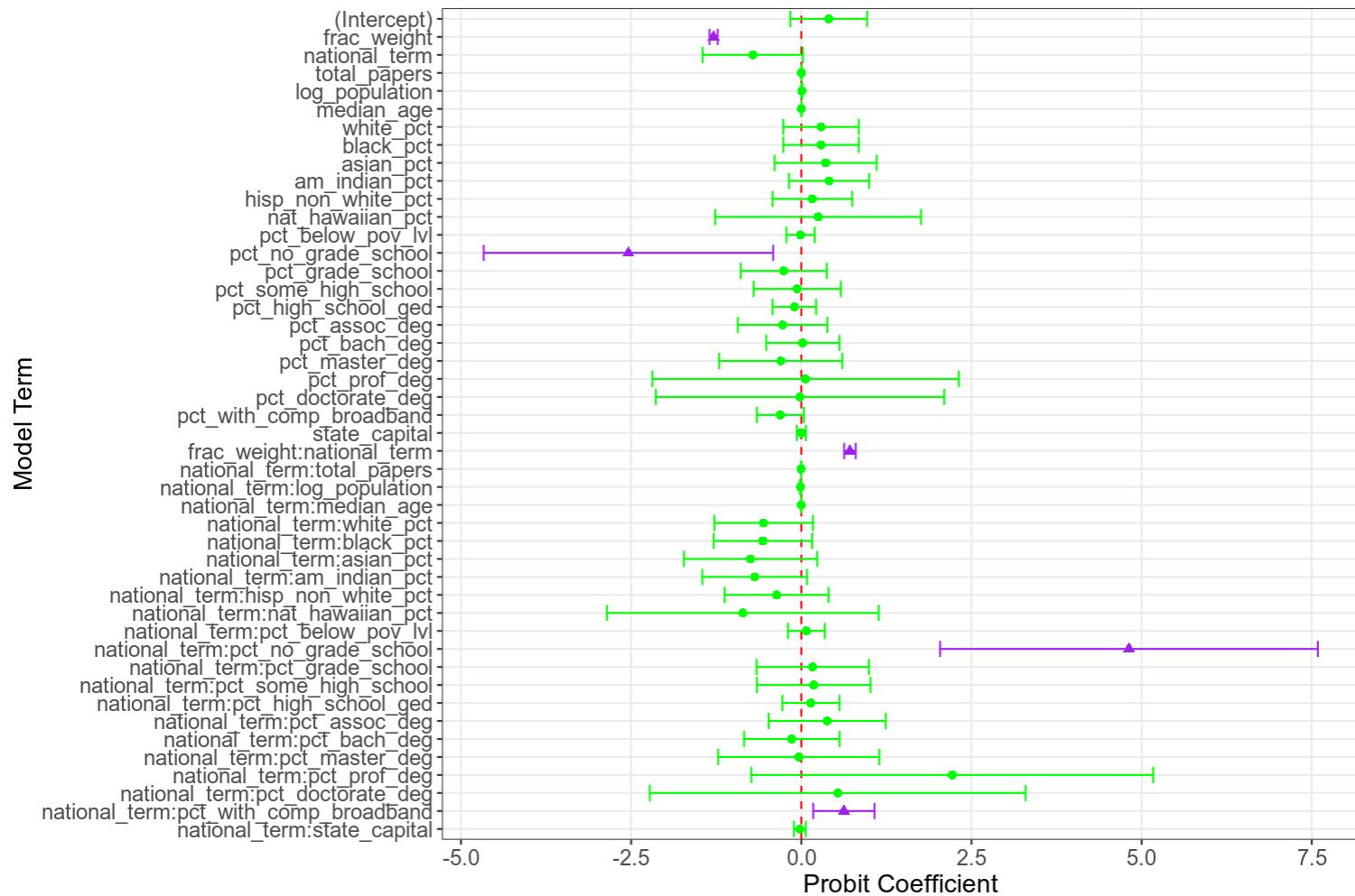
# Multinomial Logit Results



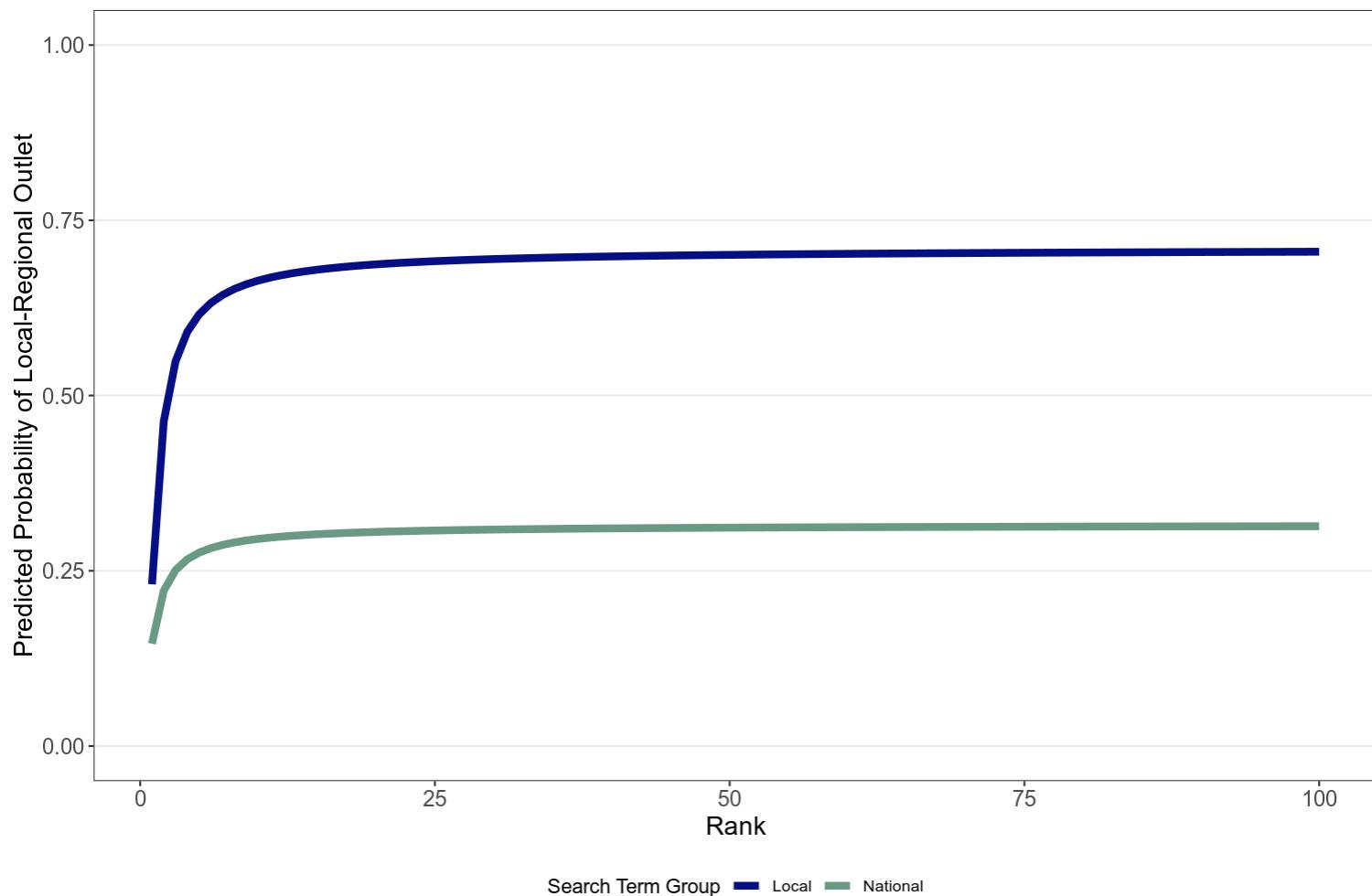
# Predicted Probabilities



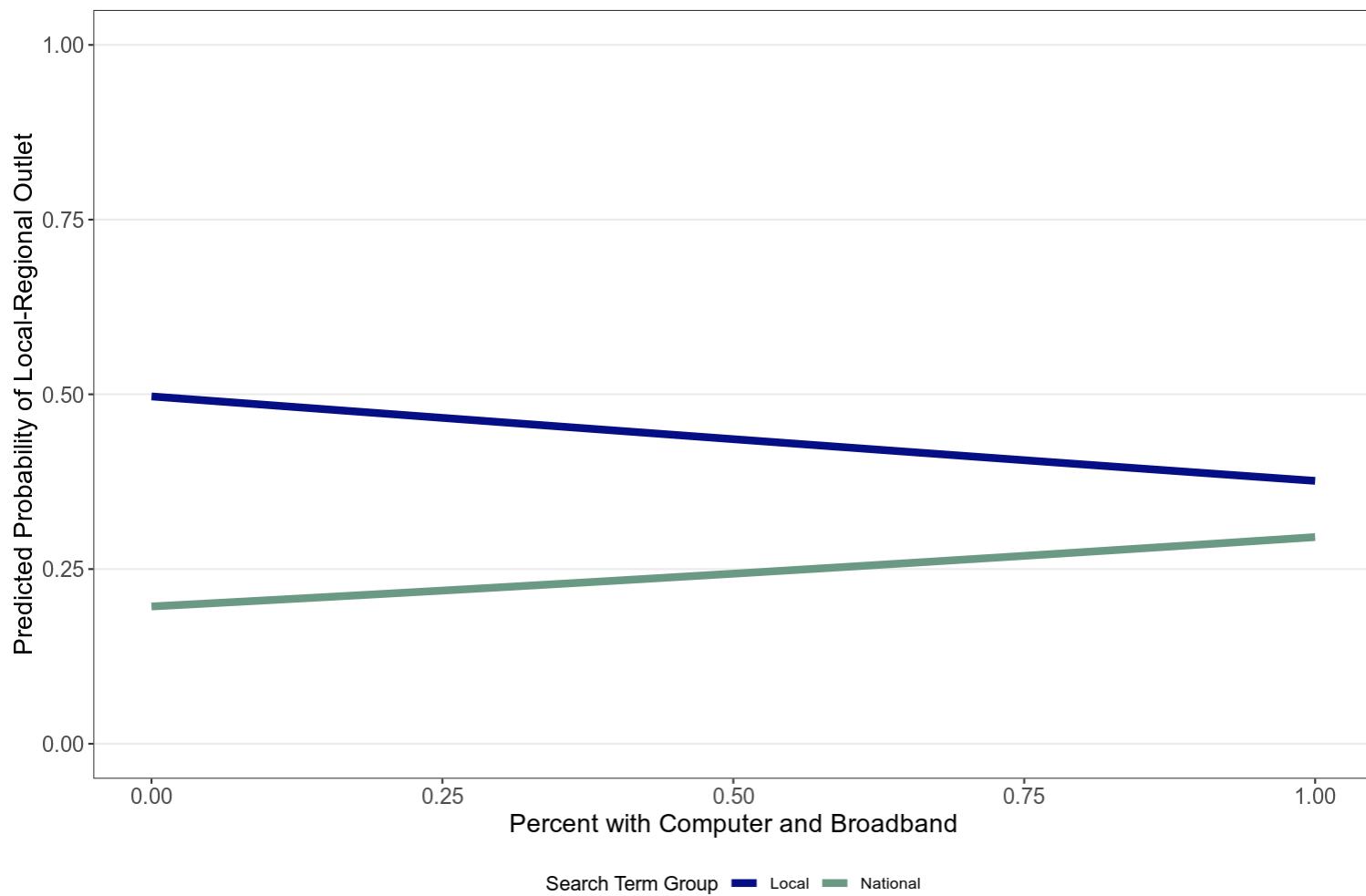
# Probit Model Results



# Change in Rank



# Change in Broadband Access



# Discussion

# Summing Up

1. Community features do not appear to affect local/national exposure
2. Local news features do not appear to affect local/national exposure
3. Topic does appear to affect local/national exposure
4. What are likely consequences of such choices?

Hopkins (2018) - National orientation of news leads to national orientation of politics

Google has an inordinate amount of influence over how issues are framed and which issues are pushed to the national agenda

# Future Directions

## 1. Consumption-side Survey

Which local/national sources do individuals turn to for different keywords?

## 2. Consumption-side Experiment

Does the composition of Google News results affect perceptions of whether an issue is local or national?

## 3. Build Better Datasets

Studies will be pushed forward by being able to match geographic data, circulation data, and local/national classifications.

Thank you!