Newspaper Closures in Canada are Not Linked to Municipal Turnout, Mayoral Margin of Victor or the Number of Mayoral Candidates

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The Data

Local News Project

- Crowd-sourced information on media transitions
- Active monitoring
- Partial validation by comparison with News Media Canada

The Data

Table 1: Local media transition types in the Local News Project original dataset

Transition Type	Closure	No Closure
Closed	44.6% (348)	0.0% (0)
Closed due to merger	13.1% (102)	0.0% (0)
Daily (free) becomes a community paper	0.0% (0)	0.4% (3)
Daily becomes a community paper	0.0% (0)	1.3% (10)
Decrease in service	0.0% (0)	12.4% (97)
Increase in service	0.0% (0)	2.7% (21)
New	0.0% (0)	18.1% (141)
New outlet produced by merger	0.0% (0)	4.1% (32)
Shifted to online	0.0% (0)	3.3% (26)

The Data

Table 2: Local media closures by type of medium in the original dataset.

Transition.Type	Broadcast	Newspaper	Online
Closed	5.5% (43)	36.2% (282)	2.9% (23)
Closed due to merger	0.0% (0)	13.1% (102)	0.0% (0)
Daily (free) becomes a community paper	0.0% (0)	0.4% (3)	0.0% (0)
Daily becomes a community paper	0.0% (0)	1.3% (10)	0.0% (0)
Decrease in service	5.8% (45)	6.7% (52)	0.0% (0)
Increase in service	1.3% (10)	0.5% (4)	0.9% (7)
New	3.1% (24)	4.2% (33)	10.8% (84)
New outlet produced by merger	0.0% (0)	4.1% (32)	0.0% (0)
Shifted to online	0.0% (0)	3.3% (26)	0.0% (0)

The Challenges

1. Are declines in local news supply by newspapers being offset by increases in news supply from digital and broadcast?
2. How do you link a newspaper to a municipality?
3. How do you treat marginal newspapers?

The Solutions

1. Count only explicitly closures of newspapers (dailies and community e.g. weeklies)
2. Find municipal election results for: mayoral margin of victory, turnout, and number of mayoral candidates back to 2001.
3. Supplement with a database of municipal election results that cover roughly the same time period of Canada's 100 largest cities (Breux, Couture, and Koop 2017).
4. Track down missing gaps through provincial databases and contacting municipalities.

The Data

- 116 unique municipalities

Table 3: Distribution of number of elections and municipalities.

Elections	Cities
4	38
5	66
6	11
7	1

The Data

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for key numeric variables.

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	missings
Margin	463	30.53	36.22	0.03	596.17	92.00
n_candidates	542	4.63	4.55	1.00	45.00	13.00
Turnout	517	36.58	8.80	16.55	60.70	38.00
Closures	555	0.19	0.57	0.00	6.00	0.00

The Data

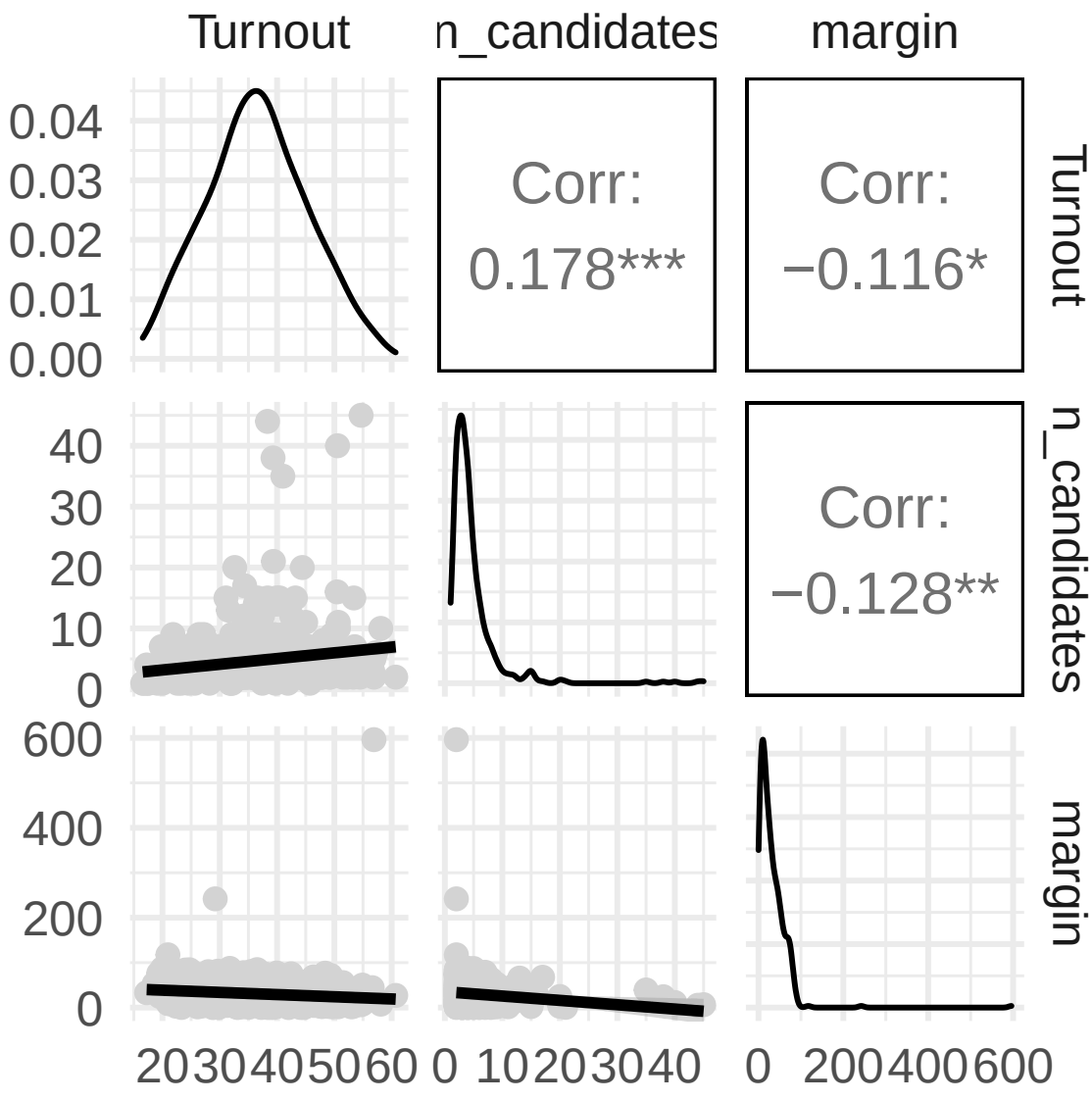

Figure 1: Correlation of dependent variables

The Results

Table 5: First 15 rows of the dataset and key variables

Year	municipality	Closures	First Post-Closure	All Post-Closure	Turnout	n_candidates	Margin
2005	Abottsford	0	0	0	34.21	5	5.060585
2008	Abottsford	0	0	0	34.20	5	28.849387
2011	Abottsford	-1	1	1	39.24	5	3.432123
2014	Abottsford	-2	0	1	37.19	2	1.788648
2018	Abottsford	-2	0	1	35.37	6	37.891025
2003	Ajax	0	0	0	26.20	2	41.797784
2006	Ajax	0	0	0	23.20	2	40.399511
2010	Ajax	0	0	0	25.40	2	56.313260
2014	Ajax	0	0	0	30.42	3	72.117621
2018	Ajax	0	0	0	32.90	5	9.776079
2003	Amherstburg	0	0	0	NA	2	NA
2006	Amherstburg	0	0	0	NA	2	NA
2010	Amherstburg	0	0	0	NA	2	NA
2014	Amherstburg	-1	1	1	47.27	4	26.943072
2018	Amherstburg	-1	0	1	42.74	2	24.989869

The Results

Table 6: Average measures of local electoral participation by treatment group. The first two rows define a treated year as only being the first election following a newspaper closure. This table reports averages from the full data-set.

Treatment Type	Group	Margin Percent	Number of Candidates	Turnout
Short-Term	Untreated	30.5%	4.6	36.3%
Short-Term	Treated	30.8%	5.0	39.1%
Long-Term	Untreated	30.8%	4.5	36.1%
Long-Term	Treated	29.2%	5.3	39.1%

Two-Way Fixed Effects Model

Table 7: Two-Way fixed effects model of newspaper closures on three measures of local participation (Long-Term).

	Turnout	log(Candidates)	log(Margin)
Treatment	0.52	-0.06	2.34
	(0.70)	(0.05)	(3.45)
Num.Obs.	517	542	463
R2	0.001	0.002	0.000
R2 Adj.	-0.336	-0.321	-0.391

Standard errors are panel-corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995)

$+$ p $<$ 0.1, * p $<$ 0.05, ** p $<$ 0.01, *** p $<$ 0.001

Two-Way Fixed Effects Model

Table 8: Two-Way fixed effects model of newspaper closures on three measures of local participation (Short-Term)

	Turnout	log(Candidates)	log(Margin)
Treatment	0.73	-0.07	-0.06
	(0.69)	(0.05)	(0.11)
Num.Obs.	517	542	463
R2	0.002	0.002	0.000
R2 Adj.	-0.334	-0.320	-0.391

Standard errors are panel-corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995).
$+$ p $<$ 0.1, * p $<$ 0.05, ** p $<$ 0.01, *** p $<$ 0.001

Two-Way Fixed Effects Model

Table 9: Two-Way fixed effects model of interaction between newspaper closers, mayoral margin of victory and number of candidates on turnout.

	Short Term	Long Term
Treatment	1.109	-1.091
	(2.654)	(2.674)
Treatment x log(Margin)	-0.964+	-0.621
	(0.539)	(0.640)
Treatment x log(n_candidates)	1.483	2.687*
	(1.121)	(1.327)
Num.Obs.	462	462
R2	0.156	0.161
R2 Adj.	-0.190	-0.183

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Future Paths

1. Could local news decline be linked to increased role of national level campaign features in vote choice (e.g. leader impressions)
2. Evaluate link with *acclamations*.
3. Reconsider excluding *decreases*.
4. Utilize continuous nature of newspaper closures.
5. Evaluate link with status as news desserts (i.e. communities without newspapers).

Concluding questions

1. How surprised are people at a null finding?
2. What is the normative significance of a null effect in the current climate in Canada?
3. What is the theoretical significance of a true null effect from this case.?

References

Breux, Sandra, Jérôme Couture, and Royce Koop. 2017. "Turnout in Local Elections: Evidence from Canadian Cities, 2004–2014." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 50 (3): 699–722. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000842391700018X.