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Local News Coverage and the Incumbency Advantage in the U.S. House

Much of the incumbency advantage in the U.S. House of Representatives is attributed to incumbents' efforts to address constituents' needs. Yet House members do not win reelection simply by performing well in office, but also by informing constituents of how well they are doing their jobs. I examined the value of local news coverage for legislators seeking to publicize their legislative work on behalf of constituents. I found that incumbents who win more newspaper coverage are viewed as being more in touch with the district and are more likely to win support from constituents during bids for reelection.

The incumbency advantage in U.S. House elections is well documented by congressional scholars. Over 90% of incumbents have won reelection to the House since World War II. A great deal of research has revealed the extent to which members of Congress perform well at representing their constituents. Legislators tend to vote consistently with constituent preferences (Bartels 1991; Miller and Stokes 1963), and they tend to represent constituents through other legislative activities as well (Hall 1996). Yet House members may not win reelection simply by performing well in office; they must also let their constituents know how well they are doing their jobs (Mayhew 1974). Thus, legislators have an incentive to inform constituents of their activities, especially since much of what legislators do in Congress is for the benefit of their district and will help them make a case for reelection. But to what extent are incumbents able to inform citizens about their work on behalf of their districts? And to what extent does this communication affect the nature of the incumbency advantage?

In this article, I examine how local news coverage contributes to the incumbency advantage in the U.S. House of Representatives. I begin by demonstrating the importance of local news coverage for incumbents hoping to tell constituents about their activities in Washington. I then demonstrate how the amount of incumbent-oriented

newspaper and television coverage that respondents to the National Election Study (NES) were exposed to during 1999 varied widely across and within congressional districts and media markets in the United States. I show that local newspaper coverage is important in determining whether or not citizens think their incumbents keep in touch with the district, but television coverage of incumbents does not have an effect. Newspaper coverage appears to increase the likelihood that constituents, particularly those who do not share their incumbent's party affiliation, will vote to reelect the incumbent.

House Members and the Local Media

Constituents elect members of Congress to act on their behalf in Congress; yet monitoring costs are sufficiently high that citizens are generally unable to keep track of how well their member of Congress does the job. Each day the House was in session in 1999, legislators introduced an average of 25 pieces of legislation, cosponsored 414 bills, and delivered 91 speeches on the House floor.¹ Given the overwhelming amount of activity taking place on Capitol Hill, legislators must work hard to draw attention to what they do during the day. Mayhew (1974) contends that members of Congress spend a great deal of time advertising their activities to constituents. For example, if a legislator introduces a bill, then the representative will find a way to tell constituents about this bill and how it affects their lives back in the district. The importance of not only being active on behalf of constituents, but also advertising this activity is critical. Hall (1996) points out that "efforts on behalf of constituents are not very valuable if they are not visible" (62). Herrnsen (1998) elaborates this idea:

[Incumbents] seek to reinforce or expand their base of support by concentrating on those aspects of their persona that make them popular with constituents. Their messages convey images of competent, caring individuals who work tirelessly in Washington to improve the lives of the folks they represent back home. Incumbents' campaign communications often describe how they have helped constituents resolve problems, brought federal programs and projects to the district, and introduced or cosponsored popular legislation. (170–71)

This type of publicity is often especially important for incumbents looking to gain support from citizens beyond their partisan base. By claiming credit for nonpartisan activities that benefit the district without drawing partisan opposition, incumbents can appeal to constituents who may not otherwise support them (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987).

House members advertise their legislative activities in different ways. For example, they may promote their activities in newsletters and other mailings they send home to their district (Lipinski 2004; Yiannakis 1982). Legislators may also reach their constituents through local media coverage. While incumbents have less control over what appears in local news outlets than they do over their own franked mailings, local coverage does have its advantages. House members can reach more of their constituents through local news coverage. Nearly three-fourths of respondents to the 2000 NES reported that they read their daily newspaper at least once a week and over 80% reported watching a television news broadcast at least that often.² Thus, a story in the local news media can reach a large portion of a legislator's constituents. Constituents are also likely to trust information presented in a local newspaper or television newscast more than a congressional newsletter, because they perceive the media's account as being the product of a less-biased third party. Media coverage may not directly influence citizens' attitudes, but it often draws attention to particular problems or issues (Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Local news coverage may therefore cause constituents to think about an incumbent's activities on behalf of the district and support that legislator more than they might have otherwise.

Indeed, local news coverage is produced in a way that tends to favor incumbents (Arnold 2004; Clarke and Evans 1983; Cook 1989; Vinson 2002). Local reporters often lack the necessary time or information to initiate and research all of their political stories (Kaniss 1991). When reporters are not using wire copy or information from shared Washington correspondents, they rely on information provided by House members and their press secretaries. House members take advantage of this dependency by actively publicizing their legislative activities. Through press releases and other methods, legislators alert local reporters to potential news of interest. They may also provide the information that reporters need either to produce or to begin producing a story on a topic. In fact, in a Freedom Forum survey, House members and their staff estimated that their office had initiated 49% of news stories.³ Local reporters provided a similar estimate for the percentage of their stories that originated from the incumbent's office. Paletz and Entman (1981) summarize the relationship between legislators and the local press:

Members of Congress expend vast quantities of time and effort and taxpayers' money to tell their constituents about their decisions, statements, and activities, in ways designed to insure reelection...But the efforts would be fruitless were it not for two factors: the reluctance of most American newspaper proprietors to pay for scrutinizing members of Congress; and the willingness of American newspapers to transmit at least some of the self-serving stories that legislators provide. (91)

Because local reporters are frequently overworked, underprepared, and unable to devote the time to congressional reporting that they need to produce critical coverage, legislators can often manipulate local coverage in a manner that suits their interests.

Of course, House members do not feed all local congressional coverage to local news outlets nor is all coverage positive (Arnold 2004). Nevertheless, negative and critical coverage of incumbents tends to be the exception, not the norm, as House members most often generate positive stories in their local news media (Cook 1989; Vinson 2002). This level of control over the local news makes this medium appealing to House members.

Variations in Local Coverage

Many House members win favorable coverage in their local news media, while other legislators may not win any coverage at all. The boundaries of 435 congressional districts often overlap poorly with the 210 media markets in the United States.⁴ The manner in which district and market boundaries overlap can have a tremendous impact on the amount of local coverage won by House members (Schaffner and Sellers 2003; Vinson 2002). The most important factor is district dominance, the percentage of the market dominated by a particular congressional district. This factor affects how local reporters decide which members of Congress to cover. As a House member's district dominates a larger share of the market (and thus more of the market audience), that House member becomes more newsworthy to local reporters.⁵ Some incumbents represent districts that dominate large shares of a single market, whereas other legislators have districts that only dominate small shares of one or more markets.

Depending on how an incumbent's district is situated with local markets, the House member may win a great deal of coverage or no coverage at all. Accordingly, congressional candidates may have higher name recognition in areas where increased coverage is likely (Campbell, Alford, and Henry 1984; Levy and Squire 2000).⁶ This increased coverage may also result in an advantage for House members.

Local News Coverage of House Members

As I have explained, local congressional media coverage may vary substantially depending on how districts and markets overlap. To provide evidence of this effect, I determined the amount of coverage that appeared in the local newspapers and television broadcasts of 770

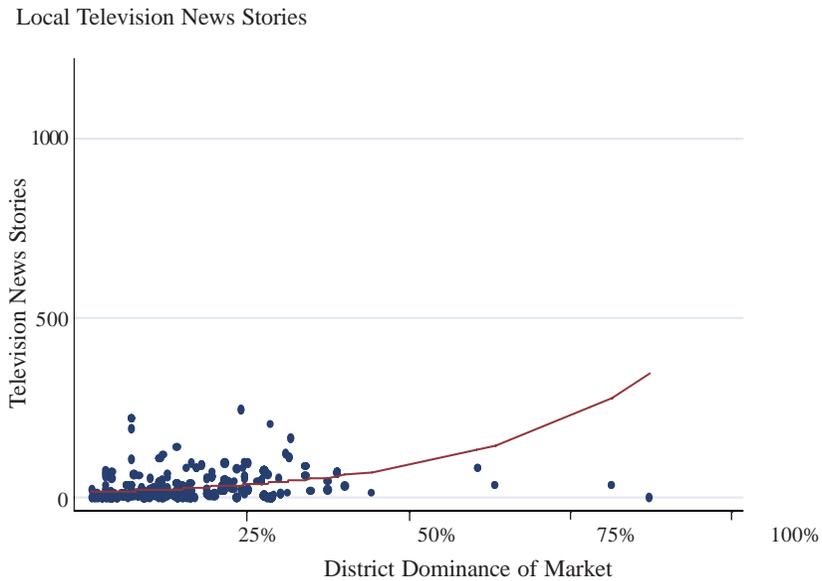
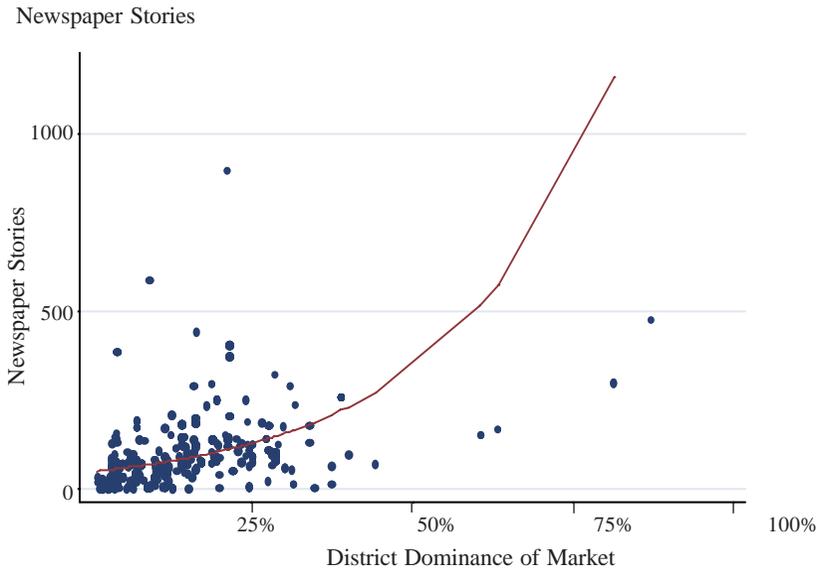
NES respondents (see Appendix for more information). The measures of coverage are counts of the number of stories mentioning a respondent's incumbent that appeared in that respondent's local newspaper or television newscasts during 1999. The measure of coverage can vary among constituents in the same market if they live in different congressional districts, and it can vary among constituents in the same district if they live in different markets. The coverage measure is limited to 1999, because this paper focuses on how incumbents use the local media to cultivate support and increase their incumbency advantage during the noncampaign period.⁷

To determine how much local coverage respondents were exposed to, I first determined the markets and congressional districts where they lived. For example, the Richmond, Charlottesville, and Washington, D.C. markets divide Virginia's 7th congressional district. Respondents from this district may therefore be exposed to coverage of their incumbent in Richmond, Charlottesville, or Washington, DC news outlets. The NES general release does not include the information necessary to make this determination, but I obtained special access to the variable for each respondent's county of residence. This information allowed me to place each respondent in his or her correct market and link that respondent to the newspaper and television news coverage in that market.⁸

To what extent were constituents exposed to different amounts of news coverage of their incumbents? Figure 1 shows how local coverage varies depending on the amount of district dominance where the respondent lives. The figure includes the actual values for coverage and the negative binomial regression line indicating the relationship between district dominance and actual coverage.⁹ The figure indicates that as a district dominates a larger share of a media market, coverage of the incumbent legislator tends to increase. Thus, coverage varies a great deal depending on the overlap between a respondent's congressional district and that person's media market.

The most striking aspect of this figure is the extent to which respondents are exposed to different levels of coverage of their incumbents. For example, several respondents in the Philadelphia area had access to only two newspaper stories and no television news coverage of their incumbent House members during 1999, while six respondents in St. Louis might have seen any of the 403 newspaper stories or 35 television newscasts mentioning their own representative. But local news coverage can also vary a great deal within a congressional district. The NES sampled three citizens from Washington's 3d congressional district: one from the Seattle area and two from the

FIGURE 1
Variance in Local News Coverage
as a Function of District Dominance



Portland-Vancouver market. Although the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* published 36 stories about Representative Brian Baird, the *Vancouver Columbian* produced nearly four times as many stories regarding the incumbent (170 stories). Likewise, Seattle television stations ran only four stories about Baird, but he was mentioned in 21 television newscasts in the Portland-Vancouver market. As a result, the respondents in Vancouver were likely to have seen substantially more news about Baird's work on Capitol Hill than Seattle-area residents saw.

In addition to differences across districts and markets, there are differences in coverage depending on the medium. Newspapers tend to devote far more coverage to incumbent House members than local television stations do. In fact, 654 of the 770 NES respondents lived in areas where the incumbent was mentioned in more newspaper stories than television newscasts. Thus, local television coverage is far less common than newspaper coverage for House members. In addition, the television stories that do focus on House members tend to contain less content than newspaper stories. In the full sample of local news coverage, the average length of a newspaper story featuring a local House member was nearly 800 words. The average length of a television news story featuring a House member was only 26.09 seconds. A story shorter than 30 seconds cannot possibly convey the same amount of information that an 800-word newspaper story can. This evidence suggests that television news produces less coverage and less-detailed coverage of House members than local newspapers produce. Accordingly, newspaper coverage may have more of an effect on constituents than television news coverage.

Nevertheless, the variation in coverage pictured in Figure 1 imparts a critical point about local congressional news—local coverage of incumbents is not equal across or within media markets in the United States. As a result, not all citizens will have equal access to information about their incumbent's accomplishments. But to what extent does this variation in congressional coverage affect the incumbency advantage enjoyed by House incumbents? Is one medium more effective in reaching constituents than another? And which citizens will be most influenced by local news coverage of their incumbent?

Local Newspaper Coverage and the Incumbency Advantage

My analysis links contextual data measuring the newspaper and television coverage of each House member in each market with individual-level data gauging the level of support NES respondents expressed for their incumbent. This unique combination of contextual

and individual-level data allows for a better understanding of how citizens are affected by news coverage of their legislators. Indeed, one limitation of most nonexperimental research on media influence is that studies often use a measure of self-reported media exposure. Yet even if the typical self-reported media usage measure is accurate, it only provides a measure of how much media the respondent consumes, not what is being presented in that medium. This information is particularly critical for measuring the impact of local congressional news, which appears to vary a great deal from locality to locality. A constituent in Pennsylvania's 13th district who read the *Philadelphia Inquirer* daily saw only two articles about his or her House member during 1999; a daily reader in Missouri's 1st district saw over 400 such articles in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Both citizens may have read the newspaper every day, but the amount of incumbent-oriented information to which each was exposed varied a great deal. Citizens in different areas may therefore express different levels of support for the incumbent. In this analysis, I used not only the self-reported media usage of the respondent, but also the amount of congressional coverage produced in that market to examine if variations in coverage lead to variations in the propensity of citizens to support incumbents.

I hypothesized that as local congressional coverage increases, constituents will be more likely to support their incumbent House member. I used two dependent variables to measure support. First, the NES asks respondents if their incumbent House member does a good job of keeping in touch with constituents in the district. An affirmative response captures precisely what incumbents hope to gain by publicizing their activities to constituents—a sense that legislators are working hard for their districts while on Capitol Hill. I coded this variable as 1 if the respondent said the incumbent did a fairly good or very good job of keeping in touch and as 0 if the respondent said the incumbent did a fairly poor or very poor job. Second, to more directly measure the impact of coverage on the incumbency advantage, I used a variable indicating whether or not respondents reported voting for their incumbent House member in 2000. I coded this variable as 1 if the respondent voted for the incumbent and as 0 if the respondent voted for the challenger. When citizens live in areas where the incumbent receives more coverage, they should be more likely to say the incumbent keeps in touch with the district and more likely to vote for the incumbent.¹⁰

The primary variables of interest for this paper are the measures of local newspaper and television coverage of the incumbent that appeared in each respondent's market. But I controlled for another

way that constituents may encounter information about their incumbent: franked mail. The franked mail measure is simply the amount of mail the House member sent to the district in 1999, divided by the number of households in that district.¹¹ I expected constituents to evaluate their House member more favorably if that legislator sent more mail to the district. In addition, I controlled for the seniority of the incumbent, since citizens may be more likely to support House members who have won reelection a number of times.

Incumbents facing a more-competitive campaign are also less likely to win support from their constituents compared to those facing little or no competition. I therefore included three variables accounting for the competitiveness of the incumbent's reelection campaign. First, a dummy variable indicates whether or not the incumbent faced a challenger who previously held an elected office.¹² Since quality challengers are more likely to run effective campaigns against incumbents, the existence of such a challenger may lead constituents to record less-favorable impressions of their incumbent and to vote less frequently for the incumbent (Jacobson 1989). A second factor that may affect the degree to which constituents support their incumbent is the amount of advertising bought by the challenger during the campaign. I calculated this measure as the log of the number of advertisements run in a market by the challenger.¹³ As this number increases, constituents will have been exposed to increasingly more advertising by the challenger, and they may become less likely to evaluate the incumbent favorably or to vote for him or her. The third measure of campaign competitiveness is the log of the challenger's campaign spending.¹⁴ As a challenger spends more money, constituents may become less likely to support or vote for the incumbent.

Finally, I also controlled for individual-level factors affecting respondents' support for incumbents. First, partisanship is a fundamental factor in most citizens' evaluations and vote decisions. I therefore included a dummy variable controlling for whether or not the respondent identified with the same party as the incumbent. Second, citizens may link their evaluations of their House member to their evaluations of Congress itself. I thus included a variable gauging the degree to which each respondent approved or disapproved of Congress.¹⁵ Third, the influence of the media's coverage on the respondent may depend on how often the respondent reads the local newspaper or watches local television news. Therefore, I controlled for media consumption by including two additional variables: the number of days per week that the respondent read the newspaper and the number of days the respondent reported having watched local television news.¹⁶

In sum, my models compare the influence of contextual factors—such as newspaper coverage, franked mail, seniority, and campaign competitiveness—to the influence of individual effects on respondents' evaluations of their incumbent House members. In both cases, the dependent variable is binary, so I estimated the models using probit. In addition, because my subsample is biased toward respondents in more-populated markets, I reestimated both models using the Heckman maximum likelihood probit selection model (Heckman 1979). This estimation technique takes into account that some variable(s) may affect the chances of observation but not the value of the dependent variable of interest. Use of the Heckman estimation did not change the results in any meaningful way, so I simply present the results from the probit estimation. (See Appendix for more information.)

Results

Table 1 presents the results from the models testing whether or not constituents felt the incumbent did a good job of keeping in touch with the district and whether or not constituents reported voting for the incumbent.¹⁷ A respondent's partisanship did have the expected significant effect in both models, but the other control variables failed to attain statistical significance. The null finding for a respondent's approval of Congress may suggest support for the notion that citizens separate evaluations of their own members of Congress from evaluations of the institution itself (Cook 1979; Parker and Davidson 1979). On the other hand, more-recent research indicates that a voter's approval of Congress does influence whether or not they vote for majority party candidates (Jones and McDermott 2004). Indeed, I found more support for the latter explanation when I ran the model including only majority party incumbents.¹⁸ This alternative estimation did not change the key findings discussed here, however.

Among the remaining control variables, the seniority of the incumbent and the amount of mail an incumbent sent to the district also lacked significance, as did the variables measuring the competitiveness of the incumbent's reelection campaign.¹⁹ It is particularly notable that the measures of campaign effects lacked significance. While such variables may not influence whether or not citizens believe that their incumbent House member does a good job of staying in touch with the district, the null findings for respondents' vote choices seem counterintuitive in light of the wealth of research demonstrating the importance of these factors in congressional elections (Jacobson 2000). In fact, the null findings in this model appear to be caused by

TABLE 1
 Model of Constituent Evaluation and Vote Choice
 (standard errors in parentheses)

Independent Variables	In Touch	Vote for Incumbent
<i>Contextual Factors</i>		
Seniority of Incumbent	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.02)
Franked Mail Sent by Incumbent	.05 (.08)	.09 (.12)
Newspaper Stories	.002* (.001)	.004* (.001)
Days R Read Newspaper	.07* (.02)	.06 (.03)
Television Stories	-.003 (.002)	-.003 (.003)
Days R Watched Local TV News	.05 (.03)	.04 (.04)
<i>Individual Factors</i>		
R Same Party as Incumbent	.53* (.13)	2.03* (.22)
R Approval of Congress	.08 (.06)	.09 (.09)
<i>Campaign Factors</i>		
Incumbent Facing Quality Challenger	-.10 (.24)	.07 (.32)
Log of Challenger Spending	.02 (.02)	-.04 (.03)
Log of Challenger Advertising	.01 (.03)	-.06 (.04)
Constant	-.88* (.29)	-.56 (.44)
Log Likelihood	-256.87	-129.96
Correctly Classified	71.74%	80.32%
N	453	315

Note: The model for vote choice includes only respondents voting in districts where a challenger was running against an incumbent.

* $p < .05$.

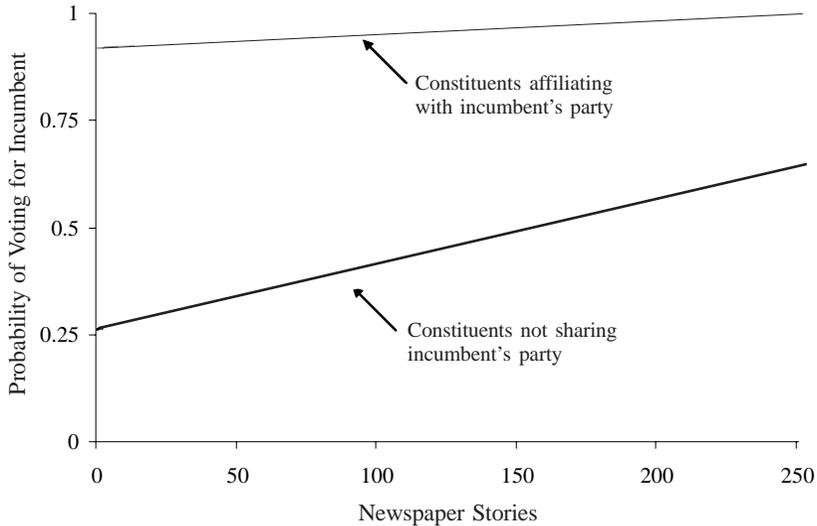
multicollinearity between the measures of spending and advertising. Not surprisingly, spending by a challenger correlated with advertising by a challenger at .43 for the sample used in the vote choice model. When either variable was excluded from the model, the other variable was statistically significant ($p < .05$) and in the expected direction. Nevertheless, I kept both variables in the final model to more completely control for campaign effects. The important point for this analysis is that the key findings were not affected by which campaign variables were or were not included in the model.

As for the measures of local news coverage and exposure, the results from Table 1 indicate that local newspaper coverage does positively affect constituent evaluations of their incumbents, but appearances on local television news programs do not have a significant effect. Given the differences between newspaper and television coverage, we should not be surprised to find significant effects for newspaper coverage and none for television news. As discussed earlier and in previous research (Robinson and Davis 1990), newspaper coverage is far more comprehensive than television coverage, and it seems to have a greater effect on citizens as a result.

In the first model, both the variables for newspaper coverage and exposure are significant, indicating that constituents are more likely to feel that their incumbent stays in touch with the district when constituents are exposed to more newspaper coverage and read the newspaper more often.²⁰ Citizens who never read the newspaper are only 61% likely to think that their incumbent keeps in touch with the district, while those who read the newspaper every day are 79% likely to think so. Citizens who are more engaged in reading the local newspaper appear to notice their incumbent's efforts on behalf of the district. Additional coverage of those efforts also affects constituent evaluations. According to the predicted estimates, respondents are 67% likely to think their incumbent keeps in touch when that legislator appears in 39 local newspaper articles and 74% likely to think so if the House member receives coverage in 140 articles.²¹ Not surprisingly, citizens exposed to more news of their incumbent's activities are somewhat more likely to believe that the incumbent is doing a good job of keeping in touch with the district.

Newspaper coverage does not simply cause constituents to feel that the incumbent is keeping in touch; it also has a tangible payoff for the House member's reelection chances. In the second model, the coefficient for newspaper coverage is significant, although the coefficient for newspaper readership lacks significance. A respondent is 71% likely to vote for the incumbent if that incumbent appears in just 39 newspaper articles in the respondent's market. On the other hand, if

FIGURE 2
 Predicted Effects of Newspaper Coverage
 on Likelihood of Voting for Incumbent



Note: Estimates generated from the model presented in Table 1, holding all other variables at their means.

coverage of the incumbent increases to 140 newspaper articles, then the respondent becomes 83% likely to vote to reelect that House member. Thus, incumbents can increase the likelihood that respondents will vote for them by winning more coverage in local newspapers.

Of course, the electoral payoff from winning local news coverage may depend on a constituent's political predispositions. Consider that citizens who shared their incumbent's party affiliation were 96% likely to vote to reelect that incumbent when other variables in the model were held at their means. For these constituents, it may matter less how often their House member is in the news, while that coverage may have more of an influence on independents and citizens who identify with the other party. Figure 2 accounts for this possibility by comparing the effects of newspaper coverage on the probability of voting for the incumbent among citizens who do and do not share the incumbent's party affiliation. This figure indicates that when incumbents benefit from winning more coverage in the local newspaper, it is mostly because of the effect this coverage has on independents and

members of the other party. When coverage of an incumbent increased from 39 newspaper stories to 140 stories during the year, members of that incumbent's party were only slightly more likely to vote for that incumbent (from 94% to 97%). On the other hand, the same increase in coverage made independents and members of the other party 15% more likely to vote for the incumbent (from 32% to 47%). Thus, newspaper coverage helps incumbents build support among constituents, particularly those constituents who are less inclined to be supportive because of their own partisan loyalties.

In sum, while partisanship is the strongest factor influencing how citizens evaluate their incumbents, newspaper coverage of incumbent House members does appear to have an important effect on these evaluations as well. In fact, the effect of newspaper coverage is particularly strong for constituents who do not share the incumbent's party affiliation. This finding is not surprising, since local news coverage of members of Congress tends to be more-nonpartisan accounts of what the legislator is accomplishing for the district. Thus, incumbents find local newspaper coverage to be a valuable resource for reaching constituents and telling them about their legislative activities on behalf of the district.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here indicates that local newspaper coverage pays off for legislators who receive that coverage, but local television news coverage has no apparent benefit for incumbents. In areas where local newspapers devote more coverage to a House member, citizens are more likely to say that the incumbent is doing a good job of keeping in touch with the district and are more likely to vote for that incumbent. This effect is particularly pronounced among constituents who do not share the incumbent's party affiliation, an indication that newspaper coverage helps incumbents build support beyond their own partisan base.

Thus, incumbents benefit from local newspaper coverage, but they do so unequally. Some legislators receive a large amount of coverage and tend to attract more support as a result. Other incumbents may represent districts that do not overlap well with media markets and may therefore receive less of an advantage in their reelection campaigns. In addition, the incumbency advantage enjoyed by legislators may vary across a congressional district, with the incumbent receiving more coverage and, subsequently, more support in some parts of the district compared to other areas.

Arnold (2004) argues that the propensity of the local media to cover members of Congress influences the ability of constituents to hold incumbents accountable. Yet the findings presented here indicate that legislators who win more local coverage also win more support from constituents, which calls into question whether or not local news coverage does bolster accountability. Indeed, the content of such coverage is often overwhelmingly positive, which leads, not surprisingly, to more-positive evaluations from constituents. But is this coverage useful for citizens? Can citizens hold their incumbents accountable when the media provide mostly favorable coverage?

On one hand, local coverage may appear too one-sided to allow citizens to hold their incumbent House members accountable. Citizens may not be able to judge a House member's performance accurately when the only news they read or see about the legislator is akin to (or even reprinted from) press releases from the incumbent's office. On the other hand, the fact that increased coverage leads citizens to evaluate their incumbent legislators more favorably may have less to do with the quality of coverage than with the quality of representation provided by most House members. Legislators tend to be attentive to constituent concerns, both in representing constituent interests in Washington and providing particularized benefits for their districts (Bartels 1991; Fenno 1978; Hall 1996; Mayhew 1974; Miller and Stokes 1963). It is to be expected that increased coverage of such attentive behavior would lead citizens to evaluate their incumbents more favorably. In addition, legislators who expect to receive more local news coverage may be more attentive to their districts, because they know they are being watched (Arnold 2004).

Constituents who see little news about their House member may evaluate the representative in a neutral or negative way, particularly if those constituents do not share the incumbent's party affiliation. And, barring a scandal of some sort, local congressional news—even quality news—will present the legislator doing something newsworthy. More often than not, legislators aim this activity at benefiting the district and their constituents. Some congressional news may disproportionately favor the House member, but much of the reason for this bias is because the news the incumbent makes at the local level lacks the controversy of national partisan politics. Thus, it is not surprising that this coverage allows incumbent House members to gain more support from constituents who may not be inclined to give such support otherwise. Citizens react favorably to news about their House member because the House member is usually working hard to impress them. Indeed, most legislators engage in legislative activities aimed to benefit their districts and impress their constituents. The difference is that

citizens see news about these efforts in some areas but not in others.

To some extent, House members enjoy an incumbency advantage not necessarily because of what they do for their districts, but rather because of what citizens know about those efforts. Where citizens have less information about their incumbent's activities, they are less likely to vote for the incumbent, particularly if they do not share the incumbent's party affiliation. All House members may work hard to represent their constituents on Capitol Hill, but only those who can tell citizens about their efforts will be rewarded. Local newspapers play a critical role in bringing this information to constituents, but such coverage is largely dependent upon the overlap of congressional districts and media markets.

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APPENDIX

Newspaper Coverage Measure and Sample Bias

The content analysis process was lengthy but mostly automated. I began by selecting the local newspapers for the analysis according to a single criterion—Lexis-Nexis included their coverage for 1999. In addition to these newspaper articles, I also included a measure of local television coverage. Video Monitoring Service creates abstracts for television news broadcasts in a number of local media markets. Lexis-Nexis receives these abstracts and provides them with their service. I was able to collect newspaper and television news coverage in 46 markets. Table A1 presents the information about the news coverage in each of these markets. Of the 1,456 NES respondents who responded to both the pre-interview and the post-interview, 770 lived in markets for which I had measures of newspaper and television news coverage.

My sample of newspaper and television coverage was biased toward more-populated markets; therefore, my data are censored and the estimates of the coefficients in the models may be inconsistent. To test for the effects of this bias, I used the Heckman selection model (Heckman 1979). The Heckman model uses a two-stage estimation to control for selection bias. The first stage is the selection model, which uses probit to estimate the likelihood that each case (censored or noncensored) will be selected. The procedure then uses the estimate from the selection stage to produce an expected value of the error term in the outcome stage equation (the stage that includes the explanatory variables from Table 1). By estimating the value of the error term and including it as an additional explanatory variable, the Heckman estimation removes the part of the error correlated with the independent variables to avoid the bias introduced by the selection procedure (Greene 1997). For both models estimated in the paper, market population was the sole independent variable included in the selection stage and was a strongly significant predictor of whether or not a case was selected. The results in Table 1 did not change significantly when I used the Heckman selection model to estimate my models.

TABLE A1
Media Used in Analysis

Market	Newspaper	Stations	Respondents
Albuquerque	<i>Albuquerque Journal Tribune</i>	3	5
Atlanta	<i>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i>	2	14
Austin	<i>Austin American Statesman</i>	3	4
Baltimore	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	3	18
Bangor	<i>Bangor Daily</i>	3	1
Boston	<i>Boston Globe</i>	3	66
Buffalo	<i>Buffalo News</i>	3	37
Charlotte	<i>Charlotte Observer</i>	3	6
Chicago	<i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>	3	35
Cincinnati	<i>Cincinnati Enquirer</i>	3	7
Cleveland	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	3	27
Columbus	<i>Columbus Dispatch</i>	3	7
Dallas-Ft. Worth	<i>Fi. Worth Star-Telegram</i>	3	13
Denver	<i>Denver Post</i>	3	27
Detroit	<i>Detroit News</i>	3	26
Greenville-Asheville	<i>Asheville Citizen-Times</i>	3	5
Harrisburg-York-Lancaster	<i>Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal</i>	2	4
Hartford-New Haven	<i>Hartford Courant</i>	2	13
Houston	<i>Houston Chronicle</i>	3	37
Indianapolis	<i>Indianapolis Star</i>	3	27
Kansas City	<i>Kansas City Star</i>	3	5
Las Vegas	<i>Las Vegas Review-Journal</i>	3	4
Los Angeles	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	3	56
Madison	<i>Madison Capital Times</i>	3	4
Miami	<i>Miami Herald</i>	3	2
Milwaukee	<i>Milwaukee Sentinel Journal</i>	3	50
Minneapolis-St. Paul	<i>Minneapolis Star Tribune</i>	3	15
Nashville	<i>Nashville Tennessean</i>	3	6
New Orleans	<i>New Orleans Times-Picayune</i>	3	3
New York	<i>New York Post</i>	3	29
Norfolk-Portsmouth	<i>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot</i>	3	3
Philadelphia	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>	3	47
Phoenix	<i>Arizona Republic</i>	3	8
Pittsburgh	<i>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</i>	3	10
Portland	<i>Oregonian/Vancouver Columbian</i>	3	8
Providence-New Bedford	<i>Providence Journal</i>	3	3
Raleigh-Durham	<i>Durham Herald-Sun</i>	3	4
Richmond	<i>Richmond Times-Dispatch</i>	3	18
Salt Lake City	<i>Salt Lake City Tribune</i>	3	35
San Antonio	<i>San Antonio News-Express</i>	3	7
San Diego	<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>	3	3
San Francisco	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	3	30
Seattle-Tacoma	<i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i>	3	8
St. Louis	<i>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i>	3	17
Tampa-St. Petersburg	<i>Tampa Tribune</i>	3	13
West Palm Beach	<i>Palm Beach Post</i>	3	3

NOTES

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1. I arrived at these figures by taking the total number of bills, cosponsors, and speeches in the House during 1999 and dividing them by the number of days the House was in session (137).

2. I computed these figures using the 2000 National Election Study.

3. This survey of 155 House members was performed by the Roper Center and sponsored by the Freedom Forum. The 1995 survey sampled more Republicans (65%) than the population of representatives.

4. Media market boundaries are defined by the Nielsen Corporation. Although the markets created by Nielsen concern television, Goldenberg and Traugott (1984) provide evidence showing that these market areas can be used to roughly approximate the readership area of a market's major daily newspaper(s).

5. For a more-detailed discussion about the overlapping of district and market boundaries, see Schaffner and Sellers 2003 or Vinson 2002.

6. A small body of research (Campbell, Alford, and Henry 1984; Levy and Squire 2000) has focused on the effects of media market boundaries on constituent knowledge of House candidates. The theoretical importance of these boundaries is their effect on local coverage, which in turn affects constituent knowledge. In this article, I directly examine the impact of local coverage on constituent knowledge. Furthermore, my investigation examines the advantage that incumbents gain from winning coverage during the noncampaign period.

7. A search of a small, random selection of legislators for 2000 indicated that coverage in 2000 was closely related to coverage in 1999. This similarity is not surprising, since market and district boundaries overlap in the same ways before and during the campaign period.

8. Nielsen Media Research creates media markets by determining all counties whose largest share of viewers watch stations in the same market area. With only a few exceptions, markets do not divide counties.

9. I created the regression lines using bivariate negative binomial regression models for each variable. These variables remain significant when one controls for other factors in a multivariate analysis. See Schaffner and Sellers 2003 for more information on models estimating local congressional coverage.

10. For this part of the analysis, I only included NES respondents living in districts where an incumbent was facing a challenger.

11. Data on congressional mail and travel come from *Statement of Disbursements of the House* (U.S. Department of Commerce 1999).

12. The information on challenger quality was provided by Eric McGhee and Kathryn Pearson, who used descriptions from the Cook Political Report to code whether or not the major party challenger in each House race had previously held elected office. Of the 770 NES respondents I examined, 60 evaluated an incumbent

facing an experienced challenger, 600 had an incumbent facing an inexperienced challenger, and 110 lived in districts where there was no challenger.

13. Data on the number of campaign advertisements aired by House candidates come from the Wisconsin Advertising Project (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002).

14. I acquired these data from the Federal Election Commission's 2000 Candidate Master File. These data include all receipts reported for the 1999–2000 campaign cycle.

15. This variable is coded as 0 if the respondent strongly disapproved of Congress, 1 if the respondent somewhat disapproved, 2 if he or she somewhat approved, and 3 if he or she strongly approved of Congress.

16. The NES asks respondents how many days they read the newspaper and watched local television news during the previous week. I assumed that the previous week's media consumption is representative of a respondent's typical media consumption.

17. Of the original 770 respondents for whom both measures of coverage were available, many dropped out of the analysis because they failed to answer questions included in the models. Additional respondents were lost because the models only include respondents in districts where an incumbent faced a challenger or, in the vote choice model, only those respondents who reported their vote for the House race.

18. When I divided the sample, the coefficient for congressional approval was small and lacked significance for minority party incumbents (.007, $p = .95$), but it was stronger and nearly significant for majority party incumbents (.22, $p = .14$).

19. This nonfinding does not necessarily mean that the congressional frank is not an effective tool. House members tend to use the frank selectively to target particular addresses. Unfortunately, the 2000 NES did not ask constituents if they received mail from their member of Congress, so it is impossible to determine whether or not franked mail had an effect on the intended audience.

20. I also tested interactions between each measure of coverage and the coinciding measure of media usage. The interaction variables lacked statistical significance in each model, and their exclusion did not change the results.

21. To gauge the effect of newspaper coverage on the dependent variables, I used a "low" value of the 25th percentile of the measure's distribution (39 stories) and a "high" value of the 75th percentile (140 stories). When calculating the predicted values for a particular independent variable, I held all other independent variables at their means.

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