# Public Goods and the Press: Policy Effects of Disparities in Local Political News *

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**Abstract**

The news media play an important role in democratic political accountability by monitoring elected officials and informing the public. However, local news outlets are constrained by limited resources that can be devoted to covering local politics. This paper examines how local newspapers in the United States allocate reporters across municipalities and the effect of this resource allocation on public spending and representation in local governments. I leverage a corpus of 114 million articles published 396 local newspapers from 1992-2021 to measure coverage at the municipality level, finding that newspapers systematically prioritize political coverage in larger, nearby cities with more wealthy and white residents. I further find that frequent news coverage is associated with greater investment in government services, and especially on highly salient goods such as policing, fire protection, and parks. Spending effects are moderated by mass ideology, suggesting that news coverage enhances the quality of representation in local governments.

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The news media play an essential role in democratic political accountability. By informing the public about decisions made by elected officials, the press improves political knowledge (Barabas and Jerit 2009), engages voters (Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido 2013; Shaker 2014; Hayes and Lawless 2021), and allows them to hold politicians accountable (e.g., Berry and Howell 2007; Hopkins and Pettingill 2018; Rubado and Jennings 2020). Likewise, the media shape the incentives of incumbents to enact policies supported by voters and exert greater effort on their behalf (e.g., Snyder and Strömberg 2010; Arceneaux et al. 2025).

In local politics, the news media may be especially important for political accountability, as there are few alternatives for the public to become informed (e.g., Hayes and Lawless 2021). Local governments in the United States are responsible for allocating tax revenues toward various of public services, including policing, parks, and transportation infrastructure (Trounstine 2010). While city and town officials are generally responsive to the preferences of the public in allocating these resources (e.g., Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2016), political accountability in local politics may be limited by low public engagement and the illegibility of many policy decisions to ordinary voters (de Benedictis-Kessner 2026).

However, local news outlets, which provide the vast majority of coverage of local politics (Mahone et al. 2019; Hayes and Lawless 2021), are limited by scarce resources and economic pressures (Hamilton 2011; Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018). Because the primary input to news coverage is labor, news outlets are often forced to make difficult choices about how to allocate scarce reporter time across many topics that may interest their readers (Peterson 2021*b*). The system of "beat" reporters that results from these decisions (Kaniss 1991; Boydstun 2013) means that some city and town governments are regularly covered by local newspapers, while others are not. These differences may be exacerbated by the mismatch of news geography and political geography, where many separately incorporated cities and towns exist within metropolitan areas served by as few as one newspaper.

This paper traces the decisions that news outlets make about how to allocate reporters to

cover local governments, as well as their effects on representation in local politics. I examine, descriptively, the characteristics of cities and towns where local politics is more likely to be covered at high frequency (i.e., by a beat reporter). I also show how this high-frequency coverage shapes local investment in public goods and government services.

To do so, I analyze a text archive of 114 million stories published in 396 U.S. local newspapers from 1992-2021 to measure the frequency with which local political news is covered in individual cities and towns. I focus on newspapers because they are the primary sources of information about local politics (Mahone et al. 2019) and face incentives to specialize on local coverage in light of growing national competition (George and Waldfogel 2006; Smith and Schiffman 2018). The newspaper text corpus allows me to identify which newspapers publish stories about local politics and importantly to attribute this coverage to the specific cities and towns being covered. This text-based approach reveals fine-grained variation in the frequency of local political coverage across newspapers and within media markets. I use these data to construct two measures of local political news coverage, which are the main variables in the analysis: First, I count the (logged) number of stories about each city or town government in its local newspapers. Second, I observe how the *frequency* of coverage is distributed over the course of the year, capturing the extent to which the city or town is covered routinely as a beat by local newspapers. This approach distinguishes this paper from others that measure news coverage by assuming that the home cities or counties of newspapers are covered (e.g., Gentzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson 2011; Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018; Gao, Lee and Murphy 2020), or leveraging the distribution of readership across political jurisdictions (e.g., Snyder and Strömberg 2010; Moskowitz 2021).

Consistent with expectations about newspapers' economic incentives (Kaniss 1991; Strömberg 2015), I find that they are more likely to devote resources to covering larger cities in their areas as well as those that are more geographically proximate to their headquarters. Accounting for population and distance, they more frequently cover local politics in wealthier communities where residents have more disposable income. I also uncover racial disparities

in where local politics is covered; municipalities with more Black or Hispanic residents are covered less frequently than those with fewer. Taken together, these findings suggest that news coverage decisions may exacerbate—or at least do little to correct for—existing class- and race-based inequalities in American politics.

I then show that local news coverage has important effects on the policy decisions of local governments. Cities and towns that are covered at least weekly by a local newspaper expend an additional $75 per capita on government services compared to those that are never covered. By comparison, electing a Democratic mayor increases spending by $96 (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016). I find that news coverage specifically increases spending on highly salient public goods, such as policing, fire protection, and parks and recreation. These increases are shaped by public opinion. I find that the effects of local news coverage on spending are moderated by mass ideology at the city level. In more conservative cities, more frequent news coverage slightly decreases government spending, whereas in cities with more liberal residents, coverage increases the size of government. This suggests that local news coverage contributes not only to the amount of spending on municipal services but also to political accountability—and in particular the incentives of elected officials to respond to public preferences.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I outline relevant literatures on the economic incentives of news organizations and political accountability in local governments. I use these to derive a series of expectations for how editors allocate scarce reporting resources and the effects that these decisions have on local budgets. Next, I detail the newspaper text corpus and my measures of news coverage frequency. Then, I present results on the predictors of news coverage and disparities across local governments, followed by those on the effects of coverage on local policymaking and representation. Finally, I discuss the implications of the results for political accountability in American cities.

# 1 Political Economy of Local Newsrooms

Decisions by news organizations about where, when, and how to cover politics are shaped in large part by economic pressures (Kaniss 1991; Hamilton 2011). News organizations may shrink in response to declining advertising revenues and audiences (Hayes and Lawless 2021), and in the most dramatic of cases may close altogether (Abernathy 2020). More commonly, when resources decline, outlets may reduce the size of their reporting staffs as labor is a significant expense (Angelucci and Cagé 2019). Because reporter time is arguably the most important input to news coverage, these cuts, reduce the number of stories published about politics, and especially local governments (Peterson 2021*b*).

Even during periods without large-scale news decline, news coverage is constrained by reporting capacity. Given a finite number of reporters and a limited number of hours that can be spent covering the news, editors must make decisions about which of the large number of topics and potential stories in their coverage areas to prioritize (Strömberg 2015). Editors do this by employing a system of "beats"—topics on which reporters specialize and provide close monitoring. Beats may be topical (e.g., environment, housing, crime), or focused on one or more governmental entities, such as covering the state capitol or the mayor and city council of a particular local government.[1]

Beat assignments shape the focus of individual reporters and, crucially, how they spend their time. Aggregating over all the reporters in the newsroom, then, the distribution of beats determines what information is published by a news organization as a whole. As a result, the decision of which beat to assign each reporter—and implicitly, which beats to leave empty—constitutes a standing decision by a news organization of how to prioritize coverage.

Editors' decisions about which beats to fill affect political news coverage through two channels. First, the assignment of a beat reporter increases the number of stories published

[1]News organizations also have nonpolitical beats focused on sports teams, entertainment, business, or general news, though these are not the focus of this paper.

about that topic. This is a mechanical response to the reduction in cost of identifying and covering interesting stories that stems from prior coverage and the narrowed focus of a beat reporter (Boydstun 2013). Second, assigning a beat reporter may increase the quality of coverage, as reporters behave like "burglar alarm" monitors paying close attention to goings-on in their beat and publishing important or interesting stories when they occur (Zaller 2003).

## 1.1 Expectations of Editors' Coverage Decisions

How do editors prioritize coverage of local governments in the cities and towns located within their markets? In light of staffing constraints, editors must decide among potentially dozens of municipalities in their geographic coverage areas. There are two forces that can reasonably be expected to shape their priorities: First, editors may seek to maximize newsroom profits (Kaniss 1991; Strömberg 2015). Second, editors' decisions may be affected by their own personal biases (Craft and Wanta 2004). Together, these forces yield a series of expectations about how editors will prioritize coverage of different local governments in their communities.

While recent declines in the local news industry have certainly tightened the resources available to news organizations, the dynamics of news organizations' difficult choices are likely not unique to the contraction of recent decades. Rather, the scarcity of reporters' time has always been forced to make these sorts of choices. And, as I show in the analyses that follow, most local governments have not been routinely covered by local newspapers over the last 35 years.

There are two primary sources of revenue that profit-maximizing news organizations may try to increase: advertising, which makes up the overwhelming majority of news organizations' revenues, and circulation (Kirchhoff 2011). Both should lead editors to prioritize coverage of larger cities, where they can publish information relevant to a greater number of readers using a smaller investment of staff time. At various levels of government, the press has been found to publish more stories about politicians who represent a larger share of

their readers (e.g., in Congress: Campbell, Alford and Henry 1984; Arnold 2004; Snyder and Strömberg 2010; in state legislatures: Myers 2025; Auslen 2025; and among judges: Lim, Snyder and Strömberg 2015). This yields a first expectation about coverage decisions made by editors:

H1: *Local politics will be covered more frequently in cities and towns with larger populations.*

The profit motive also yields a second expectation that newspapers are more likely to cover cities and towns that are closer geographically to their newsrooms. Nearer cities offer two advantages from the perspective of newspapers: First, they are are easier to cover without adding additional bureaus or office space that may be costly, especially as newspapers tend to be headquartered in larger cities that are the focal points of their regions. At the same time, readers in suburban communities are likely interested in the central cities of their areas, where they may work or spend leisure time, whereas central city residents are likely less interested in outlying suburban communities (Kaniss 1991). This yields a second expectation:

H2: *Local politics will be covered more frequently in cities and towns that are more geographically proximate to newspapers' headquarters.*

Economic motivations may further lead editors to prioritize certain cities or towns over others, holding population and distance constant. We can expect editors to prioritize wealthier municipalities where residents have more disposable income to spend on newspaper subscriptions and the products being sold by advertisers. As a result, we may expect:

H3: *Local politics will be covered more frequently in cities and towns where residents have higher incomes.*

In addition to considering economic factors, editors' decisions may be affected by unconscious biases. As a result, they may overemphasize the communities that they themselves live in or those that are similar.[2] This may be especially important for explaining racial

[2]An extreme example of this tendency is the town of Montclair, New Jersey, which *Vanity Fair* described

disparities in local politics coverage. As recently as 2018, the overwhelming majority (81%) of newspaper editors in the United States were white (News Leaders Association 2019). So, we may expect:

H4: *Local politics will be covered more frequently in cities with fewer Black and Hispanic residents and more white residents.*

# 2 Local News and Local Policymaking

At the local level in the United States, the bulk of policymaking is fundamentally about resource allocation (Trounstine 2010). Many of the most consequential decisions that local governments make concern how tax revenues are invested across a wide range of public goods (Tiebout 1956). Existing scholarship has largely explored the degree to which electoral politics and constituency features explain variation in local government spending. In particular, scholars have found that the levels of spending on local public goods are driven by public opinion (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2016), and district-level features such as racial diversity and geographic segregation (Alesina, Baqir and Easterly 1999; Hopkins 2009; Trounstine 2018).

There has also been considerable debate over the influence of elite partisanship on policy decisions, with some scholarship finding no effects from electing a Democratic mayor versus a Republican (Ferreira and Gyourko 2009; Gerber and Hopkins 2011), and other more recent work finding significant effects, though not across all public goods (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016; Einstein and Kogan 2016). Likewise, existing research disagrees as to whether the characteristics of elected officials—such as race, gender, class, and professional background of mayors and city officials—shape spending (e.g., Ferreira and Gyourko 2014; Holman 2014; Kirkland 2021).

as "disproportionately on the radar of Manhattan media outlets" because so many reporters and editors for *The New York Times* and other major national outlets live there (Klein 2021).

However, relatively little scholarship has studied the media's role in shaping local policy decisions. It is well understood that the news media contribute to political accountability in democracies. Voters in places with more active political press may be better able to hold politicians accountable for actions in office (e.g., Snyder and Strömberg 2010; Peterson 2021*a*).

Existing research finds that the ingredients are generally present for the news media to shape local government spending. Local political participation is decreased in cities where newspapers publish fewer substantive articles (Shaker 2014; Hayes and Lawless 2021). In these communities, those voters who do turn out are less likely to split their vote and more likely to vote along national party lines across offices (Hopkins 2018; Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018). Likewise, voters in less information-rich environments may find it difficult to hold politicians accountable. A key challenge for political accountability in local governments is the visibility of government decisions (de Benedictis-Kessner 2026). Even if it is possible for the public to access information about government through other sources, such as recordings of public meetings or newsletters issued by local officials, the press may uncover information that is not visible to voters (e.g., scandals or obscure details of policy proposals). But news coverage may also provide important context and detail about the implications of policy decisions that can appear arcane to ordinary citizens, thereby reducing uncertainty as to policies' effects.

News coverage can direct the public's attention toward government performance and the effectiveness of policy, aiding retrospective voting (Berry and Howell 2007; Hopkins and Pettingill 2018). More information-rich coverage, such as investigative reporting, can drive voters' willingness to punish incumbents who fail to address community problems (Trexler and Mullin 2024). Cities whose newspapers have larger staffs also experience more competitive mayoral elections that draw more challengers (Rubado and Jennings 2020). For their part, political elites appear responsive to this electoral threat. Using an experimental design, Mullin and Hansen (2023) found that seeing a news story about failing infrastructure

made city and county officials more supportive of costly investment in repairs. This effect was driven by officials who faced competitive elections.

To the extent that existing scholarship has assessed the effects of local news coverage on policymaking in cities, it has focused on the outputs of government in discrete domains, rather than examining policy decisions more broadly. For example, Gao, Lee and Murphy (2020) find that newspaper closure causes higher interest rates on municipal bonds. Likewise, research on policing finds that more nationalized news coverage reduces violent crime clearance rates (Mastrorocco and Ornaghi 2025). Existing work is also limited in that it emphasizes only the central city or county in which news organizations are based, ignoring the vast majority of local governments, which are smaller cities and towns often in the sphere of influence of a central city (and its news outlets).

## 2.1 Theory and Expectations of Media Effects on Local Spending

In this paper, I examine the effect of high-frequency news coverage (i.e., beat reporting) on local policymaking using municipal expenditure data across a variety of domains. Because the press shines a light on the actions of government—and especially the effects of policy decisions—voters in communities where local politics is covered more frequently may better understand decisions that local governments have made. At the same time, voters should have better information about the ways in which government has failed to respond to public problems. As a result, we should expect that local governments that are covered more often face incentives to invest more in local public goods and services, yielding a first expectation:

H5: *Cities and towns covered more frequently by a local newspaper will have higher levels of per capita spending.*

Of course, the effect of news coverage may vary across issue domains. On the one hand, political accountability generally is limited by the legibility and salience of policy decisions. This might lead us to expect that the effects of news coverage will be strongest in policy

domains that the public finds easiest to understand. Alternatively, news coverage may raise the visibility of less-salient public goods and services, and create incentives for accountability in these areas. These possibilities yield two hypotheses:

H6a: *Cities and towns covered more frequently by a local newspaper will spend more per capita on salient, high-visibility services such as policing, fire protection, parks and recreation, libraries, and roads.*

H6b: *Cities and towns covered more frequently by a local newspaper will spend more per capita on less visible or salient services such as sewers and sanitation.*

Public support for local government spending on services varies considerably across municipalities, and mass support for spending plays an important role in shaping what local governments do (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014). Likewise, public opinion should shape our expectations for what accountable government looks like. In communities where the public is more opposed to government spending, improved accountability should yield lower levels of spending, whereas in places where voters would prefer government invest in more services, improved accountability should yield higher levels of spending. This yields a final expectation:

H7: *The effect of local news coverage on per-capita municipal expenditure will be moderated by public opinion. The effects of spending will be larger in more liberal communities where voters have a stronger preference for increased government spending.*

# 3 Measuring Local Politics Coverage from News Text

The primary variable of interest in this paper is the frequency of news coverage in individual cities and towns. This raises a number of measurement challenges that cannot be resolved by simply observing where local newspapers are located and drawing assumptions about their coverage. Some newspapers may cover local politics very infrequently or not at all, while others invest significant resources in city hall reporting. At the same time, scarce

resources may force news organizations to invest in covering some local governments in their circulation areas but not others. For example, they may decide to invest in a major city but not suburban local governments, or they may cover some suburban governments but not others.

To capture this nuance, I turn to the text of newspapers to identify the frequency with which they cover individual municipal governments within their coverage areas. This allows me to identify not only the cities and towns where newspapers are present and may be covering local politics, but also where coverage is extremely frequent, as we would expect to observe if a beat reporter were assigned to cover city hall. I begin by constructing a dataset of the full text of 396 local newspapers over the period from 1992-2021. In total, the newspaper corpus contains 114 million articles.[3] With this data in hand, I then identify whether individual news stories discuss local government in the particular cities and towns located in the newspaper's coverage area. I measure the frequency coverage in two ways: the number of articles about each local government published in each newspaper in each year; and a measure of the frequency of this coverage over time, which is a proxy for beat reporting. I briefly explain the text analysis procedure and the two measures below.

First, I identify a coverage area for each newspaper that includes all of the local governments that may be covered. I do so using the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) where each newspaper is located. MSAs are clusters of counties constructed by the Office of Management and Budget based on economic ties and commuting patterns.[4] These are useful for identifying the potential coverage areas of newspapers. Unlike local TV stations, which exist within defined media markets, U.S. newspapers lack a common geography. Circulation data

[3]Because the copyrights of newspaper texts are generally owned by their separate publishers and licensed to vendors, no complete corpus exists that contains 100% of U.S. local newspapers. I worked with two vendors to build my corpus, which covers the geographic breadth of the country. Appendix A reports more details about the scope and coverage of the text corpus.

[4]In rare cases, newspapers are headquartered in cities or towns that do not belong to an MSA; in these cases, I construct a coverage area using the newspaper's county and any adjacent counties.

can provide some insights as to where newspapers distribute, but these data are not available for all newspapers in the text corpus, nor do they extend as far back as the text data. In Appendix B, I show that MSAs are generally well aligned to circulation areas for those newspapers where this information is available. Because MSAs are defined by economic and social interdependence among sets of proximate cities and towns, they correspond to the sets of local governments it would be reasonable for a newspaper to cover.

I next construct a dictionary using the names of all municipalities in each newspaper's MSA. I limit the dictionary to incorporated municipalities with at least 10,000 residents. For each article in the dataset, I search for any city or town names in the dictionary for that newspaper. Because the names of places commonly appear in coverage unrelated to local politics, limit my searches to those that appear within 30 characters of phrases such as `mayor`, `council`, or `city manager` that are associated with local politics. These searches yield, for all 114 million news stories, an indicator of whether the story concerns local government in a particular state or city. In total, I identify 3.2 million about local politics in the corpus, or roughly 3% of total coverage. From this, I aggregate to the newspaper-municipality-year level and observe patterns of coverage frequency over 2,245 cities and towns in the newspapers' coverage areas using two distinct measures of both the volume and frequency of coverage.

The first measure captures the total *volume* of news coverage about an individual municipal government, published in a given newspaper-year. It is simply measured by the logged number of articles mentioning that local government. In cases where there are zero published stories corresponding to a municipality-newspaper-year, I set this variable equal to zero, rather than excluding these cities and towns from the analysis. The Log Number of Stories captures the total effort devoted to covering local political stories in a municipality-year.

The second measure captures the *frequency* or consistency of news coverage within a given year. A large number of published stories does not necessarily correspond to the kind of high-intensity coverage that a beat reporter provides. Consider, for example, a city where

there is a major scandal involving the mayor. There would likely be a large number of news articles about that scandal and the fallout from it, but this coverage may not require a newspaper to dedicate a full-time reporter to covering the city. We might similarly see large spikes in coverage around election years that do not persist as newly elected officials take office.

To measure the frequency of coverage, I compute the share of rolling $K$-day windows in a year that include at least one story. For example,to measure Weekly Coverage, I compute for each newspaper-municipality-year the share of 7-day rolling windows that include one or more story. A city covered one or more times in every week would receive a value of 1, while a city that was never covered would receive a value of 0. I compute measures of Monthly (30 days), Weekly (7 days), and Biweekly (two stories in 7 days) Coverage. Appendix B shows that there is a strong correlation between both the Log Number of Stories and Coverage measures and the number of stories published that mention sitting mayors and city councilmembers by name.

This text-based approach differs from a common method in the literature on local news effects, which often considers the cities where news organizations are headquartered to be "treated" by news coverage and all other cities to be untreated (e.g., Gentzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson 2011; Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018; Gao, Lee and Murphy 2020). In some cases, scholars may augment this data with contextual variables such as the number of stories published (Hayes and Lawless 2021) or numbers of stories mentioning particular offices (Hopkins 2018). While this alternative approach allows for estimating sharp effects from newspaper entry or exit in a market, it may lead to under- or over-estimation of coverage, especially in cities and towns outside of the central city of a media market.

Figure 1 demonstrates an example of how the Coverage measures differ from the entry-and-exit design, using coverage from the *St. Petersburg Times*. The red squares report the value of Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage for each municipality in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater MSA in 2000 and 2010. The example elucidates several important

Figure 1: Coverage of Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater MSA Municipalities in the *St. Petersburg Times*


*Note:* Squares report the value of Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage in 2000 and 2010. The first panel identifies the newspaper headquarters in St. Petersburg and the MSA's largest city, Tampa.

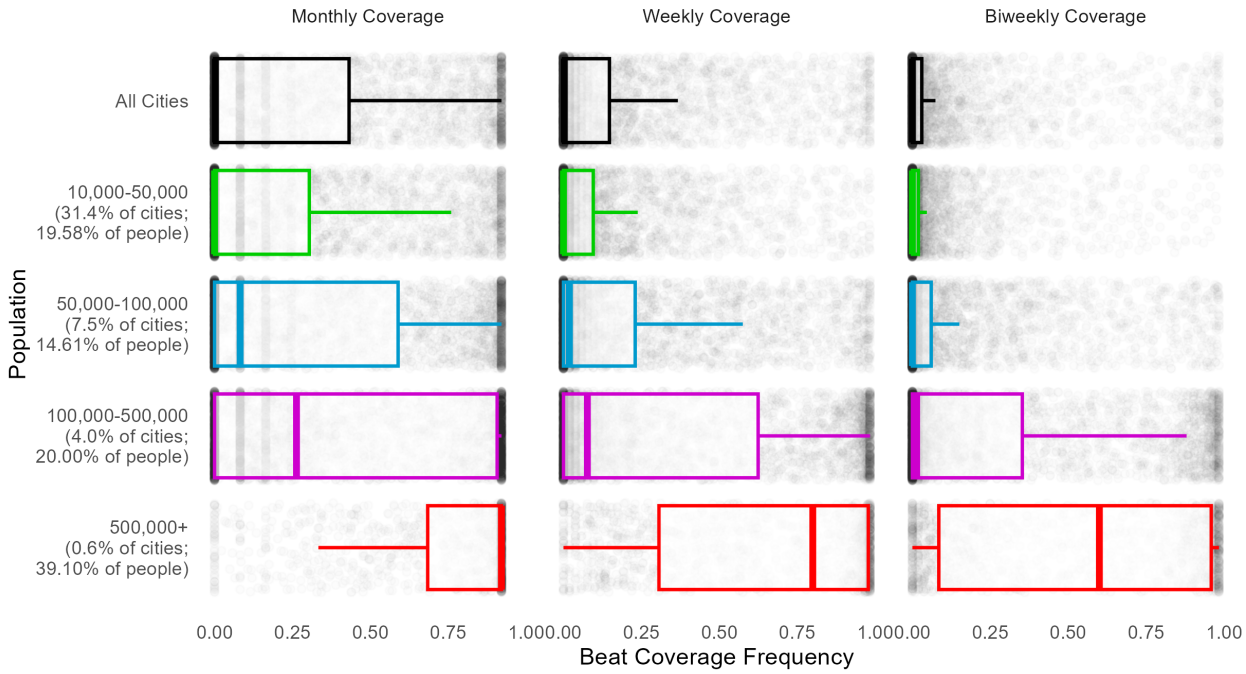
features of my empirical strategy. First, it highlights that treating only the newspaper's headquarters city in St. Petersburg as receiving coverage would significantly underestimate the coverage of other cities and towns in the region—particularly in 2000. Second, it shows that even with a robust newspaper, coverage of outlying and suburban communities is much less frequent than larger cities and those closer to the headquarters, and changes more dramatically over time.

# 4 Local Politics Coverage Decisions

In light of limited reporting resources, where do editors prioritize coverage of local politics? In this section, I report descriptive results of the frequency of local political news coverage over the 1992-2021 period I study. I also test Hypotheses 1 to 4 about the demographic and geographic predictors of more frequent coverage.

First, in Figure 2, I report the distribution of Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage for municipalities located within the coverage area of newspapers in my dataset. Beginning in the top row,we can see that the majority of cities and towns are not covered even monthly by their local newspapers; the median of Monthly Coverage in the full sample, reported in the top-left panel, is zero. The levels of Weekly and Biweekly Coverage are even lower. This low frequency of local politics coverage is largely driven by smaller towns. Moving down the y-axis of Figure 2, I report subgroup-level distributions for increasingly large cities. While coverage is infrequent even at the monthly level for cities of 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, there is much more variation in medium-small cities of 50,000 to 100,000. Still, few cities are covered weekly or biweekly. The frequency of coverage is much greater in cities of 100,000 to 500,000, though the median of Weekly Coverage is just 0.08 and of Biweekly Coverage is 0.02. In the very largest cities—which are almost always the central city in their coverage areas—coverage is much more frequent. Indeed, in these cities, the medians of Monthly Coverage is 0.92, Weekly Coverage is 0.8, and Biweekly Coverage is 0.6.

Figure 2: Local Politics Coverage by Municipality Size




*Note:* This plot summarizes the distribution of Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage of municipalities in the newspaper text dataset. Coverage is measured as the share of rolling windows that meet the coverage threshold for a given municipal government in a given newspaper in a given year, as described in Section 3 of the paper. Points in the background are a random sample of 5,000 observations.

Table 1: Predictors of Local Politics Coverage

| | Log Num. Stories | Monthly Coverage | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Population (log) | 0.39** | 0.07** | 0.06** | 0.05** |
| | (0.01) | (0.001) | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| Distance (miles) | −0.03** | −0.01** | −0.004** | −0.002** |
| | (0.001) | (0.0002) | (0.0001) | (0.0001) |
| Paper HQ City | 1.63** | 0.16** | 0.35** | 0.43** |
| | (0.03) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Paper-Year FEs | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 110,195 | 110,195 | 110,195 | 110,195 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.65 | 0.61 | 0.65 | 0.66 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are measures of local political reporting frequency at the municipality-newspaper-year level. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the newspaper level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

There are two key takeaways from these results. The first is that most local governments are not covered regularly by the news media. This is consistent across the years covered by the dataset, both before and after news decline accelerated in 2008 (see Appendix D). This suggests that the low frequency of coverage is not simply an artifact of the recent decline in local news but rather a feature of news coverage over a much longer horizon. The second is that coverage varies considerably with population. Consistent with the expectations from Hypothesis 1 and the economic incentives of news organizations, local politics is more likely to be covered in larger cities.

## 4.1 Population and Geographic Proximity

I now examine this variation in local politics coverage more systematically. Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that profit-maximizing newspapers will focus their local politics coverage on cities with larger populations and those that are nearer to the newspaper's headquarters, which are more likely to be politically and economically integrated with the city where

their newsroom is located. To test these hypotheses, I regress coverage frequency at the municipality-newspaper-year level on logged population, the distance (in miles) from the newspaper's headquarters city, and a binary indicator variable for newspaper headquarters cities. I use least-squares regression with newspaper-year fixed effects to facilitate a within-newspaper-year comparison that accounts for the unobservable total pool of reporting resources available to each news organization in each year.[5]

Table 1 reports results of these analyses. First, Model 1 shows that more stories about local government are published in larger cities and those that are more proximate to newspapers' headquarters. Likewise, the headquarters cities themselves are much more frequently covered. In Models 2-4, I find similar results using Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage as outcomes. More populous, geographically proximate cities and towns are much more likely to be covered at levels of frequency consistent with beat reporting.

## 4.2 Income and Race

Next, I turn to Hypotheses 3 and 4, which predict that demographic characteristics affect local politics coverage. As before, I model coverage as a function of city or town characteristics. Specifically, I fit least-squares regressions of the form:

$$\mathrm{Y}_{itm} = \boldsymbol{\beta}\mathbf{X}_{it} + \boldsymbol{\delta}\mathbf{Z}_{it} + \alpha_{im} + \gamma_{it} + \varepsilon_m, \tag{1}$$

where $\mathrm{Y}_{itm}$ is one of the coverage frequency variables for municipality $i$ in newspaper $m$ in year $t$. These variables are the same as those in the analyses above—Log Number of Stories and Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage. $\mathbf{X}_{it}$ is a set of demographic variables describing municipality $i$ in year $t$ and the main independent variables of interest, obtained from the U.S. Census. These include the percentage of a city's residents who are Black, the

[5]The models below for demographic and income heterogeneity also include municipality-year fixed effects. However, these would makes my primary quantities of interest in these models (coefficients on population and distance) impossible to compute.

Table 2: Race and Income Effects on Amounts of Coverage

| | Log Num. Stories | |
|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) |
| Med. Income, $1,000s | 0.03** | |
| | (0.01) | |
| % Over $150k | | 1.86** |
| | | (0.31) |
| % Black | −0.24** | −0.29** |
| | (0.06) | (0.06) |
| % Hispanic | −0.19 | −0.23 |
| | (0.13) | (0.13) |
| Municipality Controls | X | X |
| Paper-Year FEs | X | X |
| Paper-Municipality FEs | X | X |
| Observations | 106,811 | 106,811 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.90 | 0.90 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are measures of local political reporting frequency at the municipality-newspaper-year level. Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the newspaper level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

percent who are Hispanic, and one of two measures measure of economic prosperity—median household income and the percentage of households earning over $150,000. I also include additional municipality-year controls $\mathbf{Z}_{it}$,[6] as well as newspaper-municipality and newspaper-year fixed effects. These fixed effects allow me to identify the effect of changes in municipal demographics on coverage and allow for a within-newspaper-year comparison that accounts for the total, unobserved politics reporting resources that a newspaper has in a given year.

[6]I control for logged population, the percent of residents with a college degree, the percent of adult residents aged 65 or older, and the percent of the municipality that is urban. I also include quintiles of percent urban and population to account for potential nonlinearity in their effects on coverage. I obtained all Census variables from IPUMS-NHGIS (Manson et al. 2021). Although the results in Table 1 suggest that distance from the newspaper's headquarters city should be an important control, this is constant over time and so cannot be identifiable with the fixed effects in the model.

Table 3: Race and Income Effects on Coverage

| | Monthly Coverage | | Weekly Coverage | | Biweekly Coverage | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Med. Income, $1,000s | 0.01** | | 0.01** | | 0.003** | |
| | (0.001) | | (0.001) | | (0.001) | |
| % Over $150k | | 0.47** | | 0.21** | | 0.04 |
| | | (0.07) | | (0.05) | | (0.04) |
| % Black | −0.07** | −0.08** | −0.04** | −0.04** | −0.01 | −0.01 |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| % Hispanic | −0.01 | −0.01 | −0.07** | −0.08** | −0.07** | −0.08** |
| | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) |
| Municipality Controls | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Paper-Year FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Paper-Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 106,811 | 106,811 | 106,811 | 106,811 | 106,811 | 106,811 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.88 | 0.88 | 0.89 | 0.89 | 0.88 | 0.88 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are measures of local political reporting Coverage at the municipality-newspaper-year level. Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the newspaper level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

The results of these analyses are reported in Tables 2 and 3. First, Table 2 reports results where the outcome is the number of local politics stories published. In Model 1, I find that municipalities with larger Black populations covered less at all by local newspapers. A 10 percentage point increase in the Black population is associated with a nearly 70% decrease in the number of stories published. I also find a statistically significant association between median household income and coverage: wealthier communities are more likely to be covered. Model 2 reports similar results using an alternative measure of income; cities with a larger share of high-income households—where the potential for economic benefits for newspapers and their advertisers are greater—are covered more. I find no statistically significant effects on the size of the Hispanic population in cities.

Table 3 examines the effects of demographic and economic variables on the Coverage measures of local politics reporting. I first find that cities and towns with more high-income

households are more likely to be covered by the press. This holds generally for both economic measures—median income and the percent of households earning over $150,000 per year—though the effect of the second measure on Biweekly Coverage is not statistically significant. Turning to variation in coverage by racial demographics, I find that cities and towns with a greater share of Black residents are less likely to be covered monthly and weekly, echoing the results above. Cities with 10 percentage points more Black residents are covered in 70% fewer 30-day windows and 40% fewer seven-day windows than whiter municipalities. I do not find statistically significant effects of Black population on Biweekly Coverage. I likewise find that local governments in municipalities with more Hispanic residents are less likely to be covered weekly and biweekly. I surprisingly find no relationship between Black share of the population and Biweekly Coverage, or between the Hispanic share and Monthly Coverage.

The results in this section are consistent with expectations from news organizations' economic incentives, as well as the role that editorial biases may play in news coverage decisions. Local newspapers are more likely to cover larger cities with more potential readers (Hypothesis 1), as well as those located closer to their headquarters (Hypothesis 2) They are similarly more likely to emphasize cities and towns where residents have higher incomes and, as a result, more resources to spend on newspaper subscriptions and the products sold by advertisers (Hypothesis 3). There is also evidence of racial disparity in coverage that extends beyond the expectations of the profit motive. Governments in cities with more residents of color are less likely to be covered frequently (Hypothesis 4). Importantly, each of these effects is present in regressions that control for the other. That is, the relationship between household financial resources and coverage is not simply a spurious association stemming from racial bias in news reporting, nor is the reverse the case. To the extent that the media matter for political accountability, these results may raise serious concerns about distributional fairness of political representation, as not all communities are equally likely to be covered.

# 5 Research Design: Media and Public Goods Provision

My main analyses concern the effects of high-frequency beat reporting on the actions taken by local governments as observed in municipal budgets. I collected detailed data about cities' and towns' expenditures on various subcategories of their budgets from the Census of Governments. These data are collected every five years by the U.S. Census Bureau and include information about spending on specific government functions. They also include data on the sources of local government revenue. I use Census of Governments data from 1992, 1997, 2002, 2017, and 2022, which I match to local politics coverage data at the municipality-year level.

I model spending by local governments in total and in specific budgetary categories using least-squares regression models of the form:

$$\text{Spending}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \text{Coverage}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{Spending}_{i,t-5} + \boldsymbol{\delta} \mathbf{Z}_{i,t} + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_i. \tag{2}$$

$\text{Spending}_{i,t}$ is per-capita expenditure in a given budgetary category in municipality $i$ in year $t$, normalized to 2012 dollars. I fit the regression using the total operating expenditures—spending from the city or town's general fund, excluding capital outlays—as well as operating expenditures in specific categories: policing, fire protection, parks and recreation, roads, libraries, sanitation, sewers, financial administration of local government, and welfare (including cash welfare, housing, and health care spending; see Trounstine 2016).

The primary independent variable, $\text{Coverage}_{i,t-1}$ refers to reporting frequency in year $t-1$, the year that budgets were passed.[7] As before, I measure coverage using the Log Number of Stories and Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage. Because some municipalities are located in the circulation area of multiple newspapers, I take the maximum amount of

[7]Census of Governments data are collected and released based on the end date of municipalities' fiscal years (specifically, the 12 months prior to June 30 in the data release year), so budgets are generally voted on the prior year.

coverage received by a given local government in any newspaper in the dataset.

I take care to account for typical municipal sending in order to isolate the effect of media coverage and account for the ways in which municipal governments' responsibilities vary. First, I control for the lagged dependent variable, $\text{Spending}_{i,t-5}$. Prior spending is reported on a five-year lag due to the release frequency of Census of Governments data. Second, I include municipality fixed effects in the models to account for time-invariant features of local governments, such as differing responsibilities of cities both across and within states. Third, I only model spending for municipalities with nonzero spending in a given category. For example, in places where libraries are funded by counties or special districts rather than cities, I exclude them from my analysis.

Finally, the models include a series of controls at the municipality-year level, $\mathbf{Z}_{i,t}$. Specifically, I control for (logged) population and % urban, as well as quintiles of population and urbanness, as larger and more urban places may be both more likely to be covered and have more active local governments. I also control for demographics—% Black, % Hispanic, % identifying with other non-white racial groups, % college, and % 65 and older—as well as median income and county-level Democratic vote in the prior presidential election, as more liberal places may have preferences for greater government spending (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014).

# 6 Local News Effects on Local Public Goods

In this section, I present my main results on the effect of high-volume and high-frequency news coverage on local governments' expenditures. Hypothesis 5 predicted that more frequently covered cities and towns will spend more on government services. Hypotheses 6a and 6b offered two alternative expectations for which specific types of goods and services would be most affected by news coverage.

First, I examine the effect of a larger volume of published news stories on cities' expen-

Table 4: Effects of Coverage Volume on Spending

| | Total Operating (1) | Police (2) | Fire (3) | Parks & Rec. (4) | Library (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Num. Stories (log) | 8.51* | 2.89** | 1.63* | 0.82 | 0.78** |
| | (3.47) | (0.55) | (0.65) | (0.47) | (0.21) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.34** | 0.29** | 0.19 | 0.15* | 0.11 |
| | (0.09) | (0.05) | (0.12) | (0.07) | (0.06) |
| Municipality Controls | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,231 | 10,050 | 8,320 | 9,399 | 4,802 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.86 | 0.79 | 0.76 | 0.75 | 0.82 |

| | Roads (6) | Welfare (7) | Sanitation (8) | Sewer (9) | Financial Admin. (10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Num. Stories (log) | 0.46 | 1.57 | −1.34 | −0.98 | −1.86** |
| | (0.53) | (1.23) | (0.76) | (0.68) | (0.64) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.04 | 0.72** | 0.12* | 0.01 | 0.31** |
| | (0.03) | (0.22) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.11) |
| Municipality Controls | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 9,928 | 7,211 | 8,982 | 7,721 | 9,046 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.51 | 0.85 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 0.35 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are per-capita spending levels (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

ditures. Table 4 reports these results. Increasing the number of stories published about a given city by just 10% increases the per-capita operating expenditure in that community by approximately $0.86. Likewise, increases in the number of stories is associated with statistically significant increases in local spending on policing, fire protection, and libraries. These effect sizes are consistent with large spending increases when the quantity of news coverage grows. For example, doubling the number of stories published from 10 to 20 would be associated with a nearly $6 increase in per-capita spending—or $589,868 in a city of 100,000 residents. I also find that more news coverage is associated with lower spending on city financial administration.

The effect of news coverage is likely stronger when coverage of local politics is high in frequency and intensity, rather than simply in volume, as when a beat reporter is assigned. Table 3 examines these effects in greater detail using the measures of Weekly and Biweekly Coverage.[8] The top panel of Table 3 reports the effects of Weekly Coverage on per-capita spending; the bottom panel reports results of Biweekly Coverage. Local governments that are covered weekly spend $74.76 per capita more than those that are not covered. The average expenditure for municipalities in the dataset is $1,362.70, so Weekly Coverage corresponds to an approximately 5.5% increase in spending. Biweekly Coverage yields even larger effects, with those municipalities covered twice per week spending an additional $110.62 per capita (an 8.1% increase from the average city in the data).[9] The effect of news coverage is considerable, confirming the expectations of Hypothesis 5. By comparison, de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016) find that electing a Democratic mayor increases spending in cities by $95.78. The effect of Weekly Coverage on public expenditures in cities is nearly as large as that of mayoral partisanship.

I next consider the distribution of this increased expenditure across the various public

[8]For brevity, I show the effects of Weekly and Biweekly Coverage in the main paper. Appendix E shows that the results are similar, though unsurprisingly diminished in magnitude, when Monthly Coverage is used.

[9]On a log scale, I similarly find that Weekly Coverage increases spending by 4% and Biweekly Coverage increases spending by 6%. See Appendix E for models with logged spending.

Table 5: Effects of Beat Reporting on Spending

| | Total Operating | Police | Fire | Parks & Rec. | Library | Roads | Welfare | Sanitation | Sewer | Financial Admin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) |
| Weekly | 74.76** | 18.72** | 10.93** | 5.76* | 4.78** | 4.07 | 7.10 | −6.98 | −5.49 | −10.00* |
| | (20.25) | (3.44) | (3.38) | (2.68) | (1.23) | (3.06) | (7.39) | (4.41) | (3.94) | (3.90) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.34** | 0.28** | 0.20 | 0.15* | 0.11 | 0.04 | 0.72** | 0.12* | 0.01 | 0.31** |
| | (0.09) | (0.05) | (0.12) | (0.07) | (0.06) | (0.03) | (0.22) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.11) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,231 | 10,050 | 8,320 | 9,399 | 4,802 | 9,928 | 7,211 | 8,982 | 7,721 | 9,046 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.86 | 0.79 | 0.76 | 0.75 | 0.82 | 0.51 | 0.85 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 0.35 |

(a) Weekly Coverage

| | Total Operating | Police | Fire | Parks & Rec. | Library | Roads | Welfare | Sanitation | Sewer | Financial Admin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) |
| Biweekly | 110.62** | 22.24** | 13.32** | 7.40* | 5.06** | 8.13* | 11.43 | −4.87 | −1.96 | −11.46 |
| | (28.08) | (4.39) | (3.63) | (3.54) | (1.45) | (4.08) | (10.49) | (5.54) | (4.97) | (6.06) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.34** | 0.29** | 0.20 | 0.15* | 0.11 | 0.04 | 0.72** | 0.12* | 0.01 | 0.31** |
| | (0.09) | (0.05) | (0.12) | (0.07) | (0.06) | (0.02) | (0.22) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.11) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,231 | 10,050 | 8,320 | 9,399 | 4,802 | 9,928 | 7,211 | 8,982 | 7,721 | 9,046 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.86 | 0.79 | 0.76 | 0.75 | 0.82 | 0.51 | 0.85 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 0.35 |

(b) Biweekly Coverage

*Notes:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are per-capita spending levels (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

Table 6: Effects of Coverage Frequency on Municipal Revenue Sources

| | Total Revenue | | Own Source | | Taxes | | Intergov. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Weekly | 11.14 | | 14.30 | | 8.60 | | 0.12 | |
| | (25.94) | | (21.43) | | (13.08) | | (11.50) | |
| Biweekly | | 78.69** | | 59.84* | | 39.83* | | 23.42 |
| | | (30.49) | | (25.10) | | (16.21) | | (14.87) |
| Revenue (lag) | 0.28** | 0.28** | 0.24** | 0.23** | 0.30** | 0.30** | 0.26** | 0.26** |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.08) | (0.08) | (0.06) | (0.06) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| City Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| City FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,216 | 10,216 | 10,216 | 10,216 | 10,209 | 10,209 | 10,138 | 10,138 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.84 | 0.84 | 0.80 | 0.80 | 0.86 | 0.86 | 0.84 | 0.84 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are per-capita revenues (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

services that cities provide. Models 2-10 in both panels of Table 3 report results. I find that Weekly and Biweekly Coverage yields increased spending on police, fire protection, parks and recreation, and libraries. These effects are statistically distinguishable from zero at the 5% significance level. I also find that the highest frequency Biweekly Coverage produces increased spending on roads. This is consistent with the expectations from Hypothesis 6a, which argued that the effects of news coverage should be greatest on highly visible and salient services, rather than on those that the public is less interested in. On the other hand, I do not find positive effects for spending on sanitation, sewers, or financial administration. Indeed, these effects are negative, suggesting that in more covered municipalities, governments direct spending away from these less visible services. Likewise, news coverage does not affect welfare spending, which is a redistributive policy domain that benefits a smaller subset of the public.

## 6.1 Local Revenues

Where do the resources for this additional spending come from? Table 6 explores the effect of news coverage on municipal revenues. Consistent with the expenditure results, Weekly

and Biweekly Coverage are associated with cities raising more revenues. In particular, more frequently covered cities raise more in taxes, though I find no effect of news coverage on revenues from intergovernmental funds. More news coverage should contribute to public awareness of the decisions made by local governments. While we might expect, on the one hand, this to disincentivize taxation, it may alternatively be the case that a more informed public better understands how tax revenues are spent and the benefits these goods and services provide. These results are consistent with the latter story.

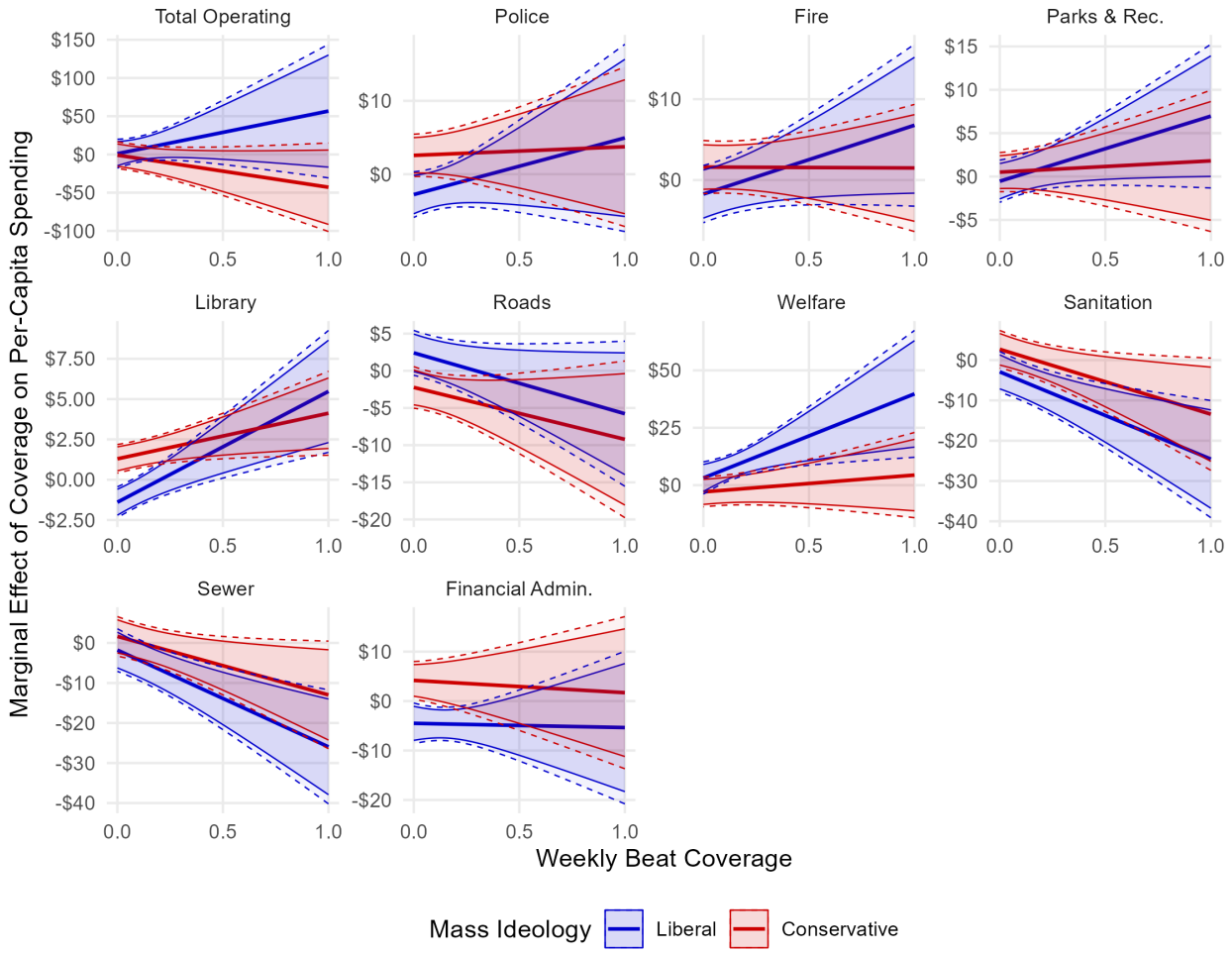
## 6.2 News Coverage and Ideological Representation

The implications of improved political accountability through media coverage may vary across communities, in particular with the ideological leanings of the public. While officials in cities with more liberal voters may respond to increased press scrutiny by delivering more goods and services to the public, the opposite pressures may exist in conservative cities where voters oppose increased spending. Here, I test whether public opinion moderates the effects of news coverage (Hypothesis 7). To do so, I modify the models above (described in Equation 2) by interacting $\text{Coverage}_{i,t-1}$ with a measure of public opinion. I use the mass ideology measures from Warshaw and Tausanovitch (2022), which allows me to observe the public's overall ideological leanings (see Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2013, 2014 for details about the measure and its utility for the study of representation in local politics). The models include lagged spending, as well as all municipality-level controls except county Democratic vote and city fixed effects. Because the ideology measure is only available beginning in 2004, I exclude earlier years from these analyses, which may explain some differences between these results and the main analyses reported above.

Figure 3 reports the marginal effects of increased Weekly Coverage on per-capita spending, broken down by cities' ideologies.[10] I estimate marginal effects at the 20th and 80th percentiles of the ideology measure. Beginning with the effects on total operating expenditure

[10]Results for Monthly and Biweekly Coverage are reported in Appendix E.

Figure 3: Effect of Beat Reporting by Ideology




*Note:* Plots show the marginal effects of Weekly Coverage on per capita spending from linear models described in the main text. All models include municipality fixed effects. Shaded regions report 90% and 95% confidence intervals, estimated with municipality clustered standard errors.

in the top-right panel, I find that the effects of news coverage clearly diverge in conservative and liberal cities. In liberal places, greater scrutiny from the press is associated with higher per capita expenditure, whereas in conservative places, greater scrutiny is associated with higher per capita expenditure. This confirms the basic intuitions of Hypothesis 7.

Among the individual components of the budget, results vary somewhat. There are large differences in effects between liberal and conservative cities on expenditures for policing, fire protection, parks and recreation, and libraries. I also observe large differences in welfare spending, despite null effects of news coverage in the main sample. Liberal cities do seem to spend more on welfare in response to increased news coverage. The effects of news coverage on municipal spending on roads, sewers, financial administration, and sanitation do not vary with ideology.

# 7 Conclusion

Local newspapers play a singular role in local politics in the United States. Whereas other levels of government benefit from competitive media environments in which multiple outlets inform the public about important decisions and policy debates, the local newspaper is often the only source of information about city and town governments (Mahone et al. 2019; Hayes and Lawless 2021). As a result, local news coverage should have a meaningful effect on political accountability and decision-making in local governments.

In this paper, I showed that more frequent news coverage leads to greater spending on local public goods. In particular, I find that cities that are covered weekly spend an additional $74.76 per capita (or 5.5% more) on local public goods. This is over three-quarters the size of the effect that a change in mayoral partisanship produces on local spending (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016). This effect is driven especially by increased spending on highly visible public services, such as policing, fire protection, and parks and recreation. The local news effect is also moderated by public opinion; in more conservative communities, increased

coverage corresponds to a decrease in public spending rather than an increase. That is, news coverage does not simply lead to increased spending but rather improved representation of the public.

But I also find that the benefits of local politics news are not distributed evenly across cities. Local newspapers are much more likely to cover city politics in larger municipalities than they are small ones, and in those that are more geographically proximate to their newsrooms. They are also more likely to cover cities and towns where residents earn higher incomes and those with fewer Black and Hispanic residents. In light of the effects of news coverage on government spending, these disparities in coverage may exacerbate, rather than reduce, existing class- and race-based disparities in American political representation.

These findings contribute to two important debates in political science. First, they join a growing literature on the determinants of public spending in local governments. While existing work has largely focused on the effects of public opinion (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014), elite partisanship (Ferreira and Gyourko 2009; Gerber and Hopkins 2011; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016), and community diversity (Alesina, Baqir and Easterly 1999; Trounstine 2016), I show that high-frequency media monitoring also plays an important role in shaping what local governments do. Indeed, because of the informational link that local news coverage provides, these findings may explain one mechanism by which public opinion affects policymaking in cities. Second, this paper enhances our understanding of the effects of local news coverage, building on prior scholarship about political participation (e.g., Shaker 2014; Hayes and Lawless 2021), polarization (Darr, Hitt and Dunaway 2018), electoral competition (Rubado and Jennings 2020), and other policy effects (e.g., Gao, Lee and Murphy 2020; Mullin and Hansen 2023). However, prior work has not examined the effects of news coverage on local governments' investment in public goods and services.

My analyses focus on scarce reporting resources over time, noting that even well-resourced news organizations must make tough decisions about how to allocate reporting capacity. However, these findings may be especially important in light of recent declines in the local

news industry. Over the past two decades, the number of working newspaper journalists in the United States has fallen by half as audiences increasingly turn to national and online sources for information (Walker 2021). In response, news organizations have cut staff and reduced coverage of local politics (Hayes and Lawless 2021; Peterson 2021*b*). When the New York weekly *The Milbrook Independent* closed in 2019, its editor told *The New York Times*:

> "School boards, town and village boards, county news local news—it all disappeared. We were a check on governments, on endless environmental and zoning hearings, on budgets that we often published in detail, on misdoings and good doings. There is now a void," (Takenaga 2019).

The results in this paper suggest important implications of this decline. Facing increased constraints, local news organizations may forced to further reduce coverage of city politics—especially in smaller communities and those with poorer residents or more residents of color. With decreased coverage comes lower investment in local public goods and worse representation public preferences. Overall, this raises important questions about the quality of representation in American cities.

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Supplementary Materials for

# "Public Goods and the Press: Policy Effects of Disparities in Local Political News"

Michael Auslen*

March 2, 2026

## Contents



## A Newspaper Text Corpus

This appendix reports information about the corpus of newspaper text that is used to construct the main variables in the paper. Text data were obtained from two sources: First, I collected full texts of English-language, daily local newspapers in the United States from ProQuest. I then collected a second dataset of text from NewsBank to supplement the ProQuest corpus, prioritizing larger newspapers that were not included in the ProQuest sample and filling in missing years from the ProQuest sample. Where a newspaper-year is included in both samples, I keep the ProQuest data.

The corpus includes 396 unique local newspapers covering 266 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) over the period from 1992-2021. In total, it contains 114 million articles and 5,567 newspaper-years. Importantly, these are not a complete sample of all newspapers in the country, nor are they randomly drawn. Large-scale newspaper text datasets of this sort are dependent on individual licenses between newspaper publishers and data vendors, so no database contains a complete universe of local news data.

However, the corpus represents a large swath of the country. Figure A1 shows the geographic distribution of the newspaper data across MSAs (the plots use 2020 MSA boundaries for simplicity). The top figure shows the number of years in which at least one newspaper

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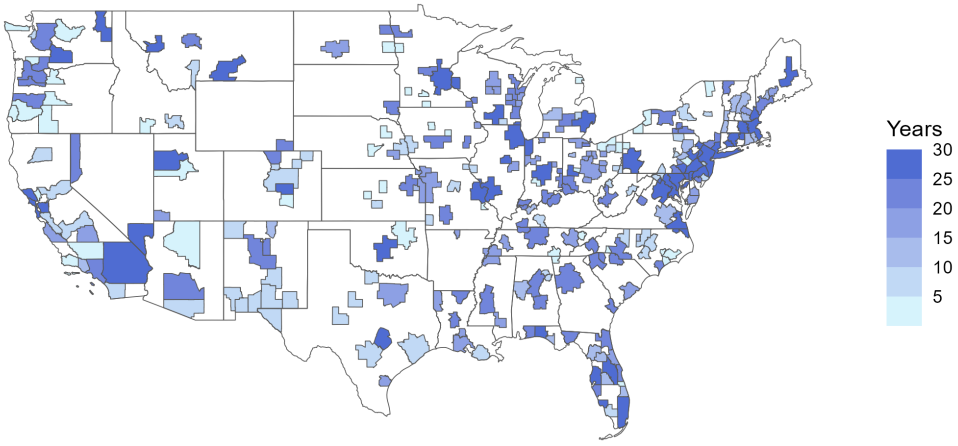
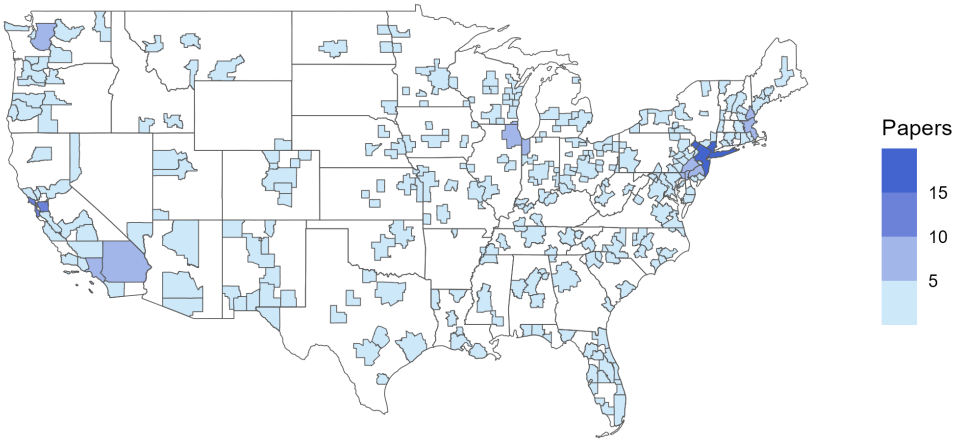
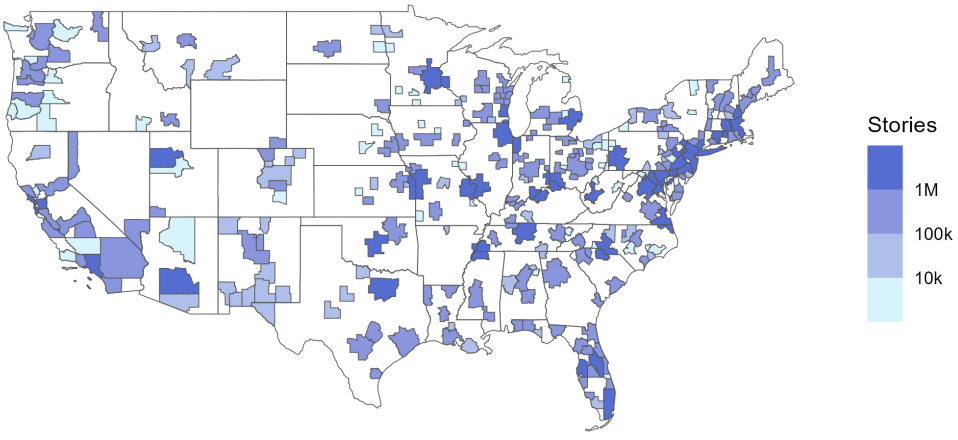
Figure A1: MSA Inclusion in Newspaper Text Corpus




(a) Years with at least one newspaper




(b) Unique newspapers




(c) Total number of news articles

is present for each MSA, and therefore all cities and towns located within the MSA. The middle planel shows the number of unique newspapers in the dataset for each included MSA. Finally, the bottom panel shows the number of news articles included in the full corpus for each MSA.

# B Measuring News Coverage

This appendix provides further detail and validation for the two measures of news coverage discussed in the main text: (1) the (logged) number of stories mentioning local government in a particular city or town, and (2) the Coverage measures.

Underpinning both measures is a search-based text analysis procedure that uses a dictionary of terms that includes the names of all municipal governments in the United States. The list of names was obtained from the U.S. Census and excludes unincorporated areas and Census Designated Places that do not have a local government. It was also limited to cities and towns of more than 10,000 residents, as are all analyses presented in the paper.

As described in the main text, the search procedure first identified all cities or towns that were partially or wholly contained within the MSA associated with each newspaper. It then searched all articles published by that newspaper to identify cases where the name of the municipality occurred within 30 characters (in either direction) of key words indicating coverage of local politics. These include: `[city/town/village] mayor`, `manager`, `council*`, `commission*`, `board`, `trustee`, or `alder*`, where `*` indicates a wildcard allowing any characters to follow (e.g., `alderman`, `commissioner`, or `councilwoman`).

## B.1 MSAs and Circulation Areas

The text analysis procedure used to measure coverage relies first on identifying which specific local governments lie within the coverage area of each newspaper. Unlike TV stations, local newspapers do not have defined media markets. Instead, I use Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). These areas are constructed by the Office of Management and Budget to contain sets of counties that share economic and commuting ties, generally centered around major cities.

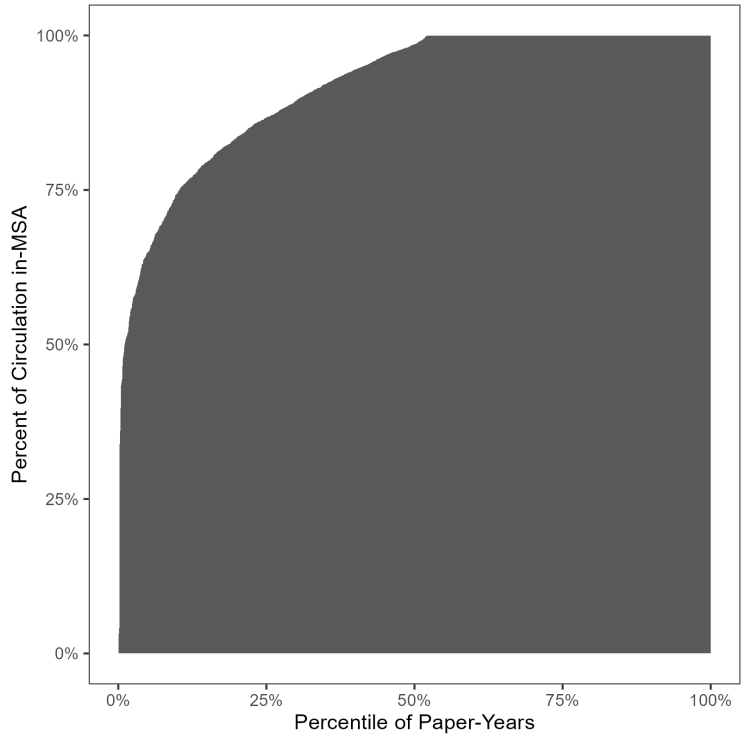
A reasonable alternative would be to use data on newspaper circulation to identify which counties the readers of each newspaper live in, under the assumption that newspapers are likely covering the places where their readers live (e.g., Snyder and Strömberg 2010). However, circulation data are limited. They are not necessarily available for all newspapers, and are not readily available back to 1992 when the text corpus begins.

Nevertheless, my MSA approach captures well the distribution of newspaper readership. Using circulation data from 2008, 2014, and 2018, Figure A2 shows that the vast majority of newspaper circulation is contained within the MSA of newspapers' headquarters cities. County-level circulation data come from the Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS) *Circulation* handbook and were digitized and shared by Peterson (2021). In the figure, the shaded gray region shows the share of readers living within the MSA, identified at the newspaper-year level. While the underlying data include some newspapers not in my text corpus, this suggests that MSAs are generally well aligned with circulation areas.

## B.2 Accuracy of Text Analysis Procedure

This appendix validates a key intuition in the search procedure: that the generic search terms at the municipality level correspond to coverage of actual local politics. Using a list of candidates for mayor and city council (de Benedictis-Kessner et al. 2023), I constructed a

Figure A2: MSA Alignment with Circulation Areas

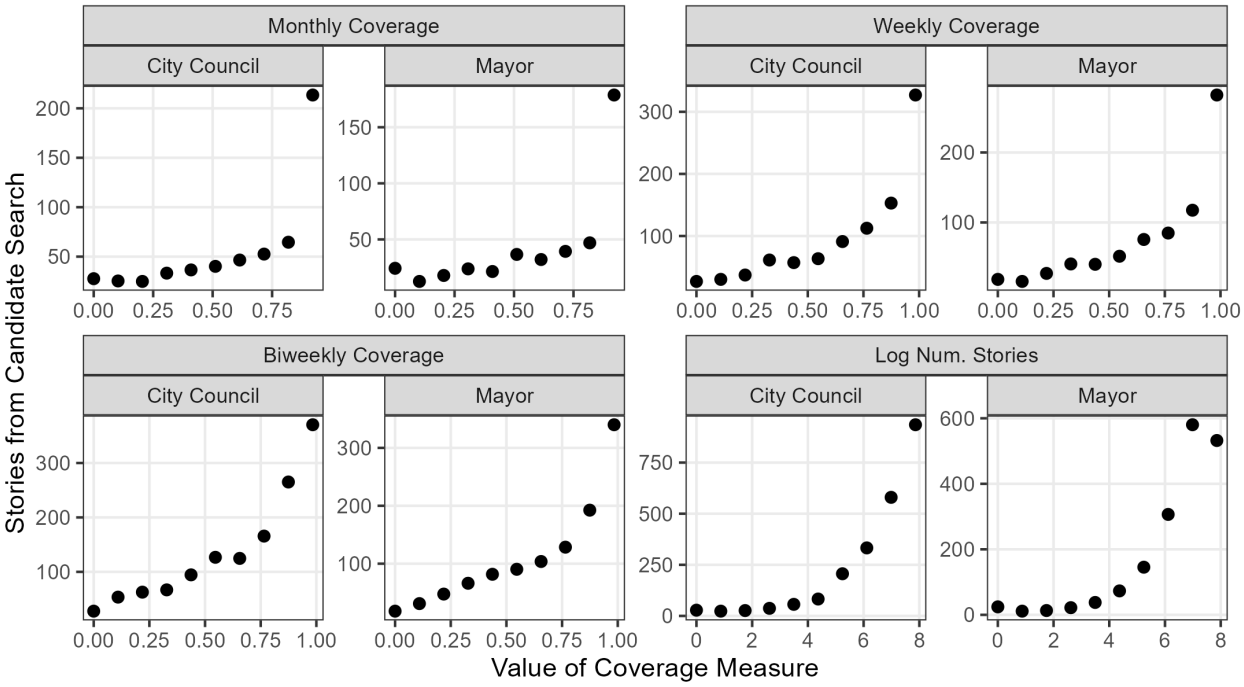



*Note:* The shaded area shows the percentage of newspaper circulation that is located within the MSA for each newspaper-year in the SRDS *Circulation* dataset.

dictionary consisting of the first and last names for winning candidates in cities and towns located in each newspaper's MSA. I then searched all articles published within four years of the election that the candidates won, as a proxy for which mayors and city councilors were in office at the time.

Figure A3 compares the search results from this candidate-based search with the main measures used in the paper, aggregated to the municipality-newspaper-year level. I find strong correlations across all four measures, using the names of both city council and mayoral candidates. In particular, I find especially high numbers of candidate mentions when the Coverage variables approach their maximum of 1.

Figure A3: Coverage Measure Validation with Candidate Names




*Note:* Points report binned means of results from the candidate name search at varying levels of the main coverage variables.

# C Descriptive Statistics

Below, I report descriptive statistics for variables used in the main analyses in the paper.

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics: Local Politics Coverage Analyses

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Any Coverage | 110,697 | 0.50 | 0.50 |
| Log Num. Stories | 110,697 | 1.21 | 1.72 |
| Monthly Coverage | 110,697 | 0.24 | 0.33 |
| Weekly Coverage | 110,697 | 0.14 | 0.26 |
| Biweekly Coverage | 110,697 | 0.08 | 0.20 |
| Log Population | 110,697 | 10.36 | 0.94 |
| Distance (miles) | 110,195 | 24.58 | 16.95 |
| Paper HQ City | 110,195 | 0.04 | 0.21 |
| % Black | 110,697 | 0.08 | 0.13 |
| % Hispanic | 110,697 | 0.20 | 0.20 |
| Median Inc., $1,000s | 110,697 | 7.58 | 3.03 |
| % over $150k | 110,697 | 0.06 | 0.05 |
| % College | 110,697 | 0.23 | 0.12 |
| % 65 and Older | 110,667 | 0.18 | 0.06 |
| % Urban | 106,841 | 0.99 | 0.04 |

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics: Expenditure and Revenue Analyses

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Log Num. Stories | 10,551 | 2.52 | 1.77 |
| Monthly Coverage | 10,551 | 0.47 | 0.36 |
| Weekly Coverage | 10,551 | 0.30 | 0.32 |
| Biweekly Coverage | 10,551 | 0.17 | 0.27 |
| Operating Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 132,201.00 | 1,562,780.00 |
| Policing Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 15,206.92 | 95,312.36 |
| Fire Protection Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 7,865.68 | 37,679.13 |
| Welfare Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 15,829.41 | 344,962.00 |
| Roads Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 4,756.07 | 18,281.40 |
| Parks and Rec. Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 4,643.47 | 17,318.51 |
| Libraries Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 1,184.79 | 6,989.85 |
| Sanitation Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 8,789.13 | 38,164.84 |
| Sewer Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 5,213.89 | 16,669.22 |
| Financial Admin. Expenditure, Per Capita | 19,672 | 2,953.99 | 59,693.79 |
| Total Revenue, Per Capita | 19,672 | 158,927.90 | 1,796,869.00 |
| Own Source Revenue, Per Capita | 19,672 | 124,238.30 | 1,257,576.00 |
| Tax Revenue, Per Capita | 19,672 | 59,846.92 | 790,945.30 |
| Intergovernmental Revenue, Per Capita | 19,672 | 34,689.63 | 554,780.60 |
| County Democratic Vote | 19,688 | 0.51 | 0.14 |
| Warshaw-Tausanovitch Ideology | 12,036 | 0.03 | 0.19 |

# D Robustness of Coverage Results

This section reports robustness tests and alternative specifications for the results on frequency of coverage.

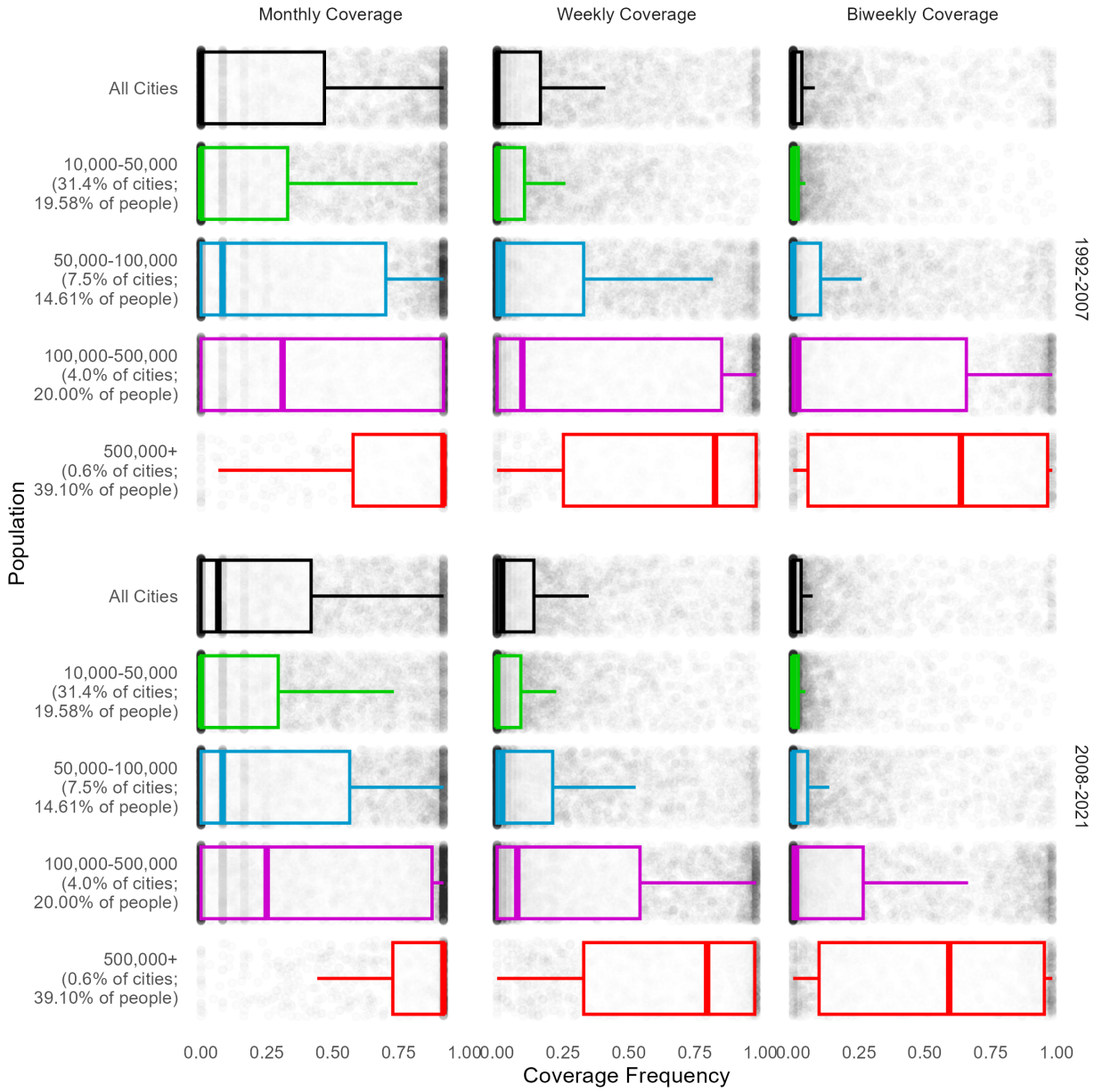
## D.1 Results over Time

Figure A4 shows how the Coverage varies across population bins over time. Because the local news industry has experienced significant retrenchment since 2008, we might expect to see dramatic reductions in coverage frequency in more recent years. While the figure confirms that Coverage was generally higher in the period from 1992-2007 as compared to 2008-2022, these differences are not so dramatic. Indeed, high-frequency beat-type coverage has always been rare. This suggests that the results from Figure 2 in the main paper are not driven by over-time variation and rather by differences in coverage frequency within newspaper-years.

Tables A3 and A4 confirm these intuitions, replicating the regression results from the main text, broken out by time period. These results confirm many of the intuitions of the models in the main text that pool time periods: Local politics coverage increases with population and proximity to the newspaper's headquarters (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Likewise, local newspapers are less likely to cover local politics in cities and towns with more Black residents (Hypothesis 4).

However, the results are less consistent when it comes to household income. In the more recent time period, I confirm the findings from the main text that local governments are more likely to be covered in communities with higher incomes (Hypothesis 3). In the 1992-2007 period, I do not find that this is the case.

Figure A4: Local Politics Coverage by Municipality Size and Time Period




*Note:* This plot summarizes the distribution of Monthly, Weekly, and Biweekly Coverage of municipalities in the newspaper text dataset. Coverage is measured as the share of rolling windows that meet the coverage threshold for a given municipal government in a given newspaper in a given year, as described in the main text of the paper. Points in the background are a random sample of 5,000 observations.

Table A3: Predictors of Local Politics Coverage, by Time Period

| | 1992-2007 | | | 2008-2021 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Log Num. Stories | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage | Log Num. Stories | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Population (log) | 0.40** | 0.07** | 0.05** | 0.39** | 0.06** | 0.04** |
| | (0.01) | (0.003) | (0.002) | (0.01) | (0.002) | (0.001) |
| Distance (miles) | −0.03** | −0.004** | −0.002** | −0.03** | −0.004** | −0.002** |
| | (0.002) | (0.0002) | (0.0001) | (0.001) | (0.0001) | (0.0001) |
| Paper HQ City | 1.33** | 0.26** | 0.36** | 1.77** | 0.40** | 0.47** |
| | (0.05) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.03) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 37,039 | 37,039 | 37,039 | 73,156 | 73,156 | 73,156 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.65 | 0.61 | 0.60 | 0.66 | 0.67 | 0.69 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are measures of local political reporting frequency at the municipality-newspaper-year level. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the newspaper level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

Table A4: Race and Income Effects on Local Politics Coverage, by Time Period

| | 1992-2007 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Log Num. Stories | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage | Log Num. Stories | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Med. Income | −0.02 | −0.004 | −0.001 | | | |
| | (0.02) | (0.003) | (0.002) | | | |
| % Over $150k | | | | −0.93 | 0.03 | 0.0004 |
| | | | | (0.90) | (0.17) | (0.12) |
| % Black | −0.92** | −0.24*** | −0.13** | −0.89** | −0.23*** | −0.12*** |
| | (0.37) | (0.07) | (0.05) | (0.37) | (0.06) | (0.05) |
| % Hispanic | −0.50 | −0.07 | −0.02 | −0.50 | −0.05 | −0.01 |
| | (0.40) | (0.06) | (0.04) | (0.38) | (0.06) | (0.04) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 37,179 | 37,179 | 37,179 | 37,179 | 37,179 | 37,179 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.93 | 0.92 | 0.91 | 0.93 | 0.92 | 0.91 |
| | 2008-2021 | | | | | |
| | Log Num. Stories | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage | Log Num. Stories | Weekly Coverage | Biweekly Coverage |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Med. Income | 0.03*** | 0.003** | 0.002* | | | |
| | (0.01) | (0.001) | (0.001) | | | |
| % Over $150k | | | | 2.24*** | 0.20*** | 0.07 |
| | | | | (0.42) | (0.06) | (0.05) |
| % Black | −0.17*** | −0.03*** | 0.001 | −0.22*** | −0.03*** | 0.0003 |
| | (0.06) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.07) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| % Hispanic | 0.01 | −0.05 | −0.07** | −0.04 | −0.06 | −0.08** |
| | (0.27) | (0.04) | (0.03) | (0.28) | (0.04) | (0.03) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 69,632 | 69,632 | 69,632 | 69,632 | 69,632 | 69,632 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.90 | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.90 | 0.91 | 0.90 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are measures of local political reporting frequency at the municipality-newspaper-year level. Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the newspaper level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

# E Robustness of Public Good Provision Results

This section reports robustness tests and alternative models for the main results on local government expenditure.

## E.1 Main Effects with Alternative Coverage Frequencies

Table A5 replicates the main expenditure results for the Monthly Coverage frequency. Table A6 replicates the results relating to municipal revenues using the Monthly Coverage variable.

## E.2 Logged Spending Models

Appendix E.2 reports the effects of Weekly and Biweekly Coverage on logged per-capita spending. This alternative specification generally replicates the findings reported in the main paper.

## E.3 Results by City Population

Figure A5 reports the results of the main results, using subsets of cities and towns by population. Larger cities are covered more frequently, and may also systematically spend on different public goods, or do so at different levels (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016). The main results reported in the paper control for logged population as well as population bins (quintiles). The results in Figure A5 further confirm that the main findings are robust across population levels. Although smaller sample sizes, especially in the largest cities, lead to wider standard errors, the results are all direcitonally consistent with those reported in the text and in many cases remain statistically significant even among these small subsets.

## E.4 Results over Time

The table below shows the effects of Weekly and Biweekly Coverage on Total Operating Expenditure in the periods from 1992-2007 and from 2012-2022. I break the sample at this point to correspond to pre- and post-Great Recession periods when the local news industry faced dramatic contraction. For ease of comparison, I also repeat the estimate for the full sample from the main text. In both periods, the effects of coverage on municipal spending are positive. However, in the more recent period, the effect is lower in magnitude and is not statistically significant at the 95% level.

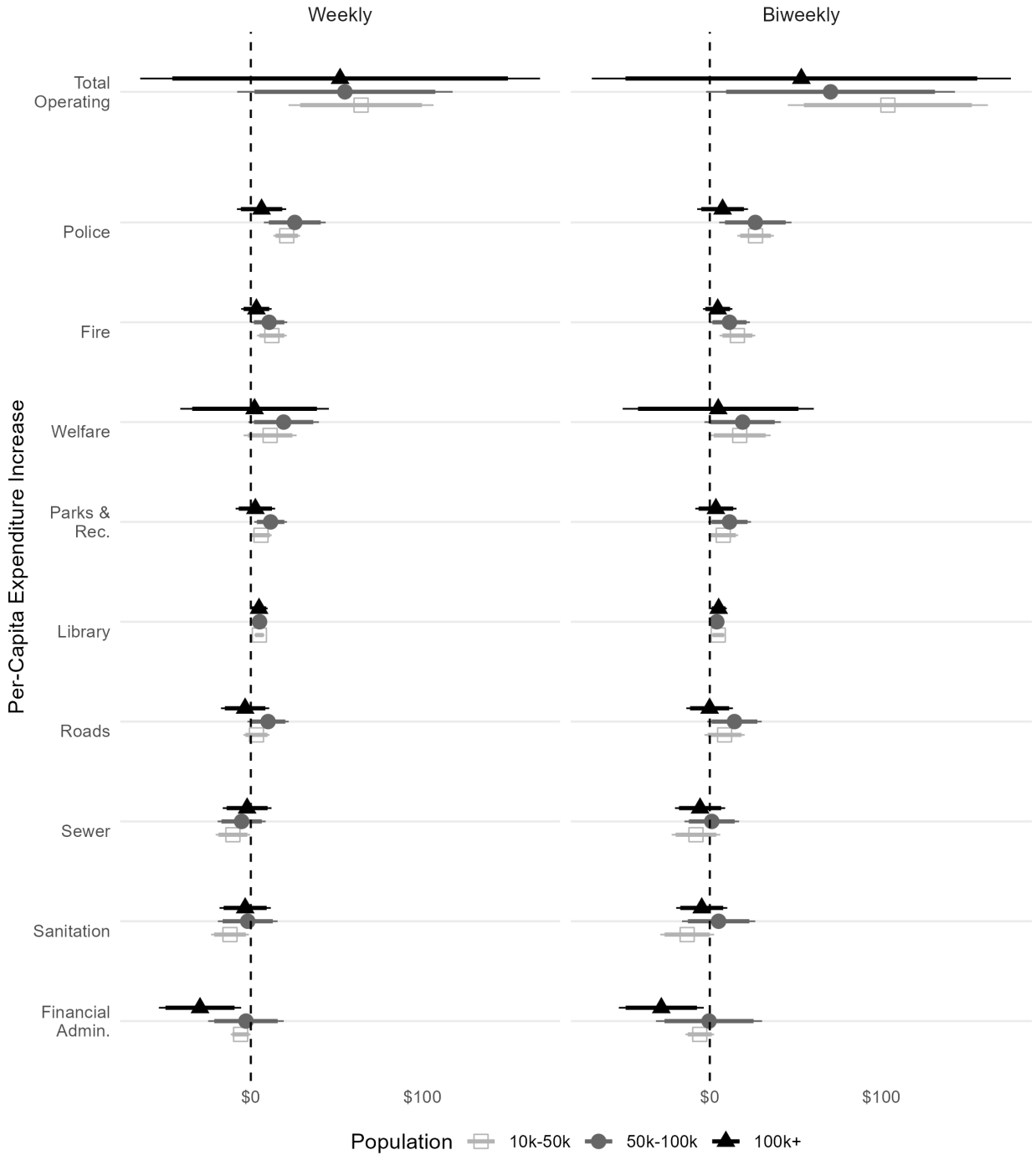
These results are consistent with a diminished effect of the news media as readership and coverage resources have declined (e.g., Peterson 2021). Nevertheless, the point estimates remain substantively large in this later period.

Table A5: Effect of Monthly Coverage on Municipal Spending

| | Total Operating (1) | Police (2) | Fire (3) | Parks & Rec. (4) | Library (5) | Roads (6) | Welfare (7) | Sanitation (8) | Sewer (9) | Financial Admin. (10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monthly | 39.13* | 13.15** | 6.78* | 3.70 | 3.88** | 1.22 | 7.65 | −6.02 | −4.42 | −7.56** |
| | (16.28) | (2.60) | (3.44) | (2.24) | (0.98) | (2.35) | (5.96) | (3.73) | (3.40) | (2.54) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.34** | 0.29** | 0.20 | 0.15* | 0.11 | 0.04 | 0.72** | 0.12* | 0.01 | 0.31** |
| | (0.09) | (0.05) | (0.12) | (0.07) | (0.06) | (0.03) | (0.22) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.11) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,231 | 10,050 | 8,320 | 9,399 | 4,802 | 9,928 | 7,211 | 8,982 | 7,721 | 9,046 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.86 | 0.79 | 0.76 | 0.75 | 0.82 | 0.51 | 0.85 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 0.35 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are per-capita spending levels (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

Figure A5: Coverage Effects on Municipal Expenditure, by Population




*Note:* Points report the effect of Weekly or Biweekly Coverage from linear regression models fit on subsets of cities and towns based on population. Error bars correspond to 95% (thin bars) and 90% (thick bars) confidence intervals from municipality clustered standard errors.

Table A6: Effect of Monthly Coverage on Municipal Revenue

| | Total Revenue (1) | Own Source (2) | Taxes (3) | Intergov. (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monthly | −33.75 | −21.35 | −11.79 | −10.63 |
| | (25.30) | (22.45) | (11.05) | (9.31) |
| Revenue (lag) | 0.28** | 0.24** | 0.30** | 0.26** |
| | (0.07) | (0.08) | (0.06) | (0.05) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,216 | 10,216 | 10,209 | 10,138 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.84 | 0.80 | 0.86 | 0.84 |

*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are per-capita revenues (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

## E.5 Ideological Representation Results with Alternative Coverage Frequencies

Figures A6 and A7 report the marginal effects of Monthly and Biweekly Coverage, interacted with ideology. As with the Weekly Coverage results in the main paper, ideology is set to the 20th and 80th percentiles.

Table A7: Effects of Beat Reporting on Spending: Logged Outcome

| | Total Operating | Police | Fire | Parks & Rec. | Library | Roads | Welfare | Sanitation | Sewer | Financial Admin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) |
| Weekly | 0.04** | 0.07** | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.04 | −0.04 | 0.01 | −0.16** |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.05) | (0.03) | (0.06) | (0.03) | (0.04) | (0.04) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.04** | 0.14** | 0.20** | 0.17** | 0.13** | 0.08** | 0.14** | 0.17** | 0.13** | 0.16** |
| | (0.01) | (0.05) | (0.04) | (0.02) | (0.05) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.04) | (0.02) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,335 | 10,050 | 8,320 | 9,399 | 4,802 | 9,928 | 7,211 | 8,982 | 7,721 | 9,046 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.79 | 0.80 | 0.83 | 0.79 | 0.85 | 0.52 | 0.65 | 0.74 | 0.72 | 0.55 |

(a) Weekly Coverage

| | Total Operating | Police | Fire | Parks & Rec. | Library | Roads | Welfare | Sanitation | Sewer | Financial Admin. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) |
| Biweekly | 0.06** | 0.08** | 0.07* | 0.04 | 0.09 | 0.09* | 0.06 | −0.03 | 0.03 | −0.15** |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.04) | (0.05) | (0.04) | (0.07) | (0.04) | (0.04) | (0.05) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.04** | 0.14** | 0.20** | 0.17** | 0.13** | 0.08** | 0.14** | 0.17** | 0.13** | 0.17** |
| | (0.01) | (0.05) | (0.04) | (0.02) | (0.05) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.04) | (0.02) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,335 | 10,050 | 8,320 | 9,399 | 4,802 | 9,928 | 7,211 | 8,982 | 7,721 | 9,046 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.79 | 0.80 | 0.83 | 0.79 | 0.85 | 0.52 | 0.65 | 0.74 | 0.72 | 0.55 |

(b) Biweekly Coverage

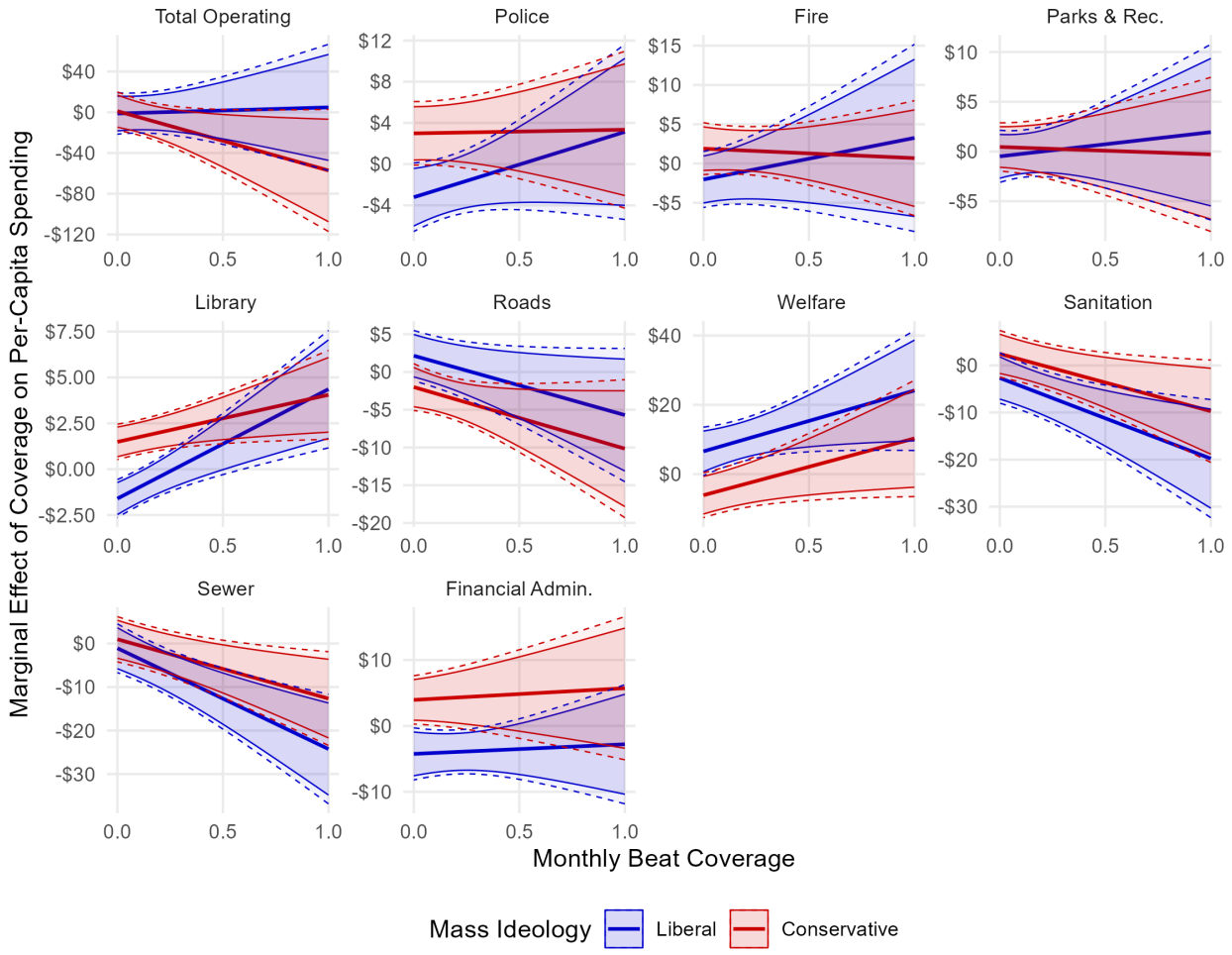
*Notes:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are logged per-capita spending levels (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main text. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

Table A8: Effect of Coverage on Spending, Over Time

| | All Years | | 1992-2007 | | 2012-2022 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Weekly | 74.76** | | 91.03** | | 23.69 | |
| | (20.25) | | (34.78) | | (43.58) | |
| Biweekly | | 110.62** | | 158.72** | | 68.53 |
| | | (28.08) | | (41.95) | | (60.25) |
| Spending (lag) | 0.34** | 0.34** | 0.12 | 0.12 | −0.13 | −0.13 |
| | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.17) | (0.17) |
| Municipality Ctrls. | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Municipality FEs | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 10,231 | 10,231 | 4,550 | 4,550 | 5,681 | 5,681 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.86 | 0.86 | 0.86 | 0.86 | 0.89 | 0.89 |

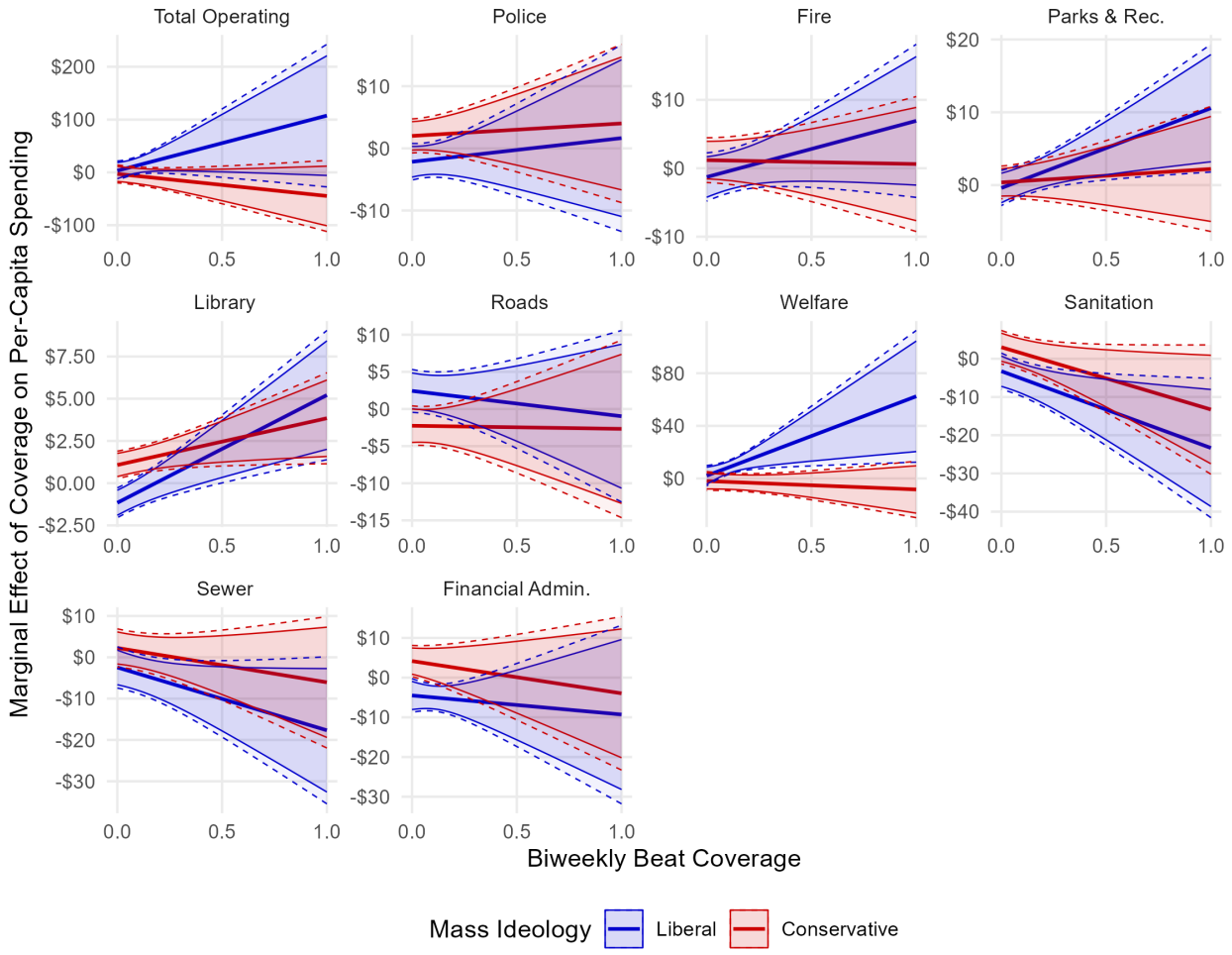
*Note:* Coefficients from least-squares regressions where the outcomes are per-capita spending levels (in 2012 dollars). Municipality-level controls are described in the main paper. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

Figure A6: Effect of Monthly Beat Reporting by Ideology




*Note:* Plots show the marginal effects of news coverage on spending from linear models described in the main text. All models include municipality fixed effects. Shaded regions report 90% and 95% confidence intervals, estimated with municipality clustered standard errors.

Figure A7: Effect of Biweekly Beat Reporting by Ideology




*Note:* Plots show the marginal effects of news coverage on spending from linear models described in the main text. All models include municipality fixed effects. Shaded regions report 90% and 95% confidence intervals, estimated with municipality clustered standard errors.

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