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Political Advantage, Disadvantage, and the Demand for Partisan News

Allison M. N. Archer, University of Richmond

In this article, I argue that the national political environment can meaningfully affect variation in aggregate demand for partisan media. I focus on the relationship between the political context—namely, political advantage and disadvantage derived from elections—and media demand in the form of partisan newspaper circulations. Using a data set that characterizes the partisan slant of local newspapers and their circulation levels between 1932 and 2004, I find that when parties are electorally advantaged in presidential contests, demand for their affiliated newspapers decreases relative to demand for papers affiliated with disadvantaged parties. I uncover evidence of similar patterns in a case study of Florida newspapers, and I also compare the power of presidential versus congressional outcomes in shaping feelings of advantage and disadvantage. Taken together, these results provide evidence of a negative link between political advantage derived from presidential elections and the relative demand for partisan news.

Why do citizens consume political news? This article examines the determinants of such news consumption by focusing on the relationship between the national political context and partisan news demand. Studying the conditions under which individuals choose to learn about politics is important because the press conveys key information to the public ranging from parties' platforms to elected officials' behavior in office. Citizens, in turn, are thought to form political opinions and make political decisions on the basis of such information (e.g., Dahl 1998).

Of course, many of the political news sources that individuals rely on today are tinged with partisan bias (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Groseclose and Milyo 2005; Ho and Quinn 2008), an attribute that also characterizes media offerings of the past. Given the presence of partisan media throughout US history (e.g., Groeling and Baum [2013], but see Schudson [1978]) and today, this article examines the conditions under which aggregate demand for news affiliated with the Republican and Democratic parties surges or declines. In doing so, I offer a new perspective on our understanding of partisan media that goes beyond their effects on viewers (e.g., Levendusky 2013) or the implications of

changes in their supply (e.g., Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinikson 2011). Instead, my primary research question asks: how does the political environment affect demand for partisan news? I argue that a sense of advantage and disadvantage in the national electoral context can meaningfully influence relative partisan media consumption.

To understand how the political environment affects partisan media demand, my research (like Gerber and Huber 2009) incorporates data rich in ecological validity that look beyond survey responses to study politically motivated behavior. Specifically, I examine two local Floridian papers' circulations between 1932 and 2014 and the aggregate circulations of local, daily partisan papers in the United States from 1932 to 2004. In doing so, my results speak to the effects of political advantage and disadvantage across different time periods and geographic contexts.

Such analyses also represent a new approach to the way that we typically conceptualize the relationship between the media and political outcomes. Existing literature often focuses on how nonpartisan and partisan media affect the political attitudes and behaviors of both citizens and elites (e.g., Clinton and Enamorado 2014; DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007;

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Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Yet I take a different approach by characterizing how factors in the political context influence the relative demand for partisan media.

This article also helps adjudicate between competing hypotheses in the literature that suggest both advantage and disadvantage could boost or depress partisan news demand. While advantage could increase morale (see, e.g., Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010) and partisan news consumption, it may promote a sense of complacency that decreases incentives to monitor politics. Conversely, the threat related to disadvantage may boost news demand (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000) but may also decrease efficacy and lead to political withdrawal (Hirschman 1970, as cited in Anderson et al. 2005).

Finally, examining the effects of advantage and disadvantage on partisan news demand has implications for the relationships between citizens and elites. Knowing whether the political context motivates some voters to consume more partisan news than others is critical, as this could lead to different responses to and interpretations of political outcomes on the basis of the content of such news. Asymmetries in the monitoring of elites could also emerge, creating parallel asymmetries in accountability and representation. Thus, understanding who pays attention most and when can provide insight into the constraints elected officials perceive among their constituents.

CONNECTING THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT TO PARTISAN MEDIA DEMAND

The goal of this article is to understand the relationship between the national political context and demand for partisan media. I argue that beyond more stable, individual-level traits like education, political advantage and disadvantage derived from parties' standings in national elections can meaningfully affect partisan news consumption. And because the relative status of political parties fluctuates over time (Anderson et al. 2005)—no one party has dominated the zero-sum game of politics throughout US history—the advantage and disadvantage felt by electoral winners and losers, respectively, should similarly fluctuate with the political context.

I focus on partisan news consumption because previous work in political communication (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2008; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Severin and Tankard [1992], as cited in Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005; Stroud 2008, [2010], as cited in Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar 2017), political psychology (e.g., Lodge and Taber 2013), and economics (e.g., Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005) suggests that individuals prefer news that aligns with their preexisting beliefs, including those that are political. That is, individuals have a preference for partisan-friendly media. Even more, the presence of biased news,

which the literature attributes to supply- (Baron 2006) and demand-side forces ([Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006; Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005], as cited in Galvis, Snyder, and Song 2016), has long been a feature of the American media landscape, which allows me to trace the relationship of interest across nearly a century. While Independent papers emerged around the turn of the twentieth century (Schudson 1978), Gentzkow et al. (2011) find evidence that partisan affiliations are rather enduring and can affect candidate endorsements into the twenty-first century. Patterson and Donsbach (1996, as cited in Baron 2006) also find evidence that political bias still affects decisions about story content and headlines among journalists in Western democracies.¹

Various strands of literature support two competing hypotheses regarding the relationship between the national political context and demand for partisan news, as well as the null hypothesis that electoral conditions are unrelated to partisan news consumption. Previous work finds that political interest is rather stable over individuals' lifetimes, as even short-term disruptions often return to their long-term equilibrium within a year (Prior 2010). Perhaps the decision to purchase a politically friendly paper (by subscribing or buying one copy of the paper) is similarly stable in both the long and short term. Should this be the case, the null hypothesis that the demand for partisan media is orthogonal to political outcomes is a convincing possibility.²

However, caveats to Prior's (2010) results suggest the political environment can affect interest, as he notes that Eastern and Western Germans experienced spikes in political interest surrounding the reunification of Germany. Thus, it is plausible that electoral outcomes could also influence partisan media demand in the short term, and the literature supports

1. Independent papers did emerge in the United States with the rise of the high-speed printing press and penny press in the 1800s (Hamilton 2004; Schudson 1978), but these papers still exhibited some partisan biases—they were just less explicit about their affiliations (see also Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinkinson 2014). Smaller, local papers that relied financially on parties and could not be sustained by advertising revenue alone like Independent media (Petrova 2011, as cited in Galvis et al. 2016) operated with partisan leanings into the 1900s (McGerr 1986). Even in the twentieth century when objectivity was the goal of professional reporters, Schudson (1978) observes there was skepticism that pure objectivity was or could ever be attained. Finally, partisan editorials have long been featured in American papers (Schudson 1978). In national data used in my main analyses, the mean percentage of Independent papers (1932–2004) is 22.39% and remains below 25% until 1984 (its maximum is 31.73% in 2000). The mean percentage of unaffiliated papers is 0.96%.

2. If people are driven to seek more information evenhandedly, the results would also support the null hypothesis. Those compelled by the context to consume more news could subscribe to both Democratic and Republican papers or do so in a random fashion that cancels out in the aggregate. This would suggest no net change across local partisan newspaper demand.

competing hypotheses regarding this relationship. First, demand for media affiliated with a party advantaged by favorable electoral conditions could increase, while demand for the disadvantaged party's media could decrease. The zero-sum nature of electoral competition in particular facilitates this effect because elections produce a clear winner and loser. Electoral winners are often more supportive of their political system than losers (Anderson et al. 2005); perhaps that sentiment also compels winners to consume more partisan-friendly news as a means of expressing support for and following their party. Political advantage could also engender enthusiasm, an emotion that increases interest in campaigns (Brader 2006), and may increase willingness to read partisan news. Similarly, the euphoria that accompanies electoral triumphs (akin to the euphoria of a sports team's victory; Healy et al. 2010) might boost morale among advantaged partisans and heighten their demand for partisan news. That is, an electoral win could elicit reactions similar to those of sports fans "basking" in the glow of their team's win (Cialdini et al. 1976, as cited in Hirt et al. 1992), with partisans basking in their party's glory by reading more about their victory or the opposition's loss.

Conversely, supporters of a disadvantaged party may choose to disengage from and exit politics (Hirschman 1970, as cited in Anderson et al. 2005). Individuals are less likely to vote when they expect to lose, particularly when they have repeatedly lost electoral contests (Anderson et al. 2005). Similar patterns may hold for partisan news demand; political losers may feel disconnected from politics and discouraged from consuming such news because it reminds them of their disadvantage. Alternatively, political losers may feel angry or aversive, emotions that lead to less systematic thought and an increased proclivity for action (Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007; MacKuen et al. 2010). Those facing an unfavorable climate may focus on political action (Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe 2015; Valentino et al. 2011) instead of passively reading news—particularly those who are internally efficacious (Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009)—as a means of reversing their disadvantaged status.

With these forces at work among advantaged and disadvantaged partisans, one outcome that these theories support is that

H1. Demand for media affiliated with electorally advantaged parties should increase relative to demand for media affiliated with electorally disadvantaged parties.

Directly comparing demand for the two types of media sheds light on which are being consumed more or less—and potentially, which party is being monitored more or less.

Alternatively, the literature supports a competing hypothesis: demand for media affiliated with disadvantaged parties could increase, while favorable conditions may inhibit demand for advantaged parties' media. The electorally advantaged may feel more complacent than enthusiastic, leading them to engage in politics without much critical thought (Marcus and MacKuen 1993; Marcus et al. 2000). Such contentment could lead advantaged partisans to let their guards down and rely on political habits instead of seeking out more partisan news. They may also defer to the officials they voted for, as winners generally have more trust in government than losers (Anderson et al. 2005). With this mind-set, increased partisan news consumption is unnecessary.

In contrast, electoral disadvantage could signal a threatening event that induces anxiety and promotes partisan news consumption. Anxiety signals failure and uncertainty (Steenbergen and Ellis 2006, as cited in Albertson and Gadarian 2015), which motivates individuals to seek out new information to resolve those negative feelings (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Marcus and MacKuen 1993; Marcus et al. 2000; Valentino et al. 2008). For instance, anxiety over immigration boosts information seeking about that topic (Albertson and Gadarian 2015), and fear cues—not enthusiasm cues—stimulate TV news consumption (Brader 2006). Importantly, individuals tend to seek out unbalanced, partisan friendly information in the face of anxiety (Valentino, Banks, et al. 2009).³

Electoral losers are persistently less satisfied with the political system than winners, have less trust in government, and are more likely to protest. Additionally, electoral loss often increases support for changes to the electoral system (Anderson et al. 2005). Such political discontent coupled with a desire for change could motivate losers to consume more partisan news as a means of monitoring the opposition. Consuming partisan news can also help disadvantaged partisans cope with their loss by spinning their circumstances into something positive for their party. For example, Bill O'Reilly told Republicans there was a silver lining to their loss in the 2012 presidential election: the pressure on Democrats was now such that "if the economy doesn't improve dramatically over the next four years, the Democratic Party will evaporate" (2012).

Taken together, this second set of theories suggests the opposite of hypothesis 1:

H2. Demand for media affiliated with electorally disadvantaged parties should increase relative to demand for media affiliated with electorally advantaged parties.

3. This is true unless one has to defend one's beliefs later, making a balanced search beneficial (Valentino, Banks, et al. 2009).

In the following sections, I examine variation in aggregate-level demand for partisan news to determine whether evidence consistent with these expectations exists. In doing so, my results speak to the first-order conditions of the relationship of interest; that is, the findings will shed light on which of the predicted patterns occur in the aggregate—if at all. These data will not be able to discern which of the mechanisms predicted by the individual-level studies are at play (see, e.g., Kramer 1983), as the literature in support of each hypothesis point to observationally equivalent outcomes. However, uncovering evidence rich in ecological realism at the aggregate level that is consistent with individual-level studies equally rich in internal validity allows us to be more confident in our understanding of how the political context relates to partisan media demand.

ADVANTAGE, DISADVANTAGE, AND LOCAL PARTISAN PAPERS' CIRCULATIONS

In studying the relationship between the national political context and partisan media demand, I focus primarily on the demand for local, daily partisan newspapers. I view such papers as just one form of partisan media that the political context can influence. Other forms could certainly be analyzed, but this medium's long-standing presence and prevalence throughout US history makes it a compelling case. And while the media environments in which local partisan papers exist have changed over time, I attempt to control for such changes in the analyses below.

Newspapers are an appropriate medium to study for several additional reasons. Throughout much of US history, papers were used as a platform for coalition merchants to advocate their stances on issues such as race. In doing so, these individuals used newspapers to guide the evolution of the parties' ideologies over time (Noel 2012). Papers also enjoy greater space to cover the news than TV broadcasts, which are constrained to sound bites and stories that last only minutes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, local papers tend to set the news agendas that their broadcast counterparts follow. Local papers also help hold elected officials accountable given their reporters' knowledge of and easy access to lower-level bureaucratic processes (Arnold 2006).

In recent years, economic distress has certainly plagued the newspaper industry. Notable local papers like the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* shifted to online coverage only (Yardley and Pérez-Peña 2009), while others have shut down entirely (see Dumpala 2009), giving citizens fewer choices in local papers that they can purchase. Aggregate circulations of local partisan papers suggest that among US cities with at least one paper, the mean percentage of cities with more than one pa-

per fell from 69% in 1869 to 3% in 2004. (See the appendix, available online for more details.)

However, if citizens have only one newspaper in their city, the financial decision to purchase or not purchase a local paper could still be affected by national politics. My results are likely conservative because those with only one local partisan paper may continue to subscribe to it so they can access news even when national political forces motivate them to do otherwise. In sum, studying local newspapers is critical because they expose readers to important information ranging from ideology to elected officials' behavior. And though papers have faced economic distress and new media have emerged over time, focusing on newspapers allows me to trace the relationship between advantage, disadvantage, and demand across nearly one century.⁴

A case study of Florida papers

To gain insight into the relationship between the political environment and demand for like-minded news, I first focus on the weekday circulations of two prominent papers in the Tampa Bay area of Florida: The *Tampa Bay Times* (formerly known as the *St. Petersburg Times*) and *The Tampa Tribune*. This case study serves as an ideal starting point for my analyses for several reasons. First, scholarly work has demonstrated that there are ideological differences in the papers' content: Prior to the *Tampa Bay Times*' purchase of *The Tampa Tribune* in 2016, analyses found the former leaned Democratic with more liberal content, while the latter leaned Republican with more conservative content (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010).⁵ Therefore, this region had the option to consume two local papers with different political leanings. Tampa Bay is also neither staunchly Republican nor staunchly Democratic; in fact, it has been considered a swing region in the swing state of Florida (Cohen 2012). Such heterogeneity in partisanship suggests that there will likely be variation (i.e., a mix of "winners" and "losers") in response to changes in the political context.

Papers in the Tampa Bay region also do not serve parts of the country like Washington, DC, in which citizens are more likely to be political junkies who perennially subscribe to newspapers regardless of the context. Even more, papers in Tampa Bay differ from those in cities like New York, which

4. Depending on the research question, future work should consider the effects of local papers' dwindling budgets on reporting and these papers' demise over time. I make efforts to account for trends across time and outline those below.

5. The media directory *Mundo Times* corroborates these ideological slants (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010); however, Budak, Goel, and Rao (2016) suggest that Gentzkow and Shapiro's (2010) findings may overstate news outlets' bias.

serve not only locals but also people throughout the country who are consistently more attentive to politics. Finally, while the politics of Tampa Bay have been characterized at times by patronage, corruption, and machines (Kerstein 1991), its political history still has not been dominated by party bosses and formal party organizations like that of Northern cities (e.g., Chicago). Thus, the relatively weaker presence of political machines in Tampa Bay is helpful because a more dominant political class composed of party machines may have systematically deterred residents from following and engaging with politics.

To understand how the national political context affects newspaper circulations, I regress the relative changes in the demand for both Tampa Bay papers on presidential election outcomes. My primary independent variable is the difference in the two-party national vote share as a percentage of all votes cast. Formally, I subtract the Democratic Party's national votes from those of the Republican Party in presidential election year t and divide that value by the total votes cast:

$$\frac{(\text{Republican Votes}_t) - (\text{Democratic Votes}_t)}{\text{Total Votes}_t} \times 100.$$

Positive values of this variable, *GOP Vote Margin*, generally indicate a Republican victory and an electorate that is presumably more disposed toward Republican ideas, while negative values indicate a Democratic victory.⁶ I use presidential elections to operationalize the political context because I am interested in how advantage and disadvantage permeating the nation affect demand for local partisan news. Additionally, presidential elections rose in prominence throughout the twentieth century as the relative importance of the office increased (Moe and Howell 1999), and the president's relative ability to achieve policy goals was enhanced. Thus, presidential contests are likely to serve as powerful political stimuli that influence demand for partisan news.⁷

Additionally, I focus on 1932 to 2014 for several reasons. First, illiteracy rates fell below 5% in the 1930s (National Center for Education Statistics 1993), which decreases the proportion of individuals who did not purchase newspapers simply because they could not read. This time period also contains the eras in which radio (1932–52) and television (1956–2004) enjoyed a national penetration rate of at least 50% (Sterling 1984, as cited in Gentzkow et al. 2011). Thus, it

could be that individuals still purchasing newspapers represent a more politically fervent segment of the population that is strongly affected by the changing political environment. Such factors combined could heighten the ability of presidential elections to affect demand for local partisan papers.

To construct the dependent variable of relative partisan media demand, I rely on original newspaper circulation data collected by the author from the *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* (1932–2010) and the *Editor & Publisher International Databook* (2012–14). This outcome variable is calculated as a measure of the relative changes in weekday circulations for each paper, and I focus on the change in circulations every four years in response to presidential election outcomes. I first calculate the change in circulations from the year after one presidential election to the year after the next presidential election for each paper. These values illustrate how demand for the Democratic paper changed over time and how demand for the Republican paper changed over time. Then, I subtract the change in the Democratic-leaning paper (i.e., the *Tampa Bay Times*) from that of the Republican-leaning paper (i.e., *The Tampa Tribune*) and convert that value to a percentage of total circulations. Formally, for each presidential election year I calculate:

$$\frac{(R_{t+1} - R_{t-3}) - (D_{t+1} - D_{t-3})}{R_{t+1} + D_{t+1}} \times 100,$$

where R_{t+1} is the circulation level of the Republican-leaning paper in the year after presidential election year t , R_{t-3} is the circulation level of the Republican-leaning paper in the year after the previous election year $t - 4$, D_{t+1} is the circulation level of the Democratic-leaning paper in the year after election year t , and D_{t-3} is the circulation level of the Democratic paper in the year after the previous election year $t - 4$.

By subtracting the change in the Democratic paper's circulations from that of the Republican paper's circulations, I am essentially comparing the papers' circulations while controlling for their raw differences and subtracting out confounding factors that equally affected both, such as wars or natural disasters (e.g., Card and Krueger 1994; Clinton and Enamorado 2014). This measure effectively controls for systematic factors by differencing out their common effects for each paper.⁸ Importantly, these aggregate-level data speak to aggregate-level patterns, so not all individuals in all years will

6. Election data were collected in 2014 from <http://www.uselectionatlas.org>. See the appendix for a plot of *GOP Vote Margin*.

7. Local political forces (e.g., how one's district or state votes) could certainly motivate partisan news consumption. Studying their effects is beyond the scope of this article but represents an interesting avenue for future work.

8. See the appendix for a plot of this measure. This is not a traditional difference-in-differences (DiD) setup, but it has similarities. I assume that in the absence of an election, circulations from the last election would follow parallel trajectories over time (e.g., Abadie 2005). They are, in effect, a baseline against which changes are compared.

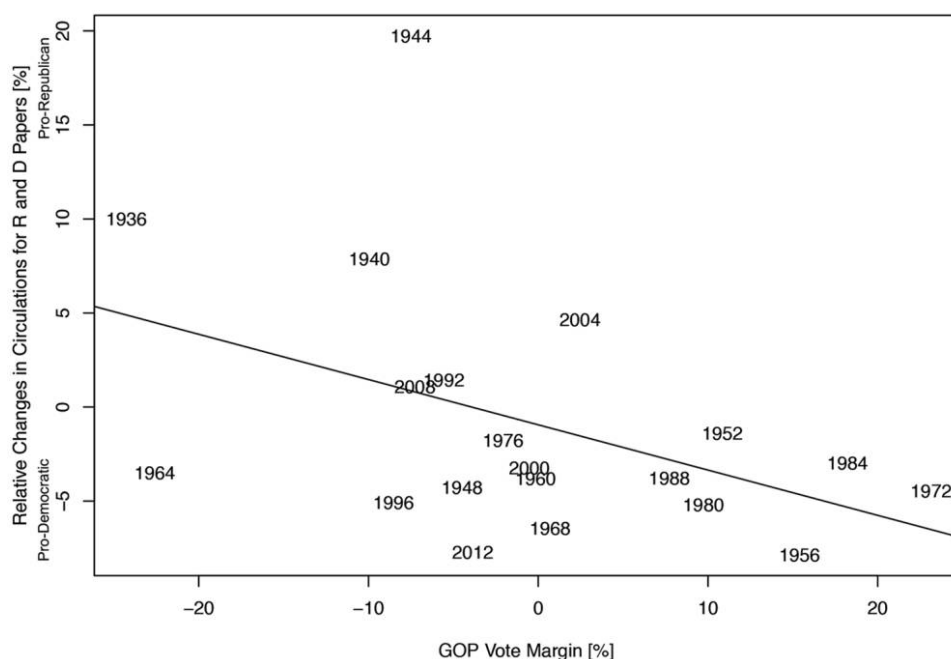


Figure 1. Relationship between GOP vote margin and relative changes in circulations for Tampa Bay partisan papers

behave the same way.⁹ And while the timing of this analysis points to a causal relationship between presidential elections and the relative demand for the two papers, these data are still observational and the analysis is ultimately correlational.

To understand how the political context affects news demand, figure 1 depicts the bivariate relationship between the electoral context and relative changes in the papers' circulations. The plotted values suggest a negative correlation, which column 1 of table 1 confirms is statistically significant ($b = -0.24$; $p = .03$).¹⁰ Substantively, an increase of one standard deviation (12.48 percentage points) in the percentage of votes received by the Republican Party over the Democratic Party corresponds with the Democratic-leaning *Tampa Bay Times* gaining roughly 10,110.03 circulations more than the Republican-leaning *Tampa Tribune*.¹¹ Including control variables for the change in gross domestic product (GDP) taken from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the lagged Republican vote margin, and the radio era of 1932 to 1952 (Sterling 1984, as cited in Gentzkow et al. 2011) in columns 2–4, respectively, suggests the negative relationship between *GOP Vote Margin* and relative circulation changes is quite robust.

9. Future work could examine this relationship among individuals to uncover the mechanisms driving overall patterns.

10. All analyses in this article use robust standard errors to account for any issues with collinearity or heteroskedasticity.

11. To calculate this value, I multiplied the standard deviation of *GOP Vote Margin* by -0.24 . I then divided that by 100 and multiplied by the mean total circulations in the year after an election (337,540.90).

In column 5, I control for time and time², which detrend the data and decrease the significance of *GOP Vote Margin*. Though it is still negatively signed ($b = -0.08$), this coefficient is not statistically significant ($p = .37$). Finally, column 6 uses an alternative specification that also controls for time trends but in a different manner. Here the data set is reorganized so that the unit of analysis is year-party of paper; that is, each row contains the circulations of party j 's paper, so there are two rows per election year—one for each party's paper. The dependent variable in this model is the change in the circulations of party j 's paper from the year after the previous election ($t - 3$) to the year after the current election ($t + 1$), and the key independent variable is *Winner*, which represents whether or not the party affiliated with a given paper won year t 's presidential election. Controls for time using decade fixed effects are also included.¹² The coefficient for *Winner* describes the average difference between the change in circulations for the winning party's paper and the change in circulations for the losing party's paper. The results again point to a negative, albeit insignificant, relationship: the disadvantaged party's paper gains an average of 3,596 more circulations than the advantaged party's paper from the year after the last election to the year after the current election ($p = .42$, two-tailed). (Note that p -values are lower in mod-

12. I use time and time² in model 5 and decade fixed effects here instead of year fixed effects because of the low N in this data set and concerns of overfitting the model. In table 1, col. 6, robust standard errors clustered by year are used.

Table 1. Political Environment and Demand for Partisan Newspapers in Tampa Bay, 1932–2014

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
GOP vote margin (%)	-.24** (.10)	-.24** (.11)	-.20* (.10)	-.14* (.07)	-.08 (.09)	
Change in GDP		-.0008 (.002)				
GOP vote margin lagged (%)			-.10 (.10)			
Radio period				8.37* (4.16)		
Time					-2.64** (1.17)	
Time ²					.10* (.05)	
Winner						-3,595.95 (4,310.70)
Decade fixed effects						Yes
Intercept	-.94 (1.38)	.02 (2.43)	-1.04 (1.34)	-2.99*** (.98)	13.58* (6.68)	9,041.48*** (2,155.35)
N	20	18	20	20	20	40
R ²	.19	.22	.22	.45	.43	.80

Note. Ordinary least squares regression coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables in cols. 1–5 are a relative measure of the changes in the two papers' circulations over time as a percentage of circulations in the year after a presidential election. Column 6 uses the alternative specification with the change in circulations for party *j*'s paper as the dependent variable, with standard errors clustered by year. GDP = gross domestic product.

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

els with other controls or operationalizations of the independent variable. See the appendix for full results.)

Taken together, the findings in this case study are consistent with hypothesis 2's expectation of a negative relationship between political advantage and the relative demand for partisan-affiliated media. However, these results are not robust to all specifications in table 1, and the analysis is limited to one specific part of the country. The next section draws on a more geographically expansive data set with which I examine circulations for all local partisan papers across states. Doing so helps us understand if and how the national political context affects relative, aggregate demand for partisan media both across time and throughout the United States.

An analysis of all local, daily partisan newspaper circulations

To understand the effects of national political conditions on partisan news consumption across time and the entire United States, I focus on the demand for all local, daily partisan newspapers from 1932 to 2004. The political context is again opera-

tionalized as the difference in the two parties' votes received in presidential elections divided by all votes cast.¹³ To measure demand for local partisan papers, I rely on a data set collected by Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinkinson (2012). These data detail the circulations for local daily papers in presidential election years from 1869 to 2004 and classify every newspaper as Republican, Democratic, Independent, or unaffiliated. Like before, I begin my analysis in 1932 but end it in 2004, as this is the last year of this data set.¹⁴

While recent scholarship attempts to quantify and rank the ideology of media outlets, this work characterizes a narrow sliver of the contemporary media environment (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Groseclose and Milyo 2005; Ho and

13. Analyses with a denominator summing the two parties' votes only produce similar results (see the appendix).

14. Data for these years are from the *Editor & Publisher Yearbook* and include only general-circulation English-language daily US papers (distributed on at least four weekdays). National papers are excluded. Data are missing for <1% of partisan papers and were downloaded from ICPSR in February 2014; they since have been revised online.

Quinn 2008) or an even narrower sample of historical papers (e.g., Groeling and Baum 2013) and is unhelpful for this analysis. Therefore, I rely on the coding scheme of Gentzkow et al. (2011) to determine the political associations of local newspapers. Specifically, the authors use whether or not the paper had ever formally declared a Republican, Democratic, or Independent affiliation to assign political associations.

The assumption of time-invariant partisan reputations is strong, but Gentzkow et al. (2011) conduct content analyses to show that between 1872 and 1928—the years in which papers were the preeminent source of news—Republican papers devoted 48% of their candidate mentions to Republicans while Democratic papers mentioned Republican candidates only 29% of the time, a difference that is highly significant. In more recent years (1932–2004), historically Republican papers endorsed Republican candidates 90% of the time, while historically Democratic papers endorsed Republican candidates only 45% of the time (Gentzkow et al. 2011).¹⁵

To understand the relative demand for partisan papers, I focus again on the changes in circulation trends. Here I use a measure of Republican and Democratic papers that calculates the change in circulations from the previous election year to the current one for both types of papers and then subtracts the change in Democratic papers from that of Republican papers. This measure again allows me to identify relative changes in demand for the two types of papers while also subtracting out the common effects of confounding factors and controlling for disparities in the papers' raw circulation levels. Formally, for each presidential election year t I calculate

$$\frac{(R_t - R_{t-4}) - (D_t - D_{t-4})}{\text{Total Circulations}_t} \times 100,$$

where R_t is the circulation level of Republican papers in presidential election year t , R_{t-4} is the circulation level of Republican papers in the previous election year $t - 4$, D_t is the circulation level of Democratic papers in election year t , and D_{t-4} is the circulation level of Democratic papers in the last election year $t - 4$. Like before, I divide this measure by total circulations in election year t .¹⁶

15. In the few cases in which a paper switched partisanship, the majority affiliation is used. The endorsement rate of out-party candidates is a bit high for Democratic papers. Ideally, I would use more fine-grained data with the strength of papers' bias assessed at each election; the political context could have a stronger effect on demand for more partisan papers. Unfortunately, such data are not readily available, so I follow Gentzkow et al. (2011) and use the affiliation provided. See the appendix for more analyses in support of this choice and a plot of circulations.

16. See the appendix for plot of DV and results with only partisan papers in the denominator (which are similar).

Ideally, I would focus on circulations in the year following presidential elections, as I did in the Florida case study. However, aggregate circulation data in the year after presidential elections are not readily available for all local partisan papers in the country from 1932 to 2004. Therefore, I make a key assumption in support of my model choice that is based on analyses of newly collected data consisting of a sample of papers' yearly circulations: I assume that newspapers' circulations in year t versus year $t + 1$ are linearly related to one another.¹⁷ (This does not preclude the possibility of circulations changing meaningfully every four years, as incremental changes each year could result in larger differences in circulations between every fourth year.)

It is also reassuring that analyses of the Tampa Bay papers produce substantively similar—and if anything, more conservative—results using this version of my outcome measure. *GOP Vote Margin's* coefficient using circulation changes from year $t - 3$ to year $t + 1$ as the dependent variable is -0.24 ($p = .03$) in a bivariate regression compared to $b = -0.19$ ($p = .12$) using circulation changes from year $t - 4$ to year t . (See the appendix for full results.)

I also assume that the sense that the advantaged party will win can be palpable to voters prior to Election Day. For instance, the 1984 election was a landslide victory for Republican President Ronald Reagan, who won 58.8% of the popular vote. Even more, Reagan's approval ratings exceeded his disapproval ratings throughout 1984 (Roper Center Public Opinion Archives 2015), so it is possible that the surge in Democratic papers' circulations in 1984 was due to Democrats sensing their impending loss prior to November and adjusting their media demand in real time.¹⁸

Figure 2 plots the relationship between the vote margin of the Republican Party in a given presidential election year and the relative changes in the papers' circulations. The bivariate regression line also pictured summarizes the negative relationship between the two: as the percentage of votes received by Republicans over Democrats increases, Republican papers' circulations actually decrease compared to those of Democratic papers ($b = -0.10$; $p = .01$).

Statistical analyses in column 1 of table 2 confirm the significance and robustness of this negative correlation. Substantively, the results suggest a 1 standard deviation increase (13.06 percentage points) in the percentage of votes received

17. To validate this assumption, I collected 13 notable papers' annual circulations (1930–2013), and I find year-to-year circulations are closely related (average $b = 0.92$ regressing t on $t - 1$). Analyses are in the appendix.

18. The effects I uncover in these analyses are, of course, average effects, so this will not always be true in each year.

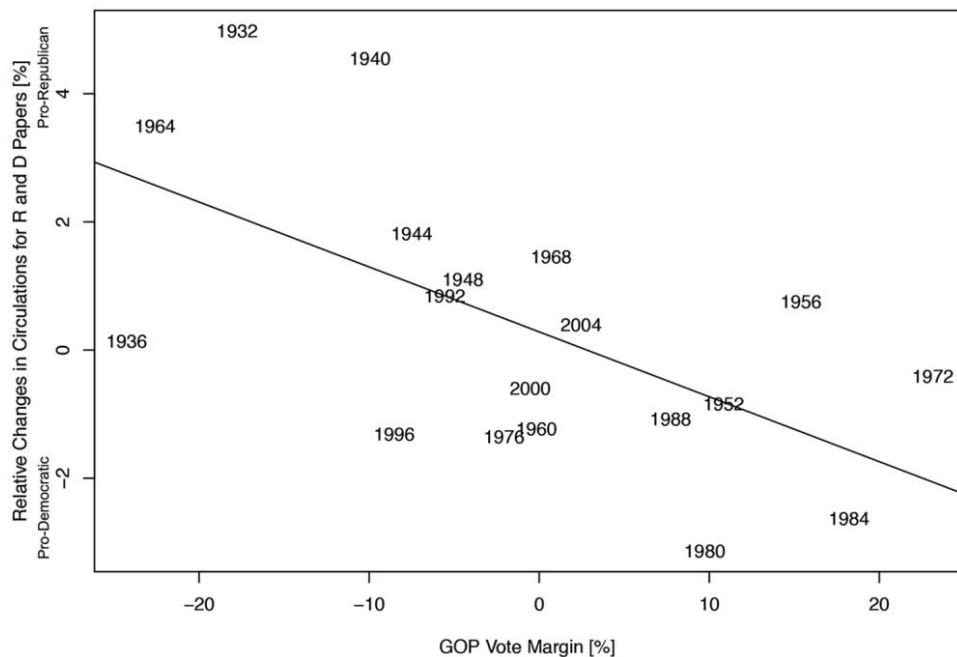


Figure 2. Relationship between GOP vote margin and relative changes in circulations for all local partisan papers

by the Republican Party over the Democratic Party corresponds with Democratic newspapers gaining roughly 693,486 more circulations than Republican papers.¹⁹ This finding provides evidence consistent with hypothesis 2's expectation of a negative relationship between relative advantage and relative demand.

To ensure the robustness of this finding and to reduce the possibility that it is due to omitted variables, table 2 also reports several other specifications similar to those used in the Florida case study. I again control for changes in GDP from the previous election year to the current one. Column 2 suggests change in GDP does marginally affect the relative changes in circulations between the two papers, but the effect of *GOP Vote Margin* remains negative and significant.²⁰ Column 3 includes the lagged *GOP Vote Margin*, and the results not only suggest the lagged vote margin is insignificant, but the independent variable of interest is again negative and significant.

I also examine whether the changing nature of the media environment across the radio and TV eras (see Gentzkow et al. 2011) may be driving the results. Column 4 suggests this is not the case, as the size and significance of *GOP Vote Margin* remain largely intact. Analyses in the appendix dividing 1932–2004 into thirds also alleviate concerns that

results are confined to one era, as the coefficient of interest is consistently negative and does not differ significantly over time. Further, column 5 detrends the data by including measures for time and time². Neither reaches significance, while *GOP Vote Margin* is negative, albeit smaller in magnitude ($b = -0.06$) and significance ($p = .19$) than before. It is reassuring, though, that placebo tests using election results from $t - 8$, $t - 4$, $t + 4$, and $t + 8$ while controlling for time and time² produce effects that are smaller in absolute magnitude and much less significant.²¹

The model in the last column of table 2 accounts for time trends in a different manner while employing an alternative specification similar to what was used in the last column of table 1. Here the data are reorganized so that the unit of analysis is year-state-party of paper. Each row contains the circulations of party j 's papers in each election year-state combination (i.e., two rows per year-state combination—one for each party's papers). Similar to before, the dependent variable is the change in the circulations of party j 's papers within a state from the previous election year ($t - 4$) to the current election year (t). The key independent variable is again *Winner*, a dummy for whether the papers' party won

19. I calculated this number by multiplying the standard deviation of *GOP Vote Margin* by the key coefficient: -0.10 . I divide that by 100 and multiply it by the mean of all circulations (53,100,000).

20. Results are the same using raw GDP; see the appendix.

21. Clinton and Enamorado (2014) use similar placebo analyses. See the appendix for these results and more related figures and robustness checks, including analyses using bootstrapping and analyses focusing on cities with one partisan paper for each party, as well as years with more competitive elections vs. noncompetitive ones. I also demonstrate that changes in *GOP Vote Margin* across elections do not seem to drive paper consumption.

Table 2. Political Environment and Demand for All Local Partisan Newspapers, 1932–2004

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
GOP vote margin (%)	-.10** (.04)	-.07** (.03)	-.10** (.04)	-.08* (.04)	-.06 (.04)	
Change in GDP		-.0009* (.0005)				
GOP vote margin lagged (%)			-.02 (.04)			
Radio period				1.39 (.91)		
Time					-.45 (.41)	
Time ²					.01 (.02)	
Winner						-9,292.30** (4,520.64)
State-year fixed effects						Yes
Intercept	.28 (.41)	.74 (.56)	.29 (.41)	-.14 (.45)	3.02 (1.89)	77,831.65 (77,904.64)
<i>N</i>	19	18	19	19	19	1,938
<i>R</i> ²	.36	.40	.37	.43	.52	.50

Note. Ordinary least squares regression coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Columns 1–5 use a dependent variable that is a relative measure of the changes in the two types of papers' circulations over time as a percentage of all circulations in a given presidential election year. Column 6 uses the alternative specification with the change in circulations for party *j*'s paper as the dependent variable. GDP = gross domestic product.

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

the presidential election. Controls for time and region using state-year fixed effects are also included.²² Therefore, the coefficient for *Winner* again represents the average difference between the change in circulations for the winning versus losing party's papers in each state-year combination. Column 6 indicates the key coefficient is both negative and significant ($b = -9,292.30$; $p = .04$). Aggregating the effect size to the national level (i.e., multiplying the coefficient by 51 to include Washington, DC) suggests the disadvantaged party's papers gain roughly 473,907 more circulations throughout the nation than the advantaged party's papers.²³

Taken together, the results in table 2 provide repeated evidence that the political context is meaningfully correlated

with aggregate partisan media demand. In particular, the results are consistent with—though not dispositive of—hypothesis 2's causal expectation that when parties are electorally advantaged, demand for their affiliated local papers decreases relative to demand for the disadvantaged party's papers. This negative link helps alleviate concerns of endogeneity, as it is unlikely the same forces increasing one type of paper's circulations would also depress voter turnout for its affiliated party. And while the findings do not allow us to discern whether the advantaged are reading less, the disadvantaged are reading more, or if it is a mixture of both, the results do undermine hypothesis 1's prediction of a positive link between advantage and relative demand, as well as the null hypothesis that the political context is unrelated to partisan news consumption.

ALL EYES ON THE WHITE HOUSE

Thus far, my analyses have suggested a negative link between partisan newspaper circulations and advantage in the national political context operationalized solely in terms of

22. See the appendix for robustness checks with different fixed effects and an alternative version of the key IV.

23. To alleviate concerns that changes in Southern voters' partisanship during this era (Stanley 1988) are driving results, I drop the 11 former confederate states. Doing so has no effect on my findings; see the appendix for results.

the presidency. However, elected officials besides the commander-in-chief could set the tone of the political environment. In this section, I expand my analysis of local partisan paper circulations to consider how the partisan makeup of the House of Representatives may influence feelings of political advantage and disadvantage in comparison to presidential election outcomes.

Examining the House over the Senate in my analysis makes sense because all 435 members of the House face reelection at the same time unlike the staggered terms of their Senate counterparts. Thus, the attention given to all of the House seats versus a subset of Senate seats is better positioned to influence the dynamics of political advantage and disadvantage. Additionally, members of the lower chamber still enjoy media attention given their lawmaking and over-

sight roles on issues that affect citizens' lives ranging from national security to healthcare.

In these analyses, I use the partisan makeup of the House elected in the same year as the president to operationalize relative advantage or disadvantage in the lower chamber. I subtract the number of Democratic seats elected from Republican seats and convert that value to a percentage of total seats to form *GOP House Seat Margin*. Positive values reflect instances in which there are more House Republicans than Democrats. For my dependent variable, I again use the two measures of circulation changes for all local partisan newspapers (1932–2004) from table 2.

I first focus on the dependent variable used in the first five models of table 2. Model 1 of table 3 reports a negative and marginally significant bivariate correlation between *GOP*

Table 3. Differential Effects of the Political Environment on Demand for Partisan Newspapers, 1932–2004

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
GOP House seat margin (%)	-.05 (.03)	-.005 (.04)	.05 (.03)	-.01 (.04)	.002 (.03)	.03 (.04)	
GOP vote margin (%)		-.10** (.04)	-.10*** (.03)	-.08* (.05)	-.08* (.04)	-.08+ (.05)	
Change in GDP			-.001** (.0005)				
GOP vote margin lagged (%)				-.02 (.05)			
Radio period					1.40 (.91)		
Time						-.42 (.43)	
Time ²						.01 (.02)	
House seats							-25.37 (52.27)
Winner							-8,153.44+ (5,120.93)
State-year fixed effects							Yes
Intercept	-.51 (.50)	.21 (.64)	1.88* (.89)	.06 (.71)	-.11 (.67)	3.58* (1.78)	82,716.18 (80,490.82)
<i>N</i>	19	19	18	19	19	19	1,938
<i>R</i> ²	.15	.36	.49	.38	.43	.54	.50

Note. Ordinary least squares regression coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Columns 1–6 use a dependent variable that is a relative measure of the changes in the two types of papers' circulations over time as a percentage of all circulations in a given presidential election year. Column 7 uses the alternative specification with the change in circulations for party *j*'s paper as the dependent variable. GDP = gross domestic product.

+ *p* < .12.

* *p* < .10.

** *p* < .05.

*** *p* < .01, two-tailed.

House Seat Margin and relative changes in demand for local partisan papers ($b = -0.05$; $p = .12$). However, model 2 of table 3 regresses the dependent variable on both the *GOP House Seat Margin* and *GOP [Presidential] Vote Margin*, the latter of which is identical to the measure used in the last two sections. Including both the House and presidency allows for a direct comparison between the influence of congressional electoral outcomes and presidential ones. And though the two are correlated at 0.60, it is plausible that they each still have independent effects.

Though still negative, the coefficient for House seats is now insignificant ($b = -0.005$; $p = .90$), while that of presidential elections is negative and significant ($b = -0.10$; $p = .03$). This suggests the significance of congressional outcomes in column 1 of table 3 was largely due to that measure tapping into House and presidential outcomes simultaneously. Columns 3–6 report robustness checks similar to those used in previous analyses, and suggest that even when controlling for a variety of other factors, the effect of presidential outcomes overpowers House outcomes. Finally, column 7 employs the alternative specification used in the last column of table 2. Once again, there is a negative and significant effect of winning the presidential election ($b = -8,153.44$; $p = .11$), but the effect of House seats won is insignificant ($b = -25.37$; $p = .63$).²⁴

In sum, the results suggest that even though House races have meaningful political consequences, their overall influence on the relative demand for partisan newspapers is overshadowed by presidential campaigns and elections. That is, citizens seem to take cues of advantage and disadvantage more from the party of the presidency than the partisan makeup of the House. Such asymmetries in attention paid to different political actors could have implications for asymmetries in citizens' abilities to monitor and hold elected representatives accountable.

CONCLUSION

In defense of their decision to publish a controversial article about government surveillance of terrorists' financial transactions, the former top editors of *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* wrote that "Our job . . . is to bring our readers information that will enable them to judge how well their elected leaders are fighting on their behalf, and at what price" (Baquet and Keller 2006). Normative theories of democracy also uphold the importance of free-flowing informa-

tion as it enhances citizens' abilities to hold elites accountable (Dahl 1998).

Given the press's import, it is crucial that scholars understand the determinants of media consumption, particularly its political determinants. My work represents one approach to doing so by examining how advantage and disadvantage in the political environment affect relative partisan news demand. While many scholars have considered the effects of media consumption on political outcomes like voter turnout or candidate choice, I examine whether political outcomes affect the consumption of partisan news. Taken together, these analyses provide compelling evidence of a negative correlation between political advantage and relative, aggregate partisan media consumption across nearly a century. This article is the first to my knowledge that establishes the first-order conditions for such a relationship. The findings also undermine the plausibility of both the null hypothesis and the expectation that political advantage could boost partisan media demand relative to disadvantage in the aggregate. Additionally, I find that presidential election outcomes tend to overpower those related to the House in terms of influence over partisan media demand.

Focusing on local partisan newspaper circulations has provided a broad historical view of the relationship of interest, but cable news channels like Fox News and MSNBC have emerged more recently as prominent sources of partisan news for Republicans and Democrats, respectively (Levendusky 2013). Research on partisan media has and should continue to draw on this contemporary news medium, and it can also shed light on the results in this article. Because partisan cable news is rather new—Fox News was created in 1996, while MSNBC began to lean left in 2007 (Pew 2007)—I am limited in the analyses I can perform. Therefore, I briefly examine fluctuations in these channels' median prime-time audiences below. In doing so, I find further evidence of a negative link between advantage and relative partisan media demand.²⁵

For instance, after the 2008 election, Democrats were advantaged with control of the White House and majorities in both houses of Congress, while Republicans were disadvantaged. That disadvantaged status seems to have propelled Republicans to watch friendly cable TV news at a greater rate than Democrats: Fox News's median prime-time viewership increased 19.02% from 2008 to 2009 compared to MSNBC's increase of 2.5%. Similarly, 2012 saw the reelection of President

24. Using the vote share won by party j produces similar results. See the appendix for the full table.

25. See the appendix for a plot of changes in their prime-time audiences.

Obama, plus Democrats gained back eight seats in the House and one in the Senate. Thus, Republicans were relatively disadvantaged, while Democrats were advantaged. Changes in viewership again suggest that advantage dampens demand for partisan news relative to disadvantage: while MSNBC saw a 24.21% decrease in audience share from 2012 to 2013, Fox News experienced only a 5.67% decrease. Even in the months right after the election of Republican Donald Trump, prime-time viewership for MSNBC increased 55% from one year prior—a growth rate that is larger than its rivals (Grynbau and Koblin 2017). In sum, these patterns suggest the results based on local partisan newspapers may generalize to another, more contemporary form of partisan media.

Throughout this article, it has been reassuring that the results based on aggregate-level data, which are rich in ecological realism and focus on actual behavior instead of potentially biased self-reports (Prior 2009), have been consistent with individual-level studies of information demand (e.g., Marcus et al. 2000). However, using solely aggregate data can lead to problems of ecological inference, as I cannot clearly identify the mechanism(s) at play. For instance, I cannot discern whether in- or out-party affect is a stronger force, or whether advantaged partisans are consuming less, disadvantaged partisans are consuming more, or a bit of both is at play. Future work could further this research by pinpointing which of the plausible individual-level mechanisms are driving these overall patterns.

Finally, the results of this article can speak to critical issues of accountability and representation. If advantaged partisans sometimes check out of politics and blindly trust elected officials, then the monitoring of those who govern may be uneven. Consequently, the feedback given to representatives may be in one party's best interest, while those in the other party may not voice their opinions as intensely. Those whose party is out of power may also be more likely to act on opinions formed after consuming partisan-tinged news that misrepresent reality. Future work might examine if the disadvantaged are generally more critical, outspoken, and politically active with a focus on the next election or perhaps more likely to participate as a result of consuming biased information. In the end, understanding how advantage and disadvantage affect the relative demand for partisan news sheds light on both the political determinants of partisan media consumption and also the relationship between elites and citizens in democratic societies.

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