

Supporting Information for: “The Fragility of the Local News Trust Advantage: Evidence from Republican Attacks on Local News”

Allison M. N. Archer Erik Peterson
University of Houston Rice University
amarcher3@uh.edu erik.peterson@rice.edu

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A Survey Information

A.1 Reporting Standards

Subjects and Context

The data analyzed here come from two online surveys.

The Prolific survey was a non-probability online survey fielded from March 15-23, 2023, among residents of the United States that were age 18 or over. It included quotas to match the US census in terms of age, race/ethnicity and gender.

The PrimePanels survey was a non-probability online survey fielded from March 15-16 2023, among residents of the United States age 18 or over. It included a quota to ensure an equal share of Democratic and Republican identifiers.

To recruit respondents, a link to the Qualtrics survey and brief description of the study were provided on the Prolific and CloudResearch platforms. Workers had the opportunity to view the study and decide whether to participate. Respondents received compensation in the amount they agreed to with the platform upon completion of the survey. Payments on these platforms often take the form of gift cards or cash.

We do not report a response rate for these panels following the guidance of AAPOR standard definitions. The AAPOR Minimum Cooperation rate for the Prolific survey was 98% and for the PrimePanels survey was 85%.

Allocation Method

Random assignment was generated by the Qualtrics survey platform. The experiment was simple random assignment and respondents were blind to the condition they were in. Suggestive of

successful random assignment, Appendix A4 shows the distribution of pre-treatment measures is similar in the treatment and control groups.

Treatments

Full text of the treatments is provided in Appendix A5. Treatment delivery occurred during a single online session. The treatment was delivered successfully and respondents were compensated by the survey vendor.

Results

Appendix A4 describes the outcome variables by treatment condition.

CONSORT participant flow diagram

3967 subjects were eligible for the study. 272 respondents failed a pre-treatment attention check and were removed. 1838 respondents were assigned to the control press release and 1857 respondents were assigned to the attack press release.

Missingness due to not completing the survey outcomes was approximately 1% in both the treatment and control groups.

Across the results presented in the main text 42 respondents were dropped because of missing data on one of the outcome variables.

No weights were used in the analysis.

Other Information

The experiment was approved by the IRB's at each researcher institution and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the study. Participants were also debriefed at the end of the study to inform them that the politician's message they read was based on real things politicians have said

but was not actually from the politician. We view the risks from using this deception as minimal and no more than the risk individuals face in everyday life precisely because the messages were based heavily on actual members of Congress’ communications to their constituents. Further, the control message encouraging individuals to vote is also based on real communication by actual members of Congress to their constituents and promotes a normatively desirable form of civic engagement. Participants were informed at the start of the study they could leave the research at any time and it would not be held against them. The researchers did not have access to any identifying information from participants and made every effort to maintain confidentiality.

A blinded version of the pre-analysis plan is available at: https://aspredicted.org/6CT_14R.

A.2 Demographics, Attention and Content

We pool surveys from two sources together for our main analysis. The Prolific survey included quotas to resemble the US Census on respondents’ age, gender and race/ethnicity. The PrimePanels survey was quota sampled to have equivalent numbers of Democrats and Republicans.

Table A1: Survey Demographics

	Pooled	Prolific	PrimePanels
Black	0.14	0.13	0.15
Hispanic	0.06	0.03	0.07
Non-Hispanic White	0.74	0.76	0.72
Other	0.06	0.08	0.05
College Plus	0.41	0.52	0.33
Female	0.51	0.51	0.51
Age	45.72	45.44	45.93
Democrat	0.54	0.60	0.50
Republican	0.39	0.26	0.48
Independent	0.07	0.14	0.02
Sample Size	3653	1521	2132

A post-treatment informational manipulation check asked respondents which politician produced the press release they saw earlier in the survey (both treatment and control conditions encountered a press release). They selected from a list of five politicians. Attention was high in the pooled survey and across both individual surveys.

Table A2: Attention Check Results

	Survey	Manipulation Check Pass Rate
1	All	0.82
2	Prolific	0.96
3	CloudResearch	0.72

Table A3: Treatment Features by State

State	Newspaper	Politician	Position
Alabama	Birmingham News	Tommy Tuberville	Senator
Alaska	Alaska Dispatch News	Kelly Tshibaka	Recent Senate Candidate
Arizona	Arizona Republic	Paul Gosar	Member of Congress
Arkansas	Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	Tom Cotton	Senator
California	Los Angeles Times	Devin Nunes	Former Member of Congress
Colorado	Denver Post	Lauren Boebert	Member of Congress
Connecticut	Hartford Courant	Leora Levy	Recent Senate Candidate
Delaware	News-Journal	Sue Cienki	State Republican Party Chair
Florida	Tampa Bay Times	Rick Scott	Senator
Georgia	Atlanta Journal-Constitution	Marjorie Taylor Greene	Member of Congress
Hawaii	Honolulu Star-Advertiser	Joe Akana	Recent Congressional Candidate
Idaho	Idaho Statesmen	Russ Fulcher	Member of Congress
Illinois	Chicago Tribune	Darren Bailey	Recent Gubernatorial Candidate
Indiana	Indianapolis Star	Jim Banks	Member of Congress
Iowa	Des Moines Register	Joni Ernst	Senator
Kansas	Wichita Eagle	Roger Marshall	Senator
Kentucky	Courier-Journal	Rand Paul	Senator
Louisiana	Advocate	Steve Scalise	Member of Congress
Maine	Portland Press Herald	Paul LePage	Former Governor
Maryland	Baltimore Sun	Andy Harris	Member of Congress
Massachusetts	Boston Globe	Geoff Diehl	Recent Gubernatorial Candidate
Michigan	Detroit Free Press	Tudor Dixon	Recent Gubernatorial Candidate
Minnesota	Minneapolis Star Tribune	Scott Jensen	Recent Gubernatorial Candidate
Mississippi	Clarion-Ledger	Cindy Hyde-Smith	Senator
Missouri	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	Josh Hawley	Senator
Montana	Billings Gazette	Ryan Zinke	Member of Congress
Nebraska	Omaha World-Herald	Jim Pillen	Governor
Nevada	Las Vegas Review-Journal	Adam Laxlt	Recent Senate Candidate
New Hampshire	New Hampshire Union Leader	Don Bolduc	Recent Senate Candidate
New Jersey	Star Ledger	Jeff Van Drew	Member of Congress
New Mexico	Albuquerque Journal	Yvette Herrell	Former Member of Congress
New York	Buffalo News	Lee Zeldin	Recent Gubernatorial Candidate
North Carolina	Charlotte Observer	Tedd Budd	Senator
North Dakota	Bismarck Tribune	Kevin Cramer	Senator
Ohio	Cleveland Plain Dealer	JD Vance	Senator
Oklahoma	Oklahoman	Markwayne Mullin	Senator
Oregon	Oregonian	Angela Plowhead	State Republican Party Vice-Chair
Pennsylvania	Philadelphia Inquirer	Doug Mastriano	Recent Gubernatorial Candidate
Rhode Island	Providence Journal	Allen Waters	Recent Congressional Candidate
South Carolina	Post and Courier	Lindsey Graham	Senator
South Dakota	Argus Leader	Kristi Noem	Governor
Tennessee	Tennessean	Marsha Blackburn	Senator
Texas	Houston Chronicle	Ted Cruz	Senator
Utah	Salt Lake Tribune	Mike Lee	Senator
Vermont	Burlington Free Press	Gerald Malloy	Recent Senate Candidate
Virginia	Virginian-Pilot	Glenn Youngkin	Governor
Washington	Seattle Times	Cathy McMorris-Rodgers	Member of Congress
West Virginia	Charleston Gazette-Mail	Alex Mooney	Member of Congress
Wisconsin	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	Ron Johnson	Senator
Wyoming	Casper Star-Tribune	Harriet Hageman	Member of Congress

A.3 Measurement

For media reputation, the first principal component explains 61% of the variance in the outcome variables. The loadings of the individual items are displayed in Table A4.

Table A4: Media Reputation - PCA Loadings

Survey Item	PC1 Loading
Coverage-“Fair”	0.44
Coverage-“Accurate”	0.43
Coverage-“Biased” (Reverse Coded)	0.22
Coverage-“Fact-Based”	0.44
Coverage-“Trustworthy”	0.44
Bias Scale (Reverse Coded)	0.13
Feeling Therm	0.40

For media use intention, the first principal component explains 63% of the variance in the outcome, with the various items included in Table A5.

Table A5: Media Use - PCA Loadings

Survey Item	PC1 Loading
Choose for State Info	0.50
Consume In Next Week	0.64
Subscribe	0.58

For politician favorability, the first principal component explains 92% of the variance in the outcome with the loadings of the different items included in Table A6.

Table A6: Political Approval - PCA Loadings

Survey Item	PC1 Loading
Politician Favorability	0.58
Politician Approval	0.58
Feeling Therm	0.57

A.4 Variable Descriptive Statistics by Condition

The pre-treatment measures of politician approval, newspaper trust and newspaper use were measured with five-point scales and included with a battery of other items at the beginning of the survey. Below we display these measures separately for the treatment and control conditions of the experiment.

Table A7: Pre-Treatment Variable Descriptive Statistics by Condition

	Variable/Condition	Mean	SD	N
1	Newspaper Trust (Pre) - Control	3.38	1.11	1814
2	Newspaper Trust (Pre) - Treatment	3.41	1.07	1839
3	Newspaper Use (Pre) - Control	2.44	1.48	1814
4	Newspaper Use (Pre) - Treatment	2.43	1.45	1839
5	Politician Approval (Pre) - Control	2.76	1.35	1814
6	Politician Approval (Pre)- Treatment	2.74	1.32	1839

Consistent with successful randomization, the means of the pre-treatment measures of local newspaper trust, local newspaper use and politician approval are very similar between the treatment and control conditions.

Table A8: Outcome Variable Descriptive Statistics by Condition

	Variable/Condition	Mean	SD	N
1	Newspaper Trust Index - Control	0.16	0.86	1814
2	Newspaper Trust Index - Treatment	-0.16	1.10	1839
3	Newspaper Use Index - Control	0.04	1.01	1814
4	Newspaper Use Index - Treatment	-0.04	0.98	1839
5	Politician Approval Index - Control	0.07	0.99	1814
6	Politician Approval Index - Treatment	-0.07	1.01	1839

A.5 Manipulation Text

The control condition press release is below:

Voting Resources for the People of [STATE]

Voting is our most fundamental right as Americans. It is a right and a responsibility, enabling the American experiment in representative government to continue for almost 250 years. When we

show up at the polls, we make our voices heard. Your voice is your vote.

For helpful information about voting, I encourage you to visit www.usa.gov/voter-registration, a website that can help you learn more about voter registration and upcoming elections.

USA.gov also has links to important voting information specific to the state of [STATE], including:

- First-time voter resources
- Voter registration information
- How and where to vote during elections
- Sample ballots
- Accessibility information

As the people of [STATE], it is up to all of us to do our part to keep our democracy running. No matter what party you belong to or your political beliefs, I encourage you to register to vote or check the status of your voter registration so you can take part in upcoming elections. Your vote will help shape the future of [STATE] and our nation. Again, please visit www.usa.gov/voter-registration for important voting information.

Democracy works best when we all work together. Please feel free to share this information with anyone you know in case they should find this information helpful too.

The treatment condition press release is below:

Dishonest Media: [NEWSPAPER]'s Abuse of Trust

It is sad, and a troubling reflection of the current state of the mainstream media, that I find myself writing about the [NEWSPAPER]'s coverage of the last election. While a free press is indispensable to a vibrant democracy, the [NEWSPAPER] has abused the trust vested in them by the public. The misrepresentations are too extensive to fully address here, but I will make some observations. During the recent midterm elections they:

- Published hit pieces, which they call “fact checks”, designed to punish any politician who pushed against the [NEWSPAPER]'s preferred narrative on education and the economy
- Essentially ignored major stories, like inflation and crime, that did not suit their left-wing agenda when covering the elections
- Repeatedly endorsed candidates who are bad for the people of [STATE]

I asked the [NEWSPAPER] to publish a letter to the editor in which I raised these concerns. They refused.

It's a shame the [NEWSPAPER] has become as biased and partisan as the national press. Local media should inform the public and let people draw their own conclusions. Instead, the [NEWSPAPER] has decided to lie, push its pet political causes and exacerbate the country's political divide. No one should be surprised their readership is shrinking faster than ever.

A.6 Survey Items

Pre-treatment

[pid3] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other/Not sure

If Democrat is selected...

[dem] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

- Strong Democrat
- Not very strong Democrat

If Republican is selected...

[rep] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

- Strong Republican
- Not very strong Republican

If Independent or Other/Not sure is selected...

[ind] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic or the Republican Party?

- The Democratic Party
- The Republican Party
- Neither
- Not sure

[familiaritypre] Please indicate whether you've heard of this person and if so their party affiliation...

- Joe Biden
- {e://Field/pol1—A politician from the respondent's state}
- {e://Field/pol2—A politician from the respondent's state}
- {e://Field/pol3—A politician from the respondent's state}
- Donald Trump

- 1-Republican
- 2-Democrat
- 3-Other Party/Independent
- 4-Not sure

[approve-people] Below is a list of people and organizations. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each is doing their job?

- Joe Biden
- {e://Field/pol1—A politician from the respondent’s state}
- {e://Field/pol2—A politician from the respondent’s state}
- {e://Field/pol3—A politician from the respondent’s state}
- Donald Trump
 - 1-Strongly approve
 - 2-Somewhat approve
 - 3-Somewhat disapprove
 - 4-Strongly disapprove
 - 5-Not sure

[approve-media-1] Below is a list of media organizations. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each is doing their job?

- Fox News
- CNN
- New York Times
- USA Today
- ProPublica
- National news outlets [you regularly use]¹
 - 1-Strongly approve
 - 2-Somewhat approve
 - 3-Somewhat disapprove

¹Randomized between including “you regularly use” or not

- 4-Strongly disapprove
- 5-Not sure

[approve-media-2] Below is another list of media organizations. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each is doing their job?

- {e://Field/newspaper} (a newspaper from your state)
- Local news outlets [you regularly use]²
- {e://Field/nonprofit} (a news website from your state)
- {e://Field/other} (a news website from your state)
 - 1-Strongly approve
 - 2-Somewhat approve
 - 3-Somewhat disapprove
 - 4-Strongly disapprove
 - 5-Not sure

[watchlocal] How often do you read or watch stories from the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent’s state}?

- 1-Three times a week or more
- 2-Every week or almost every week
- 3-One to three times a month
- 4-Less than once a month
- 5-Never

[populism] Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement:

- The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums.
- The people should be asked whenever important decisions are taken.
- Members of Congress very quickly lose touch with ordinary people.
- People like me have no influence on what the government does.
- Ordinary people all pull together.

²Randomized between including “you regularly use” or not

- Ordinary people share the same values and interests.
 - 1-Strongly agree
 - 2-Somewhat agree
 - 3-Neither agree nor disagree
 - 4-Somewhat disagree
 - 5-Strongly disagree

Post-treatment

[bias] How would you describe the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent's state}? Do you think the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent's state} is liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?

- 1-Extremely liberal
- 2-Somewhat liberal
- 3-Neither liberal nor conservative
- 4-Somewhat conservative
- 5-Extremely conservative

[trust-battery] To what extent do you think the following characteristics are suitable to describe the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent's state} and its reporting?

- Fair
- Accurate
- Biased
- Takes into account all facts
- Trustworthy
 - 1-Very suitable
 - 2-Mostly suitable
 - 3-Somewhat suitable
 - 4-Not too suitable
 - 5-Not at all suitable

[choice] We are interested in where people like to get their information. If you were looking for information about events happening in the state you live in, which of these sources would you choose first?

- 1-Yahoo News

- 2-Social media
- 3-the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent's state}
- 4-{e://Field/nonprofit—A local nonprofit news outlet from the respondent's state}
- 5-{e://Field/other—A local outlet from the respondent's state}

[consume] In the next seven days or so, how likely are you to read or watch news from the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent's state}?

- 1-Extremely likely
- 2-Very likely
- 3-Somewhat likely
- 4-Not very likely
- 5-Not at all likely

[subscribe] How interested are you in a print or digital subscription to the {e://Field/newspaper—A local newspaper from the respondent's state}?

- 1-Extremely interested
- 2-Very interested
- 3-Somewhat interested
- 4-Not very interested
- 5-Not at all interested
- 8-I already subscribe to this newspaper

[manip-check] Earlier in the survey you read a press release from a politician. Which politician wrote the press release?

- 1-Joe Biden
- 2-{e://Field/pol1—A politician from the respondent's state}
- 3-{e://Field/pol2—A politician from the respondent's state}
- 4-{e://Field/politician—A politician from the respondent's state}
- 5-Not sure

Now we have some questions about {e://Field/politician}, a politician from your state.

[pol-favorability] Do you have a favorable or an unfavorable opinion about {e://Field/politician—A politician from the respondent's state}?

- 1-Extremely favorable
- 2-Mostly favorable
- 3-Somewhat favorable
- 4-Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- 5-Somewhat unfavorable
- 6-Mostly unfavorable
- 7-Extremely unfavorable

[pol-approval] Do you approve or disapprove of {e://Field/politician—A politician from the respondent's state}'s job performance?

- 1-Approve strongly
- 2-Approve somewhat
- 3-Neither approve nor disapprove
- 4-Disapprove somewhat
- 5-Disapprove strongly

We'd like you to rate on a scale from 0 to 100 how favorable you feel towards different individuals and groups. 0 means very unfavorable, and 100 means very favorable. 50 means you do not feel favorable or unfavorable. How would you rate:

- the {e://Field/newspaper—A newspaper from the respondent's state}
- {e://Field/politician—A politician from the respondent's state}
- {e://Field/pol1—A politician from the respondent's state}
- CNN
- the Republican Party
- the Democratic Party

[debrief] Thank you for participating in this study. The message you saw from a politician in your state was based on things real politicians have said but was not actually from the politician. They did not send a press release with that message. It was created for the purposes of this study.

Please refrain from discussing the specifics of this study with others. We expect to have several more individuals participating in our study and our data could become meaningless if participants know ahead of time what they will be doing in the research study. We very much appreciate your cooperation.

Thanks again for participating! If you have any comments or questions, please note them below. When you are done reading this page, please press the arrow button below.

B Content Analysis

B.1 Media Mentions in Congressional E-Newsletters

We use the DCInbox database, which contains e-newsletters sent from 2009-2022, to characterize the tone of mentions of the media by members of Congress. We identified mentions of local news outlets, national news outlets or references to “the media.” We drew a random sample of mentions from each category by party. After discarding irrelevant references to the media identified through this process, two coders assessed these references for whether they were negative based on extracting the text immediately around the news outlet mention. Negative references included imputing an ideological orientation onto the news outlet, discussing how its coverage was inaccurate or unfair, or more general expressions of negative sentiment.

Table B1: Share of Negative Media Mentions by Party and Type of News

	Democrats	Republicans
All	0.03	0.19
General	0.10	0.50
National	0.00	0.04
Local	0.00	0.00

For Republicans, 18% of the sampled media mentions were negative. The most prominent category for media negativity was general media, with half of the mentions in this category as negative. 3% of the mentions of specific national news outlets were negative. In contrast, there were few negative mentions of local media, with only one reference falling in to this category in the sample. Put another way, nearly all the negative mentions focused on specific national media outlets (5% of the negative mentions) or the general concept of “the media” (95% of the negative mentions).

These negative references to the media took forms that were familiar from previous content analyses of elite rhetoric. For instance, in a 2014 newsletter Michigan Representative Mike Rogers argued “The New York Times published a story claiming that the terror attack in Benghazi, Libya had no links to Al Qaeda. I am appalled by what is either biased or poorly researched journalism because this claim is simply inaccurate.” In a 2020 newsletter Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson commented, “As seriously as I take Russia, China and Iran trying to destabilize our elections, the way the Democrats and the mainstream media have reacted has done more to interfere and destabilize our politics.”

In the only negative mention in the sample involving local news, Representative Thomas Rooney criticized a 2010 *Palm Beach Post* editorial discussing a recent congressional vote. While they are not often criticized, a local news outlet is mentioned in 19% of the e-newsletters sent by Republican members of Congress. What do these mentions consist of? Overwhelmingly they are recommendations where politicians direct their constituents to stories that complement arguments made in the newsletter or efforts to promote a politician’s local media appearances.

For Democratic politicians, the overall level of negativity towards the media is much lower, with only 3% of the media mentions categorized as negative. As with Republicans, these negative men-

tions nearly exclusively occurred with reference to the general concept of the media, rather than specific national or local news outlets.

This content analysis informs our study in two ways. First, the greater negativity towards the media among Republican politicians motivates our focus on them as the more plausible group of politicians to provide negative messages about local news in the future. Second, in interpreting our experimental results we see it as important to consider the much lower prevalence of negative comments about local media, from either Republicans or Democrats, and interpret the comparatively high levels of local media trust in the control groups of our study as indicating of a lack of pre-treatment with negative messages about local news, as opposed to more easily accessible criticism about the media in general.

B.2 Examples of Local News Criticism

While criticism of local news is less common than other types of media, here we present some examples based on politician messaging in e-newsletters and social media to establish that this does occur and is a relevant type of elite message to consider.

Table B2: Examples of Local News Criticism

Politician	News Source	Year	Context
Devin Nunes	Fresno Bee	2010	“The Fresno Bee seems to have joined forces with the Socialist Worker an online propaganda tool for extreme leftists, in defense of the very people who are taking our jobs away” -Mar 2010 E-Newsletter. Nunes later sued the Bee for defamation.
Cathy McMorris-Rodgers	Spokane Spokesman-Review	2018	“Recently, a column in the Spokesman-Review made misleading claims about my actions on health care reform...” -Apr 2018 E-Newsletter
Josh Hawley	Kansas City Star	2020	“More disinformation from Google-funded KC Star. My bill to hold BigTech accountable does NOT apply to user comments...” - July 2020 Tweet
Ted Cruz	Houston Chronicle	2020	“Houston Chronicle continues its hard-Left stand. Endorses the most-anti-energy ticket ever to run.” -Oct 2020 Tweet
Ron Johnson	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	2021	“The Gannett-owned Milwaukee Journal Sentinel is once again using its editorial page for defamatory false hit pieces on me.” -Aug 2021 E-Newsletter
Scott Jensen	Minneapolis StarTribune	2021	“The Star Tribune continues to rip way its own credibility. Following governments without question does NOT strengthen democracy.” - Dec 2021 Tweet
Paul Gosar	Arizona Republic	2022	“The Arizona Republic published an article that quotes me as encouraging the riot on January 6. This quote is malicious and false... This far left newspaper has spread many malicious lies...” - Feb 2022 E-newsletter
Jim Banks	Fort Wayne Journal Gazette	2022	“Journal Gazette Refuses to Recognize Biden’s Failures” -April 2022 E-newsletter sent after Journal Gazette did not publish Banks’ op-ed
Jim Pillen	Kearney Nebraska ABC	2022	“Blatant liberal media bias. If you can’t understand the difference between student loans and stop-gap payments to keep workers’ paychecks coming... You have no business reporting the news ”-Aug 2022 Tweet
Lauren Boebert	Denver Post	2022	“Denver Post, I couldn’t find one constituent who cares about what y’all say” -Nov 2022 Tweet/Video

C Pre-Analysis Plan

An anonymized version of the study’s pre-analysis plan is available at: https://aspredicted.org/6CT_14R.

C.1 Deviations from Pre-Analysis Plan

We note two deviations from the pre-analysis plan. First, the total sample is smaller than stated in the pre-analysis plan. This is because Prolific was only able to deliver a quota sample of 1,500 respondents rather than the 2,000 respondents initially expected when writing the plan. Second, with respect to H1, the pre-analysis plan only noted an expectation the attack would undermine a news outlet’s reputation, although we also anticipated this would have implications for future intent to consume news from a source. Our pre-analysis plan explicitly stated the expected effects were for both reputation and use when discussing heterogeneous effects, but unintentionally omitted this for the main effect.

C.2 Additional Analyses from Pre-Analysis Plan

An additional examination of the heterogeneity of attacks among different types of respondents did not fit into the main text. Here we present these other pre-specified analyses.

We anticipated that those high in populism would respond more to the attack treatment as shown in some prior research (Egelhofer et al. 2022). We create a measure of populism using six pre-treatment items and interact this populism index with the treatment to consider effect heterogeneity for both the local newspaper’s reputation and the respondent’s use intention in Table C1.

Table C1: Effects of Attack on Local News: By Populism

	Newspaper Reputation	Newspaper Use
Local News Attack	−0.3* (0.03)	−0.1* (0.02)
Populism	0.02 (0.02)	0.1* (0.02)
Local News Attack × Populism	−0.1* (0.03)	−0.1* (0.02)
Observations	3,653	3,653

Note: *p<0.05

In this specification we see that the attacks on local news are more effective among those who are high in populist values compared to those that are low in such values. The interaction term for media reputation indicates the marginal effect of a local news attack increases from .3 standard deviations to .4 standard deviations based on a one standard deviation increase in populist attitudes. The decline in future intent to use the news source based on this attack is also larger among this group. This examination helps flesh out the audience that is receptive to attacks on the media,

showing it includes those who are generally leery of institutions.

We also consider the consequences of the attack for the politician making it. We measure views of the politician with a three-item index of a feeling thermometer and assessments of the official’s job performance, constructed using principal components analysis in the same way as the outcomes in the main text. Table C2 examines the effects of the attack on politician approval overall (column 1) and using partisanship as a moderator in the public’s response (column 2); we once again expect the effects of attacking local news to vary by party.

Table C2: Effect of Attack on Politician Approval

	Main	PID as Moderator
Local News Attack	-0.1* (0.02)	-0.2* (0.02)
Republican		0.2* (0.03)
Local News Attack × Republican		0.2* (0.04)
Observations	3,653	3,653
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05

Table C2’s first column shows politicians face a reputational cost for attacking local news. Compared to the voter registration press release, the attack on the local news outlet reduced approval of the politician by .1 standard deviations. Table C2’s second column shows these effects are heterogeneous across party. The reputational costs for attacking the local news source are concentrated among Democrats and Independents and reduce approval of the politician by .2 standard deviations among this group. However, the interaction between the treatment and Republican partisanship takes the opposite sign and is of similar magnitude, resulting in a marginal effect of the attack that is close to zero and not statistically significant among Republicans, indicating Republican politicians did not face costs for attacking local news from their co-partisans. While this dynamic is similar to our pre-analysis plan, parts of it are inconsistent with our expectations. There is not a benefit for Republican politicians to attack local news sources among their co-partisans as their approval among Republican respondents is similar in the treatment and control conditions of the experiment.

D Robustness: In-Market Respondents

The news organizations in our study were selected based on their relevance as prominent state-wide information sources. However, to some respondents these sources might not be conceived of as “local” media if they resided in a different area of the state that was not within the newspaper’s physical distribution area. This section shows a robustness test in which we determine those respondents living in a newspaper’s market and re-estimate the main analyses from the paper. This robustness test shows the results in the main text remain highly similar when looking among those who resided in the physical market of the newspaper they evaluated.

We determine respondents who lived in the newspaper’s market using data on their county of residence obtained during the survey and data on the geographic dispersion of newspaper circulation from the Standard Rate and Data Service Yearbook, which compiles sales data from the Alliance for Audited Media and other sources. We define a respondent as living “in” a newspaper’s market if the relevant newspaper 1) had at least 500 subscribers in the county where they lived and 2) the newspaper also had more subscribers than any other local newspapers available in the county.

Defined this way, 51% of the sample resides in the market of the newspaper they evaluated in the survey. This measure has some face validity in determining those with the closest connection to these newspapers. 80% of those we define as in-market have an opinion about the local newspaper and do not use the “not sure” option when evaluating it in the pre-treatment portion of the study (for out-of-market respondents this figure is 55%). Those who reside in a newspaper’s market are particularly favorable towards the local news source, with 60% of them “strongly” or “somewhat” approving of the newspaper’s performance in the pre-treatment measure (for out-of-market respondents this figure is 39%).

In the table below we re-estimate the effects of the attack on news reputation and intent to use the news source among this group (replicating Table 1 from the main text).

Table D1: Attacks on Media Reputation and Use: In-Market Respondents Only

	Main Effect		PID as Moderator	
	Trust	Use	Trust	Use
Local News Attack	-0.3*	-0.1*	-0.1*	-0.1
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Republican			-0.2*	-0.1*
			(0.1)	(0.1)
Local News Attack × Republican			-0.5*	-0.1*
			(0.1)	(0.1)
Observations	1,844	1,844	1,844	1,844

Note:

*p<0.05

This shows the same patterns of response to attacks on local news persist when considering this in-market group. The attacks generally produce a large decrease in trust of the news source and intent to use it. These effects are particularly large when considering Republican respondents.

We next consider the effects of the attack on the reputation of the politicians making the attack.

Table D2: Attacks on Politician Reputation: In-Market Respondents Only

	Main	PID as Moderator
Local News Attack	-0.2* (0.03)	-0.2* (0.03)
Republican		0.2* (0.04)
Local News Attack × Republican		0.2* (0.1)
Observations	1,844	1,844
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05

Here the patterns are again highly similar to the results in the main text when only considering the in-market portion of the sample. The attacks lead to a decline in the politician’s reputation and the interactive model shows this effect is concentrated among Democrats and Independents. Altogether this shows our results remain the same even when looking at those within the physical market of the news outlet they evaluated in the survey.

E Robustness: Results by Survey

Here we break out the results by each component survey. Tables E1 and E2 examine the effects of the local news attack on trust and intent to use the news source (Table 1 in the main text shows this with the pooled surveys). This shows the results are highly similar across the two samples. The one distinction is that, when considering only the Prolific sample, there is not a main effect of the treatment on intent to use the news source in the future.

Table E1: Attacks on Media Reputation and Use: Prolific Sample

	Main Effect		PID as Moderator	
	Trust	Use	Trust	Use
Local News Attack	-0.3*	-0.01	-0.1*	0.1
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Republican			-0.2*	-0.1
			(0.1)	(0.1)
Local News Attack × Republican			-0.7*	-0.2*
			(0.1)	(0.1)
Observations	1,521	1,521	1,521	1,521
<i>Note:</i>				*p<0.05

Table E2: Attacks on Media Reputation and Use: PrimePanels Sample

	Main Effect		PID as Moderator	
	Trust	Use	Trust	Use
Local News Attack	-0.4*	-0.1*	-0.1*	-0.04
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Republican			-0.2*	-0.1*
			(0.05)	(0.05)
Local News Attack × Republican			-0.6*	-0.2*
			(0.1)	(0.1)
Observations	2,132	2,132	2,132	2,132
<i>Note:</i>				*p<0.05

We now consider the same results for the effects of the attack on politician reputation in Table E3 and Table E4. Once again the results are of similar direction and magnitude in either of the individual surveys.

Table E3: Attacks on Politician Reputation: Prolific Sample

	Main	PID as Moderator
Local News Attack	-0.2* (0.02)	-0.2* (0.03)
Republican		0.2* (0.04)
Local News Attack × Republican		0.2* (0.1)
Observations	1,521	1,521
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05

Table E4: Attacks on Politician Reputation: PrimePanels Sample

	Main	PID as Moderator
Local News Attack	-0.1* (0.03)	-0.2* (0.04)
Republican		0.1* (0.04)
Local News Attack × Republican		0.2* (0.1)
Observations	2,132	2,132
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05

F Robustness: State-Level Variation

To ensure ecological validity, the news outlet and politician making the attack varied across states. In this section, we present the effects separately by state for those states where we have at least 50 survey respondents. We do so to ensure the pooled results presented in the main text do not disguise substantial heterogeneity.

While estimates vary across state, and have wider confidence intervals due to the smaller sample used in each comparison, we see a largely similar pattern of results that shows the attacks were effective at reducing newspaper reputations in many places and politicians suffered a reputational cost for making them.

Figure F1: Effects of Attack on News Outlet Trust

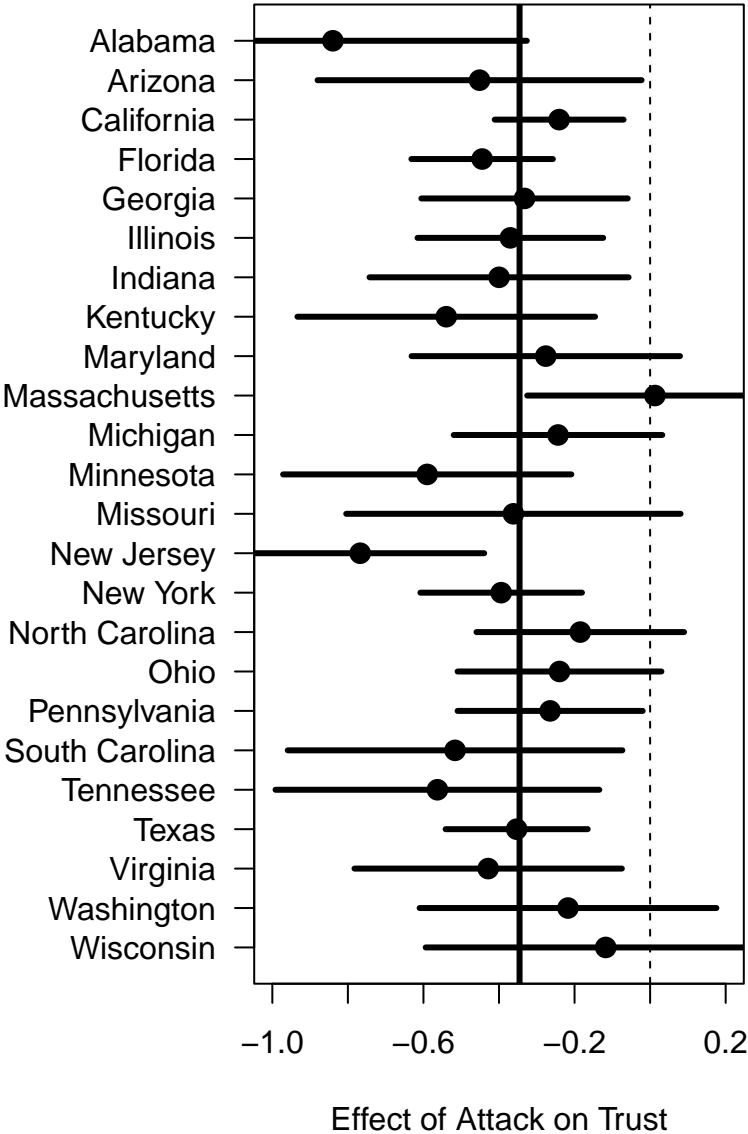
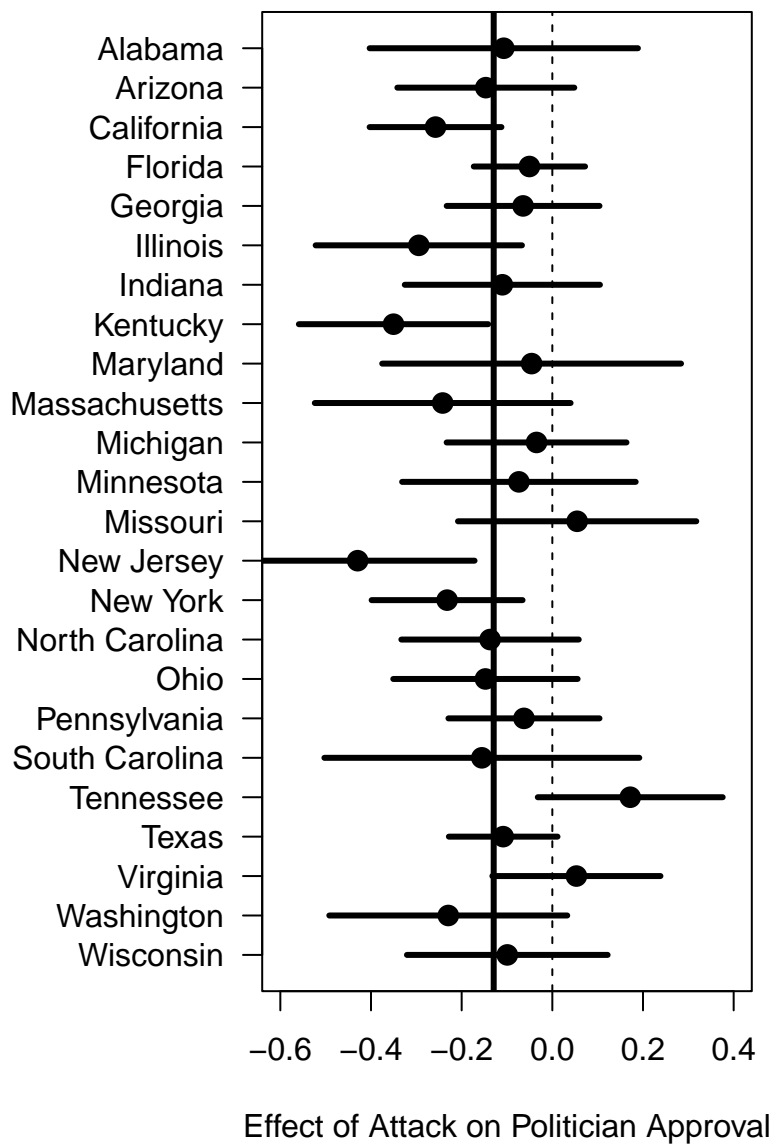


Figure F1 shows the effect of the attack on news outlet reputations in each of these states. The solid line indicates the estimate presented in the main text for the entire sample. The attack is least effective in Massachusetts and most effective in Alabama. The heterogeneity in the effects of the attacks by party suggests the partisan compositions of respondents from these states are driving these patterns. More broadly, this analysis shows the attacks are generally effective across the states we consider.

In Figure F2 we consider the effects of the attacks on the reputation of the politician making them and again display the estimate from the pooled sample with a solid black line.

Figure F2: Effects of Attack on Politician Reputation



Here again there is some variation across states, but the general story is of politicians facing a cost for making these attacks across different states.

G Other Analyses

In Figure 1 of the main text we compared the partisan divide in views of the local news source in the control and treatment conditions to the gap in assessments of CNN. Here we report that there was no spillover in which the attack on the local news source altered views of CNN. Table G1 below shows there is not a detectable difference in views of CNN on the feeling thermometer in the treatment condition compared to the control group.

Table G1: Effect of Attacks on Media Source Evaluations

	Local Newspaper Therm	CNN Therm
Attack Treatment	-7.7* (0.9)	-1.4 (1.1)
Observations	3,653	3,653
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05

Table G2 displays the interaction model used to produce the marginal effect plots show in Figure 2 of the main text. Here there is heterogeneity in line with our expectation in that criticism of the local news source was less effective at reducing news source trust among those who had higher levels of familiarity with the news source, as indicated by the positive and statistically significant interaction coefficient on this term. In contrast, the negative and statistically significant interaction between the attack and news source familiarity for use runs counter to our expectation.

Table G2: Effects of Attack on Local News: By Local News Source Familiarity

	Trust	Use
Local News Attack	-0.3* (0.03)	-0.1* (0.02)
Familiar	0.3* (0.03)	0.3* (0.03)
Local News Attack × Familiar	0.1* (0.03)	-0.1* (0.02)
Observations	3,653	3,653
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05