

# **Coverage and Effects of Broadcast Television in U.S. Elections: Republicans and Incumbents Dominate, But Gain Few Votes**

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Microsoft Research

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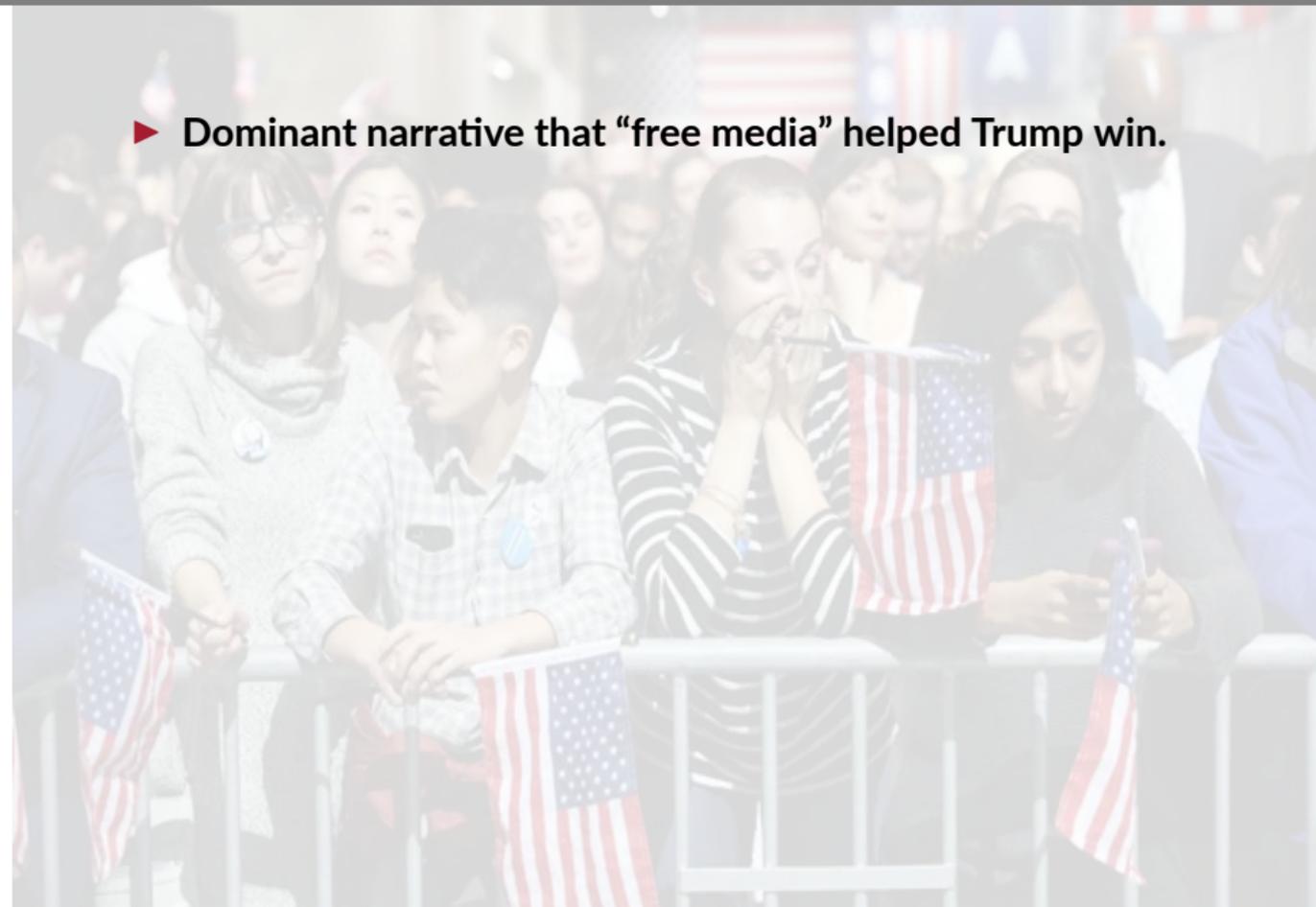
# Motivation & Research Questions

# Why Did Trump Win in 2016?



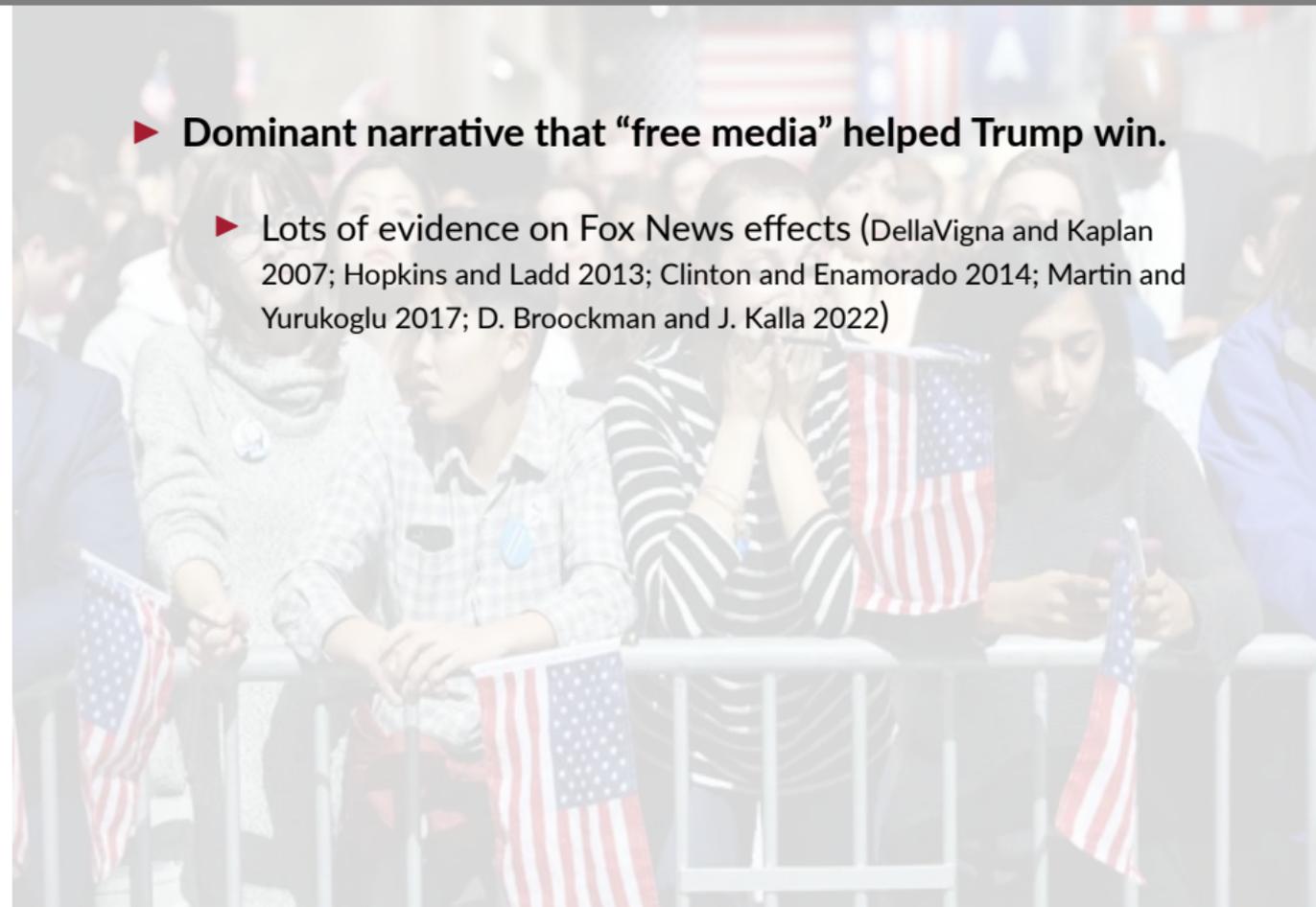
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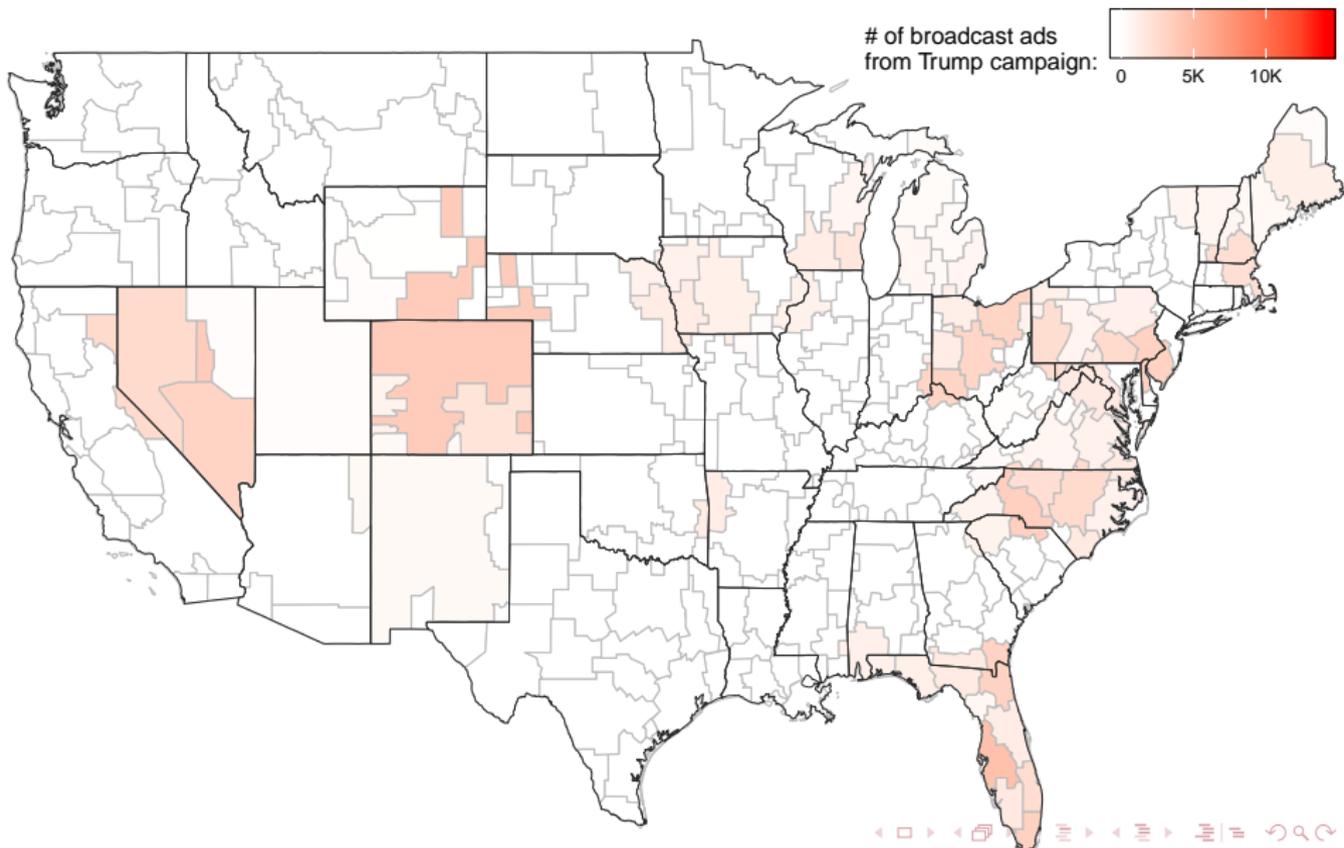
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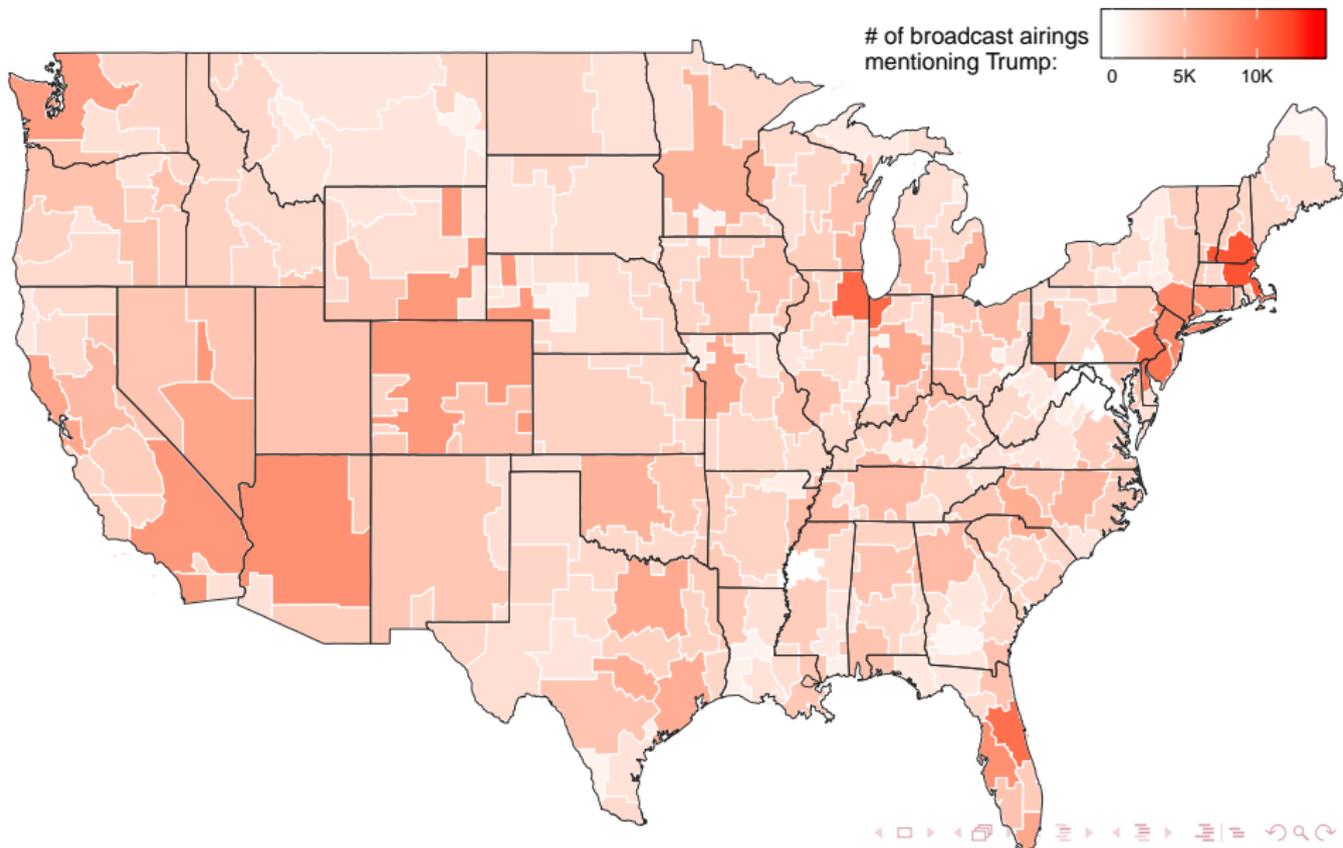
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# Trump's Paid Broadcast Ads (e.g. Local ABC Affiliates)



# Trump's Earned Broadcast Media (e.g. Local ABC Affiliates)



# Research Questions about Earned Broadcast Media

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## ▶ Causal:

- ▶ What are the vote returns from earned media?
  - ▶ Relative to ads?
- ▶ What are the returns from different kinds of coverage?

# Data & Descriptive Results

# Data

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- ▶ Transcripts of DMA-level broadcast news mentions:

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	House	Senate	President
Cycles	2014, 2016 2018, 2020	2014, 2016 2018, 2020	2016 2020
Candidates	1,214	227	3
Competitive Races	241	53	21 (states)
<i>Total Unique Observations (Last Two Months):</i>			
Media Markets	209	209	209
News Programs	16,081	18,648	28,330
News Airings	841,669	1,138,784	3,287,131
Ad Airings	1,701,568	947,151	263,443
Voting Counties	3,075	3,107	3,114
Border Voting Counties	1,988	2,006	2,007
<i>Mean Per Candidate (Last Two Months):</i>			
Media Markets	≈2	≈7	206
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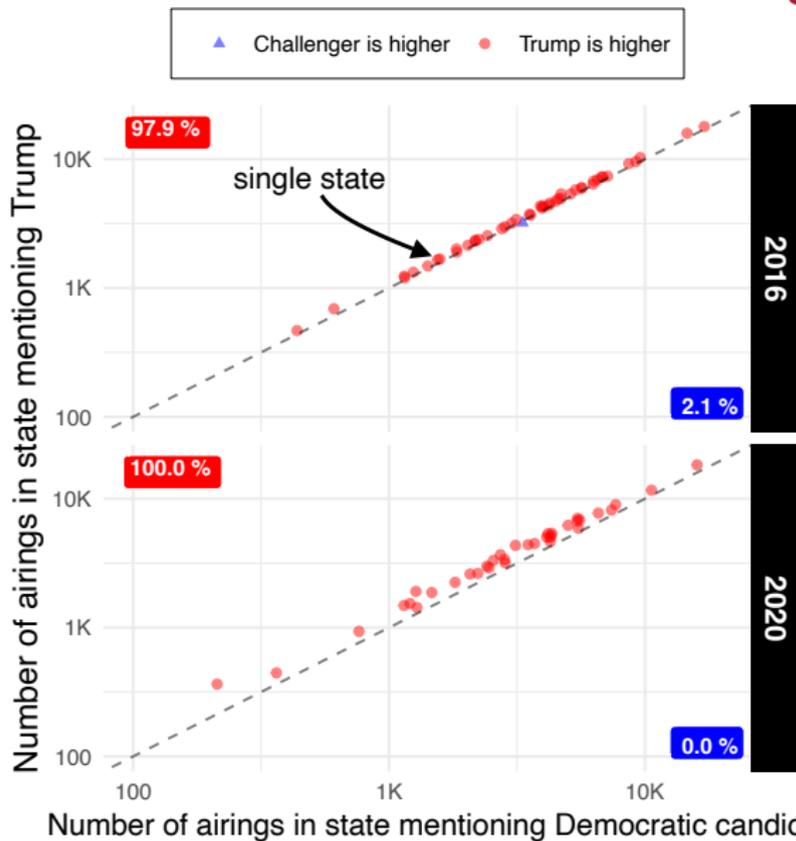
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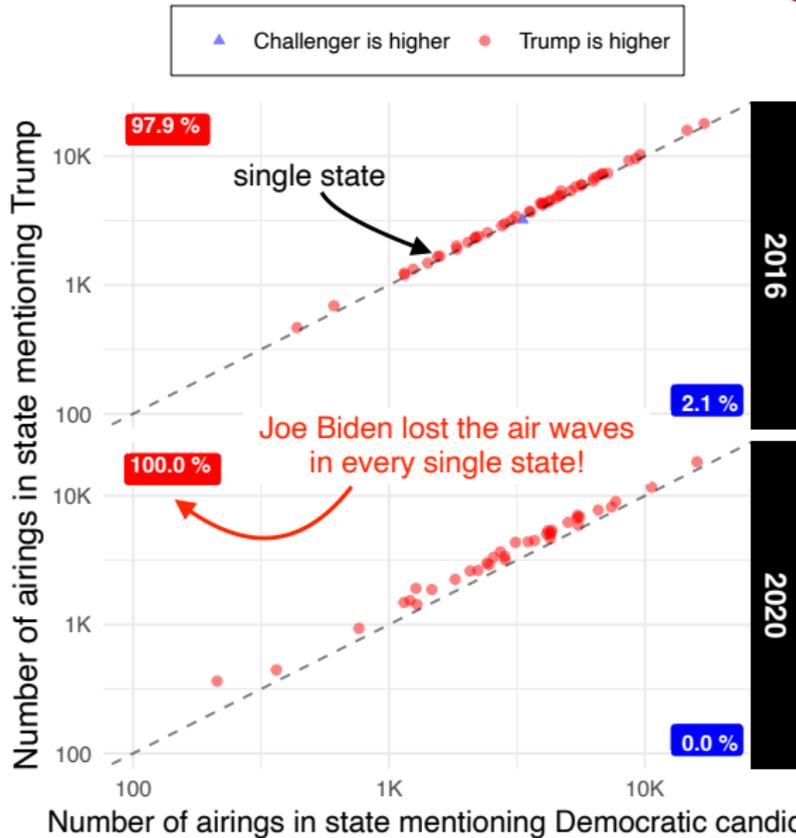
- **Vote** returns at county-level from ourcampaigns.com.
- **Tone** coded using Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary.
- **Categories** (e.g. position-taking) hand-coded and validated.
  - Yes, we tried topic modelling. It wasn't good.

# Trump's Earned Broadcast Media Advantage

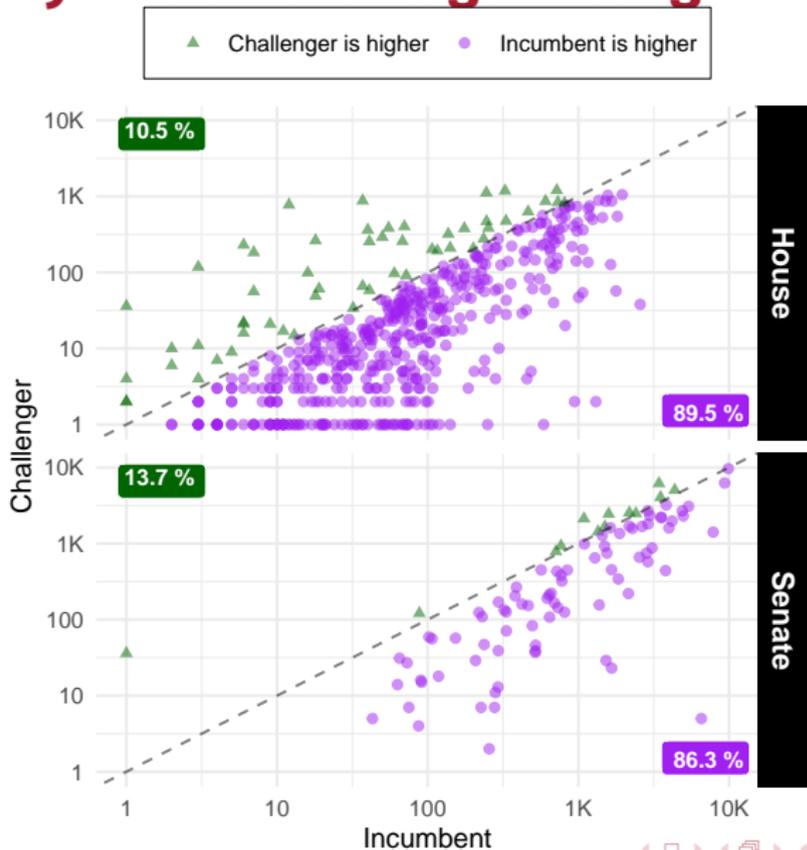
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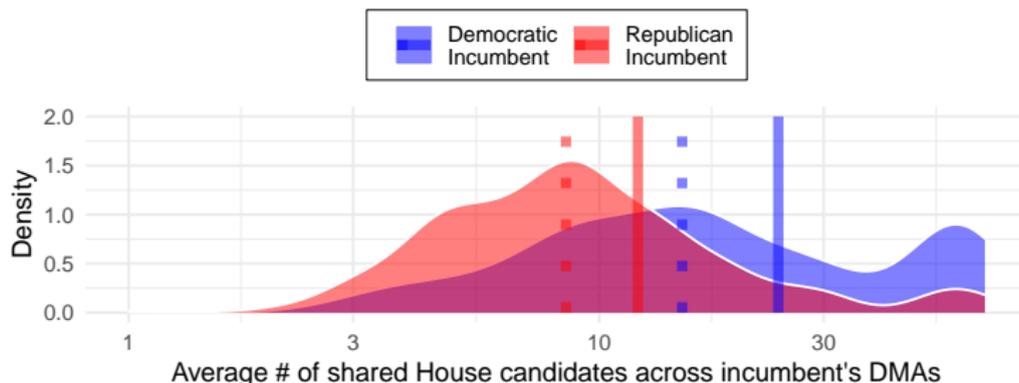
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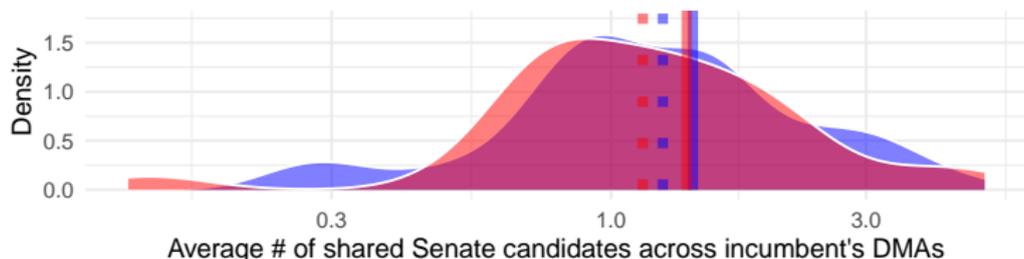
# Incumbency Media Advantage in Congressional Races



# GOP Incumbents Are in Less Saturated DMAs

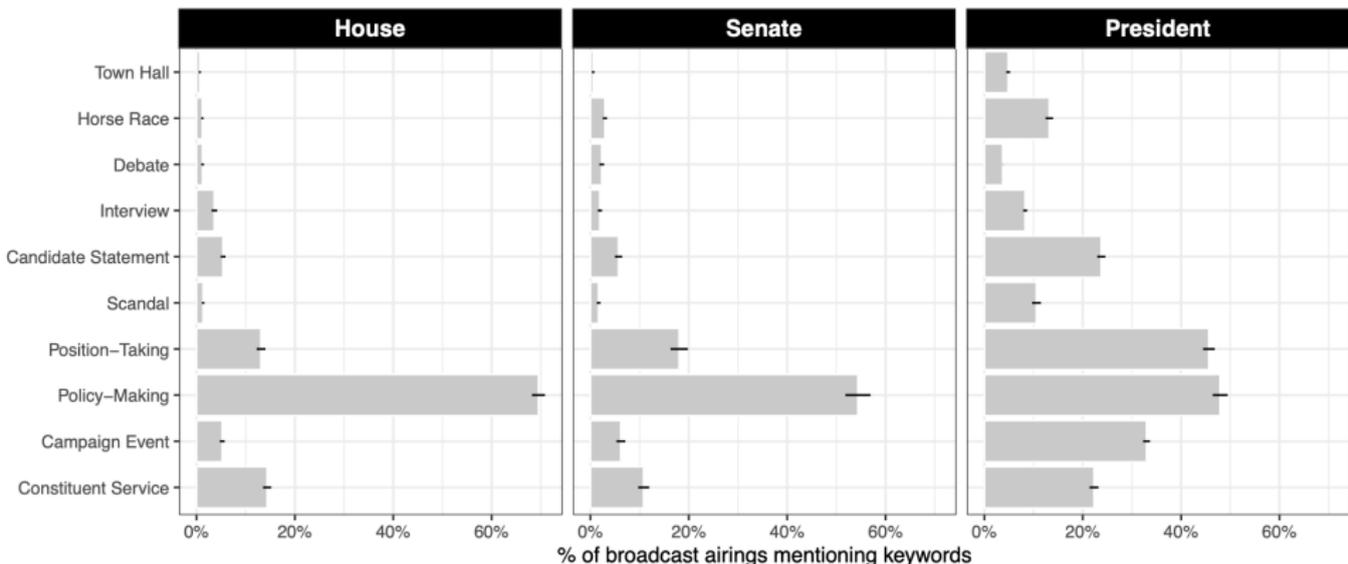


(a) House Incumbents



(b) Senate Incumbents

# Categories of Media Coverage by Office



# Causal Identification & Estimates

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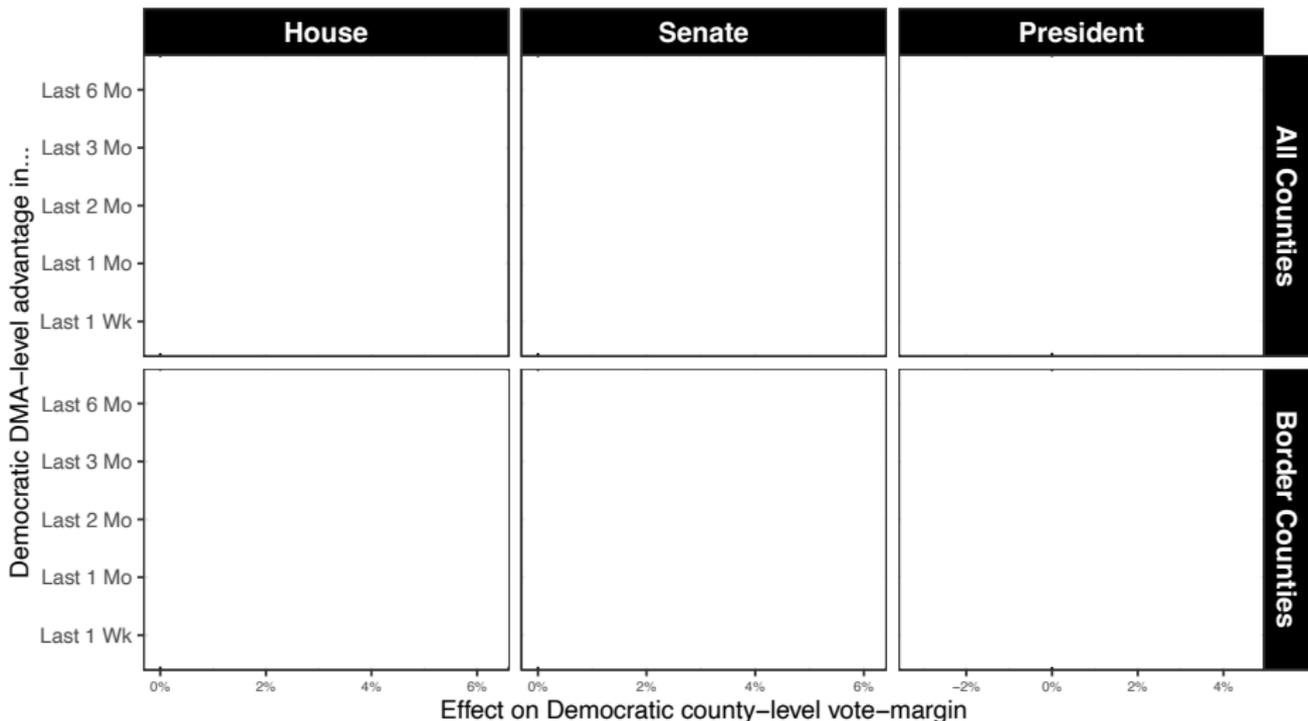
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  - ▶ Cluster standard errors at different levels (DMA-year, border pair-year, states).
  - ▶ Additional robustness checks for lag/lead effects.
  - ▶ Control for level of ad spending in that media market.

# Does Earned Media Matter?

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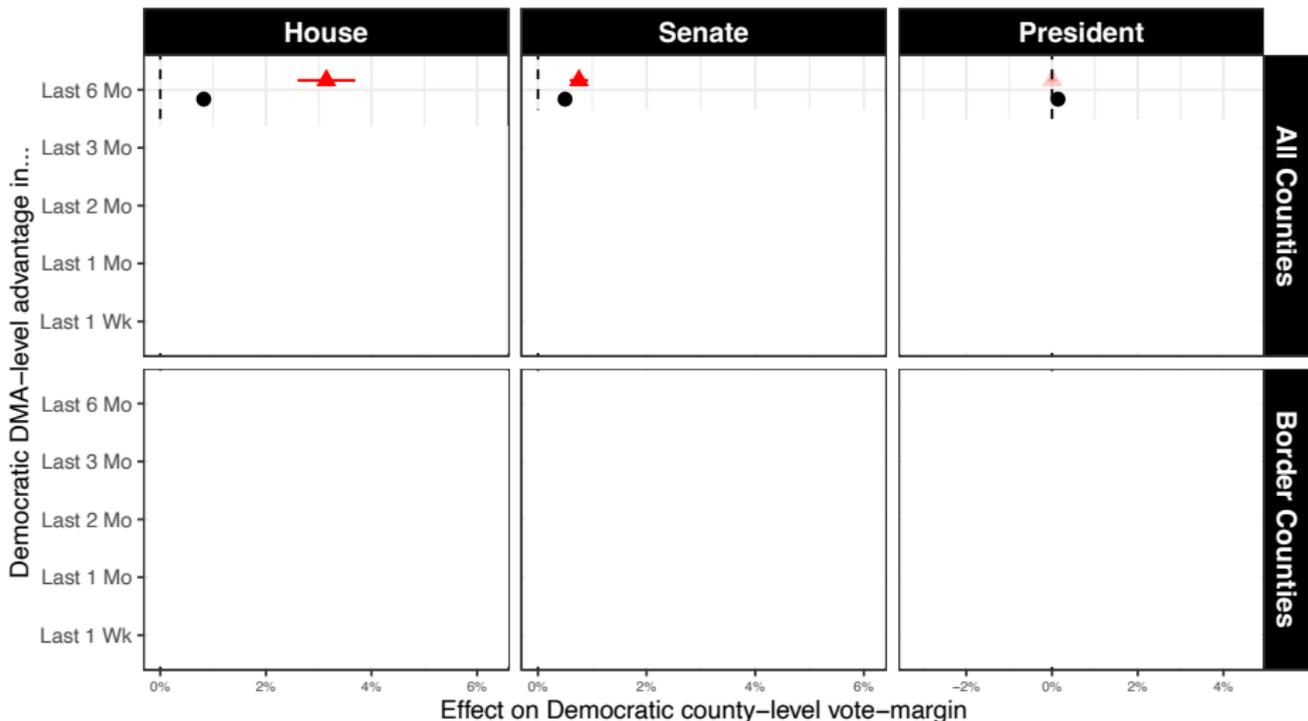
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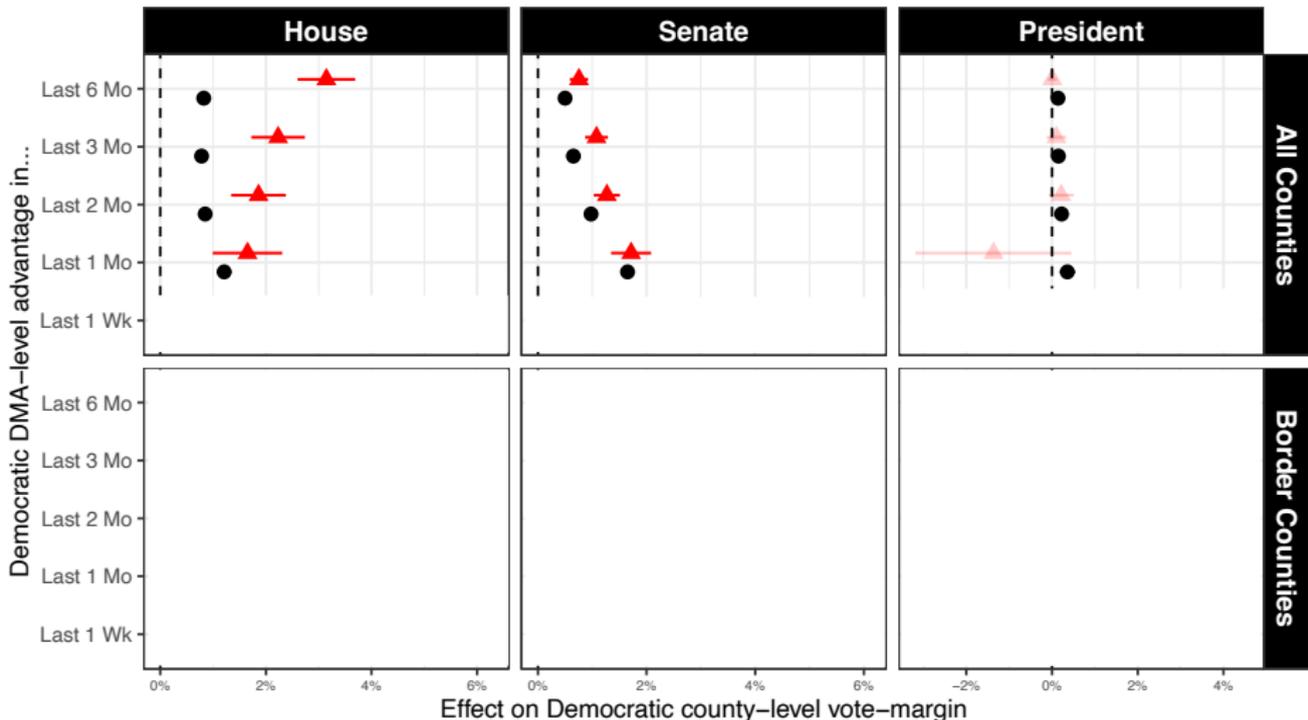
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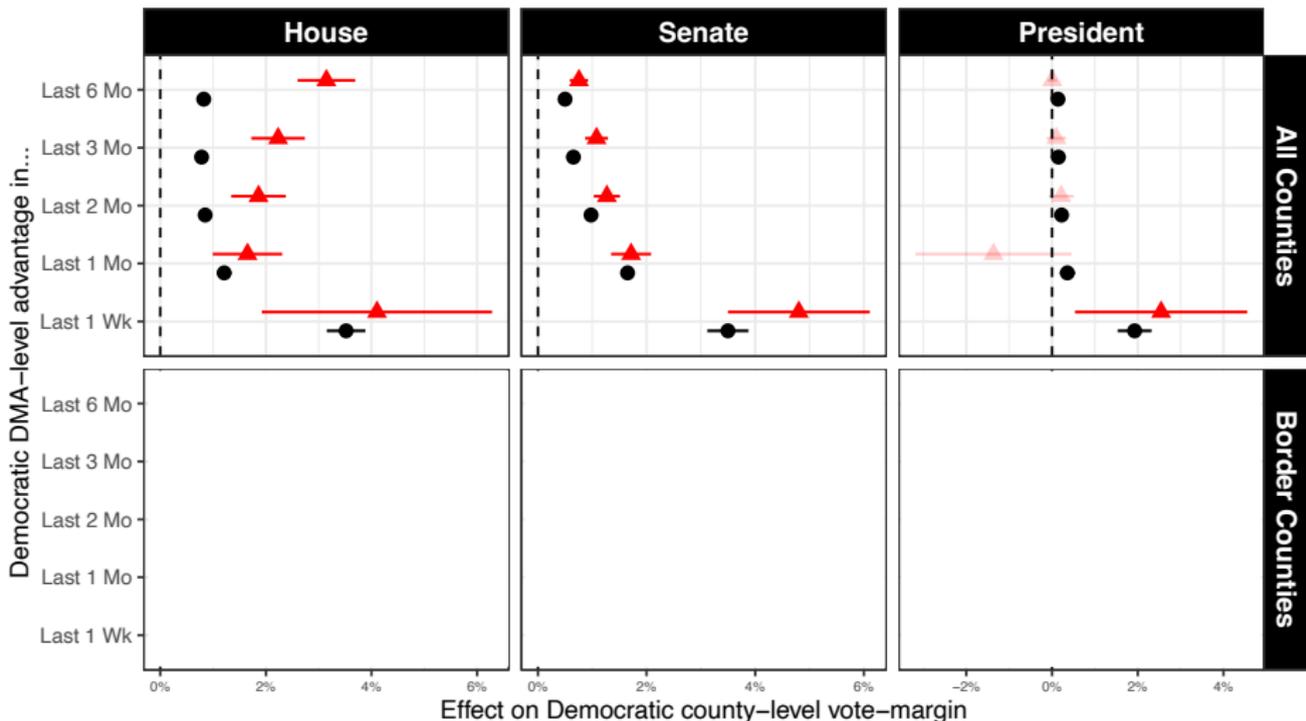
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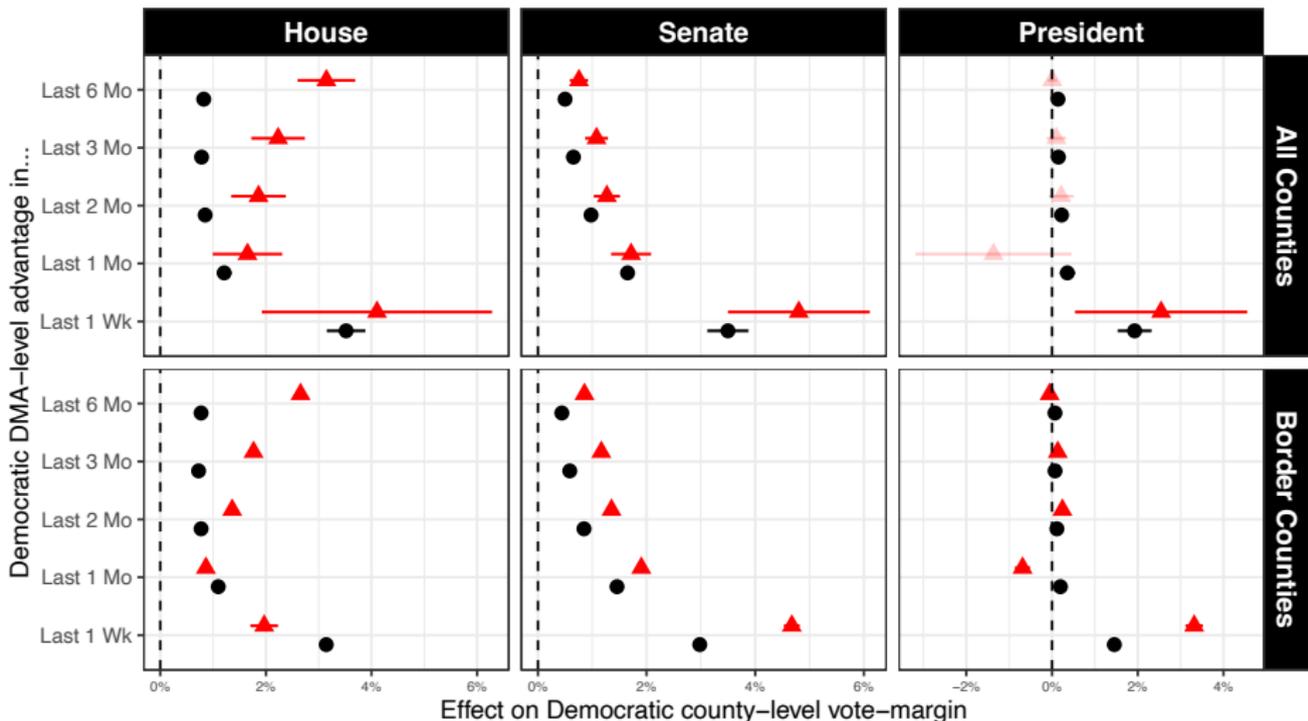
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# Wrapping Up

# Summary

\*Not covered today, but in paper.

- ▶ **Large detectable advantages for Republicans and incumbents in earned media**
  - ▶ Some of this comes from geographic advantages in district-market overlaps.
  - ▶ *Competitive races have much more earned media overall.\**
- ▶ **Small effects of earned media on vote share**
  - ▶ But often bigger than ads.
  - ▶ Effects are largely zero at Presidential level.
  - ▶ *Returns are lower in the races with lots of earned media (competitive races).\**
  - ▶ *Returns are higher from substantive coverage about constituent service, policy-making.\**

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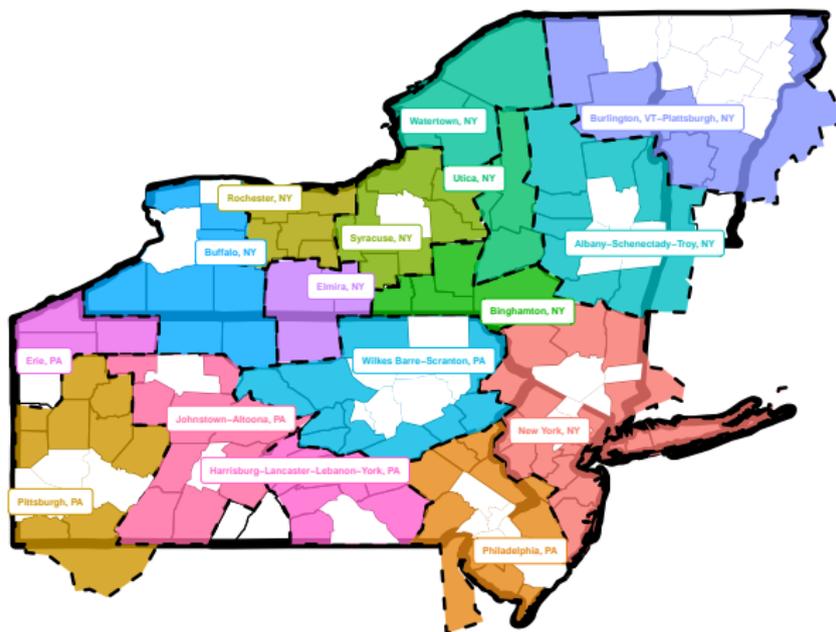


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# Examples of Border Counties Within Media Markets



Notes: Dark lines indicate state boundaries. Dashed lines indicate boundaries between media markets. The counties shown are those included in the border county sample and are colored according to the media market they belong to.

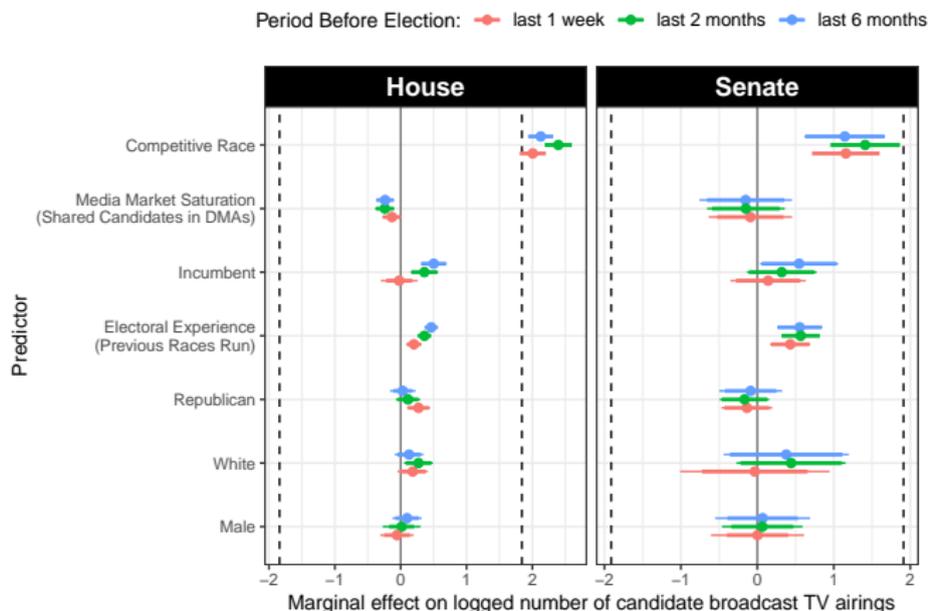
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**A: Additional Descriptive Results**

**B: Additional Causal Results**

# Predictors of Candidate Earned Media

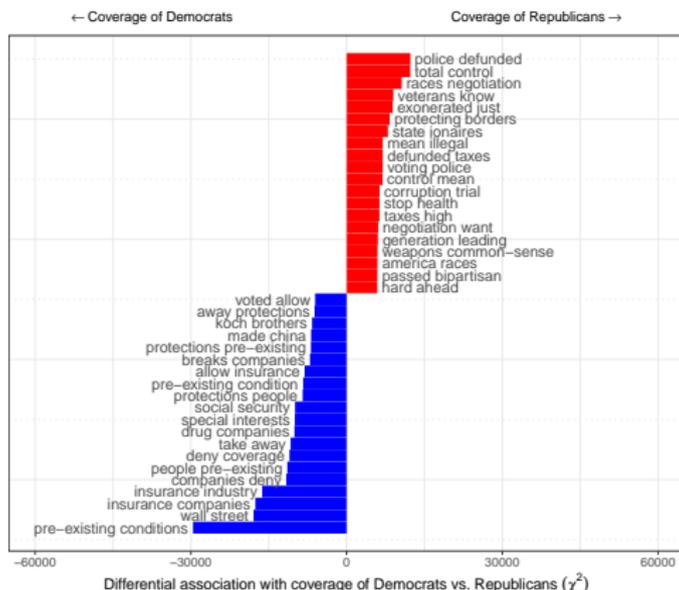


Notes: Counts of broadcast TV airings are taken in their total in the last two months leading up to election day and are logged to account for their skewed distribution. The thicker lines correspond to a 95% confidence interval for each coefficient estimate with HCO robust standard errors. The thinner confidence intervals reflect BHq corrections applied to the estimates to account for multiple testing. Dashed lines indicate  $\pm 1$  standard deviation in the distribution of the outcome.

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# Bigrams Associated with Coverage of Democrats and Republicans

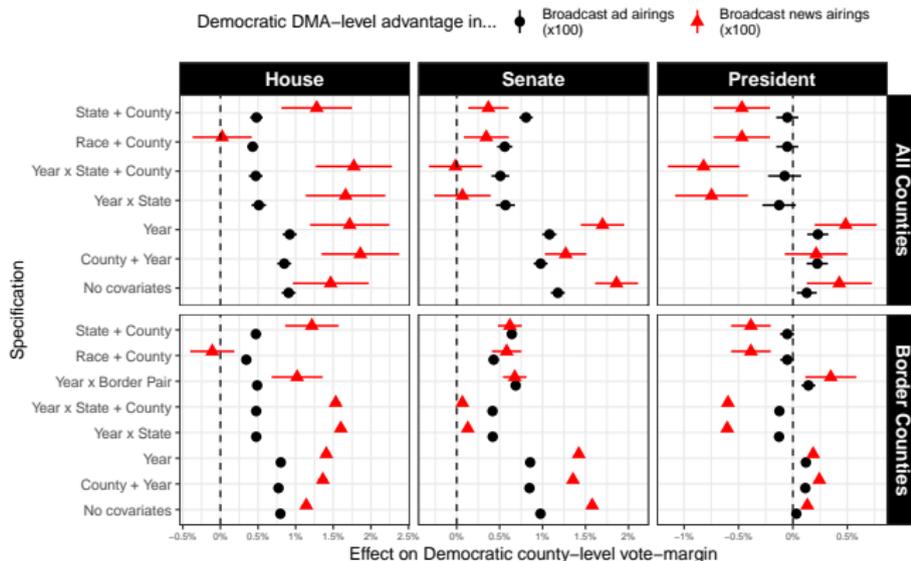


Notes: Shown are top 20 stemmed bigrams most associated with Democratic and Republican Congressional candidates' media segments respectively (2014-2020). The measure on the horizontal axis is the simple  $\chi^2$  measure of differential counts of each keyword in broadcast media segments mentioning members of the two parties.

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# Effects of Earned Media Advantage on County-Level Vote Margin Across Specification

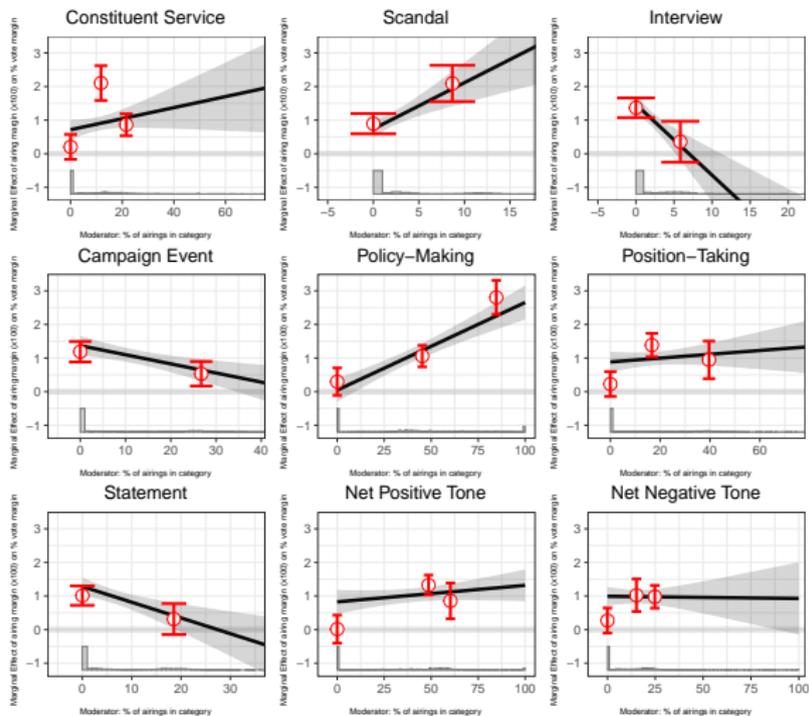


Notes: Counts of broadcast media advantage are taken in the last two months of each race. 95% confidence intervals are shown with HCO robust standard errors. The effects of ads and news airing are jointly estimated in the same model.

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# Stylistic Moderators of Earned Media Advantage on Vote Margins



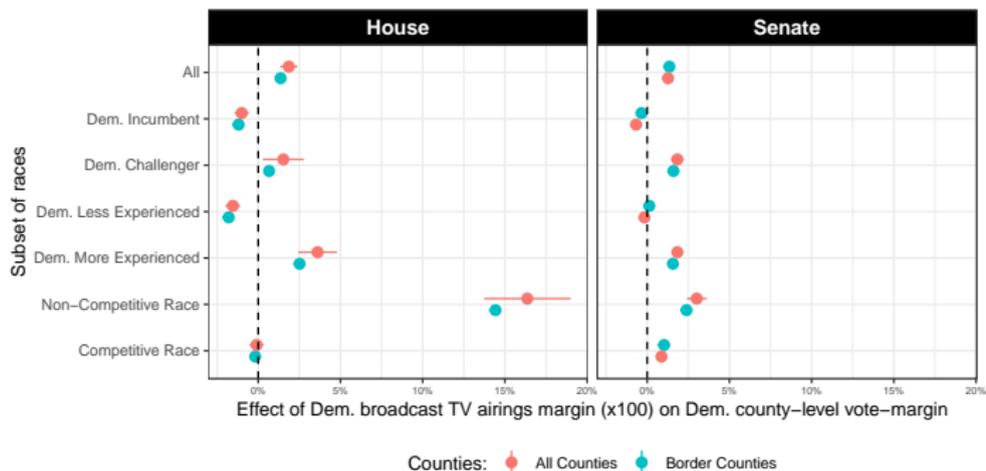
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A: Additional Descriptive Results

B: Additional Causal Results

# Heterogeneous Effects of Earned Media Advantage on Vote Margin



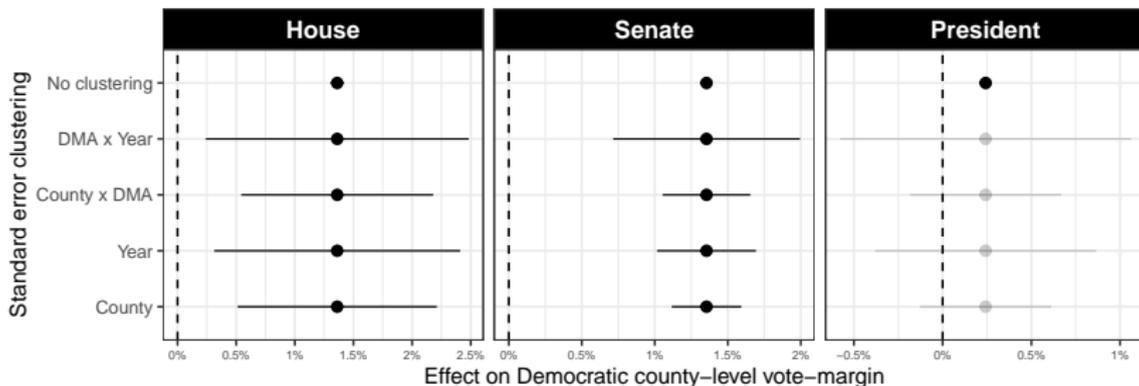
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# Earned Media Effects Adjusted for Cluster Standard Errors

Democratic DMA-level advantage in broadcast news airings (x100)



Notes: Adjusted estimates are shown here for border counties only. An additional control for broadcast ad airings in each county's media market is included as well as fixed effects for year and county.

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