Local Newspaper Coverage of the Presidency

Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha

Scholarly research says much about national news coverage of the presidency. But there has been little exploration into local news coverage of the presidency, with much research focusing on presidential campaigns or a small subset of presidential news, his local visits. Based on a sample of 288 stories taken from 1995 of the Bill Clinton and 2003 of the George W. Bush administrations, I answer the following questions: What explains the amount of local newspaper coverage of the presidency and what influences the likelihood that local newspapers will cover the presidency, daily? Support for the president, corporate ownership, newspaper resources, and the location of the story itself affect the amount of local newspaper coverage of the president and the likelihood that a newspaper will publish a story on the presidency.

Keywords: *presidency; media; local news; newspapers; amount; coverage*

It goes without saying that the media, the Washington Press Corps especially, cover the president on a daily basis. And although research shows that national news coverage is not always good for the president—indeed, it is decidedly negative (Farnsworth and Lichter 2006; Groeling and Kernell 1998)—presidents still generate substantially more news coverage than other political institutions (Graber 2002; Grossman and Kumar 1981). Clearly, the media benefit from covering the presidency because, as the perceived focal point of American government, the president is typically newsworthy.

Increasingly, presidents desire news coverage in local media outlets, in addition to national news coverage. Some may even say that presidents prefer local news coverage because it tends to be more positive than negative (Graber 2002). There are many reasons why presidents "go local," including the tendency for national television audiences of presidential speeches to be smaller than they once were (Baum and Kernell 1999), and the general trend in declining amounts of national news coverage of the presidency (Cohen

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2008). Yet, despite presidents' apparent and frequent reliance on local media to govern, little systematic political science research has examined the amount of local news coverage of the presidency (but see Barrett and Peake 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2006). Only a small body of literature has even analyzed the processes of local political news coverage in general (Kaniss 1991; see also Hamilton 2004: 149–55), local newspaper (Arnold 2004; Vinson 2003) or television (Schaffner and Gadsen 2004) coverage of legislators or local newspaper coverage of presidential campaigns (Shaw and Sparrow 1999).

In this article, I examine local newspaper coverage of the presidency and seek to explain the amount of local newspaper coverage. I also explore the likelihood of whether or not a local newspaper will cover the presidency on a given day. To answer these questions, I have compiled a data set of nearly 288 newspaper stories sampled from the third years of the Clinton (1995) and Bush (2003) administrations. Analysis of these data suggests that the amount and likelihood of newspaper coverage is a function of audience preferences and newspaper resources.

Previous Research

Only limited research explores local news coverage of politics in general, and even less of that research investigates the presidency, in particular. Kaniss (1991) examines local newspaper coverage in great detail and contributes much to our understanding of this medium, including the central role that profit, resources, and reporter expertise play in local news coverage. For profit, local reporters engage in "highlighting" (see Gans 1979) and emphasize unusual events or "atypical occurrences" to sell their stories (Kaniss 1991: 47). Yet Kaniss also concludes that profit is not sufficient to understand local newspaper coverage of local events. Rather, local newspapers must convince readers to read them, not national newspapers; metropolitan newspapers must convince suburban dwellers to read them, not suburban dailies. In other words, audience preferences are crucial to explaining local newspaper coverage of politics. Additionally, local reporters tend to be less experienced and knowledgeable than national reporters, providing a possible rationale for why local newspaper coverage should differ in numerous respects from national newspaper coverage of the presidency.

Studies reveal much about local news coverage of legislators and political campaigns. Arnold (2004) demonstrates, for instance, that legislators can count on regular and substantial coverage from their local newspapers. This is true of both campaign and non-campaign coverage (Arnold 2004: 31). Naturally, there exists substantial variation in local newspaper coverage of legislators across several measures of volume (i.e., mentions per article, articles

per month, and number of times the representative's name was in a headline). Overall, both newspaper characteristics (such as resources) and characteristics of the member of Congress explain the volume of local news coverage of legislators. Local coverage of presidential campaigns offers additional insights, including distribution of policy areas covered in campaigns and differences in the favorability of coverage according to inner (the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*) and outer ring newspapers (Shaw and Sparrow 1999). Other studies examine the predominately negative campaign coverage of the 1992 election and state of the economy (Just et al. 1996). Some even conclude that, at least for television coverage, local campaign coverage is not that local at all (Stevens et al. 2006)

Aside from research that maintains that local news coverage of the presidency should be favorable (Graber 2002), only a handful of articles examine local coverage of the presidency at some length. Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2006) show that, at least for coverage of the president's domestic travel during his Social Security reform tour, President George W. Bush received more coverage, on average, than national newspapers. Local coverage also tended to be more positive than national stories. Examining a broader sample of presidential trips unrelated to a specific policy area, Barrett and Peake (2007) show that community support for the president leads to marginally longer stories and more positive coverage. Peake (2007) reports that with regard to covering President Bush in 2004, an increase in the size of a newspaper is associated with more front-page articles, while corporate ownership correlates with fewer front-page articles.

Explaining the Amount and Likelihood of Coverage

This section draws on the existing literature to develop a theoretical explanation for what affects the amount and likelihood of local newspaper coverage of the presidency. At base, news making is a business, so newspapers will appeal to their readers as they inform, educate, and entertain them (see Compaine 1980; Hamilton 2004; Sigal 1973),[1] with the ultimate motive being profit. For any given daily newspaper, an editor must not only decide where to place a story and how long it should be, but also whether or not a story on the presidency is newsworthy enough to be published. To be newsworthy, a presidential speech must be timely and novel (Graber 2002). And although presidents have some discretion over which policies they wish to promote in their speeches, the amount or likelihood of local coverage of the presidency should primarily be a function of a newspaper's decisions. Newspaper editors make decisions about what to report as news based on several factors, including audience interests and cost of producing a newscast or newspaper (Hamilton 2004). What is more, local newspaper editors

and the local news organizations that employ them are different enough in terms of resources and the audience to whom newspapers appeal to produce variation in the amount of local news coverage of the presidency (see, among others, Kern, Levering, and Levering 1983).

Audience interest should affect the amount of local newspaper coverage of the presidency. Importantly, local media will take advantage of their audience's interest in news on the presidency. The president's routine activities are newsworthy, as he is the single most covered individual in the news (Gans 1979: 9). Indeed, 67 percent of readers of local newspapers would give "a lot of space" and "some space" to stories on political figures (Bogart 1989: 289).[2] This implies that local media not only cover the president extensively, but readers also prefer these stories. Local readers should be even more likely to read a story on the president if it engages reader's interests directly (see Bogart 1989: 297).[3] Because coverage of hard news in local newspapers tends to be fairly responsive to audience demand, contrary to its coverage of soft news (Hamilton 2004: 150), we should witness variation in the amount of presidential coverage by a local newspaper's readership.

The demand for presidential news should be even more pronounced among readers who are predisposed to support the president. Indeed, because a newspaper is a business and it will want to appeal to its audience, the level of political support that a community has expressed for the president may affect the amount of presidential news coverage. A high level of community support for the president should signal a clear interest in the presidency on the part of a newspaper's readers. It is then worth the newspaper's bottom line to print stories about the presidency and devote space to covering it because, presumably, this should increase newspaper sales and thus profit. Hypothetically, the *level of political support for the president in a community will be positively related to the amount of its coverage of the president*.

Support for the president is found not only among a newspaper's readers, but also among the newspaper's editors and reporters. Being "gatekeepers" of what readers may or may not see in their newspapers, editors and other decision-makers may exhibit a bias in favor of or against a politician, including the president (D'Alessio and Allen 2000). Such a bias should be most pronounced if there exists a clear liberal or conservative leaning of the newspaper that may be identifiable through a newspaper's editorial pages, which tends to influence newspaper coverage of campaigns and elections (Druckman and Parkin 2005; Kahn and Kenney 2002). Of course, the slant of a newspaper is not limited to a newspaper's editorial pages but, if it exists, should affect coverage throughout the newspaper (Page 1996). Logically then, a newspaper's political leaning may affect the amount of coverage on presidency, such that *a conservative newspaper should devote more space to a conservative president*.

Ownership matters to a newspaper's tendency to cover presidential or political news, too. Arguably, corporations are focused more on turning a profit from their newspaper holdings than they are in promoting and publishing a newspaper that prioritizes the principles and standards of good journalism (Bennett 2007; see among others, Downie and Kaiser 2002: chapter 4).[4] Corporate ownership encourages newspaper editors to cut costs to improve the company's bottom line. This, in turn, could affect the amount of space newspapers devote to presidential news. Because profit is prioritized more by corporately than independently owned newspapers, *corporate ownership of a newspaper should lead to less space devoted to presidential news.*

Resources also matter because the amount of local news coverage is ultimately a function of the amount of space available in a newspaper and newsworthiness of competing stories (Gans 1979: 146). Available newspaper resources vary substantially across local media outlets. Some localities serve more readers than others, and have more resources to devote to additional and more detailed coverage of numerous stories. A larger local newspaper can devote more resources to covering the president whether by having more space to allocate to Associated Press (AP) wire reports on the president or by having its own Washington correspondent who may cover the president while he is in Washington, D.C. With more resources and experienced reporters than small media outlets, newspapers that cover the president regularly will have a more detailed understanding of the president's policies, his strategies for communicating them to the public, and the likelihood that he will be successful setting agendas, affecting public opinion, or increasing his support in Congress. In other words, these reporters will have more to write about, leading to longer and more stories about the presidency. Because more resources equal more space, *an increase in a newspaper's resources should lead to more space devoted to presidential news.*

The topic of the president's visit may relate to the amount of coverage in a newspaper story. If a story reports on the president's speech the previous day, a reporter will have the details of a speech, perhaps a policy proposal, on which to report. The president's speeches are news and are likely to be covered extensively. Yet, there are other stories that do not relate directly to the president's speeches. They could be a brief overview of a key vote in Congress that pertains to a presidential policy proposal, for example. As such, and because stories that relate to the president's speech will provide more opportunity for coverage, *these stories will be positively related to the amount of coverage.* The location of the speech could also matter. As more news emanates from Washington, D.C. than any other location around the country, it is likely that there will be more stories—and a greater likelihood of covering the presidency—if that story emanates directly from the nation's capital.

Often, the larger national context in which the president finds himself may affect the president's public position (Neustadt 1990) and, therefore, newspapers' motivations for covering the president. High approval ratings indicate that the public supports the president, generally. Because newspapers wish to appeal to an audience newspapers may reflect the public's positive view of the president. So, *presidents with higher approval ratings should lead to an increase in the amount of presidential news coverage.*

Data and Methods

Compiling a data set of local newspaper coverage of the presidency required numerous decision rules. First, I selected 1995 and 2003 as years to code. I chose the third year for each president as a way to avoid reelection or midterm election years and the unique—and potentially outlier coverage—associated with post-9/11 coverage of the presidency. I choose two presidents—a Democrat and a Republican—as a way to increase the generalizability of my findings beyond a single presidency and political party.

Second, I created a list of all presidential speeches or other public remarks, as catalogued in the *Public Papers of the Presidents* for 1995 and 2003. I then reduced this list of 943 speeches to the 542 days on which the presidents delivered a speech or made a public remark. I randomly selected forty-three dates, or 8 percent of the sample, from this list. This list includes speeches made in and outside of Washington, D.C. Excluding dates where presidents spoke in Washington, D.C. could paint a limited picture of local newspaper coverage of the presidency.

Third, I selected seven newspapers (or 15 percent of the sample) from a list of forty-four newspapers taken from Arnold's (2004) list of full-service, everyday newspapers available on Lexis-Nexis. I excluded a newspaper from the master list if it was not available through Lexis-Nexis for both 1995 and 2003, the sample years. From here, I simply searched the date after the speech for either "Clinton" or "Bush" in the "Headline, Lead Paragraph(s), Terms" feature of the Lexis-Nexis search engine. The story had to pertain to the president, his administration, or his policies. These search criteria produced 288 general stories on the presidency.

To ensure a broad sample of local newspaper coverage, I selected this sample of newspapers and stories, using the story and the day—not the trip—as the unit of analysis. I do this to avoid any issues that may arise from selecting the president's trip. Simply, the president and his communications advisers may select areas that are most likely to generate the amount of news coverage the White House desires,[5] which may bias the results in favor of finding a positive relationship between community support and the amount of coverage. It will also be difficult to determine to what extent the president's decision to

travel to a location has influenced the amount of coverage or whether characteristics specific to a location and newspaper resources have done so. Naturally, previously favorable or voluminous newspaper coverage of the president could be the result of his decision to visit that location in the first place. Moreover, this approach limits analysis to studying newspaper coverage of the president's trips alone and could present a skewed perspective of what the local public as a whole reads about the presidency.

It is also worth noting that studying local news coverage could involve analyzing either newspapers or television. Consistent with other research on local news coverage, I examine newspapers for several reasons. First, even though some polling demonstrates that more people receive most of their news from local television (Pew Research Center 2002), other scholarly research demonstrates the opposite, that more people read daily newspapers (62.5 percent) than they view local television news (55.8 percent) (Hamilton 2004: 155). What is more, local television news provides scant coverage of politics, about 10 percent between 1998 and 2002 (Dean and Brady 2002).[6] Some research even shows that local newspapers influence the news cycle and set local news agendas more frequently than television does (Cook 1998; Shaw and Sparrow 1999), with television news programs simply highlighting the main points previously developed—and in greater detail—in newspapers (Downie and Kaiser 2002: 64). Finally, as Arnold (2004: 3) notes, local television news transcripts are not available for analysis as local newspaper stories are.

Coding Framework and Independent Variables

I employ three dependent variables in my analysis: amount, which I code in two ways, and whether or not a newspaper will publish a story. My first measure of amount of coverage devoted to the president is a count of the number of sentences per story.[7] I count sentences because they are easily identifiable, and require no subjective interpretation by coders. If a statement begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, it is a sentence. Other scholars have coded paragraphs in a similar fashion (Druckman and Parkin 2005). Here, the story is the unit of analysis. My second measure of amount of coverage is the number of stories in a newspaper that covers the presidency in a day. To examine the likelihood of coverage, I code a third dependent variable as one or zero, or whether or not a newspaper covered the presidency on a day in the sample. Naturally, the unit of analysis for the number of stories in a day and the likelihood of coverage for a day is the day.

The following independent variables help explain the amount and likelihood of newspaper coverage. First, community support for the president is the percentage of the voting public that supported the President in the previous election at the county level. Because newspaper circulation may extend beyond one county, I average the level of the popular vote for the president in

the previous election by each county that indicates the newspaper to be its primary source of daily print news.[8]

Second, to account for any political leaning of a newspaper, I determine whether or not a newspaper had endorsed the president from each newspaper's editorial pages. At base, if a newspaper endorses the president's election or re-election then that newspaper should offer more positive coverage than it would otherwise (see Druckman and Parkin 2005; Kahn and Kenney 2002). This measure, for the 1992 and 2000 elections, is 1 if the newspaper supported the president, 0 if the newspaper did not endorse either candidate, or –1 if it endorsed the president's opponent.

Next, corporately owned newspapers should have a negative impact on the amount of presidential news coverage. I code corporate ownership as one if a newspaper is owned by a parent company or zero if it is independently owned. These data are available from the newspaper itself, with the *Columbus Dispatch* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* being the independently owned newspapers in my sample.

I have also hypothesized that the size of the newspaper—the amount of newspaper resources—is vital to explaining newspaper coverage of the presidency. I approximate newspaper resources using its size as measured by its number of readers or Sunday circulation numbers published in the most relevant edition of *Editor & Publisher International Year Book*.[9] The idea here is that with more readers come advertising dollars, which leads to more money for staff and other resources needed to run a newspaper (see Arnold 2004). The values of these independent variables, by newspaper, are presented in the appendix.[10]

Finally, location of the president's speech may affect the number of sentences. If a story emanates from Washington, D.C., then it may be more likely to take on national, rather than local characteristics. As such, these stories should be longer than others, and are coded as one if the byline is from Washington, D.C., and zero, otherwise. In the number of stories and likelihood of coverage models, I use a similar measure, but one that is coded on the day. That is, if the president gave a speech in Washington, D.C. the day before the news coverage, it was coded one; otherwise it was coded zero. I also control for whether or not the story references a presidential speech, coded one or zero. Because the unit of analysis here is the story, only the sentences model includes this variable.

Method

I employ two basic methods in my analysis. First, both the number of stories and sentences are count data and, as such, I use negative binomial regression analysis.[11] Although results from a Poisson count model are similar, I choose a negative binomial model because I cannot be certain that the story

for each day is independent or that the stories or sentences have a constant rate of occurrence (King 1998: 51). In addition, a likelihood ratio test rejects the null hypothesis that $\alpha = 0$, making negative binomial appropriate. Second, the likelihood of whether or not a story on the presidency appears in a newspaper on a day is a binary dependent variable. Because of this, I use probit for the likelihood model.

Findings

Descriptive Comparisons

The amount of local newspaper coverage of the presidency is modest, with an average of twenty-three sentences per story and just under one story on the presidency per day. The range of sentences per story is two to sixty-five, and zero to five on the number of stories per day.[12] There is a mix of variation by local newspaper. The number of sentences per story, on average, is fairly consistent, ranging from a low of 21.1 sentences for the *Austin American-Statesman* and a high of 26.7 sentences, on average, for the *Providence Journal*. These are near or about average, but suggest that perhaps resources are not that important for the length of each story (see table 2 below). Stories appear to be related more with resources, with larger newspapers in Pittsburgh and Austin devoting more stories per newspaper on average than smaller newspapers in New Orleans and Columbus, Ohio. Overall, these descriptive results of newspaper coverage of the presidency compare quite favorably with other research on the coverage of the president's domestic travels, adding reliability to these numbers (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2006).[13]

Amount of Newspaper Coverage

I present two models, with distinct measures of amount, to explain the amount of newspaper coverage. Using the number of sentences per story as a measure for amount reveals a strongly counterintuitive finding: A larger circulation leads to fewer sentences. These counterintuitive findings for sentences could be the result of a pattern or formula of types of newspaper stories, with each tending to run about the same length. They could also be a function of AP wire reports being longer than other stories. If so, then smaller newspapers, which are prone to rely on these stories absent sufficient resources to pay their own reporters to cover the president, will dedicate more words to covering the presidency. Others have also demonstrated a similar link for coverage of presidential visits (Barrett and Peake 2007) using a different measure of resources (the average number of newspaper pages) and amount (the total number of words for all stories), while also positing a different rationale for this result.

Table 1
Average characteristics of local news coverage of the president

	Sentences		Stories	
Newspaper	Mean (Median)	Min/Max	Mean	Min/Max
Columbus Dispatch	24.3 (23)	14/48	0.81	0/3
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	22.5 (21)	2/54	1.65	0/5
Providence Journal	26.7 (25)	9/65	0.58	0/3
Times-Picayune	25.8 (25)	4/62	0.56	0/2
Austin American-Statesman	21.1 (19)	3/46	1.58	0/5
Lewiston Morning Tribune	23.8 (21)	17/44	0.26	0/1
Rocky Mountain News	22.7 (20)	3/61	1.21	0/5
Total	23.1 (21)	2/65	0.95	0/5

Table 2
Determinants of the amount of local newspaper coverage of the presidency

	Number of Sentences	Percent Change in Sentences	Number of Stories	Percent Change in Stories
Circulation	–0.0001 (0.0002)	—	0.001* (0.0004)	+31.2
Community support	–0.006* (0.003)	–5.6	0.02* (0.006)	+28.3
Washington, D.C.	–0.17* (0.06)	–8.3	0.23* (0.14)	+12.4
Endorsement	–0.08* (0.03)	–6.9	0.05 (0.08)	—
Presidential approval	0.005 (0.004)		0.006 (0.009)	—
Story relates to trip	0.18* (0.07)	+7.3	—	—
Corporate ownership	—	—	–0.24 (0.14)	–10.1
Constant	3.24* (0.27)	—	–1.95* (0.63)	—
α	0.16 (0.02)*	—	0.29 (0.12)*	—
Wald χ^2	25.22*	—	28.83*	—
N	288	—	301	—

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed)

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Robust standard errors are used to account for heteroscedasticity in the sentences model. The unit of analysis for the number of sentences and number of stories is the story and day, respectively. Story relates to the president's trip is excluded from the number of stories model given the different unit of analysis. Each is a negative binomial count model. Percent change in the expected count is for a standard deviation increase in the independent variables. Corporate ownership has no statistically significant impact on the number of sentences and is not included in the model. It is statistically significant at $p < .06$ in the stories model.

Alternatively, sentences may not be explainable by resources because they are not a relative measure. As such, sentences cannot account for any trade-offs or costs that may be related to attention devoted to the presidency. If newsworthy, these results suggest that stories will be roughly equal in length,

regardless of differences across locations. Yet, the decision of whether or not a story is indeed newsworthy is centered more on costs, or available space in a newspaper daily. The more resources, the more flexibility a newspaper has to determine that a story on the presidency is newsworthy and, therefore, worth publishing. This could lead to a greater likelihood of coverage (tested in the following subsection) or in the number of presidency stories that a newspaper can print in a day.

Indeed, examining amount as the number of daily stories on the presidency provides for a more intuitive conclusion: resources and community support both matter. A larger newspaper, as measured by circulation numbers, leads to more stories. Yet, an approximate increase in readers only leads to a fractional increase in the number of presidential stories in a daily newspaper. A very large newspaper, with a circulation of about 506,000 readers (one standard deviation above the sample mean of 324,826 readers) is expected to see about 30 percent more stories than a newspaper of average size. In addition, more community support contributes to more stories per day. A one standard deviation increase in community support above the sample mean—or 58.4 percent of the popular vote in the previous presidential election—leads to about a 30 percent increase in the number of stories on the presidency. Whether or not a story emanates from Washington, D.C. also matters, but only results in about a 12 percent increase in the number of stories. Corporate ownership expectedly decreases the number of stories per day on the presidency, at least at a lower level of statistical significance.

Likelihood of Coverage

Local newspaper editors have much discretion over which stories they will cover and which ones they will publish, including stories on the presidency. To determine which factors increase the likelihood that a newspaper covered the presidency on a day in my sample of newspapers and newspaper stories, I present another model (in table 3). The dependent variable is whether or not a newspaper published a story on the presidency for each day in my sample. The results show that a handful of variables increase the likelihood that a local newspaper will publish a story on the president. Primarily, community support matters to coverage, with a higher level of community support increasing the likelihood that a newspaper will cover the president. A one-standard deviation increase in community support increases the probability of a story being published by 0.13. National conditions—as measures by the president's public approval ratings before the day of the story—have no statistically significant impact on a local newspaper's likelihood of covering the president. At least in this sense, then, local newspaper coverage truly is local.

Two characteristics of the newspaper itself—its political leaning and corporate ownership—affect the likelihood of publication. First, a newspaper's

Table 3
The likelihood of a local newspaper story on the president

	Parameter Estimates	Predicted Probabilities
Circulation	0.001* (0.0004)	+0.07
Community support	0.02* (0.006)	+0.12
Newspaper endorsement	0.19* (0.10)	+0.15
Washington, D.C. speech	0.30* (0.15)	+0.12
Corporate ownership	–0.57* (0.18)	–0.22
Presidential approval	0.004 (0.01)	—
Constant	–1.21* (0.66)	—
Pseudo R-squared	0.09	—
Likelihood ratio χ^2	37.26*	—
PRE	23.19	—
% predicted	64.78	—
N	301	—

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed); standard errors in parentheses

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Predicted probabilities for circulation and support are based on a standard deviation change in the independent variables. Endorsement is based on a change from minimum to maximum. Predicted probabilities for D.C. and corporate ownership are calculated as a change from 0 to 1.

political leaning, as evidenced by its endorsement of the president at election time, helps explain a newspaper's propensity to publish a story on the presidency. As the measure increases from endorsing the other candidate (coded as a –1) to endorsing the president (coded as a 1), the probability of a story being published on a day increases by 0.15. Second, corporate ownership of a newspaper decreases the probability of publication by 0.22.

Newspaper resources and location matter, too. First, more resources mean more flexibility in what a newspaper can or cannot publish, leading to a greater likelihood for publication on a day for larger newspapers. Second, newspapers are more likely to cover the president when he is in Washington, D.C., not elsewhere. This is probably because presidents are more likely to make substantial news in Washington, D.C., whether by delivering a national address or signing significant legislation. What is more, all newspapers can rely on AP wire reports, which also tend to be more prominent—or at least those reporters are more strategically situated—to report on news when it comes out of the White House, a typical and heavily covered "beat." Even after controlling for newspaper resources and community support, newspapers still rely on this expectation, that presidents are more likely to make news in Washington, D.C. than elsewhere. Both of these statistically significant variables increase the likelihood of daily coverage of the presidency by about 10

percent for a one-standard deviation increase (circulation) or change from 0 to 1 (D.C. stories).

Conclusion

This article has set out to explain the amount and likelihood of local newspaper coverage of the presidency. The results show, predictably, that local newspaper characteristics, such as available resources and local community support, are instrumental in explaining the amount of local newspaper coverage of the presidency, and an increased likelihood of a local newspaper publishing a story on the presidency on any given day. What is more, there is a typical and predictive quality to local newspaper coverage in that newspapers are more likely to cover the president when he is in Washington, D.C., presumably because this is where most news on the presidency emanates.

These results are important for many reasons. First, by showing that local newspaper and audience characteristics explain the amount of local newspaper coverage of the presidency, White House staff can better gauge from which newspapers presidents are most likely to be covered and receive the most exposure. Second, that national conditions—as measured by the president's approval ratings—do not seem to affect amount of local newspaper coverage suggests that local newspaper are insulated to some extent from the more contentious national environment. This, in itself, provides presidents with an opportunity to speak to a local audience, and expect roughly the same treatment in amount of coverage in both good political times and bad. Even though this article does not speak to the tone of local newspaper coverage of the presidency, it at least indicates that presidents will receive fairly consistent amounts of coverage from local newspapers regardless of their national, popular standing.

Even so, it remains to be seen whether presidents can take advantage of conditions—primarily audience preferences and newspaper resources—that increase the amount of coverage devoted to the presidency in local newspapers. Indeed, this research only scratches the surface of the importance of local newspaper coverage of the presidency. It is a common belief among presidents and their staff that local news coverage does not "filter" information the way national news coverage does. Scholarship should explore whether local newspaper coverage of the presidency is more in tune with the president's message than national news coverage. What is more, it should examine whether this "unfiltered" coverage benefits the president in terms of setting the local public's agenda or influencing its opinion on policy issues. After all, influencing the media is presumably only a means to affecting other political institutions and actors, not an end in itself.

Appendix
Newspaper-Related Variables

Newspaper	Circulation 1995/2003	Support 1992/2000	Endorse 1992/2000
Columbus Dispatch	399,815/372,474	38/51.5	Bush/Bush
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	449,667/406,930	52.3/44	Clinton/Kerry
Providence Journal	268,576/234,681	45/33	Bush/Bush
Times-Picayune	322,823/285,602	69/19	Bush/Bush
Austin American-Statesman	235,281/233,608	48/46	None/Bush
Lewiston Morning Tribune	24,215/22,096	31/67	None/none
Rocky Mountain News	446,866/789,137	56/32	Bush/Bush
Average from sample	347,802/382,715	52.1/42.6	

Note: Average from the sample calculates the average, not based on these seven newspapers alone, but rather based on the number of stories each newspaper has in the larger sample of 288. This is done for purposes of interpretation.

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Notes

1. Sigal (1973: 8) notes that there are two profit markets for newspapers: sale of newspapers and sale of advertising space. The former is most important as it dictates how well newspaper will do in the latter over the long-term.
2. These numbers are dated but there is nothing in current research to suggest there have been any major changes in readers' story preferences.
3. Bogart (1989) does not provide evidence for this specific claim. But he does claim that people are more interested in stories that apply to them. An example: Teenagers are more interested in stories that deal with their age group. One can infer, then, that local media will "localize" coverage of the president to not only help create a local identity—the president is visiting my community—as Kaniss (1991) argues, but also to engage individuals readers. The end result should be higher circulation and readership of that newspaper when local newspapers cover the president.
4. Downie and Kaiser's (2002: 70–7) argument is a bit more nuanced than what I can test with my sample of newspapers. In effect, even corporate-owned newspapers, but those with a community-oriented goal of producing a quality newspaper (such as McClatchy), are conceptually distinct from "conglomerate" corporations. Future research should explore this wrinkle in the effects of ownership on news coverage.
5. Given this possible endogeneity problem, it is difficult to disentangle the causality of these expectations. On the one hand, the profit-seeker model suggests that newspapers will slant their coverage to benefit their audience. Yet, we do not know if the newspaper

is actually driving this decision. Keep in mind that it is the White House that selects these locations. Presumably, the White House would select a location because it is likely to generate positive coverage. This could be a function of the audience, no doubt. But it could also be a function of the resources that the White House provides. Recall that the White House wants to direct this news coverage. They will provide the events—and the information that the reporters need—to cover the president. As such, these types of visits are predisposed to be positive, which is likely to relate to ideology, but we cannot be sure of the causality of these relationships given the endogeneity of the problem.

6. This number is slightly higher if one includes Dean and Brady's numbers for foreign and defense policy in the mix, which averages about 6 percent over this time period.
7. Intercoder reliability between the two primary coders of this data set is high. Correlations for the dependent variables in this analysis are 1.0, for number of sentences and words.
8. Some have used "normed" data, modeling the difference between the county vote and national vote in the previous election. Using this measure produces no substantive differences in my reported findings.
9. I selected circulation numbers for 1995 and 2003 based on the 1996 and 2004 versions of the *Year Book*. Circulation numbers are divided by one thousand for ease of presentation. Barrett and Peake (2007) use average daily number of pages in a newspaper for a proxy for newspaper size and resources. Using the number of pages does not differ from what I present in the tables and correlates with circulation at 0.69.
10. Some have suggested that revenue, whether generated through advertising or printing national editions of *USA Today* to distribute to a local population, is a better measure of resources than circulation. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find publicly available data on newspaper revenue by newspaper. Some data are available by corporate owners of local newspaper but this is inadequate for examining a single newspaper or newspapers that are not corporately owned.
11. I also ran the models using OLS, which produces nearly identical results. This suggests that a negative binomial distribution is not necessary but I report these results, nevertheless, because they are most appropriate for the dependent variables.
12. One may be concerned with a story that has only two sentences. Yet, this only happened twice in the sample, with only twenty-two stories (about 7 percent of the sample) having sentences in the single digits.
13. What is more, a sample of twenty stories from the *Washington Post* that cover the range of dates in my sample are somewhat longer, at an average of nearly thirty-two sentences per stories.

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Biographical Notes

Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of North Texas. His research focuses on American political institutions, including the presidency, Congress, bureaucracy, and news media. His first book, *The President's Speeches: Beyond "Going Public,"* explores the impact of the president's signals on the adoption and implementation of public policy. He has also published in the *American Journal of Political Science, Political Research Quarterly, Presidential Studies Quarterly, Policy Studies Journal*, and *Congress and the Presidency*.

Address: Department of Political Science, University of North Texas, P.O. Box 305340, 1121 Union Circle, Denton, TX 76203-5340; phone: 940-565-2329; fax: 940-565-4818; e-mail: mes@unt.edu.