Local Media Coverage of Candidates for State Supreme Courts

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Abstract

What explains media coverage of state supreme court candidates? While the scholarly literature thoroughly examines media coverage of judicial decision-making, little is known about how members of the press cover candidates for the bench. This is an important omission as the campaign trail is one of the few places where voters and candidates directly interact with one another. In this research, I present new data regarding press coverage of candidates for state supreme courts between 2002 and 2014. I find that, similar to coverage of judicial opinions, members of the press are largely drawn to conflict. Nevertheless, recent setbacks in the news industry have cut into the rate of coverage candidates receive.

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1. Introduction

Critics of judicial elections often argue that voters are too uninformed to select judges or to hold them democratically accountable (Geyh 2003). Political science scholarship, however, suggests that voters are capable of participating so long as they have information about candidates for the bench (Bonneau and Hall 2009). For example, voters learn about judicial candidates, their qualifications, and policy positions sometimes directly from their campaigns (Hall 2015, Hall and Bonneau 2006, 2008), indirectly from sources such as special interest groups (Hojnacki and Baum 1992, Hughes 2019), or even the party with which candidates choose to affiliate (Klein and Baum 2001, Schaffner and Streb 2002).

Recent work submits that another indirect source of voter information in judicial elections comes from the press (Hughes 2020). As gatekeepers and agenda-setters, the media can help to make candidates for political office salient to the electorate. In the context of state judicial campaigns, local reporters help to convey information to voters such as a candidate’s experience, his or her policy positions, rulings in previous cases, or even the expected competitiveness of a given race. Hughes (2020) finds that as local reporting on state supreme court campaigns increases, voters are more likely to learn about and participate in these elections.

While previous works have evaluated the newsworthiness of judicial institutions or the disputes they resolve, few to date have rigorously examined why the media choose to cover some campaigns for the bench over others. In this research, I build upon established theory and test hypotheses using a new dataset of campaign media coverage of state supreme court candidates. The data span the years 2002 to 2014 and includes 561 candidacies across 36 states. Results indicate that when media report on candidates, incumbents enjoy an outsize advantage over challengers, but reporters also prioritize sensational news such as high-priced campaigns and mud-slinging. I conclude with a brief discussion of my findings in addition to areas that may prove fruitful for additional research.
2. News Coverage of Law and Courts

Given finite time and resources, members of the press must prioritize which stories merit their attention. The newsworthiness of a given phenomenon often relates to its potential novelty or impact for consumers, in addition to its likelihood of generating revenue via advertisements or investments in the news organization itself (Graber and Dunaway 2015, Hamilton 2004, McManus 1995). Novel political stories might involve scandals, mudslinging, or other sensational events that are relatively rare compared to the average stream of news. Impactful stories are those that are likely to be most relevant to an outlet’s subscribers. This could include stories relevant to the geographic area surrounding a news organization’s consumers—stories that are proximate or familiar to audience members. When stories are more novel or impactful, they are more likely to be profitable for the news organization and therefore garner coverage.

With respect to the judicial branch of government, law and courts scholars find broad support for the theoretical perspective of newsworthiness presented above (e.g., Vining and Marcin 2014). First, federal courts are typically more salient than are state courts (cf. Epstein and Segal 2000, Vining and Wilhelm 2010). Their opinions have broader geographic implications, and the substance of their opinions tends to have a greater effect upon American public policy. For these reasons, U.S. Supreme Court cases garner broad media coverage in national outlets such as the New York Times, which feature about 15 percent of all cases on their front page the day after they are decided (Epstein and Segal 2000). By contrast, state and local newspapers cover state courts of last resort far less frequently (Vining and Wilhelm 2011, Vining et al. 2010). Less than two percent of all state supreme court opinions receive front-page coverage the day after their announcement.

Despite limited media coverage at the state-level, the vast majority of cases in the United States are disposed there. Examining the content of cases the media chooses to cover helps us better to understand what makes them newsworthy. For example, news organizations are drawn to cases related to civil liberties such as privacy or the First Amendment and less prone to cover economic issues such as torts (Collins and Cooper 2012, Epstein and Segal 2000, Vining and Wilhelm 2010, Yanus 2009). News organizations are also
more likely to cover cases that feature declarations of unconstitutionality, dissenting opinions, or criminal appeals such as death sentences (Vining and Wilhelm 2010, 2011, Vining et al. 2010, Yanus 2009).

Even among death penalty cases—arguably the most salient type of case state courts handle—scholars find that the media tend to cover those with facts that are more novel or sensational. According to Vining, Wilhelm, and Collens (2015), newspapers are more likely to cover death penalty cases if the offender was a woman, if the number of murder victims was high, or if the court invalidated a death conviction or sentence. Conversely, newspapers are less likely to cover death cases that turn on procedural issues (Vining, Wilhelm, and Collens 2015).

The literature on media coverage of courts is largely focused upon the study of decided cases. But this is only one aspect of what can make a court or its members salient to the public. Unlike the federal courts, most state judges must run for election either to earn a seat on a court or to keep it. This involves a different kind of newsworthiness—the salience of judicial candidates and their campaigns for office. Limited scholarship has been devoted to this topic, but from the scant evidence that exists, scholars find that journalists cue off similar types of stories compared to their coverage of the case-law (Hughes 2020, Schaffner and Diascro 2007).

3. News Coverage of Judicial Candidates

Why are some candidates for the bench more newsworthy compared to others? This research question propels the remainder of the present study. In this section, I outline hypotheses for news coverage of candidates for state high courts based upon factors such as their campaign methods, the institutions for which they are running, their personal characteristics, and the health of the news industry as a whole.

3.1 Judicial Campaigns

Perhaps the most salient aspects of political campaigns occur on the hustings. To win over voters in a judicial election, candidates need to demonstrate that they have the requisite qualities, experience, temperament, and values voters prefer in a judicial representative (Hall 2001, Dubois 1979, Gill 2017). Voters, however, cannot know which candidate best represents their preferences if the candidates’
qualifications are never made known to them. Therefore, candidates must communicate with voters to share information with them.

One way candidates interact with constituents is by meeting them face-to-face. This can involve the candidate attending community gatherings, giving speeches to civic or religious organizations, or meeting with potential donors. For example, during his first campaign for chief justice, Alabama Republican Roy Moore visited with the Birmingham Kiwanis Club on one of his campaign stops (Reeves 2000). He gave a speech steeped in reverence for the American founders and then took questions from the roomful of business professionals. Engaging in such campaign activities requires funds to pay for fuel, lodging, meals, and so forth. Put simply, the more money candidates can raise, the more they should be able to spread their campaign messages through face-to-face meetings with constituents.

Candidate communication with voters can also take place indirectly. For example, candidates can pay to appear in television, radio, print, or social media advertisements. Mass forms of communication such as these are likely to enhance an individual’s exposure to the electorate compared to methods such as face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, these forms of communication require significantly greater sums of money compared to face-to-face communication.

During the 2014 Tennessee merit retention elections, for example, conservative interests tried to unseat three Democratically appointed Tennessee Supreme Court justices. In part, these groups claimed the justices had “advanced Obamacare.” The justices responded by spending $854,040 for 2,099 television advertisements. With these ads, the justices conducted a counter-campaign, arguing that criticisms related to themselves and the Affordable Care Act were “A complete whopper.” Instead, they argued, “Obamacare is a federal law. The Tennessee Supreme Court has nothing to do with that.” The three justices won their retention elections.

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2 Unfortunately for Roy Moore, the room soon turned hostile, engaging in a biting series of questions about his philosophy regarding the separation of church and state (Reeves 2000).
3 Storyboards from this campaign are available from the following address (last accessed 16 December 2019).
4 This storyboard is available from the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021).
5 Data are available from the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021).
Whether candidates communicate with voters directly or indirectly, they need campaign funds in order to maximize their exposure to prospective voters. If candidates struggle to raise and spend money, their candidacies should also struggle to garner media attention. If, however, candidates are able to raise and spend more campaign money, they will be able to disseminate their message to larger audiences and in increasingly salient forms. Therefore, I suspect that as candidates raise greater sums of money, their coverage in the press will be increasing, all things being equal.

Not only should greater exposure to the electorate increase a judicial candidate’s coverage in the press, but so too should the tone of their communication affect their campaign’s salience. Previous work on judicial elections identifies three types of messages judicial candidates might disseminate (Hall 2015). One is to promote a candidate’s campaign. Messages such as these often tout an individual’s experience, values, civic or religious memberships, and so on. For example, in 2006, Georgia Supreme Court justice Carole Hunstein ran for reelection. In promotional campaign messages, she boasted:

> With twenty-two years experience, she’s one of Georgia’s most respected judges…She’s tough and fair. Affirming two strikes and you’re out. Upholding the death penalty, and affirming tough sentencing for domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual predators….Representing Georgia values, protecting Georgia families, Supreme Court Justice Carole Hunstein.⁶

Unlike other types of campaign messaging, then, promotional forms of communications focus upon candidates themselves and make little or no mention of other candidates vying for the same position.

Standing opposite promotional messaging, contrast and attack advertising draws direct comparisons between a candidate and his or her competitors. The primary difference between contrast and attack messaging relates to tone and subject. Contrast messaging tends to focus more equally upon a candidate and his or her competitors, drawing differences between the two. For example, during the 2012 Kentucky Supreme Court elections, Will Scott contrasted himself with Janet Stumbo in a televised advertisement: “Former Justice Janet Stumbo sided with criminals fifty-nine percent of the time. Current

⁶ The storyboard for this advertisement is available from the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021).

Attack messaging focuses more upon the perceived flaws of an opponent and less upon a candidate’s own qualifications. Naturally, attack advertising tends to be more bellicose than promotional or contrasting messages. Attack messaging might focus upon an opponent’s policy positions, decision-making, endorsements, and so on. For example, during the 2010 Alabama Supreme Court race between Democrat Mac Parsons and Republican Tom Parker, Parsons attacked Parker’s integrity by claiming he didn’t pay his taxes.

Meet Tom Parker. He’s a Supreme Court justice who makes $160,000 a year. But Tom Parker doesn’t pay his taxes. The authorities hit Parker with thousands in…unpaid taxes while Parker’s been serving on Alabama’s Supreme Court. A supreme court justice who doesn’t pay his taxes. That’s really all you need to know about Tom Parker.  

Regardless of tone, I suspect that as candidates increase the frequency of their messaging, media coverage of their campaigns will be increasing. Nevertheless, I suspect that attacks on other candidates will garner greater media coverage compared to other types of messages. If newsworthiness is defined by sensationalism or impact as discussed above, then attacks on one’s competitors is clearly the most newsworthy form of communication. By comparison, promotional or contrasting messages are likely to be less salient to members of the press. Between the two, however, contrast advertising should be more newsworthy as it involves more conflict than promotional advertising does.

Finally, I suspect that some types of judicial campaigns will simply be more newsworthy compared to others. Competitive elections, for example, should be more likely to garner media attention such as horse-race coverage as the results of the contest are more uncertain compared to those campaigns in which one candidate—generally the incumbent—is expected to emerge victorious. Open elections do not have incumbent candidates and are often more competitive than closed elections. Without the incumbency advantage, competitors can compete on a more even footing. Therefore, I suspect that candidates running

\[7\] This storyboard is available from the following [address](last accessed 16 April 2021).
\[8\] This storyboard is available from the following [address](last accessed 16 April 2021).
for open supreme court positions will garner greater news coverage compared to campaigns featuring an incumbent.

3.2 Judicial Institutions

Not only are certain types of campaigns likely to be more salient to the media, but so too should candidates running in particular types of political institutions. For example, scholars find that partisan, competitive judicial elections are more salient both to the public and to the press compared to nonpartisan or uncompetitive ones (Bonneau and Hall 2009, Hughes 2020). Party labels give journalists an easy way to frame candidates, their judicial philosophies, or even the viability of their campaigns. Therefore, I suspect that candidates running with a party label will receive more news coverage compared to those who do not.

Similarly, elections with more than one candidate should be easier for journalists to cover compared to those with only one candidate (such as retention elections). In contested elections, competitors scrutinize one another’s records as they campaign for office. Compare this to uncontested elections where candidates are almost certain to achieve victory. These individuals rarely campaign on their own behalf; outside interests rarely oppose their candidacies; and even when they do they almost always fail in their effort (Aspin 2017, Hughes 2019). If outside interests don’t investigate an uncontested candidate, then members of the press will have to invest in their own research in order to report on these individuals. All things being equal, then, contested elections should receive greater rates of news coverage than uncontested elections.

Another institutional factor likely to affect media coverage of candidates for state high courts relates to the constituencies whose support candidates seek. In most states, candidates for supreme courts run at-large, but in some like Louisiana, candidates run within discrete geographic districts. Previous works find that district elections (particularly those that are nonpartisan) foster the incumbency advantage in part by fending off would-be challengers but also by depressing voter turnout (Hall 2001, 2007, Hall and

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9 See, however, work from Vining and Wilhelm (2010), which finds no clear pattern of media reporting across heterogeneous institutional designs.

10 This is especially true among third-party candidates.

11 Below, I further differentiate some the different types of judicial elections that occur absent the party label (nonpartisan, hybrid, and retention elections).
Because district campaigns are inherently more limited in scope compared to at-large elections, it is likely that reporters will take less notice of them.

Finally, an election’s timing might affect media interest in its candidates. While most states select judges at the same time as other state or federal office-holders, others choose these officers during party primaries. These primaries occur months before other state or federal representatives are chosen. Generally speaking, primary elections do not attract the same degree of voter interest compared to general elections. Therefore, I suspect that candidates whose seats are filled during primary elections will receive less coverage compared to those in which winners are chosen with other state or federal office-holders.

3.3 Judicial Candidates

Some judicial candidates are likely to be more or less salient compared to others. For example, incumbents are likely to be more newsworthy compared to challengers simply because they have been active in resolving disputes during the period leading up to an election. Covering incumbent candidates for state supreme courts will likely be easier for journalists compared to candidates with no such ready-made track record. Therefore, I suspect that incumbent candidates will garner greater rates of coverage compared to challengers.

Then again, not all incumbents may be created equal. For example, those appointed to their positions but who have yet to stand before the electorate may be less newsworthy compared to their colleagues who have successfully been returned to their positions. These types of interim appointees will not have served as long as other incumbents, ruled on as many cases, or written as many opinions. For these reasons, research finds that these individuals do not enjoy the same kinds of advantages as other incumbents. They are more likely to be challenged and less likely to win voters’ support compared to those who have won their positions previously (Hall 2001, Hall and Bonneau 2006). Therefore, I suspect that interim appointed candidates for state supreme court positions will receive less news coverage compared to others.

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12 A similar logic holds for elections to legislative positions such as the U.S. Senate. For example, Kahn (1991) finds that incumbents in uncompetitive races receive significantly greater newspaper coverage compared to challengers.
Just as not all incumbents are likely to be created equal, so too are challengers likely to differ with respect to their newsworthiness. Specifically, qualified challengers should garner greater media attention compared to unqualified challengers as they should run more competitive races compared to unqualified challengers. Quality challengers are those who have previous judicial experience or name recognition (Hall and Bonneau 2006). Unqualified challengers have little-to-no judicial experience, name recognition (or the campaign funds to generate such recognition), or belong to third-parties that don’t enjoy broad public support. I suspect that these less qualified individuals should attract less media attention compared to their more qualified counterparts.

Finally, demographic factors like race and gender might also affect a candidate’s newsworthiness. Traditionally, the American bench has been dominated by white males (e.g., Goelzhauser 2016, Haire and Moyer 2015). On the one hand, if the press are drawn to phenomena that are uncommon, they may cover racial minorities or female candidates at greater rates compared to white and male candidates. According to Goelzhauser (2016, p. 102), racial minorities made up just nine percent of all state supreme court justices between 1960 and 2014. During the same period, only 16 percent were female. On the other hand, members of the press could be systematically biased against covering minority candidates. Gill, Lazos, and Waters (2010), for example, find that Nevada attorneys consistently show signs of racial and gender bias such that female and nonwhite judges receive lower performance evaluations compared to white and male judges. It may be the case that reporters suffer from a similar kind of implicit bias.

### 3.4 State of the News Industry

News delivery and its consumption have undergone significant changes over the past 40 years—first with the introduction of the 24-hour cable news cycle and then with the advent of online, digital news (Miller and Reynolds 2014). These changes have largely come at the expense of daily newspapers. According to the Pew Research Center, advertising revenue among U.S. daily newspapers declined by approximately 62 percent, and employment in daily newsrooms declined by 47 percent between 2008 and 2018.\(^\text{13}\) During that

\(^{13}\) Pew data available from the following [address](last accessed 16 April 2021).
same span, newsrooms in general (e.g., television, radio, online, etc.) shed 25 percent of their workforce. Absent requisite human resources, media outlets cannot cover candidates for judicial positions as rigorously as they could were they fully staffed—a problem campaigns can strategically manipulate to earn more positive coverage (Darr 2016). Consequently, I anticipate that coverage of judicial candidates will be increasing as the number of employed reporters in a given state also increases.

4. Data and Statistical Methodology
I examine the newsworthiness of candidates for state courts of last resort between 2002 and 2014. I identify these individuals using data from state secretaries of state websites in addition to data found in Kritzer (2015). This research strategy yields 561 candidacies across 36 state courts of last resort. In what follows, I outline each variable and its operationalization in addition to the statistical methodology employed for the analysis below.

4.1 Dependent Variable
I operationalize my dependent variable as the amount of news coverage individual candidates for state high courts garner in the year leading up to their election dates (Coverage). Previous studies such as Schaffner and Diascro (2007) and Vining and Wilhelm (2010, 2011) examine judicial salience with respect to coverage in local newspapers. In a recent work, however, Hughes (2020) argues that operationalizing judicial salience via newspaper coverage could present difficulties. While daily newspapers lost close to half of their workforce between 2008 and 2018, employment figures in other newsrooms such as television and online outlets have remained relatively steady or have increased. Therefore, it is unclear if print news is the best possible measure for state supreme court candidate salience.

Hughes (2020) points out that picking the appropriate newspaper for analysis is itself problematic given the need to draw reasonable comparisons from state-to-state. Vining and Wilhelm (2011), for example, study the most widely circulated newspapers in each state. Some of these newspapers, however, are much

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14 Data are available at the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021).
15 I do not include in this analysis judges on either the Oklahoma or Texas criminal court of appeals. Nor do I include individuals who run uncontested for partisan, nonpartisan, or hybrid positions.
16 Data are from the Pew Research Center at the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021).
larger than others and may not even be owned by in-state interests.\textsuperscript{17} Schaffner and Diascro (2007) find that non-locally owned newspapers publish less local news compared to newspapers owned by local stakeholders. Alternatively, Vining et al. (2010) consider news coverage in capital city newspapers. While they find similar types of coverage compared to a state’s most circulated newspaper, they also find significantly less reporting compared to those organizations.

An additional problem with using newspapers to operationalize concepts such as candidate salience relates to where in the newspaper coverage of courts appears. Like Epstein and Segal (2000), Vining and Wilhelm (2010, 2011) restrict their analysis to the front page of a given newspaper such that a case is either coded to have been covered there or not. But as others have pointed out, most court coverage does not appear on the front page (Collins and Cooper 2012, Schaffner and Diascro 2007), and it seems somewhat unrealistic to think that back-matter coverage would go just as unnoticed as stories that were never reported in the first place. According to Schaffner and Diascro (2007), only about 14 percent of state supreme court candidates ever receive front-page coverage.

As a possible solution to these problems, Hughes (2020) proposes a measurement strategy for judicial salience that examines reporting by the Associated Press (AP). The AP employs on-the-ground reporters in 143 bureaus scattered throughout all fifty states. Reporters in these bureaus are exposed to the same political stimuli as are other local reporters such as those for newspapers or television. Indeed, local news outlets affiliated with the AP frequently print stories written by AP bureau reporters. Similar to Hughes (2020), then, I measure state supreme court candidate salience as an event count of the number of

\textsuperscript{17} Consider, for example, the case of the Los Angeles Times (LAT). In 2000, the Chicago-based Tribune Company acquired the LAT, beginning a saga of unrest at the news organization. In 2007, the company sold itself to Sam Zell, who promptly saddled the organization with $13 billion of debt. Within a year, Tribune Company dismissed scores of reporters and filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy as it sought to protect itself from the cratering American economy. After emerging from bankruptcy and consolidating its publishing business, Tribune rebranded itself Tronc in what would become a series of public relations disasters. In 2017, the LAT fired its senior editors. In 2018, one of its senior officials was accused of sexual harassment and anti-Semitism. That year, Tronc unsuccessfully opposed LAT employee efforts to unionize. It finally sold LAT to a private owner and changed the company name back to Tribune Publishing. The Chicago Tribune provides a detailed chronology of the unrest at Tribune Publishing (last accessed 16 April 2021).
AP State and Local Wire stories that mentioned a given candidate in the year leading up to an election.\textsuperscript{18} I identify these articles by searching for candidates’ names and the states in which they are running for office using LexisNexis.\textsuperscript{19} I present graphical summaries of this new source of data in Figure 1.

![Figure 1 about Here]

The average state supreme court candidate garnered 14.54 news stories leading up to his or her election date, though there is considerable variance in how these candidates are covered. In the northwest quadrant of Figure 1 is a histogram of candidate coverage. The distribution of coverage is highly right-skewed, demonstrating that most candidates don’t receive much media coverage, but among a select few, coverage is robust. The most widely covered candidate in the dataset (Warren McGraw of West Virginia) garnered 143 stories.\textsuperscript{20} Many candidates, however, merited scant attention. In fact, 6.56 percent of all candidates received no coverage whatsoever. Most of these individuals were either third-party candidates in partisan elections (37.83 percent) or judges running in retention elections (35.14 percent).

Indeed, retention eligible incumbents are among the least covered in the dataset. In the northeastern quadrant of Figure 1 appears the coverage rates for supreme court candidates across different institutions. We see that partisan, nonpartisan, and hybrid election candidates receive largely similar rates of coverage (approximately 17 news stories per candidate).\textsuperscript{21} Difference of means testing indicates that these figures are not statistically distinguishable from one another. Now compare candidates in competitive elections to those standing for retention. The average retention candidate garners only 8.77 news stories leading up to an election—nearly half the rate at which candidates in competitive elections are covered by the media.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Hughes (2020) finds that news reporting in the 12 months leading up to an election is highly correlated with coverage in the three and six month periods before an election, but the 12 month period offers greater variation.
\textsuperscript{19} More specifically, I entered into LexisNexis’ search field, “Candidate Name,” followed by the Boolean operator “AND,” followed by “State Name.”
\textsuperscript{20} Warren McGraw, a Democratic incumbent on the West Virginia Supreme Court, faced Republican Brent Benjamin in a highly contested, bitter campaign, which Benjamin ultimately won.
\textsuperscript{21} Candidates in partisan elections average 16.40 stories before an election. Candidates in nonpartisan elections average 17.56 stories. And candidates in hybrid elections average 17.05 stories before an election.
\textsuperscript{22} This difference of means is statistically significant ($t = 5.57$).
Finally, note from the southwestern quadrant of Figure 1 the changes in news coverage of state supreme court candidates over time. In the early 2000s, coverage was relatively commonplace as the average candidate attracted 19 news stories leading up to an election. As the decade progressed, however, news coverage tapered off, possibly due to constrictions in the news industry caused by the economic recession of 2008 and the increasing digitization of news consumption (Hughes 2020). While news coverage of state supreme court candidates regained some ground in 2012, by 2014, the downward trajectory had resumed such that candidates in 2014 averaged only 8.38 stories leading up to an election.

The new measure of candidate coverage has considerable face validity. The most widely covered candidates represent some of the most salient state supreme court campaigns in recent history. After Warren McGraw, Maureen O’Connor is the second most widely covered candidate due to her expensive contest against Tim Black for the Ohio Supreme Court in 2002. The candidates raised over $3 million and aired over 6,000 television advertisements. Ohio candidates in general are relatively newsworthy. Among the 25 most covered candidates in the dataset, three are from Ohio.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court is also well represented among the most highly covered campaigns. Of the ten most salient candidates, five ran in Wisconsin. This includes David Prosser, a justice who was said to have called the court’s chief justice, Shirley Abrahamson, “a total bitch” and who is also accused of having attempted to choke another justice, Ann Walsh Bradley. Abrahamson and Bradley also made the list. Alabama’s candidates for the bench are also among the most highly covered. Among the 25 most covered candidates, three hail from the Yellowhammer State. These are Roy Moore (the conservative firebrand made infamous for his clashes with the federal government), Tom Parker (a Roy Moore protégé),

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23 Elections in odd-numbered years are grouped with the even-numbered year following them.
24 Baum and Klein (2007) provide an in-depth analysis of this race.
25 Campaign finance data are available from the National Institute on Money in State Politics at the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021). Television advertising data are available from the Brennan Center for Justice’s annual series on judicial elections, Buying Time, available at the following address (last accessed 16 April 2021).
26 For a more detailed account of the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s scandals, see Caplan (2015).
and Drayton Nabors (the incumbent chief justice who narrowly lost to his Democratic rival, Sue Bell Cobb, in 2006, which was at the time the most expensive judicial campaign in American history).

4.2 Campaign Variables

I suspect that more expensive, visible, and churlish campaigns will be more likely to garner the media’s attention. Therefore, I include as independent variables measures of campaign expense and tone. First, I measure the amount of money a candidate for a state supreme court raised (Campaign Money). To account for inflation, I adjust all monetary figures into 2018 dollars. I then log this total to account for the diminishing effects additional campaign money is likely too have upon candidate salience. The mean level of money a candidate raised is $416,481.10. Nevertheless, this distribution is highly right-skewed as the median amount of money raised is only $108,599.50.

Next, I account for the tone of judicial campaigns. I gather the total number of television advertisements aired by a candidate or by a group on their behalf by their tone—attack, promote, or contrast. Only 11.52 percent of all candidates aired attack advertisements. As with campaign financing, attack advertising is highly skewed as the mean number of such ads aired by or on behalf of a candidate is 116.94 while the median rate was actually zero. By contrast, promotional advertisements are a more benign form of proselytization. On average, 35.64 percent of all candidacies for state courts of last resort are accompanied by promotional advertisements, and the average number aired for a given candidate is 411.96.

Finally, I control for contrast advertising. Contrast advertising is relatively rare as only 10.28 percent of candidacies aired any such ads. The average candidacy had only 70.95 contrast advertisements aired. One reason for this low figure is because no such advertisements were aired in retention elections as there is no candidate with whom to contrast the incumbent. Even still, when we omit these contests, only 14.80 percent of contested elections feature contrasting advertising.

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27 For a lengthier examination of the politics of the Alabama Supreme Court, see Hughes (2018).
28 Bonneau (2017) argues that campaign fundraising and spending in state supreme court elections are nearly indistinguishable.
29 Advertising data and coding for their tone come from the Brennan Center for Justice’s series on state high courts, Buying Time. Data are available here (last accessed 16 April 2021).
I therefore have three event count variables measuring the volume of television advertisements candidates or their surrogates aired on their behalf (Attack Ads, Promote Ads, and Contrast Ads). To account for the diminishing returns ever greater numbers of advertisements are likely to have on the media’s propensity to cover a candidate, I log each of these variables for the statistical regression below.

I collect one final variable relating to judicial campaigns, which is whether a seat is open (Open = 1 if yes, 0 otherwise). Open seats are those that have no incumbent running in them while closed seats are those in which an incumbent is one of the candidates. Open seats are somewhat uncommon in state supreme court elections as many vacancies are filled via temporary appointment. Only 23.05 percent of all campaigns were open between 2002 and 2014.

### 4.3 Institutional Variables

Next, I control for factors related to state institutions. First, I include dichotomous indicators for the type of election in which candidates run (Partisan, Nonpartisan, Hybrid, and Retention) where retention elections are the reference category. The majority of the campaigns for state supreme court positions are decided by retention elections (50.44 percent). Nonpartisan elections are the next most common type (26.41 percent), followed by partisan elections (15.73 percent), and then hybrid elections (7.42 percent). I suspect that candidates in competitive elections will not differ much with respect to one another’s news coverage but ought to garner more coverage than candidates for retention.

Next, I control for the type of district in which a candidate runs. In most states, candidates for the supreme court run at-large, but in others, candidates run within discrete geographic districts. I use a

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30 Partisan elections are like those for Congress or the presidency—candidates run under a political party’s banner and face one another in a competitive general election. Nonpartisan elections are similar insofar as they are competitive, but party labels are removed from the ballot. Hybrid elections blend features of partisan and nonpartisan elections. Political parties select nominees for the bench, but party labels are removed from the ballot. Retention elections are generally associated with states that use merit selection for their judiciaries. Under this scheme, elites appoint judges to the bench for a probationary term. After that term is up, incumbents face a retention election, allowing voters to decide to either return the judge to office or have elites appoint a replacement. Retention elections are nonpartisan and uncompetitive. Voters can merely vote to “retain” or “not retain.” They cannot vote for challengers or pick a judge’s replacement.
dichotomous variable to indicate whether a candidate ran in a geographic district \((\text{District} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise})\). Only 15.73 percent of all elections occurred in geographic districts.

Finally, I control for the timing of a given state supreme court election. While the majority of states select supreme court justices at the same time as they do other government officials such as the governor, legislators, etc., five pick winners during party primaries.\(^{31}\) I measure whether judicial elections occurred during a primary using a dichotomous variable \((\text{Primary} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise})\). Only 7.42 percent of all campaigns between 2002 and 2014 were decided during the primaries.

### 4.4 Candidate Variables

Next, I account for candidate-specific characteristics. First, I control for a candidate’s incumbency status with a dichotomous variable \((\text{Incumbent} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise})\). A slight majority of all candidates for state supreme courts are incumbents (52.30 percent). Nevertheless, 38.63 percent of these incumbents ran as interim appointees having yet to win elective office in their own rights. I control for these individuals with an additional dichotomous variable \((\text{Interim} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise})\).

Just as certain incumbents are more likely to garner coverage compared to others, so too will some challengers be more likely to attract news coverage, particularly those with previous judicial experience. I operationalize the quality of a challenger consistent with received wisdom (Hall and Bonneau 2006). If a challenger has previous judicial experience, I code them as a quality challenger \((\text{Quality Challenger} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise})\). Approximately 51.67 percent of all challengers are quality challengers. Finally, I include dichotomous indicators for candidates’ race and gender \((\text{Nonwhite} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise}; \text{Female} = 1 \text{ if yes, } 0 \text{ otherwise})\). Only 13.73 percent of all candidates for state supreme courts between 2002 and 2014 were nonwhite while 27.84 percent were women.

### 4.5 News Industry

To account for the health of the news industry, I control for the number of employed reporters in a given state and year per 1,000 residents \((\text{Reporters Per Capita})\). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics produces

\(^{31}\) These states are Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.
estimates of the number of employed news reporters and correspondents for every American state each year
in its series of reports, Occupational Employment Statistics.\textsuperscript{32} In order to account for the relative size of a
state in a given year, I divide these employment figures by a state’s population (in thousands).\textsuperscript{33}

Examining the rate of employment among reporters, I find that 0.17 reporters were employed for
every 1,000 residents in a given state and year across the period of analysis. But as Figure 2 makes clear,
there are significant trends in this rate over time. In Figure 2, I show the average per capita rate of employed
journalists in a state and year between the years 2002 and 2014. The trend line shows a downward trajectory
in the rate of employment. In 2002, the average state had 0.24 reporters employed per 1,000 residents, but
by 2014, that number had slipped to 0.15—a 39.4 percent decrease in employed journalists per capita.

4.6 Temporal Factors
Finally, I control for other sources of temporal heterogeneity not already captured by covariates in the
model using yearly fixed effects. For the analysis that follows, odd-numbered years are grouped with the
even-numbered years succeeding them, and the omitted variable for the analysis is the year 2002. In Table
1, I present descriptions and summary statistics for each variable in the analysis that follows.

4.7 Statistical Methodology
Because the dependent variable counts the number of news stories covering state supreme court candidates,
an event count regression is an appropriate estimation technique. Nevertheless, testing indicates that the
data are overdispersed. This means that there is heterogeneity in observations such that the expected count
of news coverage is not equal to its variance (a violation of assumptions in the Poisson regression model).\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} The data are available from the following internet address (last visited 16 April 2021).
\textsuperscript{33} I gather population figures from the Statistical Abstract of the United States for each year prior to 2010
(data available from the following internet address, last accessed 16 April 2021) and from the U.S. Census Bureau for
years 2010 to 2014 (data available from the following internet address, last accessed 16 April 2021).
\textsuperscript{34} Specifically, the Poisson regression model assumes a dispersion parameter, $\alpha$, equal to zero. Statistical
testing, however, indicates a dispersion parameter equal to 0.39 ($p < 0.000$). Because we can reject the null hypothesis
that $\alpha = 0$, a Poisson regression model is inappropriate.
Therefore, I instead present the results from a negative binomial regression, an event count model that allows the researcher directly to model overdispersion in the dependent variable.

Observations in the data are also nested within groups (in this case, states). This presents its own set of difficulties as unmodeled, group-level effects can influence outcomes in the dependent variable not only within but also across groups. For example, a major scandal enveloping a single state court could increase the salience of all candidates running for a position on that court and its neighboring courts. Failing to account for hierarchy in the data can lead to inefficient standard errors. Possible remedial approaches include estimating coefficients for dichotomous indicators for each group in the data or running separate regressions for each group. A more efficient approach, however, would be directly to model the variance that gives rise to these issues via multilevel modeling (Gelman and Hill 2007).

To account for group-level variance, I estimate a varying-intercept multilevel regression model. That is, each state gets its own intercept term, which allows us to examine the amount of variance across groups. If variance is minimal (substantial), then we can conclude that group-level factors have a negligent (important) effect upon the amount of news coverage state supreme court candidates receive. Estimating group-level intercepts also allows us to think about baseline rates of news coverage candidates receive across heterogeneous states. Smaller group-level intercepts indicate a lower baseline rate of news coverage while larger group-level intercepts indicate a higher baseline rate of news coverage.

5 Results

I present results from the statistical regression in Table 2. The first column shows the variables of interest, the second provides regression coefficients, the third coefficient standard errors, and the fourth column shows changes in the predicted outcome in the dependent variable given a change from one standard

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35 Multilevel models are often referred to interchangeably as hierarchical models, random effects models, and mixed effects models.

36 Statistical testing demonstrates that a multilevel model significantly improves upon model fit compared to a negative binomial regression model. Using a likelihood ratio test to compare the multilevel negative binomial to the single-level negative binomial produces: \( \chi^2 = 77.51 \) (\( p < 0.000 \)).
deviation less than a variable’s mean to one standard deviation greater than its mean (continuous-level variables) or a change from a variable’s minimum to its maximum (dichotomous variables).

[Table 2 about Here]

Table 2 also includes estimates relating to the random effects components of the multilevel model. We see significant variance in the state-level intercepts, indicating that in some states, candidates are simply more likely to garner news coverage compared to others. Further scrutiny indicates that the states with the lowest baseline rates of news coverage are Georgia, Colorado, Louisiana, Texas, and North Carolina while those with the highest baseline rates of coverage include Florida, Wisconsin, Indiana, West Virginia, and Missouri.

Turning now to the results from the model, we see good evidence that members of the press cue their coverage of state supreme court candidates upon the expense and tone of their campaigns. When candidates raise large sums of money and air churlish television advertisements, journalists are more likely to cover their campaigns. Examining the results from Table 2, we see that a change from one standard deviation less than the average candidate’s campaign funds to one standard deviation greater than the average candidate’s campaign funds increases the predicted number of news stories covering her campaign from approximately 7 to 24 (a 237 percent increase in coverage).

Attack and contrast advertising in judicial campaigns are also important indicators of press coverage. We see that a change in a candidate’s volume of attack advertising from one standard deviation less than average to one standard deviation greater than average increases the predicted number of news stories covering the candidate from around 14 to 17 (a nearly 23 percent increase in reporting). Contrast advertising is similarly predicted to increase media coverage but at a smaller rate compared to attack advertising. An increase in contrast advertising from one standard deviation less than average to one standard deviation greater than average increases the predicted number of news stories a candidate receives by approximately two (a 13 percent increase in the rate of coverage).

That attack advertising generates greater news coverage compared to contrast advertising makes sense if reporters are drawn to sensational types of behavior. In contrast to these more churlish forms of
communication, I find little evidence that promotional television ads increase media coverage of state supreme court candidates. Put simply, messages that tout a candidate’s career experiences, organizational memberships, and so on, are not very sensational compared to ads in which candidates criticize or attack one another and are less likely to be covered by the media.

I am able to reject the null hypothesis for one additional campaign related variable, which holds that candidates running for open state supreme court seats are more likely to garner media coverage compared to races in which an incumbent runs. According to the results in Table 2, candidates running for open seats attract nearly three more news stories than if they were running in a closed election (an 18 percent increase in coverage). Because open elections are typically more competitive than closed ones, their outcome is often more uncertain, which may increase news coverage of the candidates.

Note that for none of the institutional control variables am I able to reject the null hypothesis. I find little evidence that election systems significantly affect rates of news coverage—a somewhat surprising result given how little coverage retention election candidates receive compared to candidates running in competitive institutions but consistent with results presented in Vining and Wilhelm (2010). Furthermore, I find no significant evidence that candidates running in elections that take place during primaries or within discrete geographic districts are covered any less than candidates running in general or statewide elections.

Compared to institutional controls, I find better support for candidate-specific hypotheses. All things being equal, incumbent candidates can expect to garner approximately 10 more news stories leading up to an election compared to challengers (a 73 percent increase in the rate of coverage). Doubtless much of this increase in salience is attributable to their role as government policy-makers, disposing of cases regularly in the runup to an election (Hughes 2020). Nevertheless, I find that interim-appointed incumbents receive approximately three fewer articles compared to other types of state supreme court candidates (a nearly 21 percent decrease in reporting).

Other candidate-specific controls, however, fail to reject the null hypothesis. I find little evidence that quality challengers attract greater rates of news coverage compared to other candidates. Likewise, I find little evidence that members of the press cue their coverage off of candidates’ race or gender. This is
particularly interesting given previous research finding that voters and elites alike look to candidates’ demographics when evaluating their qualifications for the bench (e.g., Gill and Eugenis 2019; Gill, Lazos, and Waters 2010). That members of the press do not appear to weigh race or gender when exercising their roles as gatekeepers (to say nothing of the content of such coverage) should be of interest to those examining the difficulties minorities face in winning state supreme court elections.

I conclude this section with an examination of variables measuring the health of the news industry along with temporal effects in reporting. First, note that as the rate of reporters in a given state and year increase, so too does the rate of coverage for state supreme court candidates. From the results presented in Table 2, we see that an increase from one standard deviation less than the average rate of employed journalists to one standard deviation greater than average increases the predicted number of articles covering a candidate by nearly four (a 27 percent increase in coverage). Clearly, if there are to be news reports on state supreme court candidates, a labor force of reporters is necessary to provide them. Given that journalism as a profession has shed a significant proportion of its workforce in recent years, these results suggest that the public will either know less about candidates for the bench or will need to rely upon other sources of information than the news to fill the gap.

Finally, note that, despite having controlled for a declining workforce of reporters, the temporal controls suggest that other, unmodeled factors also contribute to the declining rate of state supreme court candidate coverage. According to the results presented in Table 2, candidates running in 2002 could expect to garner approximately 23 news stories before an election. By the year 2014, that figure had fallen to approximately 10 stories (roughly a 57 percent decrease in news coverage). At this time, we can only speculate as to what is causing this trend, but future works might consider other ways in which the local news industry has evolved since the early 2000s. Such trends might include the transition to online news, the acquisition of locally-owned media outlets by national conglomerates, or the outright closure of locally owned outlets.
6 Conclusion

In this research, I asked why local journalists report on some candidates for state supreme courts compared to others. I gathered and analyzed a new dataset of media coverage of state supreme court candidates spanning the years 2002 to 2014. This research strategy yielded reporting figures on 561 candidates for positions on 36 state supreme courts. Consistent with scholarly research on press coverage of judicial decision-making, I find that reporting on judicial campaigns is largely drawn to conflict and spectacle. Candidates for state courts of last resort are likely to garner press coverage as they raise and spend more money and as their campaign messages become increasingly churlish.

I also found that reporters condition their coverage of candidates based upon factors specific to the candidates themselves. For example, candidates for open seats receive more coverage compared to candidates—particularly challengers—who run when an incumbent is on the ballot. And while incumbents enjoy an outsize advantage in attracting news coverage, interim-appointed incumbents struggle by comparison. Other candidate-specific factors like demographics failed to account for news coverage, and I found virtually no evidence that institutional factors such as ballot type or district size affect reporting on state supreme court candidates.

One finding from this research that is likely to be of interest to those studying democratic linkages in American courts relates to the stark decline in campaign reporting since the early 2000s. In a little over a decade, reporting on state supreme court candidates more than halved. Part of this trend is doubtless attributable to widespread layoffs among state and local reporters. Nevertheless, results from the statistical model indicate that this is only part of the story. What explains the recent dearth of reporting will require greater scrutiny, but the implications for such a trend are noteworthy.

For example, Hughes (2020) finds that greater rates of reporting in state supreme court elections are associated with greater rates of voter participation. If voters lose a valuable source of information regarding candidates for the bench, they may be less likely to participate in choosing their judges. Future research will need to assess whether a receding news industry—defined by staff layoffs, the accumulation
of local news outlets by national corporations, the scale-back in circulation, or the outright dissolution of local media outlets—decreases voter information or participation in judicial elections.

Declines in the news industry may also have important implications for how judges condition their behavior on the bench. Incumbents seeking reelection have incentives to make popular decisions, particularly in cases that involve salient issue areas such as the death penalty (Brace and Boyea 2008, Hall 1987). A limited research agenda finds that judges are more likely to pander to popular preferences when their decisions are covered by the press (Cann and Wilhelm 2011). Nevertheless, these findings are based upon reporting and judicial decision-making from the late 1990s and are in need of an update. It remains an outstanding question in the scholarly literature whether local reporters continue to hold such sway over judicial decision-making. If, as Hughes (2020) argues, it is the case that decreased rates of media coverage are associated with lower rates of voter participation in judicial elections, it stands to reason that a receding news industry could make judicial pandering less rational as voters become less informed regarding judges’ decision-making.

7 References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>$\bar{X}(\sigma)$</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>Dependent Variable: Total number of A.P. stories covering state supreme court candidate in 12 months before election</td>
<td>14.54 (16.73)</td>
<td>0, 143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Money</td>
<td>Total amount of money candidate raised for candidacy, in 2018 dollars, logged</td>
<td>8.27 (6.05)</td>
<td>0, 15.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack Ads</td>
<td>Total number of attack ads aired to support candidate, logged</td>
<td>0.71 (2.03)</td>
<td>0, 8.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Ads</td>
<td>Total number of promote ads aired to support candidate, logged</td>
<td>2.22 (3.12)</td>
<td>0, 8.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast Ads</td>
<td>Total number of contrast ads aired to support candidate, logged</td>
<td>0.59 (1.81)</td>
<td>0, 7.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was open (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.42)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was a partisan race (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.42)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was a nonpartisan race (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.33 (0.47)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was a hybrid race (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.34)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was a retention race (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.30 (0.46)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was held in a district (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.35)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court race was held during a primary (“1” if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.26)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court candidate was an incumbent (“1 if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.52 (0.50)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Incumbent</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court candidate was an interim incumbent (“1 if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.40)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Challenger</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court candidate was a quality challenger (“1 if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.43)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court candidate was nonwhite (“1 if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.34)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Whether a state supreme court candidate was female (“1 if yes, “0” otherwise)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.45)</td>
<td>0, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporters Per Capita</td>
<td>Number of employed reporters in a given state and year per 1,000 residents.</td>
<td>0.17 (0.09)</td>
<td>0.01, 0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Dichotomous fixed effects for each even-year election cycle (2002 omitted)</td>
<td>2008 (1.98)</td>
<td>2002, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Local media coverage of candidates for state supreme courts (2002-2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>$\Delta \hat{Y}_{i,k}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Money</td>
<td>0.100*</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>7.16 → 24.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack Ads</td>
<td>0.051*</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>14.07 → 17.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Ads</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast Ads</td>
<td>0.033*</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>14.80 → 16.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>0.163*</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>15.20 → 17.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>-0.174</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>0.551*</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>12.40 → 21.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Incumbent</td>
<td>-0.233*</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>16.48 → 13.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Challenger</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.063</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporters Per Capita</td>
<td>1.324*</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>14.11 → 17.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2004</td>
<td>-0.159</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2006</td>
<td>-0.313*</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>22.64 → 16.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2008</td>
<td>-0.615*</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>22.64 → 12.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2010</td>
<td>-0.578*</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>22.64 → 12.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2012</td>
<td>-0.259*</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>22.64 → 17.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2014</td>
<td>-0.849*</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>22.64 → 9.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\hat{\beta}_0$ | 1.402* | 0.252 |
$\sigma^2_{\hat{\beta}_0}$ | 0.227* | 0.073 |
$\ln (\alpha)$ | -0.935* | 0.082 |

Notes: Table entries are the result of a hierarchical negative binomial statistical regression. The dependent variable is a count of news stories covering a candidate for a position on a state supreme court. $N = 561$. Wald $\chi^2 = 340.28*$. Asterisks indicate that $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed). Changes in predicted numbers of news articles ($\Delta \hat{Y}_{i,k}$) represent a change in one standard deviation less than a variable’s mean to one standard deviation greater than its mean (continuous-level variables) or a change from its minimum to maximum (dichotomous variables). The mean of the group-level intercepts is given by $\hat{\beta}_0$, and the variance in these intercepts is represented by $\sigma^2_{\hat{\beta}_0}$. Finally, $\ln (\alpha)$ represents the natural log of the dispersion parameter.
Figure 1: Media coverage of state supreme court candidates
Figure 2: Average rate of employed reporters in a given state and year (per 1,000 residents) with 95 percent confidence intervals