

**THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION
OF NEWSPAPER ENDORSEMENTS
IN U.S. ELECTIONS, 1940-2002¹**

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Abstract

We measure which candidates newspapers endorse in state and federal elections from 1940 to 2002. One sample focuses on the largest circulation newspapers in the United States from 1940 to 2002. A second sample examines 65 newspapers, representing all regions of the country, over the period 1986 to 2002. We document two important features of newspaper endorsements. First, newspapers have shifted from strongly favoring Republicans in the 1940s and 1950s, to dividing their editorial endorsements roughly equally between the parties. Today, Democratic candidates are about 10 percent more likely to receive an endorsement than Republican candidates. Second, newspaper editorials have come to favor heavily those already in office. Incumbents today receive the endorsement about 90 percent of the time. In the 1940s, incumbents received endorsements only about 60 percent of the time. The consequence of this shift, we estimate, is to increase incumbents' vote margins, on average, .2 to 1 percentage points.

1. Introduction

Newspapers and other media have two important effects on elections. First, they convey basic information to the public about the candidates running for election and the circumstances of the election. Second, newspapers may attempt to influence the electoral process through their editorial decisions, especially endorsements of candidates. While the amount of information conveyed is surely the more important, it is often thought that journalists report the important events of the day fairly.¹ Endorsements involve a very different sort of information. When newspapers endorse they take sides, and endorsements usually come at critical times in the campaign. Endorsements are a conscious political act. As such they reveal the political orientation of the press.

An extensive social science literature has examined the effects of endorsements on the informedness, preferences, and behavior of newspaper readers and the electorate in general. A range of studies of aggregate election results, survey data, and laboratory experiments find that endorsements typically increase the vote share of the endorsed candidate by about 1 to 5 percentage points.²

To understand the electoral consequences of newspapers' political activities, though, one must also know who newspapers tend to endorse and how frequently they take a political stance. We seek to answer two questions. Do newspaper editorials show a particular partisan orientation? Do newspaper endorsements show a strong incumbency or insider orientation? A premise of this study, which we will revisit toward the end of this paper, is that endorse-

¹Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) find no evidence of correlation between editorial content and reporting.

²The literature is extensive. Here is a sampling of the range of estimated effects: Robinson (1974) found an effect of 3 percentage points; Robinson (1976) reports a zero or even negative effect; Erickson (1976) finds a 5 percent effect; Krebs (1998) finds a 5 percent effect; Hollander (1979) finds a 5 percent effect; Goldenberg and Traugott (1981) find a large 16 percent effect, that is statistically insignificant due to the small sample size; Lessem (2003) finds a 1.5 percent effect. Several studies examine measures of relationships between endorsements and voting that are not immediately translated into the effect of an endorsement on voting. Bullock (1984) finds a large effect of the Atlanta Constitution's endorsements on racial cross-over voting. Lieske (1989) shows substantial and significant effects on vote totals of candidates. Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) show modest but significant effects of editorial content on vote preference. MacKuen and Coombs (1981) find strong correlations between endorsements and voter defection rates, but do not control for other factors, such as incumbency.

ments do affect individuals who read them. We seek to document the actual behavior of newspapers and the total amount of endorsing that occurs. With that information we may extrapolate what the total effect of endorsements is on electoral competition today, and over time. We seek to measure whether the variation in newspaper endorsements can explain the magnitude of incumbency voting or the partisan division in the electorate. Given the extensive psychological research, what is needed to assess the potential impact of endorsements on U.S. elections is careful measurement of the endorsement behavior of newspapers.

In addition, we hope to contribute to the continuing debate over the ideological slant of the news media. Popular books and commentaries, such as Rowse (2000), widely assert various biases in the media. These books are highly entertaining and occasionally even contain hard facts. Many academic studies typically find little or no ideological bias in reporting (*e.g.*, Robinson and Sheehan, 1983), though some recent studies document propensities of some outlets to rely more on conservative experts and other outlets to rely more on liberal experts (Brady and Ma, 2003; Groseclose and Milyo, 2004). Information compiled by Editor and Publisher reveals that newspapers endorsements overwhelmingly favored Republican candidates from the 1940s through the 1980s, and in the 1992 and 1996 campaigns were evenly divided between the Democratic and Republican candidates (Niemi and Weisberg 2000).

In this paper, we study the political orientation of the endorsements of a large number of newspapers today and a smaller set over a 60 year span. We study endorsements for a large number of offices – U.S. House and Senate, governor, and other statewide offices. Our goal is to document the political orientations of papers, but we do not seek, in this paper, to explain their behavior. That awaits future research.

We document three important patterns. First, since 1940, the amount of newspaper endorsing has grown substantially. Second, partisanship has decreased dramatically. Most of the newspapers in this study endorsed Republicans by a ratio of two to one, when they endorsed candidates in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Today, the party balance in endorsements is roughly equal. Third, papers today overwhelmingly favor incumbents. Newspapers, then,

mirror the broader changes in our electoral system.

2. Data

We collected newspaper editorial endorsement data from 67 newspapers across the country using the Lexis-Nexis database, newspaper websites, and microfilm in various libraries. The exact years covered varies by newspaper. The appendix (Table A.1) lists each newspaper and the years searched. We recorded endorsements from 15 newspapers for the period from 1940 to 2002. For the rest of the newspapers, we only collected endorsements in recent years. In the analysis looking at changes in endorsements over time, we only used the newspapers with data from 1940 to 2002. We used all of the newspapers in the sections that looked at the endorsement effect only in the current time period.

When gathering data using Lexis-Nexis or newspaper online sources, we searched using the keyword phrases “election” and “editorial,” or simply the keyword “endorsement,” limiting the date from October 10th to November 8th of the election year. This was done for every year where the website stored the archives of the newspaper. For microfilm sources, we searched for endorsements in the editorial pages during the same time frame. If a paper reprinted a list of its endorsements prior to an election, we used that information to record which candidates were endorsed in that year. If the paper did not list its endorsements, we found the individual articles where the newspaper stated its endorsements in each race.

The unit of analysis is race in which a newspaper in the sample could have reasonably made an endorsement. For each newspaper, we recorded the endorsements for all statewide races (Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, etc.), the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives.³ In addition, some newspapers made endorsements for races in adjacent states – for example, the *New York Times* makes endorsements for races in New Jersey and Connecticut. We also recorded these endorsements.

Newspapers present their editorial political endorsements in a wide range of ways. Some-

³There is one exception: we do not yet have endorsement data for U.S. House elections in 2002.

times, newspapers stated that they endorsed the entire Democratic or Republican slate. In this case, we recorded it as an endorsement for all candidates of that party in statewide races and in congressional races in districts within the circulation of the newspaper.

More commonly, newspapers single-out individual candidates in specific races. We defined five different options for the endorsement status of each candidate in statewide elections by every newspaper that endorsed in the state. The newspaper could endorse the candidate, endorse one of the opponents, not endorse in the race but endorse in other races in that state and year, or not endorse in any races in that state and year. We also recorded if we did not search that newspaper for endorsements in that year.

For House races, a sixth possible category arises when the district is not plausibly within the newspaper's readership. To capture the relevant districts in a newspaper's circulation, we studied congressional district maps from each decade to determine the location of a district relative to the circulation area of the newspaper. In House races with no endorsement, we distinguished between cases when the circulation of the newspaper included voters in a given district. We dropped cases when the Congressional district was in the state of a newspaper but the newspaper did not circulate in that district.

Sometimes, newspapers did not endorse in any races in a year. When we examined the newspaper's propensity to endorse, we included these races to show that fewer endorsements were being made. However, when estimating the effect of incumbency on endorsements, we dropped those cases. The lack of an endorsement was likely due to the choice of the newspaper to not make any endorsement and had no relation to the characteristics of the candidates in particular races. In the regression analysis, we examined only cases when an endorsement was made or when the newspaper endorsed in other races in that year.

We combined the endorsement information with data on incumbency status, previous officeholder status, and election results. These data are from a variety of sources; see Ansolabehere and Snyder (2002) for details.

One feature of the data is a steady upward trend in the overall propensity for newspapers

to make endorsements.⁴ For our sample of major newspapers, on average the newspapers made endorsements in 37 percent of the races during the period 1940-55, 56 percent during the period 1956-1969, 76 percent during the period 1970-1985, and 83 percent during the period 1986-2002 (see Appendix Table A.2 for a breakdown by newspaper). There is also a tendency to endorse more at the top of the ticket than down below. Since 1986, newspapers endorsed in 84 percent of gubernatorial races, 78 percent of U.S. Senate races, and 95 percent of U.S. House races, but only 66 percent of downballot races (this is based on our entire sample).

Although these facts are not the focus of this paper, they may be instructive about the extent of newspapers' political activity and influence, and their motivation. For example, it is interesting that newspapers are active in races where there is already a large supply of information (governor, U.S. senator), but relatively inactive in the low-information races where we might expect their endorsements to have the largest affect on voter behavior. Careful analysis of these questions await future study.

3. Party and Incumbency

Careful reading of the endorsements immediately suggested an important trend. Over the last 60 years, newspapers shifted from a focus on parties to a focus on individual candidates.

In the earlier years, newspapers tended to provide detailed explanations supporting their decisions. Newspapers frequently endorsed a specific party instead of the candidates. The specific attributes of each candidate were often not mentioned, and the newspaper would suggest that their voters either "Vote Republican" or "Vote Democratic." In these cases, they would explain why a party would better serve the nation and state. In 1954, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* urged its readers to vote for the Republican candidates. They wrote, "To uphold President Eisenhower and assure the advancement of his progressive policies,

⁴For each newspaper and year, we found the total number of races in the state and the number of those in which the newspaper made an endorsement. We did not include House races in districts outside the circulation of the newspaper. However, we did include the data from years in which a newspaper did not endorse in any race in a year.

be sure to vote for all the candidates for Congress running as Republicans.” The editorial argued on behalf of the Republican party and not the individual candidates.

As time progressed, however, endorsements became more focused on individual candidates. Newspapers detailed their reasons for supporting each candidate that they endorsed. In the 1976 race for Senator from Rhode Island, the *Providence Journal Bulletin* endorsed John Chafee for Senator by writing a detailed article explaining their choice. The editorial ended, “Practical experience in office, a proven concern for the needs of people, and a working knowledge of the Washington scene qualify John Chafee as unquestionably the best choice for United States Senator.” This shows a clear consideration to the attributes of the candidates running for the office. Incumbency was an important factor in helping a candidate receive an endorsement.

Recent editorials show the emergence of a new trend. Many newspapers write editorials explaining their choices in many of the races in the weeks leading up to the election. These editorials, however, tend to be shorter than in the past. In addition, these newspapers frequently list their endorsements in all races on one of the days prior to an election. Therefore, many voters will only see endorsements in races based on this list; voters cannot learn the rationale behind the endorsements.

These trends in endorsements suggest that editorial staffs have shifted from focusing on party to focusing on the personal characteristics of the candidates, especially incumbency. Statistical analysis of the incidence and orientation of endorsements reveal the extent of this shift.

3.1. The Effects of Party and Incumbency on Endorsements Over Time

We used a regression analysis to estimate the effect of party affiliation and incumbency on endorsement behavior. We employed the following variables. Let i index offices, let j index newspapers, let t index years, and let d denote decades. Let

$$E_{ijt} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if newspaper } j \text{ endorses Democrat for office } i \text{ in year } t \\ -1 & \text{if newspaper } j \text{ endorses Republican for office } i \text{ in year } t \\ 0 & \text{if newspaper } j \text{ makes no endorsement for office } i \text{ in year } t \end{cases}$$

There are 31 cases in our sample where a newspaper endorsed both candidates in a race. We drop these from our analysis. Also, let

$$I_{ijt} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if Democrat for office } i \text{ in year } t \text{ is only incumbent} \\ -1 & \text{if Republican for office } i \text{ in year } t \text{ is only incumbent} \\ 0 & \text{if otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Note that after redistricting there are some U.S. House races with two incumbents running, in which case $I_{ijt} = 0$. There are 41 such cases in our sample. If we drop them the results are unchanged. Finally, we use previous electoral experience to measure non-incumbent quality. Specifically, define a “high-quality” candidate as a candidate who currently holds a U.S. House seat or an elected statewide office other than the office sought. Let

$$Q_{ijt} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if Democrat for office } i \text{ in year } t \text{ is only high quality non-incumbent} \\ -1 & \text{if Republican for office } i \text{ in year } t \text{ is only high quality non-incumbent} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

We estimated the following simple linear models, exploiting the panel nature of the data.

$$E_{ijt} = \alpha_{jt} + \beta_1 I_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \tag{1}$$

$$E_{ijt} = \alpha_{jt} + \beta_1 I_{ijt} + \beta_2 Q_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \tag{2}$$

$$E_{ijt} = \alpha_{jd} + \theta_t + \beta_1 I_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \tag{3}$$

$$E_{ijt} = \alpha_{jd} + \theta_t + \beta_1 I_{ijt} + \beta_2 Q_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \tag{4}$$

Models (1) and (2) employ newspaper-year fixed-effects (α_{jt}) to capture the underlying partisanship of each newspaper – in these models newspapers are allowed to change their partisan leanings in every year. Models (3) and (4) are more parsimonious, and only allow newspapers to change their partisanship every decade (at the year ending in 0). These models also include year fixed-effects (θ_t) to capture partisan tides.

We estimated the models separately for four different time periods, allowing the parameters to vary freely across the periods. The periods are 1940-1955, 1956-1969, 1970-1985,

and 1986-2002, and were chosen based on well-known findings in the literature on the incumbency advantage in elections. The first period corresponds to a period in which the incumbency advantage was small, the second corresponds to the period of “take-off” during which the incumbency advantage rose sharply, the third corresponds to a period of further but more gradual growth in the incumbency advantage, and the fourth corresponds to the current period of a high and relatively stable incumbency advantage.

Table 1 shows the estimates for the coefficients in the above regressions. The numbers show a steady increase on the coefficient on incumbency over time, which signifies a large growth in pro-incumbent endorsing. A coefficient of .14, as in the first entry in the table, means that incumbents received 14 percent more endorsements. If the local newspaper made endorsements in every race, then incumbents are predicted to receive endorsements 57 percent of the time and challengers 43 percent of the time. A coefficient of .60 implies that incumbents receive endorsements 80 percent of the time and challengers receive endorsements 20 percent of the time.

[Table 1]

These figures point to a transformation of the editorial orientation of newspapers. In the 1940s and 1950s, incumbents received 1.3 endorsements for every endorsement challengers received. By 2000, incumbents received 4 endorsements for every endorsement the challengers received.

As incumbency rose, party influence declined. As with incumbency, the party effect is estimated for each of the 4 time periods through the fixed effects in the model. For each year, we calculated each newspapers fixed effects – the α_i 's. We then averaged the absolute value of α_i for each of the four time periods to calculate the aggregate effect of party on receiving an endorsement. We compared these values to the coefficients on incumbency for the same time periods. These results are shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows a relative decline in the effect of party from 1940 to 2002, indicating that partisanship in the newspapers decreased. As the importance of party decreased, the significance of incumbency in receiving an endorsement increased.

3.2. The Effects of Party and Incumbency on Endorsements in the Current Era

A much more extensive sample of newspapers is now available electronically through newspapers' own websites and through Lexis-Nexis and similar services. We compiled a database on 67 newspapers for the most recent years. These papers are listed in the appendix. For most of the papers, the data cover the years 1994 through 2002, though for some information is available back to 1970.

We use the larger sample to validate the over-time analysis and to provide a deeper picture. The smaller sample since 1940 provides a highly informative picture over a long period of time, but might be somewhat misleading because of the mix of papers. The larger cross-section allows us to check whether the picture that emerges from the last decade of the time series reflects newspaper coverage more broadly. Specifically, do less prominent newspapers or papers reflecting other regions show similar patterns of partisan and incumbency coverage?

We performed a statistical analysis similar to that described above to measure the party and incumbency orientation of the papers. The estimates reflect the propensity to endorse one party over another, given incumbency, and the propensity to endorse incumbents, conditional on the party endorsed. Party is measured as the average Democratic share of endorsements for each paper, and is captured with an effect for each paper. Incumbency is measured using an indicator of whether a politician is an incumbent in races where incumbents run. A second sort of candidate endorsement occurs in these data. In open seat elections, newspapers show a tendency to pick politicians who already hold office over those who do not currently hold office. We capture this effect with an indicator of candidates who hold office, but are not incumbents in the office sought. We estimated Models 1 and 2 from the specified regressions, using a newspaper year fixed effect to measure party influence. The estimated effects of office holding and party are shown in Table 2.

[Table 2]

Our analysis of the cross-section of recent papers reveals that incumbents and those with

prior electoral experience receive a disproportionate share of newspaper endorsements. The coefficients imply that when an incumbent faces a challenger who has not previously held office, newspapers today endorse the incumbent four out of five times, and the challenger only one in five times. When there is an open seat involving a candidate who has previously held office and one who has not, the experienced candidate receives the endorsement 63 percent of the time.

These findings suggest a strong propensity of newspaper editorial pages to favor those who currently hold office. Of course, this might reflect the candidates themselves. Those already in office have experience and a record to run on. In the United States today those factors matter not only to voters, but to the media.

Of note, the results in Table 2 are strikingly similar to the results for 1986 to 2002 in Table 1. The effect of incumbency on endorsements is .60 in Table 1 for the period 1986 to 2002; it is .57 in Table 2. We conclude from this fact that the sample of papers studied over time, then, reflects the more general patterns of endorsements by newspapers throughout the country.

In short, newspapers have become less partisan, and they have become more oriented toward incumbents and other office holders.

3.3. The Changing Partisanship of Newspaper Endorsements

Perhaps the most widely and intensely debated issue in the study of the media is whether the press has a partisan or ideological slant. Endorsements provide a direct measure of the partisan orientation of the press when the papers consciously choose to enter in the electoral arena. *Editor and Publisher* tabulate the number of papers endorsing Democratic and Republican presidential candidates each year. Until the 1990s, the press showed a very strong *Republican* bias, and in 1996 newspaper endorsements split evenly between the two major party candidates, Clinton and Dole.⁵

⁵Niemi and Weisberg (2000) report the rates at which newspapers endorse Republicans and Democrats for president. They show that, from the 1940s through the 1980s, about 50 percent of newspapers endorsed Republican candidates and about 10 percent of newspapers endorsed Democratic candidates. The discrepancy

A strikingly similar pattern emerges in newspaper endorsements of other federal and statewide elections. From the 1940s through the 1960s, the major newspapers in the country (our smaller sample) heavily favored Republicans in their endorsements. Today, newspapers, on average, are evenly split, or lean slightly Democratic.

The newspaper-specific fixed effects from the regressions in Tables 1 and 2 provide estimates of each newspaper's propensity to endorse Democrats rather than Republicans, after controlling for incumbency status. For each election year, we calculated the average tendency to endorse Democrats over Republicans to obtain the average "partisan bias" in newspaper endorsements for that year. Figure 2 shows this bias for the sample of major newspapers, over the period 1940-2002. Points above the zero line indicate that newspapers were more likely to endorse Democrats, while points below the zero line show that they were more likely to endorse Republicans.

[Figure 2]

In the 1940s and 1950s, newspapers on the whole favored Republicans over Democrats by roughly 2:1. Since then, newspapers have trended toward the Democrats, and by the 1970s, the Republican advantage in endorsements had vanished. Newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s split their endorsements between the parties evenly. In the 1990s, newspapers exhibited a slight tendency toward Democrats, endorsing Democratic candidates about 10 percent more often than Republicans.

Considering the remarkable trend in Figure 2 it is perhaps not surprising that many observers allege a Democratic bias in newspapers. Editors have moved away from Republicans over the last five decades. But that change comes on top of what was a very heavy Republican bias to begin with.

While our goal here is not to offer a definitive explanation for these patterns, two possible explanations for the slight Democratic tilt to the press should be addressed here. First, it might be due to the sample of papers studied over time. This is clearly not true. Looking at the entire sample of papers, endorsements in the period 1986-2002 show exactly the same

widens if the data are weighted by circulation.

average pro-Democratic bias, about a 10 percent Democratic edge.

Second, the partisan orientation of the papers might reflect their readership.⁶ The trend in Figure 2 raises doubts about the inadequacy of this explanation, at least in its simplest form. It may be the case that newspaper editorials cater to their readers. The average reader *today* is slightly more likely to be a Democrat than a Republican. But, historically, this explanation becomes problematic. From the 1940s through the 1970s, Democratic party identification was much higher than Republican party identification, but throughout these years editors overwhelmingly favored Republican candidates for president, U.S. Congress, and statewide offices.

We also calculated the propensity to endorse Democrats for each newspaper individually. Table 3 shows the estimates for the same time periods as used before. Again, there is considerable variation between newspapers. Casual inspection suggests some correlation between the partisan bias in a given newspaper's endorsements and the partisan bias of its readership, at least for the 1986-2002 period – the Boston Globe, New York Times and Los Angeles Times heavily favor Democrats, while the New Hampshire Union Leader and Richmond Dispatch favor Republicans. But the correlation is far from perfect. For example, the Providence Journal Bulletin regularly endorses Republicans even though it is the primary newspaper in one of the most Democratic states.

However, audience alone likely cannot explain the partisan slant of the press today and its changes over time. Incumbency, as our earlier analyses suggest, surely enters the equations. Since Democrats won more elections than Republicans during this period, Democratic candidates tended to have more experience than their Republican counterparts, even controlling for their incumbency status. Therefore, the greater tendency to endorse Democrats could reflect their quality and experience. In addition, the extent of competition from other media sources and ownership of newspapers also likely affect the political orientation of the press.

⁶Recent economic theorizing on media bias has suggested a variety of ways that profit maximizing newspapers might tolerate bias, by either staking out a segment of the market (Mullainathan and Shleifer 2003) or by minimizing costs (Baron 2003).

Sorting out which of these local factors explain the partisan orientation of the press is the subject for future research. The data presented here document a very important phenomenon that has as yet received little systematic treatment. The press has historically had a pro-Republican orientation, which has given way to a more balanced split between the parties. There is no “universal” tendency for newspapers to be pro-Democratic. Rather, the partisanship of the press likely reflects a set of local factors, including competition from other media, partisanship of readers, and incumbency and quality of politicians involved in specific races.

4. Implications

Newspaper endorsements reflect a general trend in American electoral politics – a trend toward valuing individual politicians more and parties less. Previous research has shown that the incumbency advantage in elections increased four-fold from 1940 and 2002. Incumbents received a 2 percent advantage in voting in the 1940’s compared to an 8 percentage point advantage in the 1990’s (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2002). Newspaper endorsements show an even more dramatic shift toward officeholders. The rate at which newspapers endorse incumbents has grown from 58 percent to 80 percent of the time.

Have incumbents benefitted as a result of the change in coverage? Analysis of cross-sectional survey data has found that individual readers are more likely to vote for a candidate who has received an endorsement, holding constant other features of the survey respondents and the electoral circumstances. Analysis of aggregate election returns further suggests that candidates who receive endorsements do better than those who do not. The estimates range from about 1 to 5 percentage points in the vote. Those candidates who received endorsements won approximately 5 percentage points more at the polls than those who were not endorsed (see footnote 2 above). Studies that exploit changes in endorsements and votes for specific politicians over time tend to find much smaller benefits, about a 1 to 2 percentage point gain. The advantage of such studies is that they hold constant the electorate and candidate

qualities.⁷

A simple calculation suggests that the increase in newspaper endorsements of incumbents may have increased incumbents vote shares by about .2 to 1 percentage point. The rate at which incumbents received endorsements increased by 22 percentage points.⁸ Assuming a 5 percent effect of an endorsement on vote margins, we calculate that the dramatic rise of incumbent endorsements may have added 1 percent to their vote margins. Assuming a more modest effect of 1 percent, we calculate that the rising incumbency advantage in endorsements would have only added .2 percentage points to incumbents' vote margins.

The modest effects of endorsements on electoral behavior makes sense from a psychological perspective. Newspaper readers tend to be highly informed and generally attentive to politics. A psychological model of persuasion and response to information such as that of John Zaller (1992) predicts only a small increase in vote for the candidate endorsed.

More interesting, though, is not the effect of endorsements on voting, but the effect of politicians and politics on newspapers' behavior. We have documented that newspapers changed in three important ways since 1940. They have become more likely to endorse politicians; they have become more balanced in the partisan mix of the candidates endorsed; and they have become more centered on officeholders, especially incumbents. These shifts correspond with a more general change in our politics. Incumbency has asserted itself as a force in American politics, and newspapers' editorial behavior is a reflection of that reality.

⁷See Lessem (2003) for more details about estimation and results.

⁸Incumbents received 80 percent of endorsements in the period 1980 to 2002, compared to 58 percent of in the period 1940 to 1960. One question is whether the changing baseline affects this calculation. Alternatively, one may view these numbers from the perspective of the candidates running. In elections from 1940-1960, 19.7 percent of incumbents were endorsed. In races between 1980 and 2002, 42.2 percent of incumbents were endorsed. This shows an increase of 22.5 percent.

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Table 1				
Predicting Endorsements by Major Newspapers 1940-2002				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Incumbent, 1940-1955	0.13** (0.03)	0.14** (0.03)	0.16** (0.03)	0.17** (0.03)
Incumbent, 1956-1969	0.37** (0.03)	0.38** (0.03)	0.37** (0.03)	0.37** (0.03)
Incumbent, 1970-1985	0.61** (0.02)	0.61** (0.03)	0.60** (0.02)	0.60** (0.02)
Incumbent, 1986-2002	0.60** (0.03)	0.62** (0.02)	0.59** (0.02)	0.61** (0.02)
Other Officeholder, 1940-1955	—	0.10 (0.08)	—	0.18* (0.09)
Other Officeholder, 1956-1969	—	0.22 (0.13)	—	0.23* (0.12)
Other Officeholder, 1970-1985	—	0.07 (0.11)	—	0.02 (0.10)
Other Officeholder, 1986-2002	—	0.40** (0.08)	—	0.32** (0.08)

Standard errors in parentheses.

Models 1 and 2 include newspaper-year fixed-effects. Models 3 and 4 include newspaper-decade fixed effects and year fixed-effects.

* statistically significant at the .05 level

** statistically significant at the .01 level

Table 2 Predicting Newspaper Endorsements, 1986-2002		
	Model 1	Model 2
Incumbent	0.57** (0.02)	0.59** (0.02)
Other Officeholder	– –	0.26** (0.05)
N	3791	3791
R-squared	0.44	0.44
Adjusted R-squared	0.35	0.36
Within R-squared		
Between R-squared		
Average Partisanship	0.33	0.33

Standard errors in parentheses.

Models 1 and 2 include newspaper-year fixed-effects.

* statistically significant at the .05 level

** statistically significant at the .01 level

Table 3
Propensity for Major Newspapers to Endorse Democrats,
1940-2002

	1940-1955	1956-1969	1970-1985	1986-2002
Baltimore Sun	0.07	0.11	0.25	0.16
Boston Globe	—	—	0.20	0.34
Chicago Tribune	-0.96	-1.01	-0.19	-0.21
Denver Post	-0.43	0.07	0.03	0.07
Detroit News	-0.09	-0.17	-0.36	-0.19
Hartford Courant	-0.65	-0.82	-0.05	0.26
Los Angeles Times	-0.96	-0.64	0.19	0.40
New York Times (in CT)	0.06	-0.02	0.15	0.10
New York Times (in NJ)	-0.52	-0.03	0.46	0.48
New York Times (in NY)	-0.15	0.08	0.46	0.53
Philadelphia Inquirer	-0.84	-0.12	-0.14	0.27
Portland Press Herald	—	—	-0.15	0.28
Providence Journal Bulletin	-0.33	-0.55	-0.50	-0.30
Richmond Times Dispatch	—	0.69	-0.83	-0.68
San Francisco Examiner	-0.96	-0.15	0.04	0.28
St Louis Post Dispatch	0.23	0.38	0.18	0.58
Union Leader (NH)	-0.87	-0.29	-0.68	-0.65

Appendix Table A.1
Newspapers Searched

Newspaper	Years Searched
Anchorage Daily News	1986-2002
Akron Beacon Journal	2002
Anniston Star	2000-2002
Arkansas Democrat Gazette	1994-2002
Atlanta Journal and Constitution	1986-2002
Augusta Chronicle	1994-2002
Austin American Statesman	1990-2002
Arkansas Democrat Gazette	1994-2002
Atlanta Journal and Constitution	1986-2002
Augusta Chronicle	1994-2002
Austin American Statesman	1990-2002
Baltimore Sun*	1940-2002
Birmingham News	1994-2002
Boston Globe*	1940-2002
Boston Herald	1994-2002
Buffalo News	1992-2002
Charleston Gazette	1994-2002
Charleston Post and Courier	1994-2002
Charlotte Observer	1986-2002
Chicago Sun Times	1992-2002
Chicago Tribune*	1940-2002
Columbus Dispatch	1992-2002
Columbus Ledger Enquirer	1994-2002
Denver Post*	1940-2002
Detroit Free Press	1998-2002
Detroit News*	1940-2002
Hartford Courant*	1940-2002
Houston Chronicle	1992-2002
Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster)	1998-2002
Kansas City Star	1992-2002
Knoxville News Sentinel	1994-2002
Lancaster New Era	1998-2002
Los Angeles Times*	1940-2002
Memphis Commercial Appeal	1990-2002
Miami Herald	1986-2002

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)	
Newspaper	Years Searched
New Orleans Times Picayune	1970-2002
New York Post	1998-2002
New York Times*	1940-2002
News and Observer (Raleigh)	1992-2002
Orlando Sentinel	1986-2002
Philadelphia Daily News	1978-2002
Philadelphia Inquirer*	1940-2002
Pittsburgh Post Gazette	1990-2002
Portland Press Herald*	1940-2002
Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA)	1992-2002
Providence Journal Bulletin*	1940-2002
Record (Bergen County)	1997-2002
Richmond Times Dispatch*	1940-2002
Roanoke Times	1990-2002
Rock Hill Herald	1998-2002
Rocky Mountain News	1994-2002
San Antonio Express News	1996-2002
San Francisco Chronicle	1976-2002
San Francisco Examiner*	1940-2002
San Jose Mercury News	1986-2002
St Louis Post Dispatch*	1940-2002
St Petersburg Times	1988-2002
State Journal Register (Springfield)	1992-2002
Tampa Tribune	1990-2002
Tallahassee Democrat	2002
Times Union (Albany)	1986-2002
Toledo Blade	1996-2002
Union Leader (NH)*	1940-2002
Washington Post	1972-2002
Washington Times	1992-2002
Winston Salem Journal	1998-2002
Worcester Telegraph and Gazette	1990-2002

Table A.2
Propensity for Major Newspapers to Make Endorsements,
1940-2002

	1940-1955	1956-1969	1970-1985	1986-2002
Baltimore Sun	92.10	100	94.55	84.62
Boston Globe	0	0	46.97	90.57
Chicago Tribune	87.82	74.10	83.21	97.17
Denver Post	92.94	86.27	92.86	84.71
Detroit News	0.83	51.55	67.14	85.92
Hartford Courant	38.89	55.17	58.54	95.24
Los Angeles Times	75.90	97.39	86.18	89.74
New York Times (in CT)	2.00	37.93	42.86	46.15
New York Times (in NJ)	8.97	92.50	100	100
New York Times (in NY)	91.38	84.17	94.96	98.04
Philadelphia Inquirer	54.05	7.27	92.19	95.77
Portland Press Herald	0	0	77.78	78.95
Providence Journal Bulletin	18.52	43.14	66.04	91.23
Richmond Times Dispatch	0	32.43	95.83	88.89
San Francisco Examiner	63.64	97.47	98.97	98.90
St Louis Post Dispatch	34.69	68.89	98.15	93.55
Union Leader (NH)	10.34	15.38	77.78	77.78

Figure 1

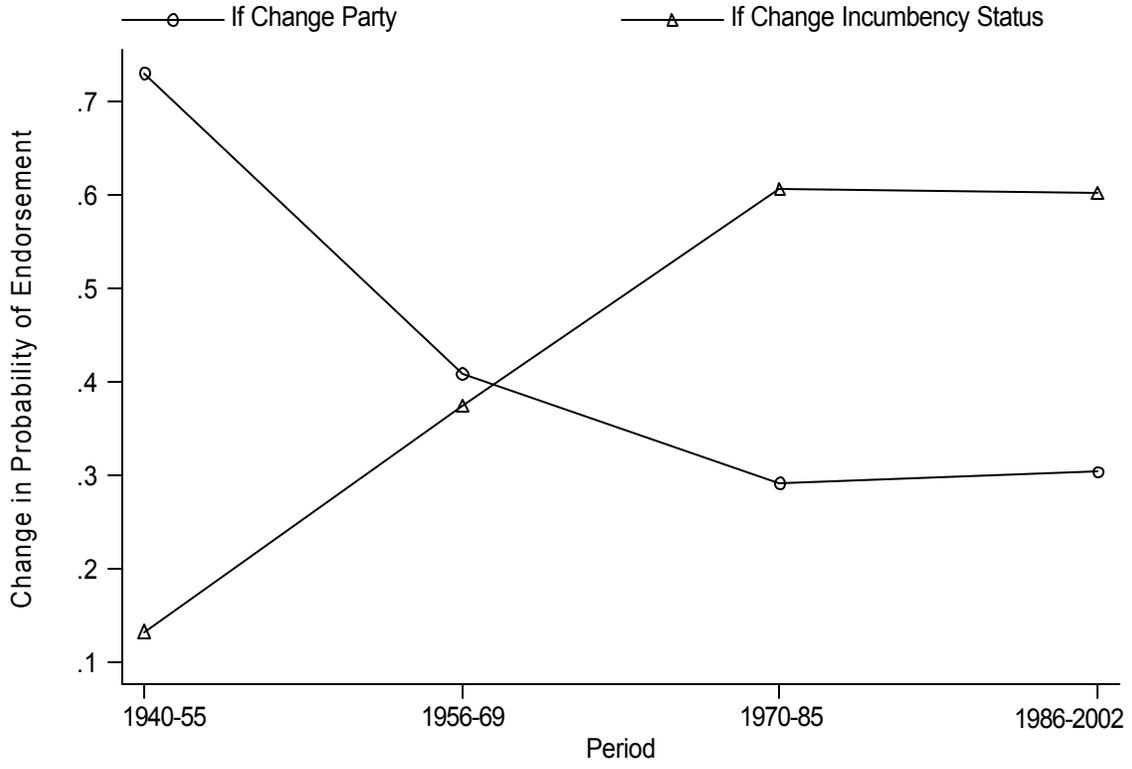


Figure 2

