THE MESSENGER MATTERS: MEDIA ENDORSEMENTS AND ELECTION OUTCOMES

Kyle A. Dropp\textsuperscript{1} and Christopher Warshaw\textsuperscript{2}

October 16, 2012

\textsuperscript{1}Ph.D. candidate, Department of Political Science, Stanford University, dropp@stanford.edu
\textsuperscript{2}Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, cwarshaw@mit.edu
We investigate how political endorsements influence election outcomes. Through a series of large, nationally representative survey experiments, we establish that an endorsement’s impact depends on the level of ideological congruence between the voter and the source, a finding with implications for the large literatures on elite cues, voting behavior and representation. Voters reward Congressional candidates when they perceive that an endorsing newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences but punish endorsed candidates when they perceive that the source is ideologically distal. These politically meaningful findings overcome limitations in the previous literature on media effects and indicate that newspapers’ behavioral norm of endorsing candidates in both primary and general election contests can harm their preferred candidates.
We study how political endorsements can influence election outcomes. Specifically, we demonstrate that newspaper endorsements are highly influential across both Congressional primary and general election contests and we are the first to establish that voters reward or punish endorsed candidates based on the relative spatial locations of media outlets, candidates and voters. These findings have implications for the important literatures on political communication, Congressional elections and representation.

Americans pay minimal attention to, and are minimally informed about, politics and public affairs. Scholars have argued that voters use endorsements as an information shortcut, or heuristic, to learn about candidates, and previous research has shown that endorsements influence voting decisions (e.g., Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Ladd and Lenz, 2009; Lupia, 1994). We challenge findings in the extant literature arguing that the simple act of receiving an endorsement boosts candidate support. Previous research indicates that campaign messages have heterogeneous effects across voters, and we extend this research as the first scholars to establish that endorsements can help or hurt candidates depending on the ideological congruence between media outlets, voters, and candidates.

The large literature on Congressional elections has demonstrated that both relatively stable factors such as incumbency advantage, candidate quality, and a district’s partisan composition, along with dynamic components including campaign spending, macroeconomic performance and national tides, affect election outcomes (e.g., Cox and Katz, 1996; Jacobson 2001). We highlight how newspapers’ current behavioral norm of endorsing candidates in Democratic primaries, Republican primaries and general election contests can distort candidate selection, affect the representative-constituent linkage and influence election outcomes. For instance, since Americans disproportionately view their local newspapers as liberal institutions, endorsements of moderates in Republican primaries actually will boost the support of highly conservative candidates.

We investigate the impact of political endorsements through a series of large, nationally representative survey experiments that overcome limitations in studies using observational data. We first showed respondents two hypothetical, ideologically similar primary election candidates and then presented respondents with two ideologically distinct general election candidates. In each experiment, we randomized whether respondents received an endorsement from the largest newspaper in their Congressional district, thus leveraging the natural variation in the ideology of newspapers across the country and enhancing the study’s external validity.

We find strong evidence that citizens use their perception of the media outlet’s ideological stance as a heuristic: citizens are more likely to support endorsed candidates when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences, and less likely to support the endorsed candidate when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically distinct from their preferences. These results, which are consistent in primaries and general election settings, indicate that newspaper endorsements function as credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information
shortcut to evaluate the spatial position and valence of a candidate.

The study proceeds as follows. First, we discuss previous work on the impact of newspaper endorsements. Next, we discuss our theory, hypotheses and previous empirical work. Third, we discuss our research design. Then, we discuss our findings. Finally, we briefly conclude.

The Impact of Newspaper Endorsements

Scholars have long debated whether political endorsements affect voters’ decisions at the ballot box. Previous research finds that voting decisions are substantially influenced by the endorsements of candidates by political groups (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Lupia, 1994), media groups (Chiang and Knight, 2011; DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Ladd and Lenz, 2009), and celebrities (Nownes, 2011; Pease and Brewer, 2008).

Moreover, a number of studies find that exposure to newspaper endorsements influences vote choices. Newspapers present a unique case because they have broad and loyal readerships and they commonly endorse candidates across both political parties in both general and primary elections. Robinson (1974) finds that voters, after accounting for observed characteristics, were more likely to support Nixon in 1972 if they read a newspaper endorsing Nixon. Krebs (1998) finds that city council candidates in Chicago received more votes if they were endorsed by the Chicago Tribune or the Sun Times. Erikson (1976) finds that newspaper endorsements in the 1964 presidential elections increased the vote share of the endorsed candidate by five percentage points. Kahn and Kenney (2002) found significant positive effects of endorsements in U.S. Senate races on the comparative feeling thermometer score in American National Election Survey data. Similarly, Druckman and Parkin (2005) find that the slant of newspapers had an impact in the 2000 Minnesota senate election. Hollander (1979) finds evidence that support for a candidate in Maryland’s 1976 gubernatorial primary increased after they received a newspaper endorsement. Ladd and Lenz (2009) show that newspaper endorsements in the U.K.’s 1997 parliamentary elections had a substantial effect on voting behavior. Finally, Chiang and Knight (2011) show that “credible” newspaper endorsements increased candidate support in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Cumulatively, these studies lead to the following hypothesis:

A number of past studies have attempted to overcome these challenges by examining the relationship between changes in voter preferences and the pattern of newspaper endorsements over time. Hollander (1979) examines voting patterns in the 1976 gubernatorial primary in Maryland and finds

---


⁴While suggestive, this study is limited to a single newspaper endorsement and also does not provide tests for the statistical significance of this increase ((Chiang and Knight, 2011)).
that support for the endorsed candidate increases after an endorsement.\(^5\) Ladd and Lenz (2009) examine changes in newspaper endorsements between the 1992 and 1997 elections in the U.K. and report that the persuasive effects of endorsements in the 1997 U.K. were large. Finally, Chiang and Knight (2011) show that “credible” newspaper endorsements increased candidate support in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

H1: *Newspaper endorsements increase the average level of support for candidates.*

Moving beyond the average effects of endorsements, scholars have long argued that the impact of endorsements is heterogeneous across different individuals. In particular, previous scholars have focused on the relationship between the ideology of the endorser and individuals. They argue that political endorsements function as a heuristic or information shortcut for voters. If people see a political group as aligned with their values, this suggests they can trust that the group would make the same decisions they would have made with complete information. Conversely, if people see it in opposition to their values and interests, then they can assume that the group would make the opposite decision than they would (Brady and Sniderman, 1985). As a result, voters are more likely to support a candidate that receives an endorsement from a like-minded group, while political endorsements from groups individuals dislike makes them less likely to support a candidate. Thus, endorsements function as credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information shortcut. These cues help individuals to make correct voting decision (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Druckman, 2001; Lupia, 1994, but see Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994)

No previous study has examined whether newspaper endorsements function as credible source cues that citizens can use as an efficient information shortcut. But several recent studies have examined whether other types of endorsements are used as a heuristic by voters. Arceneaux and Kolodny (2009) find that Republicans that were contacted by a liberal political group in a Pennsylvania state house election were less likely to support the Democratic candidates. They argue that Republicans used the endorsement as a negative voting cue, which helped some Republicans compensate for their lack of political awareness. Similarly, Hopkins and Ladd (2012) examine the impact of Fox News Channel’s national expansion on candidate preferences for 22,592 respondents to the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey. This can be seen as a study on endorsements since Fox News Channel clearly supported George W. Bush rather than Al Gore. While they find an average treatment effect indistinguishable from zero, Hopkins and Ladd (2012) find a sizable effect of Fox News access on the vote intentions of Republicans and pure independents. Thus, it appears that the Fox News endorsements act as a cue for like-minded voters.

H2: *Newspaper endorsements increase the average level of support for candidates when individuals perceive that the ideology of the newspaper is congruent with their own ideology, and decrease the average level of support for candidates when individuals perceive that the ideology of the newspaper...*

\(^5\)While suggestive, this study is limited to a single newspaper endorsement and also does not provide tests for the statistical significance of this increase (Chiang and Knight, 2011).
Research Design

This section describes the two experiments in detail, discusses experimental design considerations, describes our model specifications and details our independent variable of interest – the ideological congruence between newspapers and the respondent.

Experimental Design

We conducted three controlled, randomized survey experiments with a nationally representative sample of 5,500 adult Americans during the summer of 2012. The experiments simulated an open election contest between two hypothetical challengers in both the primary and general election contexts. In the general election experiment, the candidates exhibited clear ideological distinctions across the three policy issues, while the primary election candidates took similar ideological positions on key partisan issues. The variation in the amount of ideological distance between candidates in the general and primary elections allows us to examine whether the effect of endorsements is related to the spatial distance between candidates.

Respondents were shown separate vignettes describing two candidates running in a Congressional general election and two candidates running in a Congressional primary election (described in detail below). All respondents saw the same general election experiment. Republican and Republican-leaning respondents saw vignettes for two conservative candidates in the GOP primary, Democrats and Democratic-leaning respondents saw vignettes for two liberal candidates in a Democratic contest and pure independents did not see a primary election experiment.

General Election Experiment

This experiment was designed to examine whether newspaper endorsements influence respondents’ support for two ideologically distinct candidates in a general election. The experiment randomly assigned participants to one of three groups. The control group (n=1,858) viewed a brief vignette.
describing two candidates (one liberal, one conservative) running for a Congressional general election and then respondents expressed support for a candidate.

The two candidates were described as follows:

Candidate A is a lawyer with 10 years of experience on a city council who supports proposals to allow same-sex marriage, increase taxes on wealthy Americans, and provide subsidies for wind and solar energy.

Candidate B is a doctor with 10 years of experience on a local school board who supports proposals to ban same-sex marriage, extend the Bush tax cuts, and increase domestic oil production by allowing oil companies to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

Are you more likely to support Candidate A or Candidate B?

We also had two treatment groups (N₁=1,853 and N₂=1,877). In these two groups, we randomized whether candidate A or B received an endorsement from the largest newspaper in the respondent’s congressional district. For instance, if candidate A received an endorsement and the respondent lived in San Francisco, the description of candidate A would be: “Candidate A is a lawyer with 10 years of experience on a city council who supports proposals to allow same-sex marriage, increase taxes on wealthy Americans, and provide subsidies for wind and solar energy. Candidate A has been endorsed by the San Francisco Chronicle.”

Finally, respondents answer a simple vote choice question: “Are you more likely to support Candidate A or Candidate B?”

**Republican primary election experiment**

Our next experiment was designed to examine whether newspaper endorsements influence respondents’ support for two ideologically similar candidates in a Republican primary election. Republican and Republican-leaning respondents were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The control group (n=687) viewed a brief vignette describing two conservative candidates running for the Republican nomination for Congress and then expressed support for a candidate. As in the general election experiment, the control group (n=687) saw no endorsement, one treatment group (n=704) saw an endorsement for conservative Candidate A and the second treatment group (n=668) saw an endorsement for conservative Candidate B.

The two candidates were described as follows:

---

8 The candidates’ backgrounds as a lawyer or doctor were randomized.

9 The candidates’ backgrounds as a lawyer or manager were randomized.
Candidate A is a lawyer that serves on the boards of a number of local organizations who supports repealing Obama’s healthcare law and believes in the traditional definition of marriage between a man and a woman.

Candidate B is the manager of a local business who supports reducing the size of government and restricting access to abortion.

Are you more likely to support Candidate A or Candidate B?

Democratic primary election experiment

Our final experiment was designed to examine whether newspaper endorsements influence respondents’ support for two ideologically similar candidates in a Democratic primary election. Democrats and Democratic-leaning respondents were also randomly assigned to one of three groups in the primary election experiment. The control group (n=831) viewed a brief vignette describing two liberal candidates running for the Democratic nomination for Congress and then expressed support for a candidate. As in the general election experiment, the control group (n=831) saw no endorsement, one treatment group (n=820) saw an endorsement for liberal Candidate A and the second treatment group (n=897) saw an endorsement for liberal Candidate B.10

Candidate A is a lawyer that serves on the boards of a number of local organizations who supports Obama’s healthcare law and supports same-sex marriage rights.

Candidate B is the manager of a local business who supports subsidies for renewable energy and supports protecting a woman’s right to choose.

Are you more likely to support Candidate A or Candidate B?

Experimental Design Considerations

Many elite endorsement studies include an endorsement from a single national or prominent source; we expose individuals to the largest newspaper (by circulation) in their current Congressional district.11 This enhances the external validity of the survey experiment, gauges the impact of an endorsement from a local source with which nearly all respondents should be familiar and introduces important variation to respondents’ evaluations of the source’s credibility.

The experimental manipulation prompted respondents with the generic “Candidate A (or B) has been endorsed by LOCAL NEWSPAPER.” With this prompt, we test the impact of a newspaper experiment as a badge of honor rather than as a statement regarding the candidate’s background or

---

10 The candidates’ backgrounds as a lawyer or manager were randomized.
policy preferences. We are tapping into an underlying endorsement effect caused by brief exposure to a news segment or a discussion with friends.\textsuperscript{12}

**Regression Models**

We study whether an endorsement from a local newspaper influences candidate support using a series of logistic regressions where the main dependent variable is support for either Candidate A or Candidate B. We use a binary variable where support for Candidate A is 0 and support for candidate B is 1.

We examine whether the respondents’ personal political views or perceptions of the newspaper’s quality, reliability or partisanship impact the overall endorsement effect.

Our baseline model is as follows:

\begin{equation}
Support_i = A_0 + B_1 \times Group_i + B_2 \times Controls_i + u_i
\end{equation}

where \(Support_i\) is the dichotomous candidate support dependent variable (\(B=1, A=0\)), \(Group_i\) is the treatment group assignment (Control, Endorse A, Endorse B), \(Controls_i\) are a series of background variables such as age, educational attainment and political party, and \(u_i\) is error unexplained by the model. In the baseline specification, \(B_1\) gauges the main effect of a local newspaper endorsement for each treatment group. For example, a negative value of \(B_1\) for the Endorse A condition indicates that, relative to the control group, local newspaper endorsements increase support for Candidate A.

Our interaction models include an additional term capturing the interaction between treatment group assignment and an independent variable of interest. This specification is as follows:

\begin{equation}
Support_i = A_0 + B_1 \times Group_i + B_2 \times VarInt_i + B_3 \times (Group_i \times VarInt_i) + B_4 \times Controls_i + u_i
\end{equation}

where \(Support_i\) is the dichotomous candidate support dependent variable (A or B), \(Group_i\) is the treatment group assignment (Control, Endorse A, Endorse B) and \(VarInt_i\) is the independent variable of interest, such as the credibility of a newspaper or the ideological congruence between voters and newspapers. \(Controls_i\) are a series of background variables such as age, educational attainment and political ideology, and \(u_i\) is error unexplained by the model. In the baseline specification, \(B_3\) gauges the effect of the newspaper endorsement contingent on an individual’s characteristics. For example, suppose our variable of interest is the relative ideological distance between the newspaper and a respondent, where low values mean that there is ideological congruence. A negative value on \(B_3\) for the Endorse B condition indicates that an endorsement reduces Candidate B’s support as the ideological distance between the newspaper and the respondent increases.

\textsuperscript{12}Future studies will compare the impact of a badge of honor endorsement with a policy message (i.e., The San Francisco Chronicle endorses Candidate A because of his support for same-sex marriage) or a non-policy message (i.e., The San Francisco Chronicle endorses Candidate A because he is a strong leader).
Measuring Ideological Congruence between Individuals and Newspapers

Our key question of interest is whether the degree of ideological congruence between a newspaper and an individual affects the impact of the newspaper’s candidate endorsement. Here, we describe how we measure the degree of ideological congruence between of a newspaper and an individual.

On our survey, we asked individuals for their own political ideology on a five-point scale.\textsuperscript{13} We also asked respondents to evaluate the ideology of the largest newspaper in their district on a seven-point scale.\textsuperscript{14} We placed these two metrics onto a common scale by scaling them each between 0 and 1. Then, we simply took the absolute value of the difference between the individual’s ideology and their perceived ideology of the newspaper. This variable ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 is complete ideological congruence and 1 is complete ideological dissonance.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say their ideological views are distinct from their local newspaper. Republicans’ mean score on this measure was .52, compared with .32 for Democrats. Twelve percent of Republicans had the maximum score on this measure, compared with three percent of Democrats. Finally, 18 percent of Democrats said their newspaper had the same political views as them, compared with only five percent of Republicans.

Findings

This section describes our findings in both our general and primary election experiments.

Average Treatment Effects

Table 1 displays the main results across the three treatment groups in the general election experiment. This experiment was designed to examine whether newspaper endorsements influence respondents’ support for two ideologically distinct candidates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Average Treatment Effects in General Election Experiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Supporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Candidate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*95% Confidence Intervals in brackets

\textsuperscript{13}Response options were very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative and very conservative.

\textsuperscript{14}Response options were very liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, and very conservative.
The average treatment effect of newspaper endorsements is quite small, as shown in Table 1 on Page 10. The table shows that 49 percent of respondents support Candidate B, the conservative alternative, in the baseline condition. This declines to 46 percent when the newspaper endorses the liberal candidate and stays roughly the same when the newspaper endorses the conservative candidate. The three-point shift in candidate preference when the newspaper endorses the liberal candidate is small but statistically significant. On the other hand, local newspaper endorsements for the conservative candidate have no overall effect on candidate support.

While this null finding contradicts hypothesis 1, we are not terribly surprised that the overall endorsement effects are small. We provided a great deal of information about the two candidates’ ideological positions. In addition, the candidates took ideologically distinct positions. As a result, most voters do not need the endorsement to help them determine which candidate shares their ideological views. Finally, we did not provide any substantive information with the endorsement about the candidates’ positions.

Table 2 displays the main results across the three treatment groups in the GOP and Democratic primary experiment. This experiment was designed to examine whether newspaper endorsements influence respondents’ support for two ideologically similar candidates in a primary election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOP Primary</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Endorse A</th>
<th>Endorse B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Supporting</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate B</td>
<td>[32.7,39.9]</td>
<td>[35.7,42.9]</td>
<td>[27.1,34.1]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic Primary</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Endorse A</th>
<th>Endorse B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Supporting</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate B</td>
<td>[46.5,2.8]</td>
<td>[42.5,49.3]</td>
<td>[47.5,3.6]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*95% Confidence Intervals in brackets

Among Republicans, local newspaper endorsements actually reduce candidate support in primary elections. In the control condition, 36 percent of respondents prefer Candidate B, who supports reducing the size of government and limiting access to abortion, while 64 percent prefer Candidate A, who wants to repeal Obama’s healthcare law and supports the traditional definition of marriage.\[15\] When a newspaper endorses candidate A, this candidate loses three percentage points of support. Similarly, when the newspaper endorses candidate B, this candidate loses six-percentage points of support. The effect when the newspaper endorses candidate B is significant, as is the pooled overall effect for individuals who received an endorsement treatment versus respondents in

---

\[15\]We suspect that overall support is higher for Candidate A because he supports repealing Obama’s healthcare plan, one of the most salient issues in the 2012 campaign for Republicans.
Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning respondents, local newspaper endorsements have a more limited main effect. In the control condition, 49 percent of respondents prefer Candidate B, who supports subsidies for renewable energy and protecting a woman’s right to choose, while 51 percent prefer Candidate A, who supports Obama’s healthcare law and same-sex marriage rights. When a newspaper endorses candidate A, this candidate gains three percentage points, a statistically significant difference. Yet, when the newspaper endorses candidate B, this candidate’s support is unaffected. The pooled overall effect for individuals in any endorsement condition is not statistically significant.

### Does ideological congruence affect endorsements' impact?

Next, we examine whether the perceived ideology of a newspaper affects the impact of endorsements. We examine both bivariate relationships between ideological congruence and candidate support and regress candidate support on attitudinal congruence.

Table 3 displays the relationship between ideological congruence and candidate support in the general election endorsement experiment. It shows that respondents whose political views overlap with their local newspaper (1st quartile) are nine percentage points more likely to support Candidate B when they see their newspaper endorse B, relative to the control group, and five percentage points more likely to support Candidate A when their newspaper endorses Candidate A. Table 3 also shows suggestive evidence that respondents may punish candidates who receive endorsements from unpopular or low-quality sources. Respondents whose political views are distal from their local newspaper (4th quartile) are seven percentage points less likely to support Candidate B when he receives a newspaper endorsement from that source.

We next examine a series of logistic regression models that allow us to examine hypothesis 2. In these models, the dependent variable is 1 if the respondent supports Candidate B and 0 if he/she supports Candidate A. The coefficients are shown with respect to a respondent in the control group.

---

16 We separately examine whether perceptions of a newspaper’s objectivity affect the impact of a newspaper endorsement. We asked respondents whether their local newspaper is generally neutral, generally has a pro-Democratic, liberal slant or whether it has a pro-Republican, conservative bias in its coverage. We find evidence that respondents will punish candidates who are endorsed by out-partisan sources. In the GOP primary experiment, respondents who say their local newspaper has a pro-Democratic tilt are 13 points less likely to support Candidate B when he receives an endorsement from that source and six points less likely to support Candidate A when he receives an endorsement. In the GOP experiment, we also find suggestive evidence that respondents reward candidates when they are perceived to be endorsed by co-partisans. Respondents who say their local newspaper has a pro-Republican tilt are 11 points more likely to support B when he receives an endorsement and five points less likely to support A when he receives an endorsement, relative to the control group. Since few Republicans believe their local newspaper is pro-Republican, these findings are not statistically significant at conventional levels.

17 Given the relatively small sample sizes, we can only say that there is a suggestive punishment effect among unpopular sources.
Table 3: Percent Support for Candidate B, by Ideological Congruence in the General Election Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Endorse A</th>
<th>Endorse B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quartile (closest)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd / 3rd Quartile</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Quartile (farthest)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dependent variable is 1 if the respondent supports Candidate B and 0 if he/she supports Candidate A.

First, we examine the average treatment effects. Column 1 in Table 4 shows the average treatment effects for the general election experiment. The results suggest that newspaper endorsements do influence candidate support in the expected directions in a general election. An endorsement for candidate A increases support for candidate A, while an endorsement for candidate B increases support for candidate B. But the results are not statistically significant. Column 3 shows the average treatment effects for the primary election experiments. The results are pooled across the two primaries. The results here do not show any average treatment effect of newspaper endorsements.

Next, we examine whether the perceived ideological distance between the newspaper and respondent affect the influence of the endorsement. The base effects capture the impact of a newspaper endorsement when citizens are ideologically similar to the newspaper. The interactive effects examine whether the level of spatial distance between the newspaper and voter affects the impact of the endorsement.

The left-hand side of Table 4 shows the results from our general election experiments. It shows that an endorsement for candidate B increases support for this candidate when the voter is ideologically similar to the newspaper. However, the endorsement decreases support for candidate B when the newspaper is ideologically distal from the voter. The results for candidate A are similar, although below the conventional level of statistical significance. The right-hand side of the table examines our pooled primary election experiments. It shows that respondents that are ideologically distant from the newspaper are less likely to support candidate A when this candidate receives the newspaper endorsement in a primary election and less likely to support candidate B when this candidate receives the newspaper endorsement.

The results from Figure 1 on Page 19 are plotted in Figure 1. The level of statistical significance varies across models. But all of the models have nearly identical substantive results: respondents that are ideologically congruent with a newspaper are more likely to support candidates that receive an endorsement, while respondents that are ideologically distant from the newspaper are less likely to support candidates that receive an endorsement. In the general election experiments, an endorsement from newspapers that are ideologically similar to the voter increases support for the candidate by approximately 5 points. In contrast, an endorsement from newspapers that are ide-
ologically distant from the voter may slightly decrease candidate support. In the primary election experiments, an endorsement from newspapers that are ideologically similar to the voter increases support for the candidate by about 5 percentage points, while an endorsement from newspapers that are ideologically distant from the voter decreases candidate support by approximately 10 percentage points.

Table 4: Logistic Regressions of Candidate Support on Ideological Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Election</th>
<th>Primary Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
<td>-0.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate A</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>0.316 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate B</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Distance</td>
<td>.998 *</td>
<td>-0.433 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate A * Ideological Distance</td>
<td>(0.346)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>-0.580 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate B * Ideological Distance</td>
<td>(0.340)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.091 *</td>
<td>-2.347 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.218)</td>
<td>(0.236)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5572</td>
<td>5240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>5282.6</td>
<td>5039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log L</td>
<td>-2399.263</td>
<td>-2278.642</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dependent variable is 1 if the respondent supports Candidate B and 0 if he/she supports Candidate A. The coefficients are shown with respect to a respondent in the control group. The model includes controls for 7-point party identification, age, gender, education and race. 
* denotes that a coefficient is significant at the .1 level
All models were computed using survey weights.

Overall, our findings show that newspaper endorsements can have a positive and significant effect when there is ideological congruence between the respondent and the media source; however, these endorsements can actually reduce candidate support when respondents are ideologically distinct from the newspaper.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, our findings indicate that primary endorsements have a

\textsuperscript{18}We asked respondents to rate the ideology of their local newspaper after the endorsement modules. Therefore, it is possible that the experiment impacted responses to the newspaper ideology items. However, the data does not support these claims: Twenty-nine percent of respondents in the control condition in the general election experiment.
particularly heterogeneous impact. This could be because newspapers provide a larger amount of information for voters in primary elections where the spatial postitions of candidates appears to be similar.

**Conclusion**

This study has examined the circumstances when political endorsements influence candidate selection and election outcomes. We study this question using messages from newspapers, which have broad, loyal readerships and commonly endorse candidates in both general and primary elections.

Overall, we find little evidence that newspapers increase the average level of support for candidates. But our findings suggest that endorsements have heterogeneous impacts across groups. Most importantly, we find that the level of ideological congruence between citizens and newspapers affects the impact of the endorsement. Citizens are more likely to support candidates that receive an endorsement when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences. However, they are less likely to support the candidate that receives an endorsement when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically distinct from their preferences. This suggests that newspaper endorsements can function as credible source cues that citizens use as an efficient information shortcut to evaluate the spatial position and valence of a candidate.

It also suggests that newspapers’ practice of endorsing both Democratic and Republican candidates in primary and general election could reduce candidate support. In elections where voters have a low degree of ideological congruence with newspapers, such as Republican primaries in a media market with a left-leaning newspaper, we demonstrate that an endorsement can actually reduce candidate support. For instance, a newspaper perceived to be liberal such as *The New York Times* will boost candidate support by endorsing candidates in a Democratic primary election or general election contest in a Democratic state such as Delaware. Nevertheless, the *Times’s* endorsement may diminish candidate support in Republican primary contests or in a general election contest in a Republican district such as New Jersey’s 7th Congressional District.

In January 2012, for instance, the left-leaning *Boston Globe* endorsed former Governor Jon Hun-

...say their newspaper is very or somewhat liberal, compared to 30 percent in Condition A, where the liberal candidate is endorsed, and 28 percent in Condition B, where the conservative candidate is endorsed. Fifty-two percent of Republicans who saw no newspaper endorsements said their local newspaper was very liberal or liberal, compared with 49 percent of Republicans who saw their newspaper endorse conservative candidates in both elections. Twenty-four percent of Democrats who saw no newspaper endorsements said their local paper was very conservative or conservative, compared with 20 percent of Democrats who their newspaper endorse conservative candidates in both elections. This difference is not statistically significant. Finally, 19 percent of pure independents who saw a newspaper endorse a conservative candidate in the general election say their local newspaper is very conservative or conservative, compared with 13 percent of independents who saw no endorsement and 11 percent of independents who saw an endorsement for a liberal candidate.
stman in the New Hampshire presidential primary. Many argued that this endorsement would actually hurt Huntsman among conservatives in New Hampshire. The Romney campaign specifically cited the ideological orientation of the newspaper in its reaction: “The *Globe* has a liberal editorial page, and it’s not surprising they would endorse Jon Huntsman. Mitt Romney was pleased to get the endorsement of the more conservative *Boston Herald*”.¹⁹

These findings have implications for strategic candidates and interest groups. They suggest that candidates should seek to obtain newspaper endorsements that are ideologically similar to the median voter in their district. In contrast, it may not be in the best interest of candidates to receive an endorsement from a newspaper that is ideologically distinct from the median voter.

At a broader level, this study advances our understanding of the impact of local newspaper endorsements and provides a template for future studies on the impact of endorsements. In future studies, we plan to randomize the spatial distance between candidates. This will enable us to examine whether newspaper endorsements are more impactful when the spatial positions of candidates are similar to one another. Next, we plan to vary the message of endorsement. For instance, we might add a more explicit valence component to the endorsement. This would enable us to examine how the message of endorsements affects their impact.

¹⁹[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/mitt-romney-boston-globe-boston-herald_n_1189123.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/mitt-romney-boston-globe-boston-herald_n_1189123.html)
References


Figure 1: Relationship between Individuals’ Ideological Congruence and the Impact of Newspaper Endorsement

Effect of General Election Newspaper Endorsement of Candidate A

Effect of General Election Newspaper Endorsement of Candidate B

Effect of Primary Election Newspaper Endorsement of Candidate A

Effect of Primary Election Newspaper Endorsement of Candidate B