How does the messenger influence the impact of newspaper endorsements?

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Newspapers commonly endorse candidates in both primary and general elections. Do newspaper endorsements influence citizens’ votes? We conduct a survey experiment with 5,500 respondents matching citizens to the largest newspaper in their Congressional district. We show respondents two ideologically distinct general election candidates and two ideologically similar primary candidates. We randomly vary which candidate gets an endorsement from the local newspaper. We find that the level of ideological congruence between citizens and newspapers affects the impact of the endorsement. Citizens reward endorsed candidates when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences but punish endorsed candidates when they perceive that a newspaper is ideologically distal. These findings suggest that newspapers’ behavioral norm of endorsing candidates in both primary and general election contests can harm their preferred candidates. This study lays the foundation for a research agenda on the influence of newspaper and interest group endorsements.

Word Count: 5,577
When do newspaper endorsements influence election outcomes? This question is important because newspapers have broad and loyal readerships and they commonly endorse candidates across both political parties in both general and primary elections. For instance, *the Austin Statesman* endorsed six candidates from both parties in the 2012 congressional primary elections\(^3\) and *the Detroit News* endorsed 13 candidates from both parties in 10 congressional districts.\(^4\)

Previous studies have found that voting decisions are 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). Within this literature, there are a number of previous studies in political science, economics, and communications on the impact of newspaper endorsements in elections. The vast majority of these studies have examined the cross-sectional correlation between voting behavior and exposure to newspaper endorsements (e.g., (Druckman and Parkin, 2005; Erikson, 1976; Kahn and Kenney, 2002; Robinson, 1974, 1976)). Most of these studies find a strong correlation between exposure to newspaper endorsements and voting behavior. But there are a number of potential factors that could confound studies that examine the impact of newspaper endorsements using observational data. First, voters may choose to read newspapers with like-minded ideology (Chiang and Knight, 2011). Second, newspaper could choose to support high-quality candidates. If this latent quality is unobservable to the researcher, studies could show a spurious effect of newspaper endorsements.

Three studies have attempted to overcome these challenges by using changes in voter preferences and the pattern of newspaper endorsements over time. Hollander (1979) examines voting patterns in the 1976 gubernatorial primary in Maryland. He finds some evidence that support for the endorsed candidate increases after the endorsement.\(^5\) Ladd and Lenz (2009) examine changes in newspaper

\(^3\)http://www.statesman.com/opinion/endorsements-in-todays-primary-elections-2379631.html

\(^4\)http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20120807/OPINION01/208070311

\(^5\)While suggestive, this study is limited to a single newspaper endorsement and also does not provide tests for the
endorsements between the 1992 and 1997 elections in the U.K. They 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.

In this paper, we take a new look at the impact of newspaper endorsements by conducting a set
of survey experiments on the impact of newspaper endorsements in congressional elections. First,
we showed respondents two hypothetical, ideologically similar primary election candidates. Next,
we showed respondents two hypothetical, ideologically distinct general election candidates. In each
experiment, we randomized whether respondents received an endorsement for one of the candidate.

Across both our general and primary election experiments, we find little evidence that newspa-
pers affect the average level of support for candidates. Moving beyond the average effect of
endorsements, however, scholars have long argued that the impact of endorsements is heteroge-
neous across different contexts. In particular, scholars have argued that voters use endorsements
as an information shortcut, or heuristic, to learn about candidates. For example, voters may use
the candidate preferences of media outlets to infer the spatial positions of candidates (Arceneaux
and Kolodny, 2009; Lupia, 1994). As a result, voters may be more likely to learn about candidates
that like-minded groups media outlets support.

To test this hypothesis, we matched citizens to the largest newspaper in their Congressional
district. This enabled us to leverage the natural variation in the ideology of newspapers across
the country. We examined whether citizens are more likely to support candidates that receive an
endorsement when they perceive that the newspaper is ideologically similar to their preferences.
We find strong support for the notion that citizens use their perception of the media outlet’s
ideology as a heuristic: citizens are more likely to support endorsed candidates when they perceive

\(^6\) To the best of our knowledge, no scholars have published results of a field or survey experiment designed to gauge
the effects of local newspaper endorsements on public attitudes or candidate support.
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 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.

These findings suggest that newspapers editorial boards’ current behavioral norm of endorsing candidates in both political parties during primary and general contests may be harming their preferred candidates. For instance, a left-leaning newspaper 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 conservative 7th Congressional District.

In January 2012, for instance, the left-leaning Boston Globe endorsed former Governor Jon Hunstman 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”\(^7\).

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

\(^7\)http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/mitt-romney-boston-globe-boston-herald_n_1189123.html
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.

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 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.8 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:

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

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8While 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)).
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 those 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 heuristics 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 is incongruent with their own ideology.*

**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 a controlled, randomized survey experiment of a nationally representative sample of 5,500 adult Americans during the summer of 2012.9 We asked respondents a range of questions designed to draw out their views on politics and media usage and, in particular, to test whether local newspaper endorsements have any discernible effect on expressed opinion.

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

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9 The interviews in our database are a sample matched on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest to be representative of the general population, as determined by the 2007 American Community Survey. YouGov administered the survey by Internet.
**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.

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

This 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.¹¹

The two candidates were described as follows:

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?

¹¹The candidates’ backgrounds as a lawyer or manager were randomized.
Democratic primary election experiment

This 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.12

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.13 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.

12 The candidates’ backgrounds as a lawyer or manager were randomized.
13 We obtained the newspaper circulation data from the Audit Bureau of Circulations. http://www.accessabc.com/products/newsgeo.htm The data provides newspaper circulation at the ZIP Code level.
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 policy preferences. We are tapping into an underlying endorsement effect caused by brief exposure to a news segment or a discussion with friends.\textsuperscript{14}

Our survey experiment simulated a high-information election by including many pieces of information: the hypothetical Congressional candidates’ profession, previous government experience and stance on two or three prominent issues. In the general election experiment, the candidates exhibited clear ideological distinctions across the three policy issues, while the primary election candidates took liberal (or conservative) positions on key partisan issues.

Our survey experiment simulated an open election contest between two challengers in both the primary and general election contexts. We included political novices running for a Congressional contest. Future studies will simulate a low information contest by varying the amount of information provided for each candidate.

Finally, our survey used hypothetical Congressional candidates rather than real politicians. Since many newspapers endorse candidates a few days prior to an election, it is exceedingly difficult to administer a controlled experiment with real politicians. By using hypothetical candidates, we are able to control the ideological distance between the primary and general election candidates across respondents.

\textbf{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

\textsuperscript{14}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 policy (i.e., The San Francisco Chronicle endorses Candidate A because he is a strong leader).
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:

\[ \text{Support}_i = A_0 + B_1 \times \text{Group}_i + B_1 \times \text{Controls}_i + u_i \]

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:

\[ \text{Support}_i = A_0 + B_1 \times \text{Group}_i + B_2 \times \text{VarInt}_i + B_3 \times (\text{Group}_i \times \text{VarInt}_i) + B_4 \times \text{Controls}_i + u_i \]

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), 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.
Measuring Ideological Congruence between Individuals and Newspapers

Our key question of interest is whether the degree of ideological congruence between of 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{15} We also asked respondents to evaluate the ideology of the largest newspaper in their district on a seven-point scale.\textsuperscript{16} 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

\textsuperscript{15}Response options were very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative and very conservative.

\textsuperscript{16}Response options were very liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, and very conservative.
respondents’ support for two ideologically distinct candidates.

Table 1: Average Treatment Effects in General Election Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Endorse A (Liberal)</th>
<th>Endorse B (Conservative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Supporting</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Candidate</td>
<td>[46.4,50.9]</td>
<td>[43.4,48]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*95% Confidence Intervals in brackets

The average treatment effect of newspaper endorsements is quite small, as shown in Table 1 on Page 18. The table shows that 49 percent of respondents support Candidate B, the conservative alternative, in the baseline condition. This goes down 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 quite 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 on Page 19 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.

Among Republicans, local newspaper endorsements actually reduce candidate support in primary elections. In the control condition, 36 percent of respondents prefer Candidate B, who sup-
Table 2: Average Treatment Effects in Primary Election Experiments

<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>[46,52.8]</td>
<td>[42.5,49.3]</td>
<td>[47,53.6]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*95% Confidence Intervals in brackets

ports 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.\(^{17}\) 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 the baseline condition.

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.

\(^{17}\)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.
Does the level of ideological congruence between newspapers and voters affect the impact of endorsements?

Collectively, the results in the previous section call into question the impact of newspaper endorsements. However, it’s possible that newspaper endorsements have a heterogeneous impact across respondents. In this section, we examine whether the perceived ideology of a newspaper affects the impact of endorsements.\(^{18}\) 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.

Table 3: Percent Support for Candidate B, by Ideological Congruence in the General Election Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></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.

Table 3 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

\(^{18}\)We separately examine whether perceptions of a newspaper’s objectivity affect endorsement effects. 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 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 for 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.
endorsements from unpopular or low-quality sources. Respondents whose political views are distant 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.19

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.

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. In both experiments, we find that respondents’ perceived ideological similarity with the newspaper significantly affects the impact of the endorsement.

The left-hand side of the table shows the results from our general election experiments. Column 2 shows that respondents that are ideologically distant from the newspaper are less likely to support candidate B when this candidate receives the newspaper endorsement in a general election.

Consider three individuals with the same party affiliation and background characteristics who are in the three treatment groups in the general election experiment.20 Estimates from Column 2 suggest that an individual in the control group with perfect ideological congruence has a 54% 19Given the relatively small sample sizes, we can only say that there is a suggestive punishment effect among unpopular sources. 20This individual is a 40 year-old, white Republican with a family income of $70,000-$79,999 and a college degree.
chance of supporting Candidate B. This same individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate A has a 48% chance of supporting A, a gain of six percentage points, and the individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate B has a 62% chance of supporting B, an eight point effect in the anticipated direction.

An individual in the control group with perfect ideological dissonance has a 75% chance of supporting Candidate B. This same individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate A has a 78% chance of supporting B, a loss of three percentage points, and the individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate B has a 70% chance of supporting B, a five point drop in support.

The right-hand side of the table examines our pooled primary election experiments. Column 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>-0.231*</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate A 0.091</td>
<td>(0.143)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.328*</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>0.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate B 0.090</td>
<td>(0.140)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Distance</td>
<td>0.955*</td>
<td>-0.380*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.265)</td>
<td>(0.215)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>0.415</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate A * Ideological</td>
<td>(0.359)</td>
<td>(0.289)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Endorses</td>
<td>-0.603*</td>
<td>-0.644 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate B * Ideological</td>
<td>(0.351)</td>
<td>(0.295)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.499*</td>
<td>-2.826 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.224)</td>
<td>(0.244)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5221</td>
<td>4928</td>
<td>4357</td>
<td>4105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>4958.527</td>
<td>4741.285</td>
<td>5920.307</td>
<td>5560.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log L</td>
<td>-2399.263</td>
<td>-2278.642</td>
<td>-2884.153</td>
<td>-2692.193</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, family income, gender, education and race. *denotes that a coefficient is significant at the .1 level.

All models were computed using survey weights.
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.

Again, consider three individuals with the same party affiliation and background characteristics who are in the three treatment groups in the GOP primary election experiment. Estimates from Column 4 suggest that an individual in the control group with perfect ideological congruence has a 60% chance of supporting conservative Candidate B. This same individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate A has a 55% chance of supporting B, a gain of five percentage points, and the individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate B has a 63% chance of supporting B, a three point effect in the anticipated direction.

An individual in the control group with perfect ideological dissonance has a 51% chance of supporting Candidate B. This same individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate A has a 56% chance of supporting B, a loss of five percentage points, and the individual who sees an endorsement for Candidate B has a 38% chance of supporting B, a 13 point drop in support.

Overall, the estimates from Table 4 demonstrate 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.

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21 This individual is a 40 year-old, white Republican with a family income of $70,000-$79,999 and a college degree. 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 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.

22
Conclusion

This study has examined the circumstances when newspaper endorsements influence election outcomes. This is an important question because newspapers commonly endorse candidates. Moreover, they 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.

These findings have implications for strategic candidates and interest group. They suggest that candidates should seek to obtain newspapers that are ideologically similar to the median voter in their district. In contrast, it may not be in 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 take several steps to improve our research design. First, we plan to randomize
the spatial distance between candidates. This will enable us to examine whether newspaper en-
dorsements 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.
References


