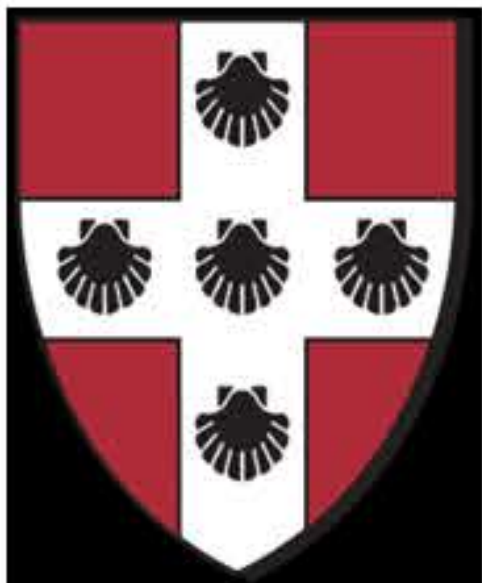# Impact of Exposure to Party Mentions in Political Ads and Local News on Ability to Identify Candidates' Political Party

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[1]QAC Summer Program 2012 [2]Wesleyan Media Project

Background

Candidates' party identification is one of if not the most important traits voters use in determining vote choice. Unsurprisingly, many people vote purely based on a candidate's party affiliation. Candidates often use this to their advantage, promoting their party if it will be beneficial to their chances of being elected.

However, there are also situations in which candidates work to hide their party affiliation in order to attract voters in the middle, or voters who typically support the opposing party but align themselves more with attributes of the candidate.

Due to its salience in determining vote choice, it is important to ask: How do voters learn party identification of political candidates?

Political advertising and local news are the two main ways political candidates reach out to voters. This study looks at whether greater exposure to party mentions in these two mediums leads to better ability to place these candidates in their respective parties. It then looks at how these mentions affect the ability of respondents to place Democratic candidates as more liberal than their Republican counterparts.

The hypotheses were that the more exposure voters have to news and political ads, the more likely they are to identify the party affiliation of candidates and their respective ratings. Additionally, exposure will have a larger impact on political novices, or those who have low political knowledge.

Variables and Method

This project looked at House, Senate and Gubernatorial races.
Dependent Variables:
It uses three dependent variables for each political race:
1)The ability to place the Democratic candidate on a political spectrum
2)The ability to place the Republican candidate on a political spectrum
3)The ability to place Democrat as more liberal than Republican on a political spectrum
Independent variables:
Exposure variables:
- Log(Avg hours of TV * Network * # of party mentions in ads & local news on their preferred channel)
- The political knowledge variable was created by giving a score of 0-6 based off of the number of correct answers to the following questions:
1)Party with house majority, 2)Current secretary of state, 3)Job of Nancy Pelosi, 4)Job of Clarence Thomas, 5)job of John Roberts, 6)Job of Dennis Hastert.
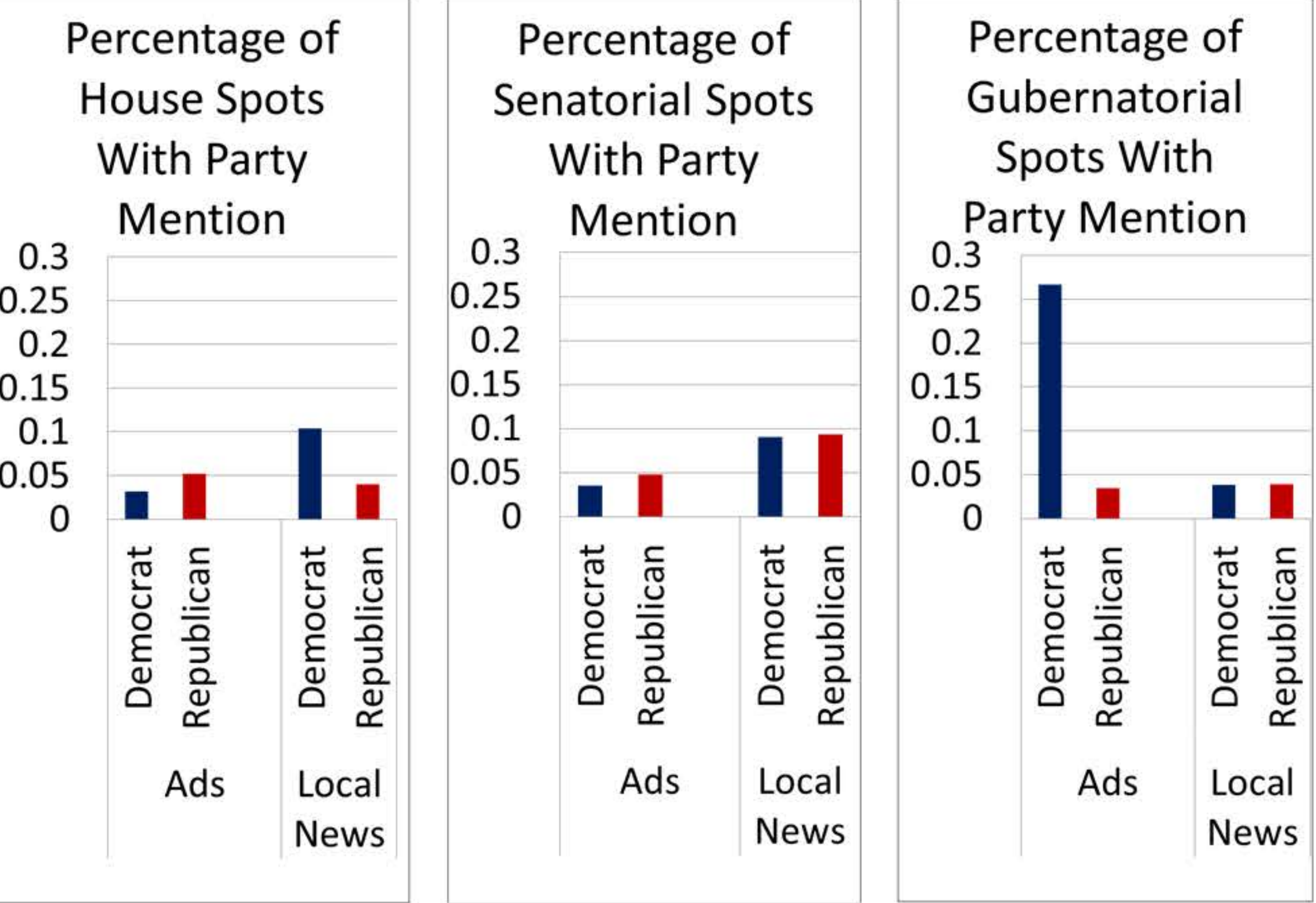Also included was an interaction variable between political knowledge and exposure.
- The rest of the variables are demographic controls, including party identification and strength of party id.
Method:
We performed logistic regressions on the various models because each of our dependent variables are dichotomous (only have two possible answers).

Party Mentions

Percentage of House Spots With Party Mention

Percentage of Senatorial Spots With Party Mention

Percentage of Gubernatorial Spots With Party Mention

Results

Republican Gubernatorial Candidates	Advertisements model			Local news Model		
	Ability to place candidate	Standard Error	Significance level	Ability to place candidate	Standard Error	Significance Level
Log of exposure to Republican Gubernatorial advertisements	0.602	(0.270)	**			
Exposure to Rep Gov ads*political knowledge	-0.095	(0.054)	*			
Log of exposure to Republican Gubernatorial news				2.080	(0.482)	***
Exposure to rep gov news*political knowledge				-0.349	(0.096)	***
Political knowledge	0.366	(0.069)	***	0.489	(0.076)	***
Party id - 7 point scale	0.020	(0.031)		0.024	(0.031)	
Strength of party id	0.158	(0.062)	**	0.147	(0.062)	**

FOR EACH OF THE MODELS:
Significance levels: *=.1, **=.05, ***=.01
Also included in these models: Age, Gender, Race, Presence of incumbent in political race

Results (cont.)

Senate Candidates	Advertisements model			Local news Model		
	Correct placement of Dem to Left of Rep	Standard Error	Significance level	Correct placement of Dem to Left of Rep	Standard Error	Significance Level
Log of total exposure to Senate advertisements	0.137	(0.491)				
Exposure to senate ads*political knowledge	-0.006	(0.091)				
Log of total exposure to Senate news				1.847	(0.945)	*
Exposure to senate news*political knowledge				-0.227	(0.175)	
Political knowledge	0.270	(0.179)		0.516	(0.190)	***
Party id - 7 point scale	0.009	(0.050)		0.024	(0.051)	
Strength of party id	0.105	(0.107)		0.149	(0.107)	

Conclusions

Each of these models are consistent with most of our results in showing that relatively, local news party mentions have a greater and more significant impact on respondents ability to place candidates' parties. Although the results we found were slightly less significant than expected, we did find that greater exposure to these mentions never had a significantly negative relationship with ability to place the candidates.

Therefore, if a person was exposed to more party mentions, that person would either have the same or better chance of being able to determine the party id of the various candidates in their race.

Although more research is necessary this tells us that local news provide somewhat of a public service by being an aid to voters in determination of candidates' party id, and political ads are a somewhat significant aid.

Acknowledgements