Media & the Politics of Implementation: Explaining Geographic Variation in Local TV Coverage of the ACA

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• Wesleyan University
News as Commodity, not a Mirror

• News is a highly selective version of reality (Lippmann 1922; Gans 1979; Hamilton 2004)

• Much of political science assumes information transmission (see Althaus et al. 2011)

• Even within communication, news production takes a backseat to effects
Key Insight: Coverage Unlikely to be Uniform

• Audience characteristics
• Ease of access to story material
• Ownership characteristics
• Geographic proximity to story
• Congruence between media and political boundaries

• In other words, production is variable and complex
Competing Interests Shaping ACA Coverage

• News producers
• Politicians
• Organized interests

Interested here in predicting volume (content focus later)
Data & Measures

• Closed captioned searches of local TV news from 10/1/13-4/15/14
• Key words: “health care,” “healthcare,” “Obama care,” “Obamacare” and “Affordable Care Act”
• 685 stations in 208 media markets, all evening news (4:30-11:59pm)

• American Community Survey (ACS)
• Wesleyan Media Project political and insurance advertising data
• RWJF insurance market information
• BIA Kelsey Station Ownership Information
Volume of Evening Local TV ACA Hits
Oct 1, 2013 – Apr 15, 2014
Local TV News Hits by Station

![Graph showing the frequency of stations with closed captioning hits. The x-axis represents the number of closed captioning hits, ranging from 0 to 600. The y-axis represents the frequency of stations, ranging from 0 to 8. The graph shows a peak in the frequency of stations around 200 hits, with a significant drop as the number of hits increases.]
Analytic Approach

• Negative binomial count models
• Clustering by state, robust SEs (robust to hierarchical)
• All results from one model
Factors Shaping News: Audience Interest

*Greater interest in the ACA in a market should drive coverage up*

- Markets with more uninsured: more coverage
- Markets with more direct purchasers: more coverage
- Markets with high poverty: unclear
- Partisanship: unclear
- Political competition: more coverage
- Controls for news consumer demographics: age, sex, education, race
Factors Shaping News: Audience Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Coeff.</th>
<th>(S.E.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uninsured (% 18-64 NCI population)</td>
<td>1.278**</td>
<td>(0.597)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiv. health ins. enrollees (% 18-64 NCI pop)</td>
<td>-0.206</td>
<td>(1.414)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty (%)</td>
<td>-3.093**</td>
<td>(1.316)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (%)</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
<td>(0.205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College grad or more (%)</td>
<td>0.982</td>
<td>(0.734)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>-17.73***</td>
<td>(3.353)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 20-64 (%)</td>
<td>1.070</td>
<td>(1.684)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65+ (%)</td>
<td>-1.107</td>
<td>(1.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama vote in DMA (%)</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>(0.266)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margin of victory (50 – abs(Obama vote))</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>(0.415)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ease of Access to Sources & Story Materials

Availability of materials for ACA stories should increase coverage

• Accessibility of spokespeople should increase coverage
• Volume of ACA insurance and political ads should increase coverage
• Type of insurance marketplace: state-based should have more stories
Ease of Access to Sources & Story Materials

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<tr>
<td>Consumer assistance funds (per uninsured)</td>
<td>-0.00415</td>
<td>(0.00263)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance ad volume (000s)</td>
<td>0.0195**</td>
<td>(0.00900)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ad volume (000s)</td>
<td>0.0642</td>
<td>(0.0417)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership exchange</td>
<td>0.200***</td>
<td>(0.0665)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-based exchange</td>
<td>0.162**</td>
<td>(0.0711)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Predicted Count by Exchange Type

- Federally-Facilitated
- Partnership
- State-Based
Station & Ownership Characteristics

Stations are enabled and constrained by their network affiliates and ownership groups choices and priorities for programming

• Fox affiliates (more sports, fewer newscasts): less coverage
• Ownership profits: unclear
## Station & Ownership Characteristics

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<tr>
<td>CBS affiliate</td>
<td>0.0293</td>
<td>(0.0415)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox affiliate</td>
<td>-0.228***</td>
<td>(0.0473)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC affiliate</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
<td>(0.0417)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second tier (revenue)</td>
<td>-0.114**</td>
<td>(0.0490)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest tier (revenue)</td>
<td>-0.158***</td>
<td>(0.0483)</td>
</tr>
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Predicted Count by Owner Revenue Tier

![Bar chart showing predicted number of ACA hits by revenue tier. The chart has three categories: Largest Profits, Mid-Tier Profits, and Lowest Profits. The y-axis represents the predicted number of ACA hits ranging from 150 to 200, and the x-axis shows the revenue tiers. Largest Profits have the highest bar, followed by Mid-Tier Profits, and then Lowest Profits.]
Structural Factors Affecting Production

*Structural set-up of media markets (population served and geographic congruence) matter*

- Number of states within DMA: decrease coverage
- Population of the media market: decrease coverage
- Insurer competition: increase coverage (expect negative sign)
## Structural Factors Affecting Production

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<td># of states within DMA</td>
<td>0.0316</td>
<td>(0.0203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMA total population (Ms)</td>
<td>-0.0321*</td>
<td>(0.0174)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHI (insurance competition)</td>
<td>-2.02e-05</td>
<td>(1.28e-05)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Contribution & Future Directions

• Variance in news coverage of the ACA is predictable
• Systematic analysis of local TV across the country

• Future work
  • Over time
  • Assessing content