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The Local News Crisis and Political Scandal

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ABSTRACT



The local news crisis in the United States has raised concerns about accountability in state and local government. But existing research has provided only indirect evidence that the decline of local news reporting has made it harder for voters to punish poor-performing elected officials. In this paper, I examine local newspaper coverage of state and congressional political scandals from 1990 through 2022. I first show that scandals now receive about 25% of the coverage they once did, a development that is directly related to the decline in newsroom reporting resources. I then show that the volume of scandal reporting is associated with whether officials face sanction for their behavior. When newspapers devote less coverage to a scandal, incumbents are less likely to leave office or receive a lower vote share when they run for reelection. Because scandals get significantly less coverage than they did even a decade ago, it may now be easier for politicians to ride them out and avoid punishment for bad behavior.


KEYWORDS

Local news; political scandal; accountability

Democracy in the United States is predicated on accountability in state and local government, where tens of thousands of elected officials make decisions every day that affect residents' lives. But the collapse of the local news industry in recent years has set off a chorus of concern about the consequences of diminishing state and local watchdogs. "As local news sources disappear and their resources decrease," writes Moskowitz (2021, p. 127), "scandals, corruption, and other bad behavior may be more likely to go unnoticed." Contemplating a world with less local journalism, Rubado and Jennings (2020, p. 1349) envision local officials who "feel free to act in their own interests and the interests of their friends and supporters without fear of being unseated." Others have identified "worrying implications" in the wake of media consolidation (Martin & McCrain, 2019, p. 283) and suggest accountability in local politics will become "increasingly elusive" (Hayes & Lawless, 2021, p. 138).

These concerns appear well-founded. A large body of research in both comparative and American politics has linked a robust news media with better and more responsive government (Arnold, 2004; Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Ferraz & Finan, 2008; Larreguy et al., 2020; Snyder & Strömberg, 2010). And a raft of recent studies has connected the local news crisis to negative outcomes for community life and local politics: There is now less reporting about state and local government (Hayes & Lawless, 2018; Martin & McCrain, 2019; Peterson, 2021b), residents are less engaged in local politics (Hayes & Lawless, 2021; Hopkins, 2018; Rubado & Jennings, 2020), and voters are less likely to support candidates

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from the opposing party (Darr et al., 2018, 2021; Moskowitz, 2021). Many of these same developments are evident in nations around the world (Bruggemann et al., 2016; Nielsen, 2015; Vogler et al., 2023).

Diminished reporting resources, decreased civic participation, and increased partisanship are undoubtedly bad outcomes. They represent only indirect evidence, however, that the local news crisis has reduced accountability for elected officials. What we do not know is whether the kind of reporting that would help voters oust poor-performing local leaders has systematically declined in recent years.

Nor do we know if the level of news reporting is related to whether local officials are held accountable for their actions in office. This is in part because there are theoretical reasons that we might expect news outlets to have preserved reporting about political malfeasance, even as they have cut other types of state and local reporting. And in an era of growing partisanship and diminished attention to local news, local coverage of elected officials' performance may simply not be relevant to how voters evaluate them. These uncertainties thus leave the impact of the local news crisis unclear, making it hard to say whether leaders do in fact have more freedom to "breach rules, standards, and laws in pursuit of private interests" (Rubado & Jennings, 2020, p. 1349).

In this paper, I provide the first direct test of the prevailing argument about electoral accountability and the local news crisis in the United States. Drawing on a database of state and congressional political scandals from 1990 through 2022, I show that local newspapers have in the last decade devoted a decreasing amount of coverage to accusations of wrongdoing by elected officials. By one measure, reporting on scandals now is less than 25% of what it was at its peak in the early 2000s. I also show that the volume of scandal reporting is associated with accountability. The more coverage a scandal receives, the more likely an incumbent is to resign, retire, or lose their next election – a pattern that is evident even in recent years. Among officials who stand for reelection, more scandal coverage is correlated with a lower vote share.

These findings suggest mixed implications for debates about the media and political accountability. On one hand, local news outlets continue to have the power to hold elected officials accountable when they are embroiled in scandals. Even as audiences for local news have declined, more coverage makes it harder for misbehaving incumbents to survive. On the other hand, local outlets simply do not cover political scandals as aggressively as they did 20 years ago. Because there is less attention to politicians' alleged misdeeds, officials now have a better chance of surviving a scandal. As a result, the ability of the local media to enforce accountability has indeed diminished.

The Local News Crisis and Political Accountability

The local news crisis has its roots in the media transformation of the 1990s and early 2000s (see Hayes & Lawless, 2021 for an overview). With the diffusion of cable and satellite television, the internet, and social media, consumers' choices for news and entertainment expanded dramatically. The result was audience fragmentation (Prior, 2007) and a significant decline in readership of the state and local newspapers that had been the foundation of the U.S. media ecosystem. The combination of shrinking audiences and the migration of advertising online ruined local newspapers' business model and led to an

industry-wide financial crisis, a phenomenon that has also played out in Europe and elsewhere (Gulyas et al., 2023).

The consequences have been profound. Over the last 20 years, more than 2,000 newspapers across the United States have folded (Abernathy, 2022) and virtually every surviving daily paper slashed its reporting staff (Hayes & Lawless, 2021). For instance, between 2004 and 2020 the number of newspaper newsroom employees in the United States fell 57% (Waldman, 2022), resulting in a significant reduction in coverage of local politics (Peterson, 2021b). In a study of more than 200 dailies, Hayes and Lawless (2021) show that the number of stories about local government declined by more than half from 1996 to 2017 (see also L'Heude, 2023). Meanwhile, the number of full-time reporters covering statehouses fell 11% between 2014 and 2022, with news outlets increasingly relying on part-timers, interns, and students (Shearer et al., 2022). While studies have differed about trends in state political reporting (e.g., Hayes & Lawless, 2017; Hopkins, 2018; Myers, 2024; Peterson, 2021b), Americans' likelihood of encountering news about state and local government is at a historical low.

These developments are viewed as a major threat to state and local accountability, because the existence of a robust independent news media encourages good government. In particular, "watchdog journalism," in which journalists alert the public to potential governmental malfeasance, is a crucial way that the news media keep elected officials in line (e.g., Norris, 2014). By making politicians' actions more visible, media give citizens the opportunity to vote out those engaging in undesirable or unethical conduct. A vibrant system of news thus pressures elected officials to perform better in order to avoid angering or disappointing their constituents. In their landmark study, Snyder and Strömberg (2010, p. 357) show that more news coverage "makes voters better informed, which increases monitoring and induces politicians to work harder, which, finally, produces better policies." With fewer watchdogs now than there were 20 years ago, state and local officials presumably are less worried that poor performance will be noticed or reported on widely.

Existing research provides evidence consistent with this supposition. For instance, the geographic overlap between congressional districts and newspaper circulation areas has in the last two decades become a weaker predictor of whether voters punish ideologically extreme candidates (Canes-Wrone & Kistner, 2023). Similarly, coverage of political scandals in national media does not appear to harm congressional candidates as much as it did in the 1980s and early 1990s (Hamel & Miller, 2019). Research also suggests that changes to the local news environment have affected the level of corruption in state and local government (Matherly & Greenwood, 2021; Usher & Kim-Leffingwell, 2023).¹

These studies, however, do not directly address the chief arguments about the local news crisis and electoral accountability. First, they do not actually measure local news coverage, but instead rely on proxies like market boundaries, newspaper closures, national news reporting, or aggregated data on journalist employment. These indicators necessitate strong assumptions about how reporting on state and local politicians has changed over time, and do not allow researchers to quantify it explicitly. Second, studies of corruption prosecutions do not distinguish between elected officials and other government employees. That is important, because a key mechanism of the media's accountability function is to inform citizens, who may then punish an elected official at the ballot box. Analyzing corruption cases that include non-elected officials thus conflates political and mere legal accountability, making it impossible to say whether increases in corruption are a function of diminished

electoral accountability. Third, studies of ideological extremity and corruption focus only on a subset of behavior that violates public confidence. Ideally, a study of accountability should examine how a wide variety of politicians' questionable actions are covered by the media and how that affects the penalties that officials may or may not pay.

I address these limitations by examining state and local media coverage of political scandals. I define scandals as public accusations that an elected official has committed a crime or a significant violation of a widely held ethical or societal norm. This includes misbehavior directly related to an elected official's position, such as corruption or misuse of public funds. But it can also include private behavior, such as marital infidelity, illegal drug use, or dressing up in blackface. My definition is consistent with research that has described scandals as instances of "norm transgression" (e.g., von Sikorski, 2018) or "moral violations" (Redlawsk & Walter, 2024). While some studies have defined scandals by the level of media attention they receive (e.g., Entman, 2012; Nyhan, 2015), I do not adopt that approach because my question is whether and how news coverage varies over time and from scandal to scandal. Some scandals, as I define them, may receive limited attention, while others will receive a great deal.

Scandals are a good case for studying accountability for at least two reasons. First, they often involve behavior that most voters view as inappropriate or concerning. Second, they represent moments in which the media's watchdog function is expected to be on display, since one source of the media's power is its ability to publicize bad behavior by elected officials. As a result, the type of accountability I focus on is how a scandal and its attending news coverage affect an official's electoral fortunes – in particular whether they leave office following a scandal or see their vote share reduced in a subsequent election.²

The Media Logic of Scandal Coverage

My expectation is that state and local news coverage of scandals has declined in recent decades. But that expectation, while consistent with the deterioration of the local media environment, is not a theoretical slam-dunk.

One perspective suggests that coverage of wrongdoing by politicians might not have declined. Two reasons are journalistic norms and economic incentives. Journalistic norms establish criteria for newsworthiness that determine what the media devote attention to (e.g., Bennett, 1996; Wolfsfeld, 2022). For instance, journalists find attractive stories that involve well-known people and dramatic events, features of many political scandals. Journalists also gravitate toward the kind of conflict inherent in scandals, as incumbents fight the allegations against them and their political opponents exploit them. Scandals also can create divisions within a party, particularly when party leaders have to decide whether to defend or abandon a fellow party member under siege.³ Such intra-party cleavages often generate disproportionate attention because they are unusual (Baum & Groeling, 2010).

There is also an economic logic to scandal coverage (e.g., Puglisi & Snyder, 2011). Scandals generate audience interest because of the same dramatic characteristics that make them newsworthy. Writing about the media frenzy during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal of the late 1990s, critic Steven Brill described scandals as igniting a "rocket under the entire revenue structure" for media outlets.⁴ Hamilton (2003) argues that as the media environment has grown more competitive, consumer preferences have become a stronger influence on news content, which puts a premium on dramatic and sensational stories (see

also Kernell et al., 2018). The journalistic and economic pull of scandals may thus create an incentive for local news outlets to continue to cover them aggressively, even as they have cut back on more mundane aspects of state and local politics.

But despite scandals' appeal, it is likely that their coverage in local newspapers has declined. There are at least three reasons. First, there is the basic reality of resources. Fewer staff means fewer stories that can be written, regardless of how newsworthy they are. That is one reason that reductions in coverage have occurred across the board on virtually every topic related to local politics (Hayes & Lawless, 2021). Even if a scandal story is compelling, the level of attention that a cash-strapped news outlet can give it will be limited by the shrinking resources at its disposal.

Second, the economic pull of local political scandals may be less powerful than it first seems. While presidential scandals like the Lewinsky affair may lead to huge audience gains for some news outlets, state and local scandals may not do the same. Consumer interest in state and local politics is modest (e.g., Hindman, 2018; McCrain and Peterson 2025; Shaker, 2012; Trounstine, 2009), and because local scandals are mainly of interest to people in only a small geographic area, the size of a ratings or readership boost will always be limited – local news does not “scale.” As a result, state and local political scandals may not produce the kind of bonanza that leads national outlets to pour resources into covering presidential misdeeds.

Third, original state and local scandal reporting still costs more than other forms of news. Even if a scandal does increase audience interest, giving reporters the time to chase follow-up stories may not generate a justifiable return on investment.⁵ Consequently, strapped local news outlets are likely to struggle to sustain coverage over a lengthy time period. As journalist Mary Ellen Klas described her experience at one Florida paper in an era of cutbacks, politicians facing media investigations “would just wait us out – until our over-stretched staff left to chase the next big story.”⁶

Of course, scandals that are more newsworthy and more likely to generate more audience interest will get more coverage than others. But on average, I expect state and local newspaper reporting on political scandals is likely to have declined as the local news crisis has worsened.

Scandal Coverage and Political Accountability

The second question is the extent to which coverage of scandals is related to electoral accountability, and whether that relationship has changed as state and local media have declined. One theoretical view suggests that two developments may have reduced or eliminated the effect of local scandal coverage on a politician's likelihood of being punished for a scandal.

First, partisanship has become so strong that the effects of scandal may be attenuated (Funck & McCabe, 2022). The strength of voters' ties to parties may make the propriety of elected officials' behavior less important, as long as they continue to represent their party's interests. At the national level, Donald Trump's continued support from Republicans despite his many scandals is the signal example. But this is also the case for lower-level offices, where copartisans express less concern over a politician's scandal than do out-partisans (Costa et al., 2020; Rothschild et al., 2021; Schonhage & Geys, 2024; Wolsky, 2022). Likewise, party leaders may feel pressure to jettison an elected official whose behavior

is an embarrassment, but the desire not to weaken the party's power may prompt them to rally behind the scandal-plagued politician if they believe they can survive the next election (Schonhage & Geys, 2022). This might be especially true in an era of highly competitive elections (Lee, 2016).

Second, at a time of “nationalized” politics, consumers' news habits have changed. Audiences for local news are significantly smaller than they were even a few years ago (e.g., Hopkins, 2018; Hopkins & Gorton, 2024; Trexler, 2023). At the same time, consumers have gravitated toward national content (e.g., Trussler, 2021), meaning that many Americans are now relatively more attentive to national than local news. As a result, coverage of state and local scandals in national media, not local outlets, may shape how voters react.

Nonetheless, I expect that the volume of scandal coverage in state and local outlets remains associated with electoral accountability. Prior studies have found that both state and congressional scandals lower support for incumbents, leading to higher retirement rates and lower vote share (Basinger, 2013; Rottinghaus, 2023; Welch & Hibbing, 1997). And the more media coverage scandals receive, the larger the electoral penalties (Costas-Pérez et al., 2012; Ulbig & Miller, 2012; von Sikorski, 2018).⁷

Local news also continues to affect attitudes and behavior. Peterson (2021a), for instance, finds that exposure to newspaper coverage still increases residents' political knowledge, even as its impact has weakened over time. Hayes and Lawless (2018) show that variation in the coverage of congressional candidates in a district affects voters' knowledge of the candidates and ability to evaluate their ideology. When citizens are exposed to local news, they become less partisan in their voting behavior, suggesting that learning new information about local incumbents can shape voter support (Darr et al., 2018; Moskowitz, 2021). Since scandal coverage is likely to reach at least as large an audience as routine state and local political news, I anticipate that higher levels of scandal coverage should still be associated with a higher likelihood of accountability.

Local political news reporting also tends to reach the most engaged citizens, the kinds of people most likely to vote in state and local elections and express their views to elected officials (Hayes & Lawless, 2021). Thus, even if the overall audience has grown smaller, reaching an audience that is readily mobilized and that politicians are more likely to fear – by virtue of their participation rates – may create a path for scandal news to increase accountability.

Ultimately, then, I expect that local news coverage of political scandals will have declined over time. But even amid that decline, scandals that receive more coverage will likely be associated with higher rates of punishment for incumbents. At the same time, if the absolute level of scandal coverage has fallen in recent years, overall levels of accountability are also likely to be lower. This is one reason it is critical to directly measure both the level of coverage and its relationship to accountability.

Measuring State and Local Scandal Coverage

To study changes in local coverage, I draw on a database of political scandals involving statewide elected officials and members of Congress from 1990 through 2022.⁸ The data set, maintained by journalist Nathaniel Rakich, consists of scandals in which a politician has been “credibly accused of illegal or unethical activity.”⁹ This includes instances in which an

incumbent has been arrested or accused by authorities of corruption or financial impropriety, accused of violating campaign finance or ethics laws, and accused of sexual misconduct or an extramarital affair. The scandals in the data set also involve other misbehavior, such as drunk driving, drug possession, or significant violations of societal norms (e.g., dressing up in blackface). A short description of each scandal appears in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Like previous work (e.g., Basinger, 2013), the data set does not include episodes that involve merely embarrassing information about an official or controversial actions that do not clearly rise to the level of unethical behavior (such as yelling “you lie” at the president during a State of the Union speech). Unlike prior studies that have focused on presidential (e.g., Entman, 2012; Nyhan, 2015), executive branch (Puglisi & Snyder, 2011), congressional (Basinger, 2013; Hamel & Miller, 2019; Welch & Hibbing, 1997), or gubernatorial (Nyhan, 2017) scandals, these data allow me to study coverage of a range of statewide officials (including U.S. Senators) as well as House members, whose monitoring by the media has been significantly affected by the local news crisis.

Rakich began collecting the data in 2013 and continues to update it. He retrospectively identified scandals that had occurred in prior years through various search methods.¹⁰ One concern is that scandals earlier in the data set may be systematically more prominent than those that were collected more recently, because identifying lower-profile historical scandals through internet research might be difficult. If so, then any longitudinal decline in coverage might be due to over-time differences in the prominence of scandals included in the data, not necessarily because of changes in the local media environment.

I address this concern in two ways. First, in several instances I report findings from only between 2013 and 2022, when Rakich was actively collecting the data. During this time, there should not be systematic differences in the prominence of scandals, since the data were being collected in real time. Second, I account for the prominence of each scandal in the data set by using an independent assessment of the severity of the accusations against the elected official. This assessment comes from a survey – described in more detail below – in which respondents rated the seriousness of the (anonymized) accusations in each scandal. While scandal severity is only one factor that might raise or lower a scandal’s profile, it is likely to be correlated with media attention and can help address the concern about potential over-time differences in the prominence of scandals in the data set.

To measure the volume of coverage, I proceed in several steps. First, for each scandal, I identified the relevant state or local newspaper. For statewide officials, including U.S. senators, I analyzed the state’s largest newspaper.¹¹ For House members, I identified the largest-circulation newspaper in the district, following the approach of Hayes and Lawless (2021).

Second, I conducted mini-case studies for each of the 211 scandals in the data set that met the criteria for inclusion for analysis.¹² This involved researching and reading details about each episode using press accounts, Wikipedia, and other historical sources. I used these case studies to identify words and phrases likely to appear in news coverage about the particular scandal. These words and phrases became the basis of my search in each publication for scandal-related coverage.¹³ I adopted this labor-intensive, case-by-case approach because scandals involve a wide variety of circumstances, and the way news outlets report on them varies by the particulars of each episode. Simply conducting keyword

searches for “scandal” or “investigation” in conjunction with an incumbent’s name produces variable and inaccurate results.¹⁴

Third, using the incident-specific terms, I searched the archives of the relevant newspaper in NewsBank or ProQuest to identify the first date a scandal story appeared in the news. Having identified the date that coverage of a scandal began, I counted the number of stories that mention the scandal throughout what I call the “scandal period.” I define the scandal period as the day from the first scandal story to one of several possible ending dates – when an official announced their resignation or that they would not run for reelection; when an official was removed from office; when an official lost in a primary election; or the next general election date. For the purposes of my coding, the scandal period ends as soon as one of those things happens. One implication is that the length of a scandal period will vary depending on how close to an election a scandal breaks as well as whether and when an official steps down or announces they will not run for reelection. In my analysis, I account for variation in the scandal period to ensure that any differences in the volume of coverage are not a function of differences in length of scandal periods.

The analysis does not include scandal coverage after an incumbent wins or loses reelection, so I am not able to trace coverage that extends beyond election day. But for the purposes of measuring news that is important for accountability, this is less relevant. If a candidate wins reelection, it suggests a limited amount of accountability.¹⁵ If a candidate loses, then coverage after the election is likely to diminish – not necessarily because a newspaper lacks the ability to sustain coverage but because the behavior of an outgoing elected official automatically becomes less newsworthy.

Declining Local News Coverage of Scandals

The first question is how attention to political scandals in local newspapers has changed over time. The left side of [Figure 1](#) plots the data for statewide elected officials, including U.S. senators. Each dot represents the number of stories for an individual scandal; the year indicates when the scandal broke. The solid line represents a lowess estimator to smooth the trend, so it is less sensitive to outliers.

Looking at the top left, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* published 774 stories about Governor Jim Guy Tucker’s connection to the Whitewater real estate deal involving Bill and Hillary Clinton after the scandal broke in 1995. The *Anchorage Daily News* published 398 stories after Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens was implicated in 2007 in a federal corruption probe of unreported gifts, including home renovations. In 2018, I found 270 stories in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* related to allegations that Governor Eric Greitens violated a law forbidding sexual blackmail.

The graph makes clear that scandal coverage has declined significantly over time. On average, a statewide scandal in the 1990s generated 228 stories. Between 2000 and 2009, that number dropped to 111. Since 2010, it has fallen further to 87. The post-2010 decline is even more eye-popping because it includes the 1,690 stories about the “Bridgewater” scandal ensnaring New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (though Christie is omitted from the graph to make the figure more readable).¹⁶ Excluding the Christie case, the average number of stories since 2010 declines to 60 – meaning that scandal coverage has fallen to just 25% of what it was in the 1990s.

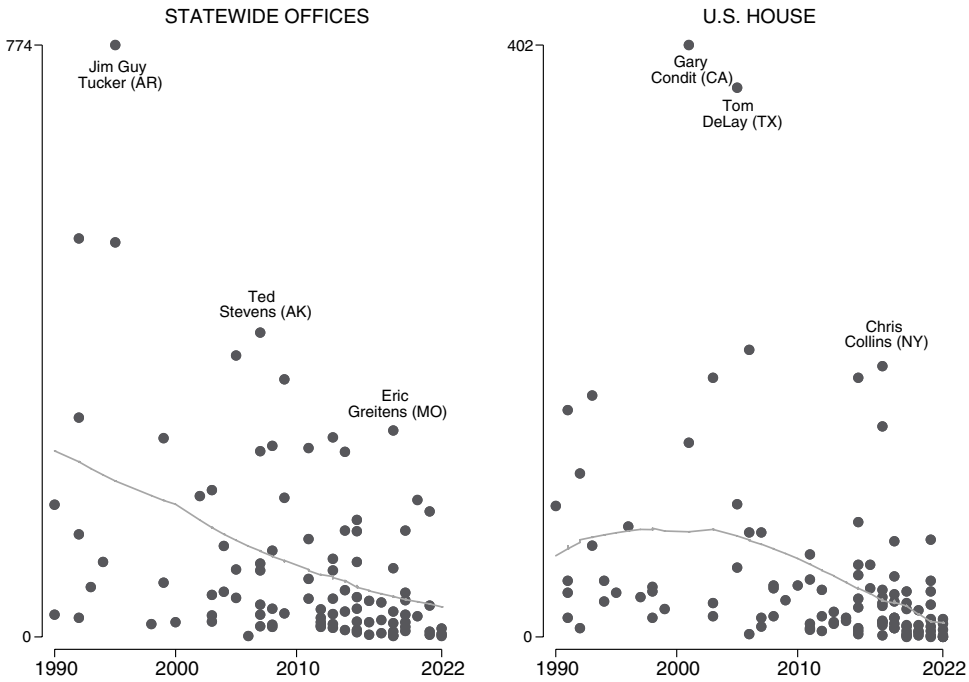


Figure 1. Number of scandal stories in local newspapers, 1990–2022. Graph presents the number of local newspaper stories published about each scandal. Solid line is a lowest smoother.

The right side of the graph plots the same data for House members. The overall number of stories is lower, both because House members are often covered by smaller newspapers and because House members tend to be less prominent than statewide officials. But a downward trend is evident for these scandals as well.

In the 1990s, House scandals produced on average 53 stories. The high-water mark, however, came in the first decade of the 2000s, the result of scandals involving U.S. Rep. Gary Condit (in 2001 after he was linked to missing federal intern Chandra Levy); U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, one of several members caught up in scandals involving the lobbyist Jack Abramoff; and U.S. Rep. William Jefferson, in whose freezer the FBI found cash allegedly part of a bribery scheme. Between 2000 and 2009, House scandals generated an average of 95 stories.

But since 2010, the average has fallen to just 23. That is despite the fact that the data include scandals like the 2017 insider trading charges against U.S. Rep. Chris Collins, which produced 184 stories in the *Buffalo News*; a federal investigation of sex trafficking surrounding U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz; and the conviction of U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah on federal bribery and racketeering charges. As in the statewide data, scandal coverage of House members is now about 25% of its peak.

Of course, one possibility is that the decline in coverage is a function of changes in the kinds of scandals politicians have found themselves embroiled in. If the types of scandals emerging in recent years involve behavior that would generate less media interest, then the

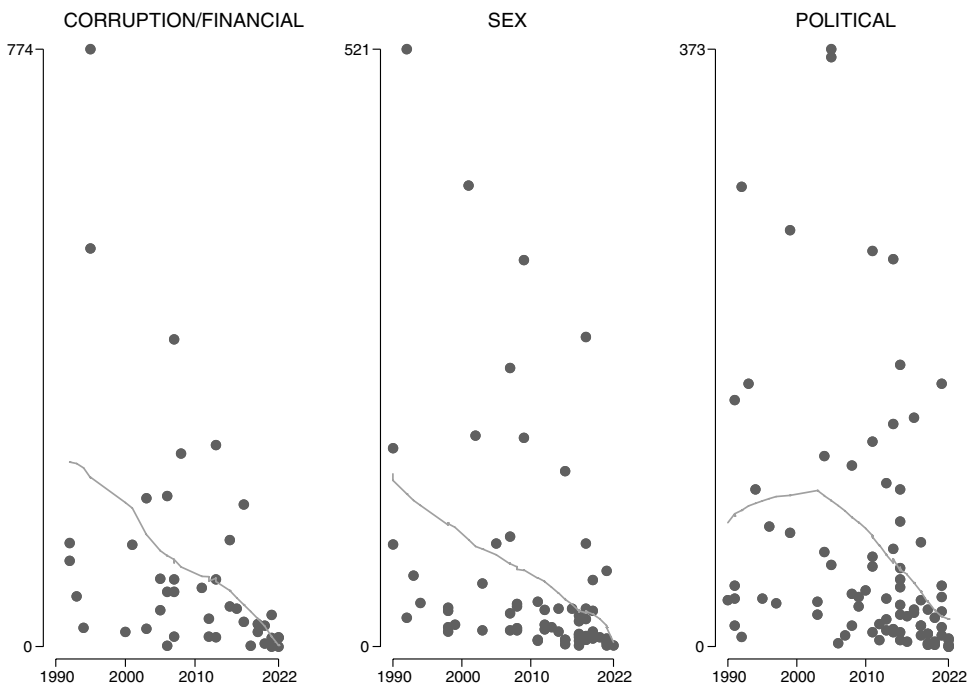


Figure 2. Number of scandal stories in local newspapers, by scandal type, 1990–2022. Graph presents the number of local newspaper stories published about each scandal, split by the type of scandal. Solid lines are loess smoothers.

decline in coverage might not be due to changes in the local media’s reporting capacity. Instead, it could be that the substance of the scandals has changed.

But [Figure 2](#) shows that the volume of coverage has declined in recent decades for each of the major categories, following [Basinger \(2013\)](#) – corruption or financial scandals, sex scandals, and political scandals.¹⁷ This figure includes both statewide and House scandals.¹⁸

Coverage of corruption and financial scandals has declined the most. But reporting on sex and political scandals both also peaked in the late 1990s and early 2000s and has declined since. For political scandals, the decline has been especially steep since 2014. Moreover, the share of different types of scandals has changed relatively little over the last three decades.¹⁹ Any change in media reporting does not seem to be explained by changes in the types of scandals.²⁰

We can assess these developments more rigorously in a regression model. In [Table 1](#), I present models explaining the volume of scandal coverage. These models account for a variety of factors that might influence scandal coverage and allow for a better test of whether the decline over time is in fact related to a reduction in newspaper resources.

My measure of newspaper resources is a variable for the size of the news hole, the total number of stories a newspaper produced during the scandal period. In other words, the variable measures all of a newspaper’s content during this time frame. Newspapers with a larger news hole will have more advertising revenue and a larger reporting staff, and thus

Table 1. The relationship between newspaper resources and scandal coverage, 1990–2022.

	Coefficient (Robust Standard Error)
News Hole	1.071* (0.277)
Scandal Severity	5.787 (8.995)
Financial Scandal	31.773 (45.605)
Corruption Scandal	14.922 (28.132)
Sex Scandal	10.830 (18.446)
Other Scandal	–27.921 (24.431)
Statewide Official	49.397* (15.496)
Republican	20.815 (20.280)
Woman	–47.638* (16.854)
Presidential Vote Margin	0.296 (0.675)
Days of Scandal	0.015 (0.025)
Constant	–17.280 (32.951)
Adjusted R ²	0.16
N	211

* $p < .05$. Dependent variable is the number of scandal stories published by a newspaper. Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses.

will have greater ability to cover a political scandal (see Hayes & Lawless, 2021). I expect that as the news hole increases, so will coverage of scandals. The implication of such a relationship would be that as the news hole declines – as has happened industry-wide in recent years – so will scandal coverage.

To address concerns about changes in the prominence of scandals over time, the model controls for the severity of the scandal. My measure of severity comes from a survey of a sample of undergraduate students ($N = 41$), in which each respondent was randomly assigned to read 20 of the scandal descriptions that appear in the Appendix. They were asked to rate the seriousness of the accusation on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. The summaries described only the accusation facing the elected official and did not include the politician's name, the office they held, their gender, or partisanship, factors that I control for in the model. Every scandal was evaluated by four respondents, and the severity score is the average of those ratings.²¹

The model also includes measures of the type of scandal (financial, corruption, sex, and other scandals, with political scandals as the omitted category). I also include the vote margin in the prior presidential election in the politician's state or district, since scandals in more competitive jurisdictions might receive more attention. Finally, I control for the length of a scandal – the number of days in the scandal period. This ensures that a decline in coverage over time is not simply a function of a change in the typical length of the scandal period.

In [Table 1](#), I find that newspaper resources, as measured by the news hole, are significantly related to scandal coverage. Outlets with more resources publish more coverage of political scandals, even after accounting for other factors. Crucially, that means that as resources decline, so does scandal coverage. This suggests that one reason for the reduction in coverage in the last decade is the major cutbacks at local newspapers. To be sure, it could also be that smaller newspapers – with smaller news holes – devote less coverage to scandals. But when I control for circulation size, the news hole continues to significantly predict scandal coverage.²² In addition, the same pattern emerges when I restrict the analysis to just 2013–2022, another indicator that these results are not simply a product of the declining prominence of scandals in recent years.²³

The data set is not large enough to explore within-paper variation as a way of determining how changes in resources have affected scandal coverage. It is descriptively clear, however, that the decline in scandal coverage over time is correlated with the decline in the size of the news hole. For instance, the average daily size of the news hole for a newspaper during a scandal period in the 1990s was 140 stories. By the first decade of the 2000s, it was 108. Since 2010, it has been 87, significantly less than what it was in the 1990s. This implies that one likely reason for the decline in scandal coverage is simply a decline in the capacity of newspapers to cover them.

The takeaway from these analyses is that scandal coverage has been declining for 30 years, with an especially steep drop-off in the last decade. Politicians who find themselves implicated in misbehavior are now less likely to get the unfavorable coverage that comes along with a scandal than they once were. This development is not explained by the severity, type, or length of scandals or of other characteristics of the individuals involved. Instead, the decline in scandal reporting appears due to the same newsroom cutbacks that have reduced coverage of more mundane aspects of politics.

As Scandal Coverage Declines, so Does Accountability

To what extent does variation in scandal coverage matter? For the over-time decline of local scandal coverage to be relevant to electoral accountability, then we also need to observe that the amount of scandal coverage is associated with outcomes for scandal-implicated politicians. Absent that, the reduction in news organizations' capacity to cover scandals may not be substantively important.

My approach is to examine the relationship between the volume of media coverage and what happened to an incumbent following their scandal. First, I collected data on whether an incumbent left office following a scandal. This could occur if they were removed, resigned before their term was up, declined to run for reelection and retired, or lost a bid for reelection (either in a primary or general election). Second, among officials who ran for reelection after a scandal (and made it through their primary), I collected data on their vote share in their first post-scandal general election. My theoretical expectation is that incumbents whose scandal receives more coverage will be more likely to leave office or receive a lower vote share in their subsequent election.²⁴

Initially, we can look descriptively at what has happened to politicians implicated in scandals over time. [Figure 3](#) plots the percentage of statewide (left-hand panel) and House officials (right-hand panel) implicated in a scandal who left office over the course of the

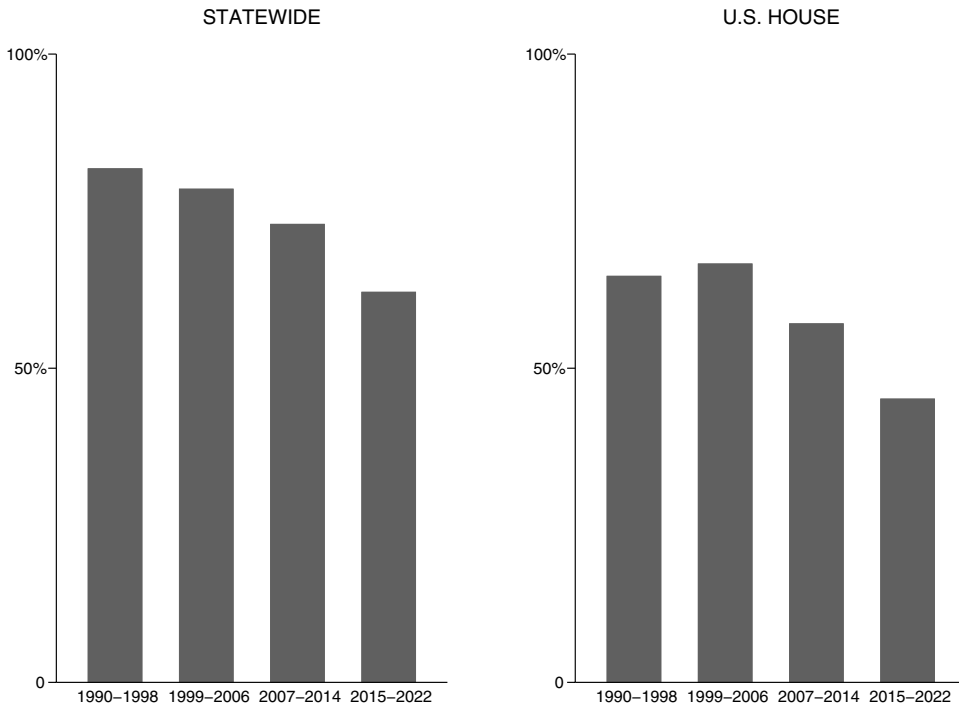


Figure 3. The share of scandal-implicated politicians leaving office, 1990–2022. Graph displays the percentage of elected officials leaving office after being implicated in a scandal. Data collected by the author.

1990s and 2000s. Between 1990 and 2006, 82% of statewide officials were punished, either by voluntarily leaving office or being removed by fellow politicians or voters. From 2007 to 2014, that number fell to 73%. Between 2015 to 2022, it declined to 62%. The over-time patterns are the same if we slice the time periods in larger or smaller increments.

For House members, the peak of punishment was in 1999–2006, at 67%. But punishment declined to 57% in 2007–2014 and to less than half (45%) in 2015–2022. Notably, these trends match with what we saw in the coverage data: Reporting on political scandals was significantly higher in the 1990s and early 2000s than in more recent years, just like levels of incumbent accountability.

That pattern is merely suggestive, of course, and there are multiple potential explanations. Growing partisan polarization may make both voters and fellow party leaders more tolerant of a politician’s misbehavior. Likewise, as states and congressional districts have become more reliably partisan, declining levels of punishment may simply reflect the fact that more politicians are willing to stand for reelection after a scandal because their margin for error is larger. The more reliably partisan a state or district is, the more votes a politician can afford to lose before he or she is at risk.

It could also be that in an era of declining local news consumption, national media coverage of scandals is more important than local coverage. Whether an elected official leaves office or loses votes in their next election may depend on how much national attention a scandal receives. And because the officials in my data are prominent statewide

Table 2. The relationship between scandal coverage and accountability.

	Left Office		Post-Scandal Vote Shift	
Scandal Stories	0.009*	0.007	-0.087*	-0.090*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.021)	(0.024)
Post-2009	–	–0.554	–	2.510
		(0.502)		(6.460)
Scandal Stories x Post-2009	–	0.002	–	0.040
		(0.007)		(0.034)
Scandal Severity	0.566*	0.603*	–1.440	–1.835
	(0.182)	(0.204)	(1.790)	(2.323)
NYT Coverage	–0.001	–0.000	0.108	0.121*
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.062)	(0.055)
Presidential Vote Margin	–0.055*	–0.055*	0.129	0.150
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.116)	(0.124)
Financial Scandal	–0.777	–0.747	1.750	0.187
	(0.796)	(0.786)	(2.555)	(3.182)
Corruption Scandal	0.758	0.605	–3.875	–3.114
	(0.633)	(0.610)	(4.604)	(4.517)
Sex Scandal	–0.290	–0.332	4.389	5.923
	(0.478)	(0.481)	(3.675)	(3.540)
Other Scandal	0.117	0.196	–14.368*	–14.160*
	(0.503)	(0.507)	(4.197)	(4.448)
Statewide Official	1.016*	1.031*	13.187*	14.228*
	(0.391)	(0.394)	(3.578)	(3.456)
Republican	–0.036	–0.007	3.034	2.558
	(0.400)	(0.397)	(2.952)	(3.123)
Woman	0.572	0.576	–7.684*	–7.020*
	(0.421)	(0.426)	(2.416)	(2.579)
Days of Scandal	–0.003*	–0.003*	–0.007	–0.009*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Constant	–0.608	–0.310	1.366	0.546
	(0.946)	(0.903)	(5.964)	(5.024)
Pseudo R ² /Adjusted R ²	0.254	0.259	0.198	0.204
N	211	211	85	85

* $p < .05$. Dependent variable in the Left Office models is whether a politician left office following a scandal. Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients. Dependent variable in the Post-Scandal Vote Shift models is the difference in vote share in the politician's pre- and post-scandal general elections. Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients. Robust standard errors are in parentheses for both sets of models.

officeholders or members of Congress, it is likely that many of their scandals received at least some national coverage. To measure national coverage, I used the same keywords that formed the basis of my local newspaper analysis to search the ProQuest archives of the *New York Times*. A variable indicating the number of *Times* stories about each scandal is included in the model in Table 2.²⁵

To consider these alternative explanations alongside local scandal coverage, I specify a logistic regression model to explain whether a politician was punished following a scandal. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the politician left office following the scandal, 0 if they remained in office. The key independent variable is the number of scandal stories published in the politician's local newspaper. If variation in coverage matters, we would expect this variable to be positive – more coverage leads to a higher likelihood of punishment.

The model also controls for the length of a scandal; shorter scandals tend to be associated with punishment, as politicians are more likely to announce their departure quickly when a scandal is particularly damaging. I include variables for the type of scandal (with other scandals as the omitted category), the partisanship and gender of the accused politician, and whether the politician is a statewide official (vs. a House member). Finally, I include

a variable measuring the vote margin in their state or district in the previous presidential election. The measure is scaled so that higher numbers indicate a less competitive district. Lower numbers mean the district is more evenly split by partisanship, which theoretically may lead to a higher level of punishment than if the district leans heavily toward the incumbent's party. As a result, I expect that variable to be negative.

The results appear in the second column of [Table 2](#). Even controlling for those other factors, scandal coverage remains associated with punishment. The coefficient is positive, meaning that when there is more scandal coverage, the chances of an official leaving office are higher. Given recent trends, the key inference is the reverse – as the number of scandal stories goes down, politicians are less likely to leave office following a scandal.²⁶ But national media coverage, measured by the number of stories in the *New York Times*, has no effect.

The third column of [Table 2](#) displays a model that includes an interaction term to test for the possibility that the effect of scandal coverage has diminished in more recent years, as politics has become more partisan. I interact the scandal coverage variable with an indicator for whether the scandal took place after 2009.²⁷ The interaction is not significant, indicating that the effect of media coverage is not diminished in more recent years. Even as the volume of coverage has fallen in the last decade, scandals that receive more coverage are still more likely to result in the departure of an incumbent from office. Restricting the analysis to 2013–2022 confirms the finding, while also demonstrating that the relationship does not seem to be driven by any differences in the prominence of scandals from earlier in the data set.²⁸

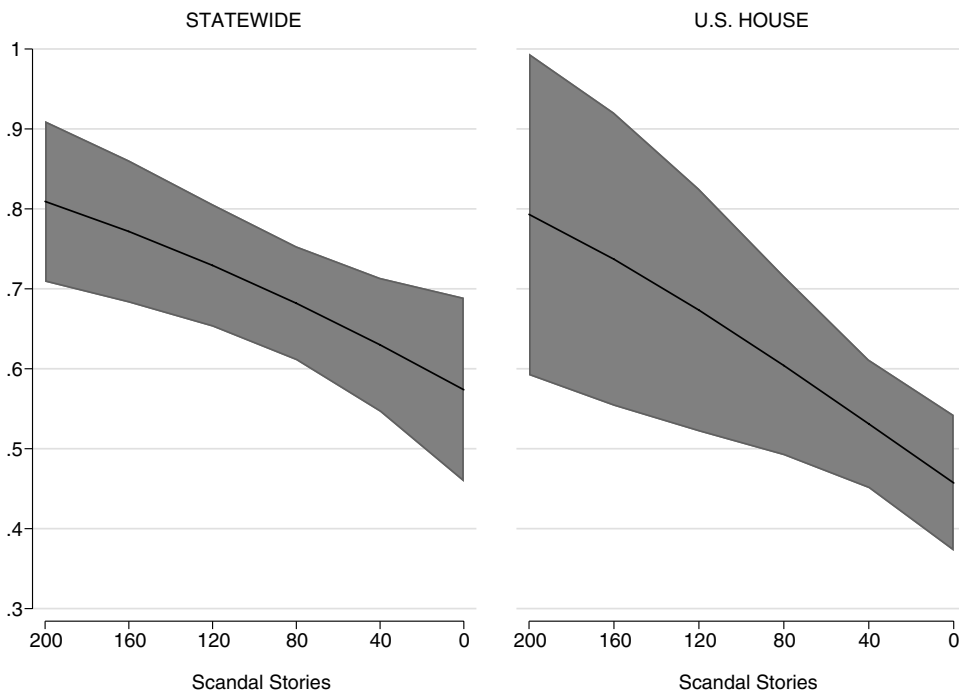


Figure 4. Scandal coverage and the likelihood of an incumbent leaving office. Note: Graph displays predicted probability that a politician leaves office following a scandal as a function of the number of scandal stories in the local newspaper. Estimates are derived from the baseline Left Office model in [Table 2](#). Shaded areas are 95% confidence intervals.

That result does not, however, suggest that declining coverage is no cause for concern. Even if more relatively more coverage has remained associated with higher levels of punishment in the last decade, it could still be that the lower absolute levels of coverage in recent years mean that accountability is down. [Figure 4](#) suggests one piece of evidence to support that interpretation.

The graph plots the probability that an official departs office following a scandal, estimated from the baseline Left Office model in [Table 2](#). For instance, the probability that a statewide official or House member whose scandal is featured in more than 200 stories will leave office is around 0.8. On the other hand, as the number of stories declines to single digits, the probability that an incumbent will be held accountable falls to below 0.6 for statewide officials and 0.5 for House members.

Although I cannot conduct a time-series analysis with the relatively sparse and small data set, [Figure 4](#) illustrates the likely consequence of the decline in coverage of scandals over the last three decades. In the 1990s, the average number of scandal stories about statewide officials was 127, implying a high rate of incumbent accountability. But over the last decade, that number has declined to less than 100, a number associated with a significantly lower likelihood of punishment. Likewise, the average number of House scandal stories in the last decade has been less than 25, implying a punishment rate of less than 0.5.

Of course, whether a politician leaves office is only one measure of accountability. In cases where a scandal-implicated politician runs for reelection, we would expect greater media scrutiny of his behavior to reduce his popularity. Even if they win reelection, a smaller margin of victory would be one indicator of accountability. To examine that possibility, I focus on the 85 incumbents in my data set who were implicated in a scandal, made it through their primary, and then ran in the general election. I compare their pre-scandal general election vote share to their post-scandal vote share to estimate the relationship between scandal coverage and electoral accountability.²⁹ The results of the model appear in the third column of [Table 2](#). As in the punishment model, I control for a variety of other factors.

Again, I find a relationship between scandal coverage and the shift in the vote. As scandal coverage increases, politicians lose a larger share of the vote compared to their previous electoral victory. For every increase in 12 stories about a scandal, a politician loses 1 percent of their pre-scandal vote share. The more voters hear about a scandal, the weaker the electoral performance for politicians. Even if they do win, they have a smaller margin of victory, suggesting that the volume of coverage matters for accountability.

The over-time declines in coverage thus suggest that the damage from news coverage in recent years will be less of a concern for incumbents, because there simply isn't as much of it. For instance, in House contests, the average number of scandal stories between 2000 and 2009 was 100. Between 2010 and 2022, it was 23. According to the model, that reduction would mean that an incumbent on average could expect to lose about 6 points fewer in the last decade than in the 2000 to 2009 period. These patterns suggest that the decline of local news represents a gift to politicians who find themselves embroiled in a scandal.

Conclusion

There has been no shortage of concern about the implications of the local news crisis for political accountability. But for all of the worries that newspaper closures and newsroom

layoffs may diminish the quality of representation in state and local politics, there has been a lack of evidence connecting the two. In this paper, however, I have shown that observers should indeed be worried that the retrenchment at local newspapers may cause bad behavior by elected officials to go unreported or underreported. Coverage of state and local scandals has been declining for two decades and now stands at one-quarter of its peak. Less scandal reporting is associated with a lower likelihood of elected officials being punished, suggesting that the hollowing out of the local news industry is likely to help politicians escape accountability for bad performance.

The findings speak to theoretical debates about the role of the news media in a changing political environment. One perspective suggests that the rise of partisanship, a decline in media trust, and shrinking audiences have rendered traditional news organizations irrelevant for holding elected officials accountable. But my analysis suggests such a conclusion is premature. Although mainstream news outlets are now just one source among many, their reporting on scandals increases the risks for politicians. As such, political leaders still have something to fear when they are accused of wrongdoing and the media aggressively pursue the story.

My findings also contribute to an important debate about the mechanism by which the news media enforce accountability. In a recent study, Auslen (2024) finds little evidence that news reporting increases public knowledge of state legislators or affects voting behavior in elections. Instead, he suggests that the media enforce political accountability simply by monitoring politicians and increasing the perceived costs of going against their constituents' preferences. My results indicate that, at least at times, media coverage can also hold officials accountable by directly activating voters. To be sure, scandals may constitute a special case, because the public pays more attention when an elected official is facing accusations of wrongdoing. More work that seeks to identify the circumstances under which the media enforce accountability through monitoring or voter activation would be welcome.

To be sure, this research also has limitations. First, we should exercise caution in drawing strong causal connections between the volume of news coverage and accountability for state and local elected officials. Because significant political scandals are relatively rare, the data set for my analysis is necessarily small and statistical approaches that would allow for better causal identification are not feasible. Thus, research that adopts approaches to studying the relationship between local news and accountability with larger data sets that allow for alternative estimation strategies would be welcome. Recent efforts by Auslen (2024) and Myers (2024), for instance, are positive developments in that regard.

Second, in focusing on political scandals, I have chosen to study what is perhaps low-hanging fruit – the place we might most readily observe declines in local media accountability. But for our system of government to work most effectively, we need news media that can not only alert voters when elected officials are letting them down, but also tell voters what government leaders are doing well so that they can be rewarded. That kind of information is more likely to arise from routine reporting about the activities of state and local government. And it is that type of mundane coverage that has grown especially hard to find in recent years. As a result, elected officials who solve problems and manage government effectively may not get the credit they deserve. If that happens, voters may be less likely to reward politicians who perform well, further weakening the connection between government performance and accountability.

Third, my research, like most others, has focused on the demise of local newspapers. This is generally justified by the fact that newspapers remain the main source of original local reporting in most communities. But it has left us with a limited understanding of the role played by alternative sources of local news in the changing local media environment. For example, in the last 20 years, hundreds of local news startups have emerged, seeking to fill the void left by the decline of traditional media outlets. Because little research has focused on these newer news organizations, it remains unclear whether and how they can enhance political accountability at either the state or local level. Yet the full spectrum of changes to the local news industry – both its troubles but also its emerging possibilities – deserves attention. Otherwise, we may be missing an important component of a system that can promote democratic accountability.

Despite of these limitations, this research might prove to be a useful starting point for studies that extend beyond statewide and congressional officials. Indeed, it is coverage of local government – mayor’s offices, city halls, and county commissions – that has taken the biggest hit in recent years. With fewer journalists covering the actions of local elected representatives, corruption and malfeasance in municipal and county government are likely to unnoticed. And even when scandals do break, many local news organizations will not have the resources to sustain the reporting that could lead to a poor-performing official’s ouster or defeat. If that situation becomes the norm in cities and towns across the country, the quality of governance may very well suffer further.

Notes

1. Their findings are puzzlingly different, however. Matherly and Greenwood (2021) report that daily newspaper closures between 1996 and 2018 increased the number of corruption cases filed by federal prosecutors. They conclude that this is because public officials were more willing to engage in corruption with fewer reporters around. Usher and Kim-Leffingwell (2023), on the other hand, show that county-level newspaper employment is not correlated with the number of corruption prosecutions. Instead, they find that the presence of investigative journalism nonprofits in an area increases the number of corruption cases. They argue that this is evidence that accountability journalism increases the likelihood of corruption being revealed, allowing prosecutors to charge for those offenses.
2. To be sure, other forms of accountability – such as being subjected to a congressional investigation or censured by one’s colleagues – could be important. But these are often antecedents to the kind of electoral accountability exercised by voters, which is central to debates over the local news crisis.
3. Former Republican Rep. George Santos, who was expelled from Congress in 2023, comes to mind here.
4. Brill, Steven. 1998. “Pressgate.” Brill’s Content, July/August, p. 135.
5. A simple example may illustrate. Imagine that a scandal story about a U.S. House member accused of tax fraud generates 20,000 page views on average, and a good reporter can produce two new scandal stories every week. Meanwhile, stories about other topics – for instance, simple crime reports – garner 10,000 page views on average. But because those require less effort, a reporter can produce six per week. In that scenario, devoting reporting resources to a relatively popular scandal story won’t make strict economic sense, because a publisher can get more page views by devoting a reporter’s time to less resource-intensive projects.
6. Klas, Mary Ellen. 2019. “Less Local News Means Less Democracy.” Nieman Reports, September 20. Online at: <https://niemanreports.org/articles/less-local-news-means-less-democracy/>

7. Other research focuses on how scandal coverage itself is driven by political factors (Nyhan, 2015, 2017).
8. The database is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ksBLxRR3GCZd33IvhkcNqqBd5K8HwIWC7YuAkVmS1lg/edit#gid=0>
9. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/george-santos-resign/>
10. Personal communication with Rakich. Part of this process is described here: <http://baseballot.blogspot.com/2013/04/history-shows-its-game-over-for-sanford.html>.
11. The state's largest paper will have the widest reach and is, in most cases, the most likely to cover a statewide scandal. Its coverage may also trickle down to other papers, giving coverage even more impact. Of course, there may be some instances in which a scandal receives more attention in a smaller paper, such as one that serves the state capital. But because state capital newspapers have suffered staffing losses at the same rate as other newspapers, there is no reason to think my choice to use the state's largest newspaper would produce different findings over time. In some cases, I selected the second largest paper because the largest was not available in an electronic database. In a handful of cases in which no in-district paper was available, I use the state's largest paper. When I drop these cases from the analysis, the results are not different.
12. I report results from the scandals for which I coded at least one scandal story. Some cases were excluded because the scandal was still ongoing or unresolved (e.g., 2022 ethics allegations against Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez). In other cases, the politician announced their resignation just as a scandal story was breaking (e.g., U.S. Rep. Chris Lee resigned the same day reports began circulating about flirtatious e-mails he sent on Craigslist); a politician revealed the scandal themselves in their resignation announcement (e.g., New Jersey Gov. Jim McGreevey resigned before mainstream outlets began reporting on his affair with a staffer); a scandal broke after a politician had already lost their reelection bid (e.g., Rhode Island Gov. Edward DiPrete in 1990); or a few other unusual circumstances. See the Appendix for more details.
13. This process was iterative. Using an initial set of keywords, I searched a newspaper's archives, usually identifying a group of relevant stories. I then read through those stories to identify additional terms that were commonly used in the newspaper's reporting on the scandal. I then incorporated those terms into a subsequent and final search. I did that in an effort make sure I was capturing all of the relevant coverage, since my initial keywords occasionally missed some stories. In other cases, my initial keywords were not specific enough to exclude stories that were not related to a scandal, which I discovered by reading through the stories returned by my first search. In those cases, I eliminated or changed the keywords – based on reading the newspaper's coverage – and took care not to include in my counts unrelated stories.
14. Automating this process by searching for terms like “scandal,” “investigation,” “allegation,” or “accusation” in conjunction with an official's name produces widely varying results from paper to paper. That is because these terms either fail to identify stories about individual scandals or identify stories that are not about the scandal at all. To demonstrate this, in 10% of my cases I searched the relevant newspaper for the politician's name and – instead of the scandal-specific terms that I developed from my case studies – roots of the words that might appear frequently in scandal stories (scandal* OR investig* OR alleg* OR accus*). In 70% of cases, the generic searches overcounted scandal stories, compared to my targeted case study approach. In 18%, they undercounted stories. And in 12% they produced the same number. On average, the generic counting method produced more than twice as many apparent scandal stories as did the targeted method. Thus, the generic search method not only dramatically overstates the volume of coverage but also does so inconsistently, with overcounts and undercounts occurring seemingly randomly from case to case.
15. There are some cases where scandal coverage continues after an incumbent wins reelection. One situation is when an official is under investigation during a campaign and is indicted or arrested afterward. For instance, Rep. William Jefferson won reelection in 2006 amid a federal corruption probe, was indicted in 2007, and lost reelection in 2008. But because most scandals

do not involve criminal charges, coverage diminishes significantly once an incumbent has won reelection.

16. Christie is included in all other analyses of statewide scandals in the paper. Figure A1 in the Appendix presents the same graph with a logged measure of scandal coverage, which includes data for the Christie Bridgegate scandal.
17. In the figure, I aggregate together corruption and financial scandals, which share many common features. I also place scandals that don't fall into one of these three categories into a residual category of "Other," which includes drunk driving, drug use, and fatal traffic crashes.
18. The graph again excludes Christie to keep the figures readable.
19. For instance, the share of sex scandals was 35% in the 1990s and 29% in the period from 2010 to 2022. Likewise, the share of political scandals was 45% in the 1990s and 42% in the period from 2010 to 2022. The share of corruption/financial scandals was 19% in the 1990s and 16% in the period from 2010 to 2022.
20. Nor is it a function of the length of scandals, as the regression in [Table 1](#) confirms. For statewide officials, scandals in the 1990s did last longer, averaging 823 days. But after dropping to 394 days in the early 2000s, the average scandal period since 2010 increased to 528, without a corresponding increase in coverage. For U.S. House members, the scandal period changed little over the last three decades, averaging 280 days in the 1990s, 310 days between 2000 and 2009, and 296 days from 2010 through 2022.
21. More details on the survey appear in the Appendix.
22. I do not include circulation in the main models, because I do not have accurate circulation data for a handful of newspapers. But when I drop those cases and include circulation in the models, the effect of the news hole remains significant and substantively similar. See [Table A2](#) in the Appendix.
23. See [Table A3](#) in the Appendix.
24. One limitation of this approach is that it does not allow me to estimate the effect of increases (or decreases) in scandal coverage compared to incumbents who are not implicated in a scandal. But there are two reasons that I don't adopt that approach. First, in examining the implications of media coverage for accountability, the relevant comparison is not to the hundreds of other office holders who did not face a scandal. In the vast majority of cases, their departures from office are due to an entirely different set of factors. Thus, it would be a conceptual mistake to conflate resignations or retirements because of a scandal with departures for more mundane reasons. Second, the key factor in this research question is media coverage of a scandal. For non-scandal implicated incumbents, that variable would universally be zero, making it difficult to produce a sensible statistical estimate of the relationship between media attention and accountability. As a result, I focus on media coverage within the scandal cases, which allows me to draw inferences about the role that changes in coverage play in shaping outcomes for scandal-implicated incumbents.
25. I choose the *Times* because it has historically been viewed as an agenda setter for other media outlets (e.g., [Shaw and Sparrow 1999](#)). As such, its coverage of scandals is likely to be generally representative of patterns in other mainstream national outlets.
26. In separate models, I include a variable for a newspaper's circulation size, reducing the sample size slightly. It does not have any effect on the likelihood of punishment (or vote shift). See [Table A4](#) in the Appendix.
27. Given the trends in [Figure 1](#), this is an arbitrary cutoff, but other cut points produce the same results.
28. Results of the 2013–2022 model appears in [Table A5](#). The model also shows that *New York Times* coverage remains a non-significant predictor of whether a politician leaves office, even in a period in which many consumers have gravitated toward national news.

29. I gathered vote data from congressional election data sets maintained by Gary Jacobson, the MIT Election Lab, and Daily Kos.

Disclosure Statement

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Notes on contributor

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