

All Ambition is Local: News Consumption and the Decision to Run for Office

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Abstract

Why do people run for office? Standard political science explanations focus on two main factors – the political opportunity structure and the socialization process. Little attention, however, has been devoted to the role the information environment plays in shaping political ambition. This is a significant omission at a time when changes to the U.S. media landscape have had profound effects on American politics. We develop a framework to explain how political information – in particular, exposure to local news – affects interest in running for office. Across numerous surveys of the U.S. public and two studies of potential candidates, we show that consumption of local news, but not national news, predicts ambition. Experimental evidence demonstrates that exposure to information about local policy failures acts as the causal mechanism. These findings have implications for theoretical accounts of candidate emergence and suggest that the decline of local news may alter the pool of people who decide to run for office in the United States.

Why do people run for office? Given the more than 500,000 elective positions in the United States, this question has animated research for decades. Political scientists tend to focus on two major explanations. One emphasizes the “political opportunity structure.” That is, potential candidates respond strategically to favorable political and structural conditions. When an incumbent retires and an open seat is available, or when the partisan composition of a district matches that of an aspiring candidate, a person contemplating a bid for elective office is more likely to emerge. The second explanation – defined broadly as socialization – homes in on the way that potential candidates’ personal backgrounds, professional experiences, connections to politics, and perceived qualifications shape their interest in running. These two explanations often work in tandem, since only potential candidates who are socialized to think about entering the electoral arena ever have reason to consider the political opportunity structure.

There has been little attention, however, to the role the information environment plays in shaping political ambition. This is a significant omission at a time when changes to the U.S. media landscape have had profound effects on American politics. The rise of the internet and the nationalization of Americans’ media habits have altered how people get information, the content of the information they see, and how they turn that information into political action. Although a handful of studies suggests a relationship between these developments and candidate emergence (Rubado and Jennings 2020; Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido 2013), there has been no systematic effort to explain how patterns of information acquisition may influence people’s interest in running for office. This is especially surprising because launching a campaign is fundamentally an act of political participation, and scholars have long known that informational forces are central to explaining various forms of political engagement.

In this paper, we develop a framework to explain how political information – in this case, news coverage – can affect nascent interest in running for office. We argue that exposure to local

news, in particular, is critical to the development of political ambition. The vast majority of elective offices are situated at the local level, and the vast majority of political careers begin at the local level. Thus, consuming local media, especially when it highlights problems facing a community, can provide potential candidates with the background and knowledge about their local government that may mobilize them to consider a candidacy. Consumption of national news, however, should foster ambition less consistently because it does not help people connect problems to the political context where most opportunities to run exist. Consequently, people who regularly consume local news should be more likely to develop an interest in running for office than those who don't.

To test this argument, we draw on a combination of observational and experimental data: two nationally representative surveys, three statewide surveys, and two studies of “potential candidates” – one a large-scale survey and the other a national survey experiment designed to provide a rigorous causal test. Across these studies, we find that consumption of local news is strongly related to political ambition in general and interest in running for local office specifically. This is true among both the general population and potential candidates. Further, the experiment demonstrates that the mechanism that spurs ambition is exposure to negative local news – that is, stories that highlight local policy failures. National news consumption, on the other hand, is a weak and inconsistent predictor of whether people express interest in a local candidacy.

These findings have widespread implications. First, efforts to explain candidate emergence should incorporate people's news consumption habits. Individuals who are qualified and well positioned to run for office may never consider it if their news habits do not give them a reason to invest in politics in their local community. Moreover, the findings imply that the struggles of the local news industry and its shrinking audience (Hayes and Lawless 2021) may undermine political ambition in the United States. Not only may the increasingly anemic local news environment make it less likely that people will consider running for local office, but it may also leave the pool of

candidates comprised of individuals whose primary goal has little to do with serving their local communities.

Who Runs for Office? Standard Accounts of the Candidate Emergence Process

From the time that Harold Lasswell (1948, 20) observed that “some personalities are power seekers, searching out the power institutions of the society . . . and devoting themselves to the capture and use of government,” political scientists have sought to understand why certain people pursue political power, whereas others have no interest whatsoever in running for office. Although the decision to enter the electoral arena is complex and multi-faceted, the literature coalesces behind two broad forces that shape political ambition: the political opportunity structure and political socialization.

Many scholars approach the decision to run for office as primarily a strategic response to the external political environment (Schlesinger 1966). The paradigm assumes that when faced with a favorable political opportunity structure – for example, an open seat, a term limited incumbent, party congruence with constituents, or uncompetitive elections – a potential candidate will opt to enter a race (Black 1972; Eulau and Prewitt 1973; Goodliffe 2001; Kazee 1994; Maestas et al. 2006; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966; Stone and Maisel 2003). Aspiring candidates’ personal backgrounds and experiences are treated as exogenous. Rather, the “seats available and the hierarchy of positions for advancement give shape and definition to the political career” (Prinz 1993, 27).

Focusing on the political opportunity structure sheds light on whether potential candidates will choose to run for a particular office at a given time, seek higher office, or retire from politics altogether. The explanation is less suited, however, to explain the earlier stages of the candidate emergence process. After all, an important phase of the development of political ambition occurs well before the actual decision to enter a specific race ever transpires. If a potential candidate has

never considered running for office at the abstract level, then he or she likely won't be cognizant of the opportunity structure, let alone respond strategically to it (see Fox and Lawless 2005; Lawless 2012).

The political socialization explanation addresses this concern. In this earlier stage of the candidate emergence process, potential candidates' politically relevant backgrounds, traits, and experiences determine whether the idea of running for office ever appears on their radar screen (Lawless and Fox 2025; 2010; 2005; see also Fishel 1971; Soule 1969; Barber 1965; Lasswell 1948). Potential candidates whose professional backgrounds place them in close proximity to the political arena, for example, are more likely to consider running for office. The same is true for potential candidates who grew up in politicized homes, were ever encouraged or recruited to run for office, or consider themselves qualified to be a candidate (see Gulzar 2021; Lawless 2012).

Much of the work in this vein addresses the gender gap in political ambition, or the way traditional gender socialization makes it less likely that women envision themselves as candidates (Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2024; Lawless and Fox 2025; Karpowitz, Preece, and Monson 2017). But recent studies have also documented relationships between political ambition and occupational status (Carnes 2018; 2016; Carnes and Lupu 2025), partisan affiliation (Crowder-Meyer and Lauderdale 2014), personality traits in general (Clifford, Simas, and Kirkland 2021; Dynes et al. 2019; Hart et al. 2022), and attitudes toward competition in particular (Kanthak and Woon 2015; Preece 2015).

Together, the opportunity structure and socialization explanations take us a long way in predicting who considers running for office and who actually takes the plunge. Both explanations, however, share a common and significant omission: Neither accounts for the information environment potential candidates navigate. To be sure, the opportunity structure explanation acknowledges that political interest (as well as financial security and political experience) matters for

candidate emergence. But for the most part, the paradigm takes ambition as “given.” Whether it’s realized is a function of the opportunity structure. Similarly, socialization-based accounts of candidate emergence recognize that general political interest correlates with ambition. But potential candidates’ specific news habits and the way they acquire political information tend to be ignored.

The Overlooked Piece: Local News and Political Ambition

The lack of attention to information in the study of political ambition is puzzling because it’s so central to explanations for political engagement. For decades, research has argued that people’s likelihood of participating in the political process is connected to their access to information (Downs 1957; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). When information is limited, citizens find it difficult to distinguish between alternatives, leading the costs of participation to outweigh any perceived benefits (Feddersen and Pesendorfer 1996; Hayes and McKee 2009). As people are exposed to more information, their political knowledge increases, which facilitates participation (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Voter turnout, for instance, is higher in elections in which more information is available to citizens than in those where it’s not (Aldrich 1993; Cox and Munger 1989; Gilliam 1985; Jackson 1993; Nicholson and Miller 1997). Similarly, people who are exposed to more news are more likely to engage in civic activities (Prior 2005; Putnam 2000; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

Information can facilitate participation in multiple ways, but one important mechanism is by clarifying the stakes of politics. People who have more political information are more likely to see differences between parties and candidates and to understand the implications of political developments (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Converse 1964). They are also more likely to understand how politics affects them personally (Hutchings 2003). In general, information helps people connect remote political discussions and circumstances to their own lives and communities. That knowledge may then lead them to engage in political action.

This process is particularly important for political ambition. People don't just wake up one morning and decide to run for office. Rather, the idea has typically been percolating for some time – often because of a problem they see in their community (Canon 1990; Costantini 1990; Fox 1997; see also Lawless and Fox 2025). It takes time for that broad interest in a candidacy to grow into an actual decision to run, but the seed has to be planted. And the problems that motivate people to run are not conjured out of thin air. Instead, citizens learn about them from exposure to information about social and political conditions. The role of information doesn't end there, however. Potential candidates must also have a basic knowledge of the structure of government, the way current elected officials are addressing a problem (or not), and how serving in office would offer an opportunity to develop a new or better solution. People tend to acquire both kinds of knowledge – what the salient problems are and how government is responding to them – through the news media (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972).

Because the entry point into public office – both in terms of considering a candidacy and launching a campaign – tends to be at the local level, we argue that people's exposure to information about local conditions will spur political ambition. For the vast majority of people, the way they learn about local conditions is through local media – newspapers, television, radio, and other outlets (Hayes and Lawless 2021). To be sure, the content of local news varies – including information about community happenings, weather, sports, and so forth. But we expect that reporting about local problems encourages people's interest in running for office. Since local public affairs news tends to accentuate the negative – for instance, high housing costs, failing schools, or aging infrastructure – consuming local news often means learning about issues that local governments are failing to address (Soroka and Adams 2015; Esbaugh-Soha 2010). One implication is that exposure to more investigative or watchdog reporting – the kind that highlights government failures – is likely to propel interest in running.

We don't expect the same effect when people are exposed to national news. Although news about Washington, DC, or international politics may increase political engagement, it is unlikely to prompt people to consider a candidacy, particularly at the local level, because there is rarely a clear connection between national news coverage and the local context where almost all elective offices are situated. Nor does national news give people information about how particular problems are being addressed in their community.¹

Although the literature has largely overlooked the relationship between news consumption and political ambition, two studies do suggest a connection. Both focus on the consequences of the decline of local newspapers in recent decades. Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido (2013) examine the effects of the 2007 closure of the *Cincinnati Post*, one of two major newspapers serving markets in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. After the newspaper shut down, the number of candidates running for seats on local school boards, county councils, and city commissions declined for at least several years. Rubado and Jennings (2020) measure staffing levels at 11 California local newspapers and find that as the number of reporters and editors declined over a 20-year period, so too did the number of mayoral candidates in the communities served by those papers. These case studies suggest the plausibility of our argument, but we need a broader array of data to confirm the relationship between local news and political ambition, as well as to address competing explanations.

Data on Political Ambition and News Consumption

Studying the extent to which local news consumption shapes political ambition is straightforward, at least theoretically. Operationalizing the relationship, however, is more difficult. One likely reason research has largely ignored the connection is that surveys rarely include

¹ To this point, concerns about specific issues seem to be especially good predictors of whether potential candidates launch a campaign. In a recent study, Green, Conroy, and Hammond (2024) show that aspiring candidates who expressed concerns about a specific issue as a reason for running were more likely to launch a campaign than were people who said they were motivated by broader political trends, such as the election of Donald Trump.

appropriate measures of both media habits and political ambition. Studies of candidate emergence typically contain gauges of political ambition but not detailed questions about people’s media consumption, including attention to local news. And studies well-suited to characterize people’s media habits rarely include questions about political ambition.

We take a multi-faceted approach that provides numerous tests of our key hypothesis. First, we included on two nationally representative surveys questions that allow us to measure both interest in running for office and media habits, especially at the local level: a module from the 2017 Cooperative Election Study and an original poll conducted by SSRS during the 2024 presidential campaign. Second, we conducted three statewide surveys (in Michigan, Montana, and New Hampshire) in the spring and summer of 2024 that allow us to assess how exposure to different sources of local news may affect ambition. Third, we rely on two national samples of “potential candidates”: a 2021 – 2022 survey and a 2025 survey experiment we fielded, the latter of which provides a test of the causal mechanism linking local news to political ambition (see Appendix A for a description of each survey and its sample size). Together, these datasets allow us to explore within a variety of contexts and populations the association between news habits and interest in running for office. If we find consistent patterns – across both observational and experimental studies – that that will provide strong evidence that the relationship we’re positing is robust.

Local News Consumers Express More Interest in Running for Office

We begin the analysis by turning to our two national surveys and three statewide surveys to describe the basic relationship between political ambition and local news habits. Each survey included a standard measure of political ambition in which we asked respondents whether they ever thought about running for office (e.g., Lawless and Fox 2025; see also Carnes 2018; Gulzar 2021). Respondents could report they had already run for elective office, had seriously considered it, that it had crossed their mind, or that they had not thought about it. Consistent with previous scholarship,

we define people who fall into one of the first three categories as expressing political ambition. On average, across the five surveys 17% reported that the idea of running for an elective position at least crossed their mind. This includes people who had seriously considered running (2.9%) or had already thrown their hats into the ring (2.1%).²

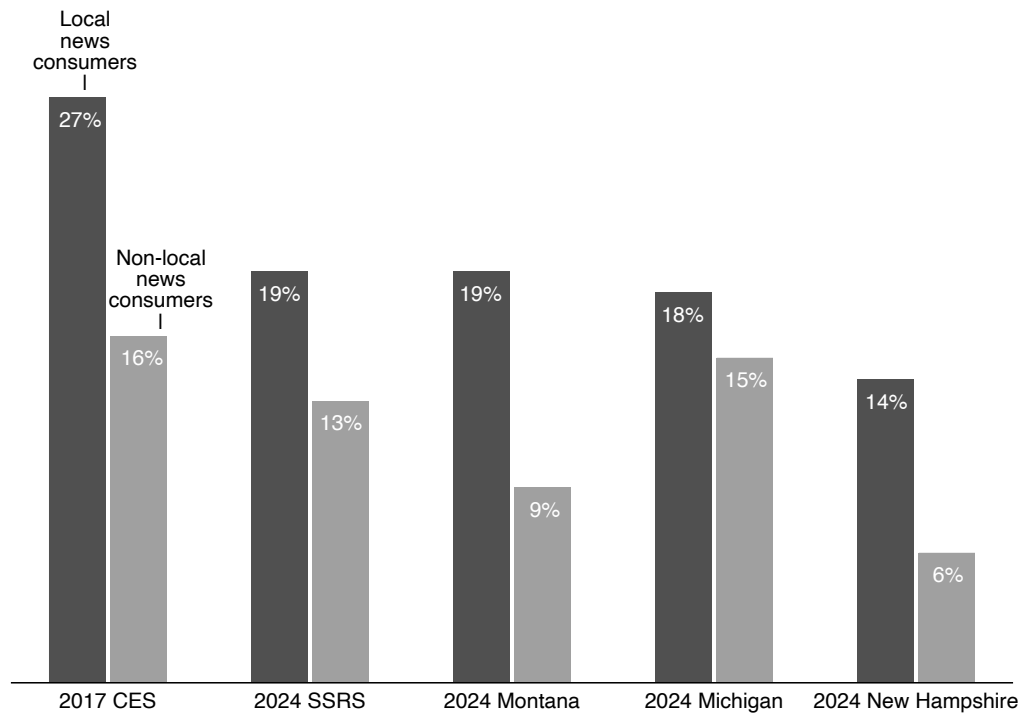
In each survey, we also asked respondents how they get news about local politics and their local community. We included questions about whether they read a local newspaper, watched local television news, listened to local radio, visited digital state and local outlets, and the like (see Appendix B for the battery of local news questions on each survey). Although the specific items differed somewhat across surveys, they all measure respondents' local news habits with an unusual level of detail. And the data reveal that a sizable share of people consumes local news. In the SSRS sample, for instance, nearly 60% of respondents reported having consumed some form of local news in the last 24 hours; two thirds reported consuming at least two sources of local news – newspaper, television, radio, or blog – “sometimes” or “often.” Among respondents in the national CES sample, 70% reported following local news “closely” or “very closely.”

Figure 1 shows that across all five surveys, respondents who consumed some form of local news – for instance, read a local newspaper or watched local TV news – were more likely to express interest in running for office than people who did not. In the 2017 CES, for instance, 27% of people who consume local news said they had at least considered running, compared to 16% of non-local news consumers, a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$). The gap in the other four surveys ranges from 3 to 10 points.³

² Levels of political ambition varied across survey, but not dramatically. In the SSRS national survey, 17% of respondents considered running for office, including 1.5% who gave it serious thought and 1% who actually ran. Interest was slightly higher in the CES module, where 20% of respondents considered running, including 3% who gave it serious thought and 2% who actually ran. In the statewide surveys, interest in running ranged from 13% of respondents in New Hampshire to 17% in Montana to 18% in Michigan. The percentage of people who had seriously thought about running in the state surveys ranged from 1.5% (NH) to 4.3% (MT), and the percentage who actually ran ranged from 2.3% (MI) to 2.8% (MT).

³ The difference is significant ($p < .05$) in every case except the Michigan survey.

Figure 1. Interest in Running for Office, by Local News Consumption

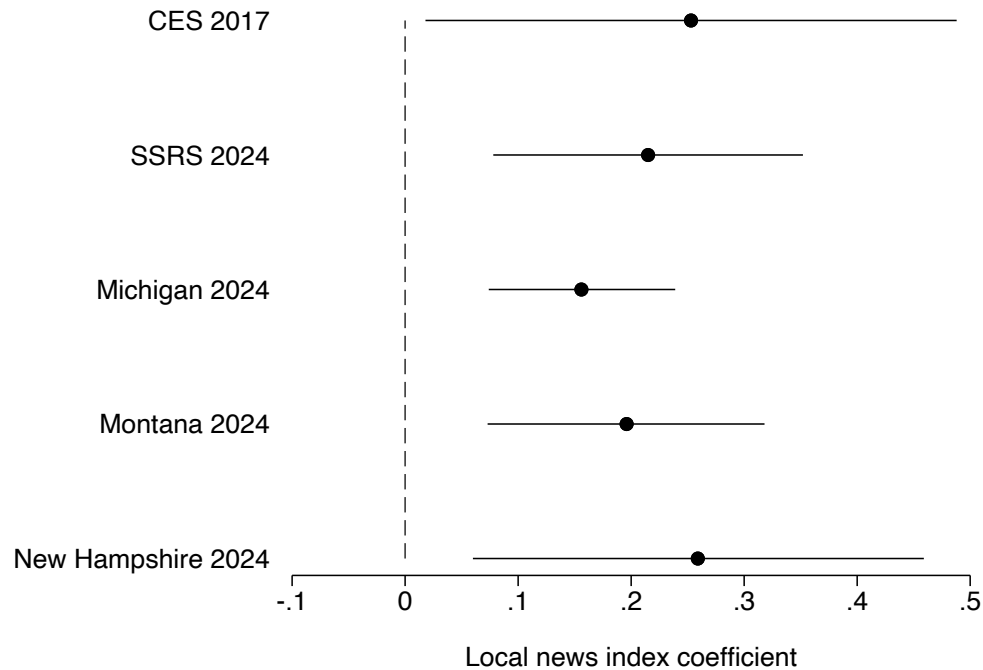


Notes: Bars represent the percentage of respondents who considered running for office (including those who had actually run for an elective position), broken down by whether they consumed at least one source of local news “often” or “sometimes” (for the statewide surveys and the 2024 national survey) or in the last 24 hours (for the 2017 national survey). See Appendix A for details on each sample and Appendix B for the local news items included in each survey. All comparisons are significant at $p < .05$ except Michigan.

Of course, such blunt comparisons are only suggestive. They do not account for other factors that might correlate with both local news consumption and political ambition or variation in how much local news respondents consume. To provide a more precise test, we modeled interest in running for office as a function of various demographic factors and partisanship as well as an index that captures variation in how much attention people pay to local news. The index is built from multiple items in each survey that asked respondents about the local outlets on which they rely. To create a roughly comparable measure across surveys, we summed up the number of local sources each respondent used. Higher scores indicate more local news consumption. (See Appendix Table 1 for the full models.)

Figure 2 presents coefficients (and 95% confidence intervals) for the local news index in each survey. In every case, an increase in local news consumption is associated with a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of expressing interest in running for office.

Figure 2. The Relationship between Local News Consumption and Political Ambition



Notes: Point estimates represent coefficients from logistic regression models predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for office. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Full models appear in Appendix Table 1.

In the 2017 CES, for example, a respondent who reported getting local news from two sources was 12 percentage points more likely to express interest in running than a respondent who did not consume local news. At the state level, the same shift in the Montana survey produced a 7-point increase in interest in running.⁴ Given that less than 20% of respondents said they ever considered running for office, this is a meaningful change.

⁴ Because the local news index is different in each survey, we cannot compare these effects across surveys. It's not necessarily the case, for example, that the effect is smaller in Montana than in the CES. But it is the case that within each sample, more local news consumption is associated with higher levels of interest in running for office.

Local, Not National, News Consumption Predicts Political Ambition

Our theoretical argument is more nuanced, however. Whereas we expect local news consumption to encourage political ambition, we do not expect exposure to national news to systematically shape interest in running for office. National news rarely focuses on local political conditions and problems, the performance of local elected officials, or the nuts and bolts required to get involved in politics – the type of information likely to facilitate ambition.

Our two national surveys allow us to test this argument because they include a battery of items about national news consumption; the statewide surveys do not. The national surveys also include items that measure respondents' political engagement, which allows us to provide a stronger test of the argument that local news consumption exerts an independent effect on political ambition rather than simply serves as a proxy for political interest. Thus, we added to our original models an index of exposure to national news and a measure of political engagement (see Appendix Table 2).

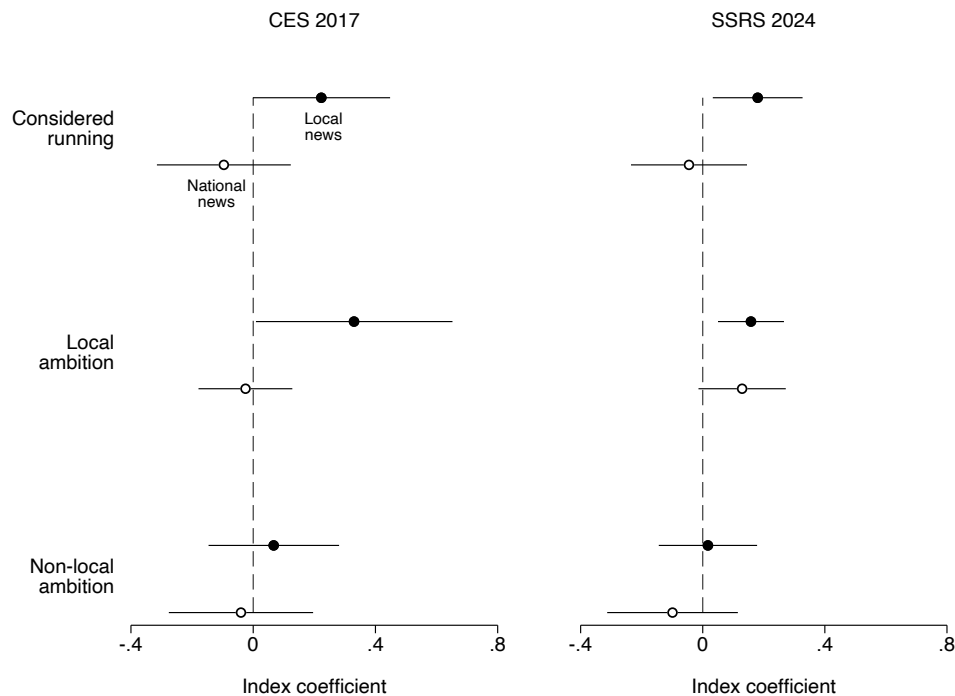
Figure 3 plots coefficients for both the local and national news index. The top row presents the results from models predicting whether a respondent has ever considered running for office. In both the CES and SSRS surveys, local news consumption is a significant predictor of ambition, while national news consumption is not. Moreover, a post-estimation Wald test reveals that in the CES survey, the local news coefficient is larger than the national news coefficient.⁵

We can also test an important implication of our argument by examining the level of office respondents expressed interest in seeking. If local news provides information about local issues, local elected officials, and the local political context, then it should spur interest in local positions, not higher-level offices. On both national surveys, we asked respondents, even if they'd never

⁵ For the CES, the p-value for a test of the difference between the local and national news coefficients is .07. For the SSRS survey, it is .24.

thought about running for office, which offices they might ever be interested in seeking (see Appendix Table 3).

Figure 3. Local News, National News, and Political Ambition



Notes: Point estimates represent coefficients from logistic regression models predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for office, interest in running for local office, and interest in statewide or federal office. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Full models appear in Appendix Table 2.

As we'd expect, respondents are much more likely to express interest in running for local office – schoolboard, town or city council, or mayor – than state or national positions.⁶ And the results presented in the middle row of Figure 3 show that in both surveys, interest in local office is a function of local news consumption. Exposure to local news is not, however, a predictor of non-

⁶ In the 2024 SSRS sample, for instance, 47% of respondents expressed interest in at least one local position, compared to just 12% who reported that they'd consider running for a statewide or federal position. The gap in the 2017 CES sample is similar; whereas 56% of respondents considered a local position, only 26% were open to a statewide or federal post.

local ambition (bottom row of the figure). Again, national news consumption fails to achieve statistical significance across the board.⁷

Public Affairs-Focused Local News Especially Encourages Political Ambition

Not all local news is created equal. Some local outlets produce much more substantive coverage of public affairs than others (Dunaway and Graber 2022). And if political ambition arises from exposure to news about problems in a local community, then interest in running for office should be highest among people who consume the most substantive local news. Typically, this would mean newspapers, which historically have been more likely than other outlets, such as local television, to do the kind of watchdog and accountability reporting that highlights governmental failures (e.g., Fowler 2018). But the rapid deterioration of the newspaper business means that even many daily newspapers no longer offer substantial local government coverage (Hayes and Lawless 2021).

Consequently, we turn to non-profit local news sources – a growing category of outlets in the United States devoted to public affairs – to assess the relationship between political ambition and exposure to accountability reporting. Our three statewide surveys asked respondents whether they regularly got news from a major non-profit state and local news outlet; depending on the respondent’s state, the survey included a question about Bridge Michigan, Montana Free Press, or New Hampshire Public Radio. Like many other non-profits, all three focus on state and local public affairs, regularly feature investigations of government failures, and provide consumers with information that should encourage political ambition (Hayes 2025).

⁷ In the CES, a Wald test shows the local news coefficient is a significantly stronger predictor of local ambition than the national news coefficient ($p < .05$). In the SSRS survey, the difference between the two is not significant. In the non-local ambition models, there are no differences between the two coefficients, suggesting that news habits are only weakly related to people’s ambition for higher level offices.

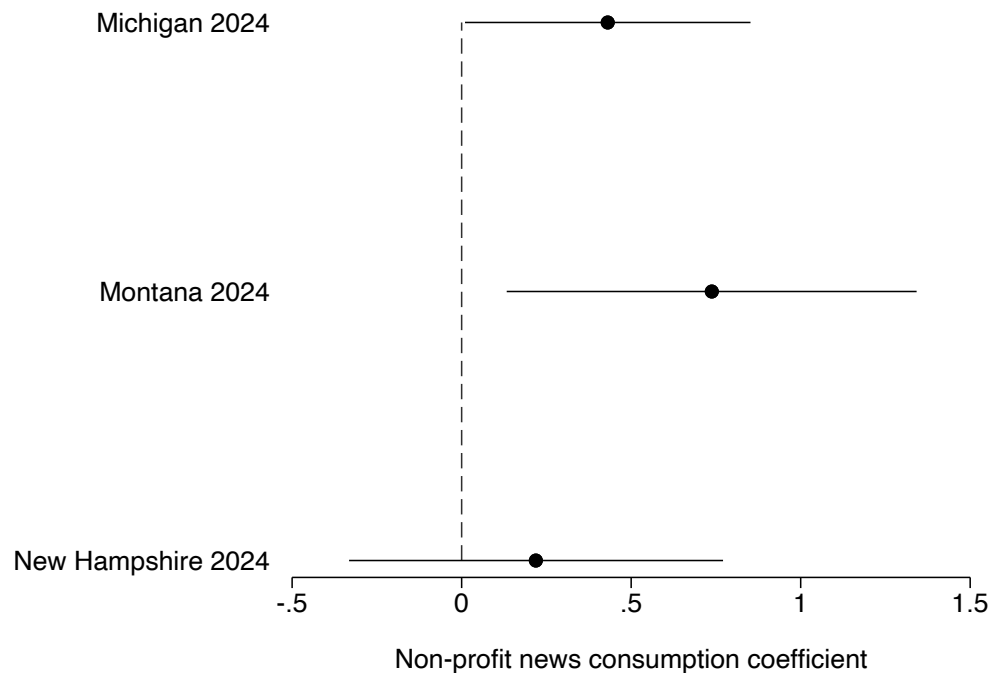
To test whether consuming a more substantive news source matters for ambition, we once again performed logistic regression models predicting a respondent's interest in running for office. But here, we disaggregated our local news measures and included an indicator for whether a respondent regularly got news from the state's major non-profit local news source. Each model also controls for the demographic and political factors included in our previous models, as well as attention to other sources of state and local news.

Figure 4 presents the coefficients (with corresponding 95% confidence intervals) for non-profit news consumption. The results are suggestive, although not uniform. In Michigan and Montana, respondents who regularly accessed news from the public affairs-focused non-profit in their state were significantly more likely to express political ambition than those who did not. In Michigan, for instance, regularly reading Bridge Michigan increased a respondent's likelihood of considering a candidacy by 6 percentage points. This finding emerges even as the model controls for respondents' use of other state and local media outlets, suggesting a distinct effect for local sources devoted specifically to covering government and politics.

In New Hampshire, on the other hand, regular consumers of New Hampshire Public Radio were not more likely than non-regular consumers to express interest in running for office. One reason may be that even as the radio station produces much public affairs reporting, it also offers more entertainment content than either Bridge Michigan or the Montana Free Press, perhaps reducing its impact as a source of substantive news.⁸ Nonetheless, the findings in Michigan and Montana are notable and provide at least tentative support for the connection between substantive political reporting and political ambition.

⁸ The unusual nature of New Hampshire Public Radio's market might also play a role, as the outlet covers New England in general, including Vermont and Boston. That might mean some of its governmental reporting is less relevant to the New Hampshire residents in our survey.

Figure 4. Non-Profit Local News Use and Political Ambition



Notes: Point estimates represent coefficients from logistic regression models predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for office. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Full models appear in Appendix Table 4.

The Link between Local News and Political Ambition Holds among Potential Candidates

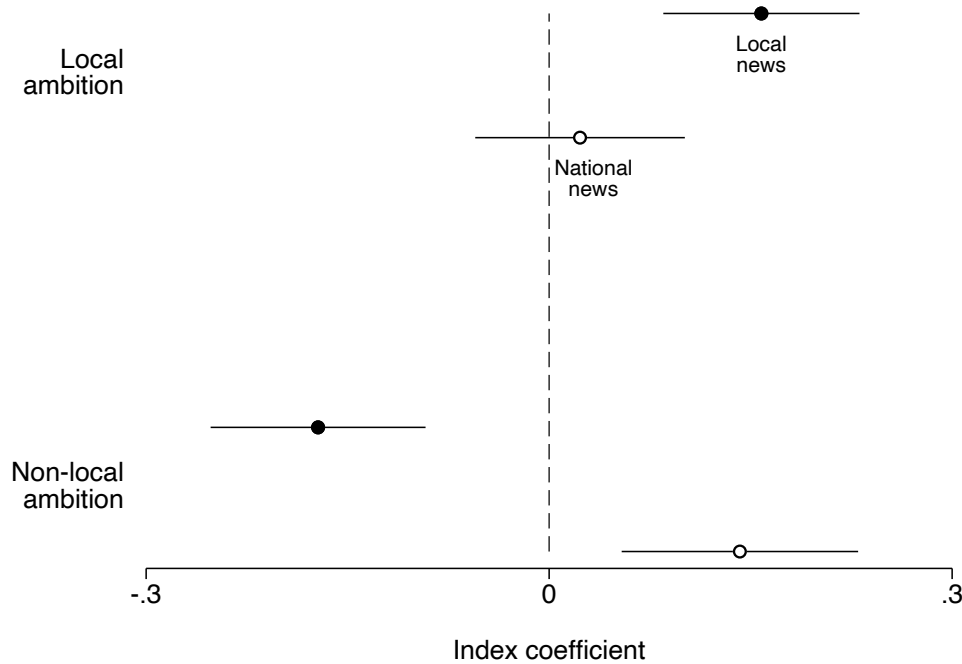
The findings from two national and three statewide surveys support our theoretical argument: People who consume more local news are more likely to express interest in running for office, particularly at the local level. That pattern may be strongest when consumers get news from outlets with substantive coverage of local politics. And national news does not have the same effect, likely because national news outlets don't help people connect their local concerns with a point of entry into politics. Despite our consistent findings across surveys, they are all based on samples of the general population. This means not only that most respondents have never considered running for office, but also that hardly any will ever emerge as candidates. As an additional test of the argument, we turn to data collected from potential candidates – women and men whose backgrounds better approximate the pool of people who tend to run for office.

Our data come from the 2021 – 2022 wave of the Citizen Political Ambition Study, which includes surveys of more than 5,000 “potential candidates” (see Lawless and Fox 2025 and Appendix C for details on the sample). Roughly half of these people are lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists, the four leading professions that precede a state legislative or congressional candidacy. The other half are college-educated and work full-time, but not in one of the feeder professions; this background is common among local candidates. An advantage of these data is that respondents are very politically active – five times more likely than the general population to have volunteered on a campaign, four times more likely to have attended a political meeting, and more than twice as likely to have made a political donation.⁹ They’re also much more likely to exhibit political ambition. Approximately 40% of respondents reported that the idea of running for an elective position at least “crossed my mind.” This includes people who have seriously considered running (7%) and those who have already run (6%). If the patterns we observed among general population samples hold here, then we can be more confident in the relationship between local news consumption and political ambition.

Figure 5 presents the results of logistic regression models predicting potential candidates’ interest in running for local office as well as statewide or federal office (with corresponding 95% confidence intervals). The models are similar to our general population analyses, but also include measures of whether a respondent was ever recruited to run for office from a political actor, ever encouraged to run from a family member, colleague, or member of the clergy, and the extent to which he or she feels qualified to run. Each of these is a strong predictor of ambition (see Gulzar 2021; Lawless 2012; Lawless and Fox 2025). Appendix Table 5 presents models with and without these additional controls.

⁹ These comparisons are based on American National Election Studies data from 2020.

Figure 5. Potential Candidates' Interest in Running for Local and Higher Offices



Notes: Point estimates represent coefficients from logistic regression models predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for local office and interest in statewide or federal office. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Results are from the fully specified models in Appendix Table 5.

As in our general population analyses, potential candidates who consume more local news are more likely to express interest in running for local office (top row of the figure). We can put the magnitude of the finding into perspective in two ways. First, among the sample of potential candidates, 58% expressed interest in running for one of the local offices we asked about – school board, city council, or mayor.¹⁰ All else equal, a respondent who consumes two sources of local news is approximately 6 percentage points more likely to say she is interested in running for local office than someone who does not consume local news. Second, the local news effect is generally the same magnitude as that associated with a one-unit increase on a four-point qualifications measure (i.e., the

¹⁰ As was the case in our earlier analyses, we include the full sample, not just people who have considered running for office.

difference between self-assessing as “qualified” versus “very qualified” to run for office). It’s also comparable to the effect of two additional acts of political participation.

Just like our previous analyses, we observe a comparatively weak relationship between national news consumption and local ambition. National news consumption is not associated with interest in running for local office, and its coefficient is significantly smaller than the local news coefficient ($p < .05$).

The story is different for ambition for statewide or federal office. Unlike in our previous analyses, national news consumption is positive and significant, implying that attention to national politics does encourage interest in non-local offices. Local news consumption, however, is negative and significant. This suggests that national news may play a role in shaping ambition for higher-level office among potential candidates. But because even among this politically engaged sample almost three times as many respondents expressed interest in a local office than a non-local one (58% versus 21%), local news habits are more relevant for explaining broader patterns of candidate emergence.

An Experimental Test of the Relationship between Local News and Political Ambition

Given that observational data are limited in the extent to which they can provide causal evidence for our argument, as a final test, we designed and fielded an experiment to examine the relationship between local news and political ambition. This approach provides an opportunity to scrutinize the mechanism we suggest accounts for the effects of local news on ambition: learning about problems that face a community.

YouGov fielded the survey to 1,000 U.S. adults who met two criteria: they held at least a bachelor’s degree and were currently employed full time. Constructing the sample this way allows us to test our argument on the group of people most likely to run for office in the United States. At the same time, because this sample of potential candidates has relatively high political awareness and

well-formed participatory habits, it poses a difficult test for the effects of local news to affect political ambition.

The premise of the experiment was to randomize respondents' exposure to news content and then ask about their interest in running for office. The survey began with demographic and background questions and a distraction exercise in which respondents answered a series of questions about their personality. We then randomly assigned respondents into one of three conditions: a Local News treatment, a National News treatment, or a control group.

Respondents assigned to the Local News condition were told, "Now we'd like to show you some recent headlines from local news outlets in your area. For each one, please tell us how important you think the story is." Asking respondents to rate the importance of each story encouraged them to pay attention to the substance of the headlines. Each respondent then saw four headlines about different local issues – housing affordability, school performance, flooding threats, and road upgrades. We tailored each headline to the county where the respondent lived.¹¹ Residents of Fulton County, Georgia, for example, saw a housing headline that read, "Fulton County's Housing Affordability Crisis Worsens as Local Leaders Delay Action."¹² We did not attribute the headlines to a specific local news source.

We also randomly varied the valence of the headlines; respondents saw either a negative or positive version for each issue. Negative headlines, such as the housing affordability crisis above, focused on a problem that local leaders had failed to address or solve. Positive headlines indicated that local officials had addressed or were moving toward a solution – for instance, "Fulton County's Housing Affordability Crisis Eases as Local Leaders Take Action." Each respondent saw between 0 and 4 negative headlines.

¹¹ Respondents' counties were determined by their zip codes. For zip codes that cross county borders, respondents were assigned to the county in which most of those zip code respondents lived.

¹² Respondents were fully debriefed at the end of the survey and told that the headlines they saw were fictional.

Respondents assigned to the National News treatment were told they would see “recent headlines from national news outlets” and, as in the Local News treatment, were asked to rate the importance of four stories. The headlines focused on national issues – border security, China policy, economic relief, and confidence in the courts. Again, we varied the valence of each item, with negative headlines suggesting that the problem was worsening or not being addressed, and positive headlines implying that a problem was being solved or easing.¹³

The third group of respondents – those assigned to the control group – did not see any news content (see Appendix D for headlines associated with each experimental treatment).

After the experimental manipulation, respondents answered questions about their interest in running for various offices, using the same items we used in our earlier surveys. The focus of our analysis here is whether respondents in the Local News treatment expressed more interest in running for local office – school board, city or town council, or mayor – than those in the other treatments, and whether that varied by the negativity of the headlines they saw.

Turning first to the main treatment effects, we find evidence consistent with our argument but not dispositive. The percentage of respondents expressing interest in at least one local office was highest for those exposed to the Local News treatment, at 54%. It was 51% in the control and 49% among those who viewed national news headlines.¹⁴ These differences are not statistically significant.¹⁵ Given the small sample sizes in each treatment, however, this is not surprising. Moreover, the experimental intervention is fairly weak – one-time exposure to four news headlines.

But more importantly, the broad treatment categories bundle together exposure to both negative and positive headlines, which we do not expect to affect ambition equally. To test for the

¹³ The negative border security headline, for example, read, “Partisan Gridlock in Washington Stalls Border Security Deal.” The positive headline, on the other hand, told respondents that “Partisan Gridlock in Washington Eases as Leaders Agree on Border Security Deal.”

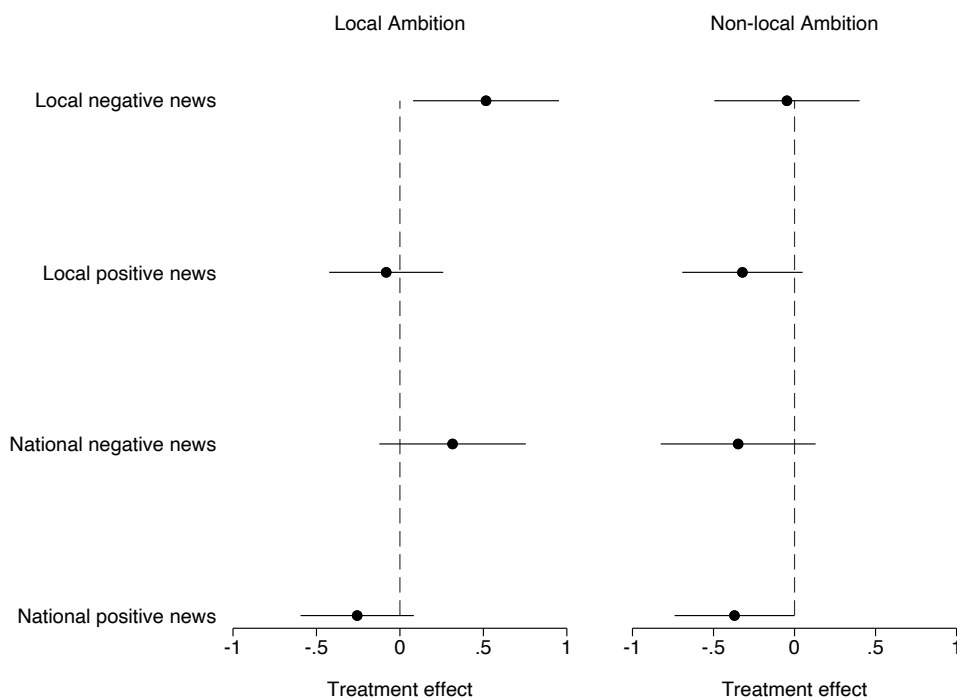
¹⁴ The experimental analyses are unweighted, following Franco et al. (2017) and Miratrix et al. (2018).

¹⁵ The p-value for the difference between the Local News treatment and the control is 0.45. The difference between the Local News and National News treatments is 0.22.

mechanism we have posited – that negative headlines remind respondents of problems that need to be solved and, accordingly, focus their attention on the offices where they could play a role solving them – we divided respondents into two categories: (1) those who saw at least three negative headlines and (2) those who saw two or fewer negative headlines. This allows us to determine whether respondents exposed to more negative news expressed different levels of ambition than those who saw more headlines about problems being solved.

Figure 6 plots the treatment effects of the valence of local and national headlines on interest in running for local and non-local office. The point estimates are coefficients from a regression model and represent differences from the control. The horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 6. Experimental Effects of Exposure to Local and National News



Notes: Point estimates are coefficients from logistic regression models predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for local office and interest in statewide or federal office. Coefficients represent differences from the control condition. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Results are from the models in Appendix Table 6.

Turning first to the left side of the figure, respondents who saw at least three negative local headlines (Local negative news) were significantly more likely to express interest in running for local office (63%) than respondents in the control condition (51%). They were also 14 percentage points more likely than those who saw at least two positive local headlines to report interest in running for school board, city council, or mayor. This was the only condition to produce a statistically significant difference from the control.¹⁶ Notably, the effect of negativity in the headlines is not a product of our dichotomous categorization of negative news. When we regress interest in local office on a continuous variable that measures the number of negative headlines a respondent read (ranging from 0 to 4), that variable is significant; as the number of negative headlines increases, so does interest in local office.

The right-hand side of the figure shows that, consistent with our survey data, exposure to news – local or national, positive or negative – does not exert a systematic effect on interest in running for statewide or federal office. None of the treatment effects is statistically distinguishable from the control or from one another. Exposure to news of any sort has little effect on people’s interest in higher-level offices.

Conclusion

The political ambition literature has demonstrated that the political opportunity structure and the socialization process explain why people do or do not run for office. But the lack of attention to how potential candidates acquire political information is a significant theoretical hole in this body of work. One reason for the omission is that the relationship between news habits and ambition might seem so intuitive that research isn’t necessary: Consuming news makes people more

¹⁶ The Local negative effect is also statistically larger than the Local positive or National positive conditions. The effect is not statistically distinguishable from the National negative headlines group, however (59% of those respondents expressed interest in a local office, as did 45% of those who saw the National positive headlines).

politically aware, and that political awareness spurs their interest in running for office. We have shown, however, that mere news consumption is not what matters. Instead, it is mainly attention to local news – in particular, local news that highlights a problem – that creates a foundation for political ambition. This is likely because local news coverage helps people identify community concerns that can be addressed by the offices where most opportunities for running arise – in local government.

Theoretically, our argument and findings suggest that scholars should devote more attention to identifying the way that exposure to news and information shapes interest in entering electoral politics. After all, our observational and experimental data combine to support an informational story – local news helps people connect important problems in their community to the actions that government officials are, or are not, taking to solve them. But local news might also spur political ambition by forging a psychological connection between local residents and their community. People who learn more about their cities and towns through news coverage might develop a greater sense of local identity, which may translate into seeking local office. The fact that we find similar patterns across national surveys, state surveys, a survey experiment, and among the general population as well as people well-positioned to run for office suggests that exposure to local news plays a significant role in determining the makeup of the hundreds of thousands of elected officials across the United States. More research on potential mechanisms could help elaborate on various ways that political ambition may change as people's news habits evolve.

Our findings further suggest that the evolution of the media environment in the last three decades will have profound implications for who runs for office in the United States. Throughout the 20th century, most Americans got most of their news from local news sources. Even if they weren't especially interested in public affairs, regular local news consumption meant residents routinely learned about the most important problems in their community. But because of both

declines in the supply of local news and consumer attention to it, Americans now get less information about local politics and government (e.g., Hayes and Lawless 2021; Hopkins 2018). Although levels of ambition haven't changed dramatically (Lawless and Fox 2025), interest in running for office at the local level may very well start to decline. In the coming years, younger generations, whose news habits are dominated by social media and who consume very little local news, will replace older cohorts. That will almost certainly lead to a pool of potential candidates whose connection to local news is more tenuous than that of previous generations.

At a minimum, the decline in local news consumption may change the kind of people who run for office. Individuals who were once motivated by an interest in fixing their communities may be more likely to pursue office for other reasons (or be replaced by people who are politically ambitious for other reasons). They may respond to levels of hyper-partisanship. They may be increasingly motivated by self-interest or financial gain. They may view running for office as a way to address national issues and debates. To the extent this occurs, it would be worrisome. It seems uncontroversial to assert that democracy is most likely to flourish when political leaders are motivated to improve the lives of the constituents they serve in the communities where they live. The disappearance of local news may reshape local politics and local politicians for generations.

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Appendix A. Summary of Datasets

Composition	Date	Source	Sample Size
Michigan state survey	April 24 – 20, 2024	Qualtrics	2,020
Montana state survey	May 8 – 16, 2024	Qualtrics	650
New Hampshire state survey	June 10 – 26, 2024	Qualtrics	655
CES national survey	October 2017	YouGov	1,000
SSRS national survey	October 12 – November 4, 2024	SSRS	1,264
Potential candidates survey	November 18, 2021 – March 22, 2022	YouGov	5,076
Potential candidates survey experiment	June 28, 2025 – July 1, 2025	YouGov	1,000

Notes: For the three statewide surveys, the samples were representative of each state’s population on most dimensions, although they were somewhat older than the population of each state. To approximate each state’s population more precisely, we weighted the data by U.S. Census estimates for state populations on age, gender, race, and education. All results in this paper are based on the analysis of the weighted data, except for the experiment.

Appendix B. Local News Questions, by Survey

“How often would you say you get news and information from the following sources?”

Response categories: often, sometimes, rarely, never

Michigan survey

Local TV news
Local newspapers
Local radio stations
Statewide newspapers
Statewide radio stations
Bridge Michigan

Montana survey

Local TV news
Public radio
Montana Free Press
Daily Montanan
Billings Gazette
Bozeman Daily Chronicle
Missoulian
Flathead Beacon

New Hampshire survey

NH public radio
WMUR
NH Union Leader
NH Bulletin
Boston Globe

2024 SSRS

Local TV news station
Local daily newspaper
Local radio station
Local blog

“In the past 24 hours, have you done any of the following? Check all that apply.”

2017 CES

Read the print version of a local newspaper
Read the online version of a local newspaper
Read a blog about politics in your community
Read a blog about politics in your state

Potential candidates survey

Read the print version of a local newspaper
Read the online version of a local newspaper
Read a blog about politics in your community
Watched a local television news broadcast

“Thinking now about your general news habits, how often do you . . . ?”

Response categories: regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, never

2025 potential candidates experiment

Read a local newspaper (either in print or online)
Read a national newspaper (either in print or online)
Listen to news on the radio
Watch local television news
Watch national evening network television news (ABC World News, CBS Evening News, or NBC Nightly News)
Watch cable television news (such as CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC)

Appendix C: Potential Candidates Sample

YouGov broke the potential candidates sample into two parts. First, they compiled a sample based on the four feeder professions to politics, which included surveys of 1,576 people who identified as lawyers, educators, or business professionals, as well as 500 politically active, college-educated women and men. The frame for the politically active sample was representative of respondents in the 2020 Cooperative Election Study who engaged in at least four of the following activities in the last year: (1) attended local political meetings (such as school board or city council); (2) put up a political sign (such as a lawn sign or bumper sticker); (3) worked for a candidate or campaign; (4) attended a political protest, march, or demonstration; (5) contacted a public official; and (6) donated money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on age, race, and education and evenly split on gender.

Then, YouGov supplemented the sample with surveys of 3,417 full-time employed, college-educated respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 3,000 to produce the final dataset. The frame for this sample was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

Appendix D: Experimental Treatments

Local Treatment: Respondents were shown four local news headlines referring to their county name. Each respondent saw one headline about each of the four issues (housing, schools, flooding, roads). For each topic, each respondent was randomly shown either the negative or positive headline.

Negative	Positive
[Fulton] County's Housing Affordability Crisis Worsens as Local Leaders Delay Action	[Fulton] County's Housing Affordability Crisis Eases as Local Leaders Take Action
[Fulton] County Schools Struggle to Close Achievement Gaps as School Board Warns Budget Cuts Loom	[Fulton] County Schools Close Achievement Gaps as School Board Announces Annual Budget Will Be Balanced
[Fulton] County Faces Future Flooding Threat as Stormwater Management System Fails	[Fulton] County Addresses Future Flooding Threat with Stormwater Management System Upgrade
Residents Fed Up as [Fulton] County Delays Road Upgrades Amid Growing Need	Residents Cheer as [Fulton] County Launches Road Upgrades Amid Growing Need

National Treatment: Respondents were shown four national news headlines. Each respondent saw one headline about each of the four issues (border security, China policy, the economy, the courts). For each topic, each respondent was randomly shown either the negative or positive headline.

Negative	Positive
Partisan Gridlock in Washington Stalls Border Security Deal	Partisan Gridlock in Washington Eases as Leaders Agree on a Border Security Deal
White House Advisers Divided as U.S. Struggles to Define Strategy for Dealing with China	White House Advisers Rally behind Plan to Define Strategy for Dealing with China
Republican and Democratic Divisions Undercut Progress on Economic Relief	Republican and Democratic Compromise Suggests Progress on Economic Relief
Political Battles Escalate as Confidence in Courts Becomes Partisan Flashpoint	Political Battles Take Back Seat as Confidence in Courts Improves

Control respondents: These respondents were not shown any news headlines.

Appendix E: Human Subjects Protocols

All seven surveys included in the analysis received IRB approval from our home institutions. But beyond that approval, we are confident that YouGov, SSRS, and Qualtrics all employ practices that should mitigate standard concerns about engaging with human subjects: power, consent, deception, harm and trauma, confidentiality, and impact.

YouGov

We commissioned YouGov to build both samples of potential candidates and the 2017 national sample. Although our study received IRB approval from our universities, YouGov also provided us with a 12-page document, entitled, “Survey Procedures: Information Related to the Treatment of Human Subjects,” that fully describes their sampling recruitment, compensation, and other protocols. The details that follow are taken directly from the March 2020 document YouGov provided (those were the practices in place when our surveys were carried out).

The potential candidate surveys did not involve deception or the potential for harm or trauma as regularly conceived. In addition, we see no broad concerns about impact. While it’s true that the survey questions might prompt some citizens to think about running for office, civic engagement is a positive externality. Finally, the protocols put in place by YouGov – summarized below – should eliminate concerns regarding power, consent, and confidentiality.

According to YouGov, samples are drawn from a proprietary opt-in survey panel, comprised of 1.2 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in YouGov’s web surveys. At any given time, YouGov maintains numerous recruitment campaigns based on salient current events. Panel members are recruited by various methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population. These include web advertising campaigns (public surveys), permission-based email campaigns, partner-

sponsored solicitations, telephone-to-web recruitment (RDD based sampling), and mail-to-web recruitment (voter registration-based sampling).

The primary method of recruitment for the YouGov panel – and the manner in which most of our respondents were solicited – is web advertising campaigns that target respondents through keyword searches. In the words of YouGov, “a search in Google may prompt an active YouGov advertisement inviting their opinion on the search topic. At the conclusion of the short survey respondents are invited to join the YouGov panel to directly receive and participate in additional surveys. All recruited members must pass through a double opt-in procedure, where respondents must confirm their consent again by responding to an email.” The database then checks to ensure that the newly recruited panelist is new and has a valid address.

YouGov augments the panel with difficult to recruit respondents by soliciting panelists in telephone and mail surveys. Respondents provide a working email where they can receive an electronic invitation and confirm their consent and interest in receiving and participating in YouGov web surveys. Each respondent receives the following consent statement upon providing contact information and indicating an interest in receiving survey invitations from YouGov: “YouGov invites people to complete self-administered surveys via the web using a panel of respondents.” Panelists are provided the privacy policy when they voluntarily sign up and a link to this with each study request. Specifically, each invitation states that their participation is voluntary and confidential.

YouGov compensates participants through an incentive program in which survey respondents receive “PollingPoints” they may redeem:

Points Reward

25,000	UNICEF Donation
30,000	\$25 gift cards from AMC, Fandango, CVS, Regal, or Walgreens
35,000	\$15 Amazon gift card or \$25 Kmart gift card
40,000	\$25 Foot Locker gift card

45,000	\$25 Nike gift card
57,500	\$50 FreshGift gift card
60,000	\$50 gift card from Lowe's, Chili's, Applebee's, GameStop, Groupon, iTunes, Sears, TJX, Best Buy, Bed Bath & Beyond, Walmart, Foot Locker, Target, Macy's, or Old Navy
65,000	\$50 gift card from Nike, Amazon, Global Hotel, or Visa
100,000	\$100 Visa Prepaid card, \$100 UNICEF Donation, or \$100 Amazon gift card

Each panelist receives between 250 and 5,000 points to complete a survey. YouGov considers the survey reward policies and incentives “to serve as a genuine token of appreciation for YouGov panelists.”

Qualtrics

We conducted our three state surveys through Qualtrics' research panel. They were invited to participate in a study of “how you get news and information about the state of [respondent's state] and your community.” Qualtrics draws respondents from a group of panelists, recruited through various methods, who have agreed to participate in market research. At the state level, they use demographic quotas (age, race, education, etc.) to maximize representativeness.

Before answering the first question, respondents were informed that participation was voluntary. We then obtained informed consent at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were told that the study would not benefit them directly, but that the research may benefit society by improving our understanding of politics and society. Respondents were free to end their participation at any time. The surveys did not involve deception, nor did they collect personally identifying information.

We did not compensate respondents for participating in the survey, although Qualtrics offers an incentive scheme to their panelists similar to YouGov (see above).

SSRS

SSRS Opinion Panel members are recruited randomly based on a nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design (including Hawaii and Alaska). ABS respondents are randomly sampled by Marketing Systems Group (MSG) through the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File (CDS), a regularly-updated listing of all known addresses in the U.S. For the SSRS Opinion Panel, known business addresses are excluded from the sample frame.

The SSRS Opinion Panel is a multi-mode panel. Internet households participate via web while all non-internet households (including those who have internet but are unwilling to take surveys online) participate via phone. All respondents in our study were SSRS Opinion Panelists who are U.S. adults ages 18 or older. The sample drawn was stratified by age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, census region, party identification, and preferred survey language to ensure adequate representation of each demographic group.

Before answering the first question, respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and offered informed consent. Like in the other surveys, respondents were told that the study would not benefit them directly, but that the research may benefit society by improving our understanding of politics and society. Respondents were free to end their participation at any time. The surveys did not involve deception, nor did they collect personally identifying information.

We did not compensate respondents for participating in the survey.

Appendix Table 1. The Relationship between Local News Consumption and Political Ambition

	National Surveys		State Surveys		
	2017 CES	2024 SSRS	Michigan	Montana	New Hampshire
Local news index	.253 * (.120)	.215 * (.070)	.156 * (.042)	.196 * (.062)	.259 * (.102)
College educated	.668 * (.307)	.342 (.178)	.142 (.172)	.238 (.282)	.534 (.301)
Income	.042 (.039)	.023 (.071)	.033 (.028)	.053 (.047)	.038 (.049)
Woman	-1.196 * (.254)	-1.103 * (.173)	-.953 * (.146)	-1.316 * (.240)	-.898 * (.261)
White	-.158 (.415)	-.013 (.200)	-.578 * (.177)	-.044 (.350)	-.336 (.533)
Age	-.001 (.006)	-.155 * (.050)	-.017 * (.005)	-.003 (.007)	-.002 (.007)
Democrat	.145 (.307)	.585 (.341)	.576 * (.240)	-.519 (.339)	.481 (.411)
Republican	.327 (.257)	.697 * (.343)	.766 * (.250)	-.476 (.328)	.788 (.411)
Constant	-1.549 * (.622)	-1.804 * (.425)	-1.108 * (.367)	-1.335 * (.601)	-3.250 * (.741)
Pseudo R ²	.090	.098	.083	.118	.084
N	832	1,232	2,008	641	654

Notes: Entries represent logistic regression coefficients (and standard errors) predicting whether a respondent ever considered running for office. * $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Appendix Table 2. Local News, National News, and Political Ambition

	2017 CES Survey			2024 SSRS Survey		
	Considered Running	Local Ambition	Statewide or Federal Ambition	Considered Running	Local Ambition	Statewide or Federal Ambition
Local news index	.223 * (.115)	.330 * (.164)	.067 (.110)	.180 * (.075)	.158 * (.055)	.017 (.082)
National news index	-.096 (.112)	-.025 (.079)	-.040 (.121)	-.045 (.097)	.129 (.073)	-.099 (.109)
College educated	.572 (.313)	.564 * (.194)	-.091 (.208)	.230 (.185)	.334 * (.137)	.364 (.206)
Income	.025 (.037)	.011 (.039)	.045 (.031)	.032 (.073)	.085 (.053)	-.145 (.082)
Woman	-1.098 * (.290)	.100 (.217)	-1.034 * (.233)	-1.123 * (.179)	-.640 * (.124)	-.969 * (.197)
White	-.317 (.395)	-.176 (.223)	-.151 (.257)	-.101 (.207)	-.064 (.151)	-.617 * (.214)
Age	-.007 (.006)	-.004 (.007)	-.031 * (.005)	-.167 * (.053)	-.228 * (.040)	-.173 * (.058)
Democrat	.007 (.328)	.275 (.289)	.469 (.346)	.289 (.351)	.682 * (.232)	.358 (.383)
Republican	.109 (.282)	.415 (.299)	.120 (.330)	.545 (.348)	.885 * (.233)	.701 (.383)
Interest/Participation	.862 * (.190)	.155 * (.154)	.623 * (.167)	.479 * (.068)	.268 * (.057)	.365 * (.074)
Constant	-3.720 * (.751)	-.959 * (.598)	-1.604 * (.611)	-1.841 * (.434)	-.581 (.303)	-1.089 * (.454)
Pseudo R ²	.130	.040	.121	.164	.143	.117
N	803	803	803	1,232	1,232	1,232

Notes: Entries represent logistic regression coefficients (and standard errors) predicting whether a respondent ever considered running for office, expressed interest in local office (school board, mayor, or city/town council), or expressed interested in federal or statewide office (U.S. House, U.S. Senate, president, governor, other statewide position). * p < .05.

Table 3. Elective Office Preferences

	2017 CES Survey	2024 SSRS Survey	2021–2022 Potential Candidates Survey	2025 Potential Candidates Experiment
Local Office				
School board	29 %	23 %	33 %	29 %
Town or city council	39	34	46	38
Mayor	10	10	13	14
State Office				
State legislator	15	11	25	22
Secretary of State	-	4	6	6
Governor	7	5	7	8
Federal Office				
U.S. House of Representatives	10	7	15	16
U.S. Senate	-	6	10	12
President	7	4	4	5
N	1,000	1,264	5,076	1,000

Note: Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who said they would consider running for the specified position. In the 2017 CES, the survey did not ask about the U.S. House and U.S. Senate separately, so the 10% entry reflects the percentage of respondents who expressed interest in running for at least one chamber of the U.S. Congress. Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents often expressed interest in more than one position.

Appendix Table 4. Non-Profit Local News Use and Political Ambition

	Michigan	Montana	New Hampshire
Non-profit local news use	.431 * (.215)	.738 * (.301)	.219 (.281)
Local news index	.100 * (.048)	-.090 (.086)	.271 * (.130)
College educated	.144 (.173)	-.239 (.284)	.537 (.302)
Income	.035 (.028)	.053 (.048)	.038 (.049)
Woman	-.941 * (.146)	-1.300 * (.241)	-.899 * (.262)
White	-.561 * (.177)	.056 (.354)	.341 (.533)
Age	-.016 * (.005)	-.004 (.007)	-.002 (.007)
Democrat	.577 * (.239)	-.514 (.345)	.482 (.410)
Republican	.775 * (.249)	.427 (.337)	.785 (.412)
Constant	-1.143 * (.367)	-1.245 * (.606)	-3.250 * (.741)
Pseudo R ²	.080	.116	.077
N	2,008	641	655

Notes: Entries represent logistic regression coefficients (and standard errors) predicting whether a respondent ever considered running for office. As in Tables 1 and 2, the local news index sums the number of local outlets from which respondents got news, but does not include the non-profit outlet. * $p < .05$.

Appendix Table 5. Potential Candidates' Interest in Running for Local and Higher Offices

	Local Office		Federal or Statewide Office	
Local news index	.203 *	.158 *	-.114 *	-.172 *
	(.035)	(.037)	(.040)	(.041)
National news index	.067	.023	.160 *	.142 *
	(.038)	(.040)	(.045)	(.045)
Woman	-.222 *	-.031	-.702 *	-.569 *
	(.065)	(.069)	(.078)	(.080)
Education	.188 *	-.020	.156 *	-.009
	(.066)	(.070)	(.078)	(.081)
Income	-.022	-.039 *	.034 *	.024
	(.012)	(.013)	(.014)	(.014)
Black	.211 *	.154	.393 *	.335 *
	(.104)	(.108)	(.117)	(.120)
Latino	.107	.025	.174	.106
	(.101)	(.106)	(.116)	(.119)
Married	.043	.008	-.234 *	-.255 *
	(.076)	(.079)	(.090)	(.092)
Children under 18 at home	.145	.106	.013	-.047
	(.075)	(.078)	(.087)	(.089)
Birth year	.017 *	.020 *	.023 *	.025 *
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)
Democrat	.049	.127	.009	.065
	(.095)	(.098)	(.114)	(.116)
Republican	.033	-.001	.085	.037
	(.103)	(.107)	(.123)	(.126)
Political efficacy	.133 *	.067 *	.178 *	.124 *
	(.029)	(.031)	(.034)	(.035)
Political participation	.354 *	.236 *	.215 *	.097 *
	(.021)	(.023)	(.022)	(.024)
Self-assessed qualifications		.408 *		.293 *
		(.037)		(.043)
Recruited by political actor		-.086		.306 *
		(.107)		(.101)
Encouraged by personal source		.810 *		.532 *
		(.081)		(.187)
Constant	-35.362 *	-40.776 *	-47.283 *	-51.542 *
	(5.359)	(5.644)	(6.293)	(6.494)
Pseudo-R ²	.156	.232	.097	.139
N	4,655	4,652	4,655	4,652

Notes: Entries represent logistic regression coefficients (and standard errors) predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for local or statewide or federal office. * p < .05.

Appendix Table 6. Experimental Effects of Exposure to Local and National News

	Local Ambition	Non-Local Ambition
Local negative news	.516 * (.223)	-.047 (.229)
Local positive news	-.082 (.174)	-.321 (.189)
National negative news	.315 (.224)	-.348 (.244)
National positive news	-.256 (.173)	-.370 (.189)
Constant	.036 (.111)	-.620 (.116)
Pseudo R ²	.010	.005
N	1,000	1,000

Notes: Point estimates are coefficients from logistic regression models predicting whether a respondent expressed interest in running for local office (school board, city or town council, mayor) and interest in non-local (statewide or federal) office. Coefficients represent differences from the control condition. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. * $p < .05$.