

Appendix: Local News Data

We identified local television news coverage of the ACA by selecting segments on up to two news broadcasts during the highest-rated half hour of local news in each of the 210 local media markets, based on closed-captioned searches for health reform–related words (i.e., “health care,” “healthcare,” “Obamacare,” “Obama care,” and “Affordable Care Act”). We identified a total of 2,759 relevant segments using those search criteria. Of those segments 1,813 (66 percent) were acquired without technical issues. As is typical of these data, 782 (28 percent) were unable to be acquired and/or coded due to server or other technical issues in capture or in acquisition. In addition, 142 (5 percent) were confirmed to be duplicate hits and 22 (0.8 percent) were not local news programming; both types of coverage are therefore excluded. The average market capture rate was 89 percent. All but seven media markets were above a 75 percent capture rate. We failed to capture any identified content in only one media market (Johnstown, Pennsylvania).

We coded each of the 1,813 successfully acquired segments for whether ACA was mentioned (and the extent to which it was discussed); whether the focus of coverage was all about the politics, all about the product/marketplace of the ACA, or something in between; and, within stories that were not solely about the politics, the tone of that coverage as it reflected on the ACA product marketplace (discouraging, encouraging, both, or neither/neutral). We then weighted the total number of stories identified in each market by its capture rate to avoid penalizing markets with lower capture rates in comparing volume. For example, in Alpena, Michigan, we successfully captured 75 percent of the total broadcasts in the sample and found two stories mentioning the ACA. To arrive at the total number of stories, we multiply 2 by $1/0.75$ (or

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1.33333) to arrive at a total of 2.666667 stories. Using the weighting, we arrive at our estimate of 2,043 total stories (adding 230 to the 1,813 that were successfully acquired). Weighting does not affect the proportional breakdown of our content coding presented, but affects only the total number.

Of the 2,043 stories, 757 (37 percent) did not mention the ACA and/or were only teasers for upcoming stories. The figures reported in the text are based on the 1,286 (accounting for capture rate weighting) remaining stories that included at least a passing reference to ACA.

To compare the content of coverage between states running their own exchanges and those that are not, we had to arrive at a market classification that would take into account the fact that media market boundaries do not line up precisely with state borders. We created a file containing every possible market-state pair such that if a market has residents from more than one state within its borders, it would appear in the data set more than once (e.g., Minneapolis would appear twice—once for Minnesota residents who are part of a state exchange and once for Wisconsin residents who are not). We then conducted a sensitivity analysis by comparing the results for three separate specifications, making different assumptions: (1) counting each market once and classifying it according to the state that has the highest percentage of the population within the market (based on census county population sizes from 2010); (2) counting only market-state pairs where the number of residents within a state makes up at least 20 percent of the total market population (e.g., this would drop Minneapolis-Wisconsin from the data set since

residents of Wisconsin make up only 6.2 percent of the Minneapolis market population);¹ and (3) counting all market-state pairs regardless of the size of the population within each (so the Minneapolis-Wisconsin pair would be included, and Minneapolis content would be counted twice, once as part of a state marketplace and once as part of the federal/partnership marketplace). Results presented in the manuscript are based on the middle-ground results of the 20 percent cutoff, although the basic conclusions were comparable regardless of which specification we used (with states using federally run exchanges having more unfavorable coverage than states running their own exchanges by about 10 percentage points, a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in all three specifications).

¹ We looked carefully at the possible cutoffs. The 20 percent cutoff does not exclude any market-state pairs that challenged face validity; for instance, the cutoff ensures that Kentucky residents of the Paducah (Kentucky, sharing a border with Illinois) market are not dropped (they constitute just over 25 percent of the market population, with the remainder in Illinois). More importantly, the results presented are robust to alternative cutoff specifications.