Small screen, big echo?
Political persuasion on the local TV news: evidence from Sinclair

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How did we get here?

"Among Trump voters, 40% say he "definitely" won and another 36% say he "probably" won the election. Only 7% of Trump voters concede that Biden definitely won the 2020 election, while another 15% say he probably won. Biden voters nearly unanimously believe their candidate won."
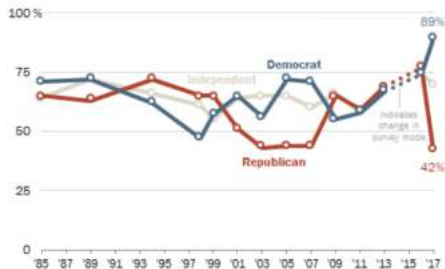
Source: Pew Research Center (2021)

In part, polarization in news coverage and trust in its accuracy.

▶ Which can hamper the ability of the media to inform voters to demand political accountability.

% of U.S. adults who think that criticism from news organizations _keeps_
political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done

Source: Pew Research Center (2018)

Party support for watchdog role often shifts with control of the White House; largest divide measured post-Trump.

Local TV news stands out as one of the most highly trusted, across the political spectrum.

▶ 76% of Americans have "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of trust in their local television news. **Source:** 2018 Poynter Media Trust Survey

Local news controversy with report that one of the largest owner of local TV stations in the US (Sinclair Broadcast Group) directed its anchors to read a conservatively biased script about *"the troubling trend of irresponsible, one-sided news stories plaguing our country."* **Source:** CNN report and Deadspin video mash-up

This paper: Investigate the political persuasion of a trusted news source: biased **local** news media,
then focus on heterogeneous responses to persuasion,

Main questions:

▶ How persuasive is this biased local news coverage wrt political outcomes?

▶ And under what conditions?

Identification:
(1) **change in news content** towards a conservative slant since the run-up to the 2004 presidential election of the Sinclair Broadcast group (SBG) as a natural experiment (event study).

On the *assumption* that the evolution of within-county changes in outcomes would have been the same absent this **change in content**.

Past Literature

- ▶ **News can influence viewer's political preferences and opinions:** (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Enikolopov et al., 2011; Djourelova, 2023)

- ▶ **Heterogeneous responses to media bias based on priors:** (Adena et al., 2015; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014)

- ▶ **Mechanisms of political persuasion:**
  Belief-based model (Chiang and Knight, 2011 re: newspaper endorsements and voting)
  vs. Preference-based model (Landry et al., 2006 re: solicitor attractiveness and willingness-to-pay)

- ▶ **Economic disaffection, populism, and politics:** (Broz et al., 2021; Rodrik, 2020; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Autor et al., 2020)

- ▶ **On the Sinclair Broadcast Group:** (Martin and Mcrain, 2019; Mastrorocco and Ornaghi, 2020)

Preview of results:

- ▶ Increasing Republican gains in presidential and congressional elections.
  - ▶ Persuasion rate: 4.7% of its potential audience in 2008-2012, and 14.4% in 2016-2020
  - ▶ Back of the envelope calculation: absence of Sinclair bias could have reversed the 2016 election result.
- ▶ Effect is concentrated among counties with population decline and with a high share of native-born and non college educated
- ▶ Rise in (self-declared) xenophobic attitudes and tolerance for racial inequality for non college educated individuals

Contribution:

- ▶ Exploiting a change in content while keeping ownership constant
- ▶ Unique "non-partisan" context of local news, which has not been exploited before (to my knowledge).
- ▶ Persuasion in the context of Trump and rise of populist rhetoric (Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017, Djourelova, 2023)
- ▶ Political repercussions of the Sinclair Broadcast Group.

Road map

1. Context:
   - ▶ the Local TV Industry
   - ▶ Sinclair Broadcast Group
2. Data
3. Empirical Strategy
4. Main results on change in content
   - ▶ County-level
   - ▶ Individual-level
5. Discussion

- ▶ **Privately owned, public good:** electromagnetic spectrum.
- ▶ **Serves a community**= Designated Media Market (DMA), set of counties. Only viewable within those counties.
- ▶ Affiliated to a major network provider, that provides national (mostly entertainment) programming (affiliates system resemble franchises)
- ▶ **The local news is usually produced by the station itself.**
- ▶ Media companies (like SBG) own the facilities and manage stations, i.e. maintaining the affiliate agreements and the production of local news.
  - ▶ Importantly: **no logo/identifying marker of ownership** on stations, only national affiliate has an on-air logo
- ▶ **Highly trusted and watched across the ideological spectrum**

▸ Slant of national affiliate broadcast news.

Relevant and trusted source of information about politics.

Partisan distribution of audience resembles the electorate as a whole (Fowler et al., 2007)

% who got news about politics and government in the previous week from...

American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22.
Based on web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political
values questions (see About the Survey for more details). Ten most used sources for
each group shown here. For complete list, see Appendix B.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
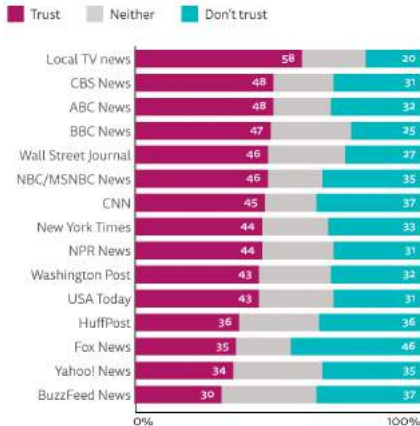
BRAND TRUST SCORES

Trust = % scored 6-10 on 10-point scale. Don't trust = 0-4. Neither = 5.
Those that haven't heard of each brand were excluded. Only the above brands were
included in the survey so should not be treated as a list of the most trusted brands.

Source: Pew Research Center (2017)

Source: Reuters Digital News Report (2021)

Viewership of local TV news

Represents about 26% of all TV households in 2007 and about 20% in 2016.

U.S. local TV: news viewer count 2007-2016, by time slot (in millions)

Viewers of local evening news shows on TV in the U.S. 2018, by age
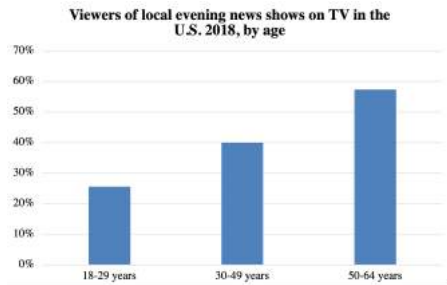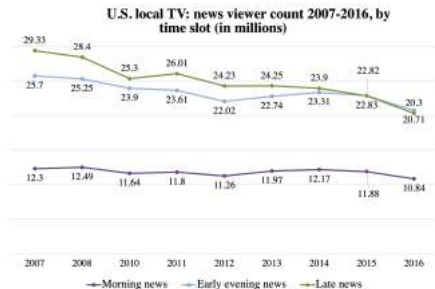
▸ OLS/Probit on determinants of local TV viewrship

"I'd like to have 80% of the country if I could get it. I'd like to have 90%."

Sinclair CEO David Smith at a UBS Media Conference in NY, December 2012.

- ▶ Founded in 1971, becomes public in 1995.
- ▶ Family-run company.
- ▶ Neared bankruptcy in 2000s, restructured and rebounded to more than double its station count in 2013.
- ▶ Rapid expansion, especially after 2012, through use of "local marketing agreements" and in small and medium sized markets.

Operates mainly through the *supply-side filtering* of available news stories.

"Fox News Channel has demonstrated that people want a different level of truth, and if you can do it nationally, why not locally? If we're successful in creating meaningful, relevant controversy, we'll be doing a community service."

Sinclair CEO David Smith to Adweek

▶ Martin and Mcrain (2019): news coverage is implicitly conservatively slanted and oriented towards national politics.

▶ Current biased practices start in **run-up to the 2004 election** with launch of News Central in 2002, etc. ▸ List of examples ▸ Why 2004?

▶ "Must-runs": centrally-produced brief video commentaries/scripts. (video)

▶ *"We're here to deliver your message."* Sinclair CEO to the 2016 Trump campaign.

1. **Electoral Outcomes:**
    - ▶ **County-level** electoral returns for 1992 to 2020 presidential and congressional elections.
    - ▶ **Individual level** geolocalized electoral survey: ANES - restricted-access (1992-2016) & CES (2006-2020)

2. **Controls**
    - ▶ **County level.** Population estimates, education shares, unemployment rate, average household income, and share of christians.
    - ▶ **Individual level.** Respondent age and its square, gender, educational and income group, and dummies for being married, white, Protestant, union member and second-generation immigrant.

3. **Sinclair Broadcast Group Station Availability**
    - ▶ Call signs (station identifiers), network affiliations, channel number, and DMAs of stations owned, operated, or in an agreement with Sinclair.
        - ▶ Proxy availability of news by station having a major network affiliation.
        - ▶ DMA as the geographical boundaries of treatment.

4. **Data on viewership:**
    - ▶ Warren's Television and Cable Factbook in 2001.

Methodology

- ▶ **Event study using change in content:** Sinclair developing conservative bias in the run-up to the 2004 election.
  - ▶ Exogenous shock to local news rhetoric while keeping ownership and all other aspects constant.
  - ▶ (potential) problem of unobservables correlated with treatment timing and outcomes.
- ▶ Not used: Later expansion of Sinclair entering new media markets after 2004
  - ▶ (potential) problems of endogeneity of Sinclair's acquisition strategy to go into small and medium-sized markets in swing states, where the political media landscape is already saturated around elections.
    ▶ Naive differences   ▶ Results on expansion group

Treatment

- Change in SBG content
- None: Control

▸ Map: Sinclair acquisitions and exits
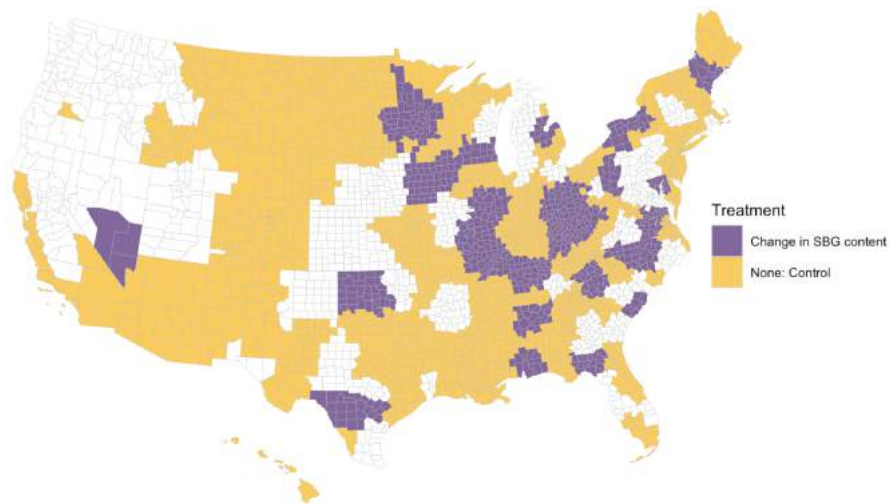
Viewership and reach of coverage
for the three groups of counties

DMA characteristics by SBG acquisition group, 2000					
	Median	SD	Min	Max	N
SBG before 2004-2020					
DMA rank	55.00	26.66	13.00	112.00	33
Number of TV households in 000s	515.16	297.07	231.35	1510.13	33
SBG after 2008-2020					
DMA rank	101.50	48.72	8.00	199.00	54
Number of TV households in 000s	257.54	353.58	48.60	2047.34	54
No SBG					
DMA rank	134.50	64.47	1.00	210.00	116
Number of TV households in 000s	171.78	971.04	4.88	6935.61	116
Total					
DMA rank	104.00	60.16	1.00	210.00	203
Number of TV households in 000s	252.50	768.12	4.88	6935.61	203

Share of station viewership among DMA TV households, 2000
Diff: −0.0745 (0.0289)***

Treatment = Content　　　　　　Treatment = Expansion

Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
N= 74, Mean = 0.618(.125).

Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2008 to 2020
N= 85. Mean = 0.544(.219).
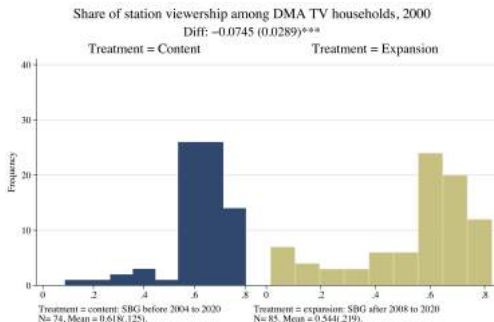
Some pre-treatment differences:
Relative to the control, Sinclair counties were less dense, less educated and less poor, with a smaller share of non-Christians among the religious. ▸ Table

Yet, treatment and control counties are balanced:
no within county demographic changes correlated with availability of SBG bias.

Dependent variable:	Dummy for Sinclair bias availability		
	COEF	SE	N
Population vars.:			
Population density (sq km)	-0.007	(0.004)	17,616
Total population (ln)	0.005	(0.021)	17,616
Population age 65 plus (ln)	-0.006	(0.032)	17,613
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	0.000	(0.021)	17,613
Total female population (ln)	0.004	(0.022)	17,616
Total black population (ln)	-0.003	(0.117)	17,165
Total white population (ln)	-0.004	(0.034)	17,616
Total asian population (ln)	-0.027	(0.048)	17,196
Total hispanic population (ln)	0.101	(0.077)	17,556
Socio-demographic vars.:			
People that completed high school (%)	0.001	(0.007)	17,616
People that completed college (%)	0.001	(0.003)	17,616
Unemployment rate	0.001	(0.002)	17,616
Log of household income	-0.012	(0.011)	17,615
Poverty rate	0.005	(0.003)	17,614
Religion vars.:			
Log of total religious adherents	-0.019	(0.020)	17,577
Log of adherents of major religions	-0.039	(0.025)	17,577
Share of Christians among major religions	0.012	(0.007)	17,616
Share of Protestants among major religions	0.004	(0.006)	17,616

▸ Balance for all groups.

19 / 35

Event study specification on change in content

$$Y_{d,t} = \delta_{-3}D_{d,t}^{1992} + \delta_{-2}D_{d,t}^{1996} + \delta_0 D_{d,t}^{2004} + \delta_1 D_{d,t}^{2008} + \delta_2 D_{d,t}^{2012} + \delta_3 D_{d,t}^{2016}$$
$$+ \delta_4 D_{d,t}^{2020} + \omega P_{d,t} + \sigma' \mathbf{X}_{d,t} + \phi_d + \tau_t + \epsilon_{d,t}$$

- $Y_{d,t}$: outcome of interest;
- $D_{d,t}^e$: dummy for treatment in year;
- $P_{d,t}$: prediction of trend of vote share in pre-period based on controls;
- $\mathbf{X}_{d,t}$: vector of county controls - pop. density; white, and female pop (ln); share of high school and college educated; hh income (ln); unemployment rate; share of christians;
- ϕ_d: county fixed effect; τ_t: year fixed effects;
- $\epsilon_{d,t}$: heteroskedasticity-robust error term clustered at the level of treatment, the DMA.

$\implies \delta_{0-4} =$ **coefficients of interest: the average treatment effect of the change in Sinclair content within a county in years 2004 to 2020.**

In presidential elections: 2.5% point increase during 2008/2012, doubles during 2016/2020 election and significantly different from each other (p-value=0.0023***). = **4 and 9% relative to the mean.**
Persuasion rates in line with literature: Sinclair persuaded 4.7% in 2008/2012 and 14.4% in 2016/2020 of its potential audience. ▸ Persuasion rates

Vote for president:
Change in the Republican two–party vote share
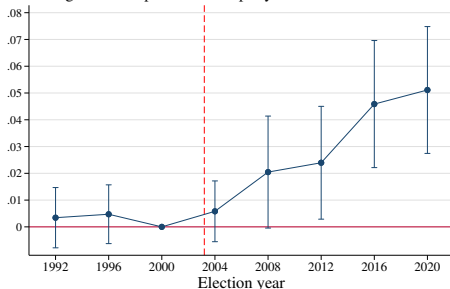
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 17612, R2 = .899. Mean = 0.580(.148).

Vote for congress:
Change in the Prob(Republican congress candidate won)
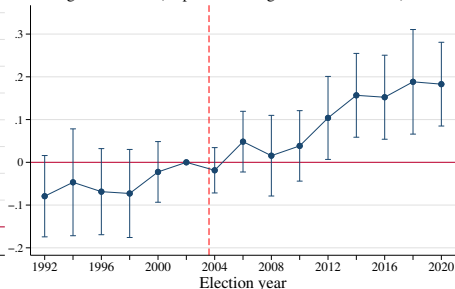
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 35966, R2 = .441. Mean = 0.626(.484).

Mechanism: selection in who turns out, with weak evidence of mobilization.

▶ weak evidence of congruent increase in turnout and decrease in share of
   registered voters in 2020 ▸ Table.

Turnout among registered voters
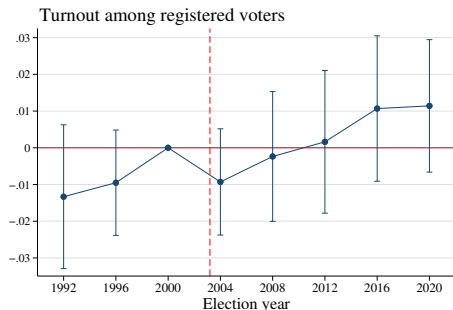
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 15465, R2 = .779. Mean = 0.680(.09).

Share of registered voters
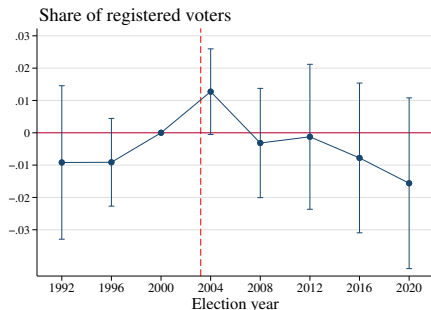
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 15465, R2 = .786. Mean = 0.867(.109).

Effect strongest among demographically and culturally isolated counties.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:	Republican Two Party Vote Share		
Demographic var., normalized:	Population decline 2000-2016 %Δ	Share in 2000 native born	no college degree
Sinclair bias	0.0139	0.0085	0.0119
	(0.0106)	(0.0100)	(0.0099)
Sinclair bias × Demographic var.	-0.0059	0.0207***	0.0084*
	(0.0060)	(0.0069)	(0.0044)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0316***	0.0187***	0.0266***
	(0.0082)	(0.0071)	(0.0089)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × Demographic var.	0.0257***	0.0490***	0.0224***
	(0.0033)	(0.0090)	(0.0044)
Observations	17,612	17,581	17,581
R-squared	0.900	0.901	0.900
County & Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment prediction	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓
Mean of non-normalized demographic var.	-6.472	0.968	0.579
SD of demographic var.	18.54	0.0470	0.113
Mean of dependent var.	0.580	0.581	0.581
SD of dependent var.	0.148	0.148	0.148

Lack of evidence of a supplemental effect from economic considerations

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent var.:	**Republican Two Party Vote Share**		
Economics var., normalized:	Import pressure	Distressed community score in year 2000	Poverty rate
Sinclair bias	0.0141	0.0140	0.0141
	(0.0103)	(0.0104)	(0.0106)
Sinclair bias × Economic var.	0.0001	0.0064	0.0011
	(0.0070)	(0.0054)	(0.0062)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0311***	0.0315***	0.0311***
	(0.0093)	(0.0091)	(0.0089)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × Economic var.	0.0037	0.0031	-0.0062
	(0.0058)	(0.0048)	(0.0064)
Observations	17,581	17,548	17,612
R-squared	0.898	0.899	0.899
County & Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment prediction	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓
Mean of non-normalized economic var.	1.267	50.17	0.135
SD of economic var.	0.966	29.34	0.0580
Mean of dependent var.	0.581	0.580	0.580
SD of dependent var.	0.148	0.148	0.148

Note: Distressed communities score comes from the Economic Innovation Group. The seven component metrics are (1) No high school diploma; (2) Housing vacancy rate; (3) Adults not working; (4) Poverty rate; (5) Median income ratio; (6) Change in employment; (7) Change in establishments.

nor evidence of polarization given prior partisanship of county. ▸ Table

Back of the envelope calculation using the 2016 election

Set up: Democrats needed 38 more electoral votes to win the election. Consider the three states with the closest Republican margin of victory: Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin (total EV = 46), assume that the treatment effect is constant across states, and no effect on turnout.

Sinclair vote shift = share of voting population exposed to Sinclair
× effect in 2016 × number of votes

State	Republican margin	Share exposed to Sinclair	Number of votes	Sinclair vote shift	Margin without Sinclair
Michigan	10,704	16%	3,206,563	27,000	-16,296
Pennsylvania	44.292	33%	4,035,611	67,380	-23,088
Wisconsin	22,748	76%	2,256,801	88,161	-65,413

$\longrightarrow$ Exposure to Sinclair bias could have shifted the vote by more than the margin of victory, and thus may have contributed to Republicans winning.

Placebo tests: affiliates don't matter

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Dependent variable:	Republican two party presidential vote share				
Affiliate:	FOX	ABC	CBS	NBC	WB/CW
Sinclair bias	0.0093	0.0155	0.0180*	0.0156	-0.0057
	(0.0099)	(0.0126)	(0.0108)	(0.0116)	(0.0100)
Sinclair bias × Affiliate	0.0069	-0.0062	-0.0447***	-0.0104	0.0374***
	(0.0141)	(0.0141)	(0.0135)	(0.0138)	(0.0139)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0288**	0.0285***	0.0305***	0.0365***	0.0423***
	(0.0133)	(0.0097)	(0.0094)	(0.0089)	(0.0120)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × Affiliate	0.0043	0.0129	0.0130	-0.0310	-0.0202
	(0.0157)	(0.0180)	(0.0128)	(0.0212)	(0.0155)
Sinclar bias × Added on station after 2004					
Observations	17,612	17,612	17,612	17,612	17,612
R-squared	0.899	0.899	0.899	0.899	0.900
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.580	0.580	0.580	0.580	0.580
SD of dependent var.	0.148	0.148	0.148	0.148	0.148

ANES (1992-2016): Presidential and congressional vote

Change in the prob(Voted for Republican Pres. candidate)
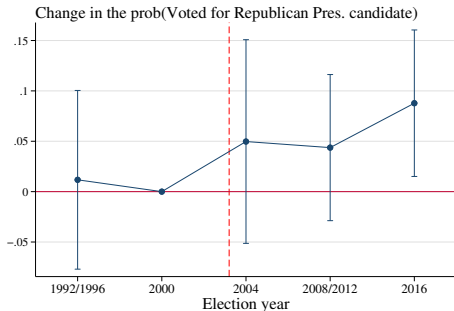
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2016
90% CIs. N= 10728, R2 = .222. Mean = 0.355(.478).

Change in the prob(Voted for Republican Cong. candidate)
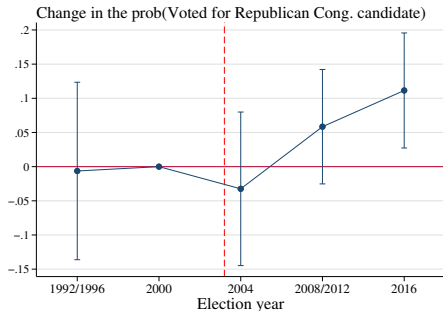
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2016
90% CIs. N= 7936, R2 = .262. Mean = 0.458(.498).

▸ Results without controls.

▸ Table.

▸ Desccription of election surveys.

Evidence of educational heterogeneity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent variable:	Voted for Republican presidential candidate			
Survey:	American National Election		Cooperative Election	
Sinclair bias	0.0369	0.0429		
	(0.0303)	(0.0323)		
Sinclair bias × College educated		-0.0238		
		(0.0306)		
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0434**	0.0366	0.0246**	0.0312***
	(0.0189)	(0.0294)	(0.0103)	(0.0114)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × College educated		-0.0079		-0.0284*
		(0.0626)		(0.0156)
Observations	10,728	10,728	175,565	175,565
R-squared	0.222	0.225	0.271	0.273
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual and County Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.355	0.355	0.449	0.449
SD of dependent var.	0.478	0.478	0.497	0.497

...and possible polarization in attitudes.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
		PCA score:	Supports increase in
	Decrease number	Racial inequality	border security
Dependent variable:	of Immigrants	attitudes	between US and Mexico
Survey:	American National Election		Cooperative Election
Sinclair bias	0.0795***	0.0296	
	(0.0285)	(0.0231)	
Sinclair bias × College educated	-0.0342	-0.0271	
	(0.0293)	(0.0345)	
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0612*	0.0641**	0.0310**
	(0.0338)	(0.0299)	(0.0154)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × College educated	-0.0612	-0.0382	-0.0355**
	(0.0579)	(0.0660)	(0.0162)
Observations	12,495	5,352	66,432
R-squared	0.0860	0.206	0.0780
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓
Individual and County Controls	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.450	0.704	0.538
SD of dependent var.	0.498	0.355	0.499

Notes: Racial inequality attitudes refers to disagreement with the following questions: (1) '' Blacks have gotten less than they deserve'' (2) ''Conditions make it difficult for blacks to succeed'' (3) ''Blacks should have special favors to succeed'' (4) ''Blacks must try harder to succeed''.

35

Change in feeling thermometer [0-100] for Republican presidential candidate
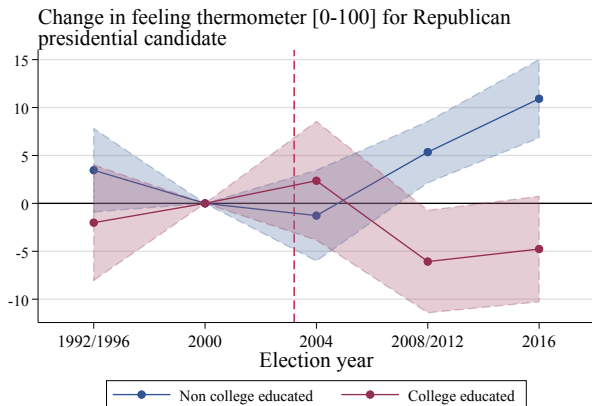
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2016. 90% CIs.
N(noBA)= 9402; N(BA) = 4200

▸ Table

Congruently, evidence of a "rally around the party" effect: respondents are more likely to identify as Republicans but not conservatives.   ▸ Results

Does not apply to policy preferences of the Republican party or populist rhetoric:

▶ some evidence on an effect for preferences for small government and redistribution, but not mirrored in CES sample

▶ no evidence of an increase in support for populist rhetoric: disillusionment with government, disagreement that the respondent's opinions matter, a desire for isolationism

Evidence against confounders to educational heterogeneity

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:	Voted for Republican presidential candidate		
Survey:	American National Election	Cooperative Election	
Sinclair bias	0.0450		
	(0.0315)		
Sinclair bias × Age 50 and over	-0.0149		
	(0.0159)		
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0568*	0.0242*	0.0188*
	(0.0317)	(0.0139)	(0.0107)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × Age 50 and over	-0.0247	0.0006	
	(0.0535)	(0.0128)	
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × Lack news interest			0.0429**
			(0.0177)
Observations	10,728	175,565	173,784
R-squared	0.223	0.271	0.271
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓
Individual and County Controls	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.355	0.449	0.450
SD of dependent var.	0.478	0.497	0.498

Additional robustness checks

▶ set of controls ▸ County results   ▸ Individual results
▶ redefine treatment variables
    ▶ treatment intensity: the level and share of initial viewership of Sinclair
      stations. ▸ County results   ▸ Individual results   ▸ Results
    ▶ for CES results: the number of years since exposure and a pseudo event
      study of presidential years. ▸ Results
▶ redefine outcome variable
    ▶ for county level results: defining the outcome variable to the
      Republican vote as a share of registered voters.

On the to-do list

1. Use data on content (available only post-treatment) to investigate dynamics i.e. Is immigration covered more often on Sinclair stations or is the topic more salient to viewers?
2. Improve "Back of the envelope" calculation using county level margins
3. Robustness to identification strategy: alternative control groups: matched sample and later Sinclair acquisitions
4. For another paper: effect on local political accountability, public goods provision, community social cohesion

Slanted local news can have profound political impacts, and is sensitive to environmental and personal characteristics.

▶ Sinclair persuaded 3x more of its potential audience in 2016/2020 at the peak of populist rhetoric compared to 2008/2012.

▶ Subject to local demographic conditions (population decline, lack of immigrants, and low-educated) in contrast to economic disaffection.

▶ Individual mechanisms point to differential effects based on educational attainment on a rise in (self-declared) xenophobic attitudes and tolerance for racial inequality, and sentiments towards Trump.

⟶ Increasing incentives to seek out outside information, either individually or through exposure by living in more diverse and lively communities, can potentially mitigate these persuasion effects.

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Treatment variation for Sinclair expansion
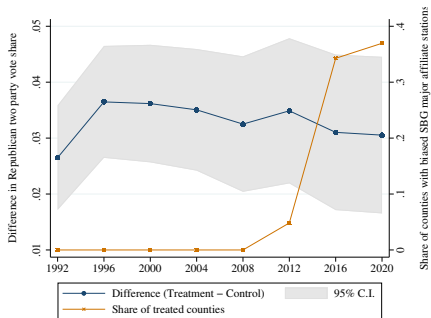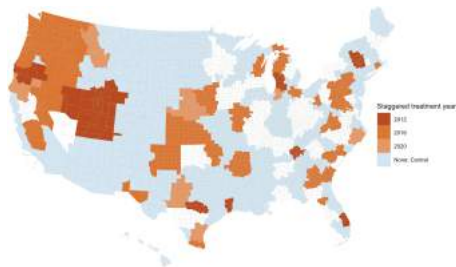
Balance test of Sinclair coverage

Within-county demographic changes correlated with Sinclair bias expansion

Dep Var.:	Dummy for Sinclair bias availability		
Treatment sample:	Expansion: SBG 2012- 2020		
	COEF	SE	
Population vars.:			
Population density (sq km)	-0.001	(0.006)	19,048
Total population (ln)	-0.001	(0.022)	19,048
Population age 65 plus (ln)	-0.005	(0.040)	19,045
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	0.000	(0.024)	19,045
Total female population (ln)	-0.002	(0.023)	19,048
Total black population (ln)	0.095	(0.092)	18,401
Total white population (ln)	0.007	(0.024)	19,048
Total other population (ln)	-0.035	(0.057)	18,724
Total asian population (ln)	-0.022	(0.036)	18,518
Total hispanic population (ln)	-0.028	(0.056)	18,982
Socio-demographic vars.:			
People that completed high school (%)	-0.009*	(0.005)	19,048
People that completed college (%)	-0.001	(0.003)	19,048
Unemployment rate	-0.001	(0.001)	19,048
Log of household income	-0.005	(0.008)	19,044
Poverty rate	0.001	(0.002)	19,040
Religion vars.:			
Log of total religious adherents	0.010	(0.027)	18,987
Log of adherents of major religions	0.155	(0.160)	18,976
Share of Christians among major religions	-0.047	(0.044)	19,048
Share of Protestants among major religions	-0.014*	(0.007)	19,048
Share of Jewish among major religions	0.001	(0.000)	19,048

▶ Balance for all groups.

Notes: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. All regressions control for county and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the DMA-level. Counties in DMAs sold by SBG after 2004 are excluded from the sample. The total number of counties per year is 2,381.

Event study specification 2

$$RS_{d,t} = \delta_{-3}D_{d,t}^{-3} + \delta_{-2}D_{d,t}^{-2} + \delta_0 D_{d,t}^0 + \delta_1 D_{d,t}^1 + \delta_2 D_{d,t}^2$$
$$+\omega P_{d,t} + \sigma' \mathbf{X}_{d,t} + \phi_d + \tau_t + \epsilon_{i,d,t}$$

- $RS_{d,t}$: Republican two party vote share;
- $D_{d,t}^e$: dummy for treatment in relative year e;
- $P_{d,t}$: prediction of trend of vote share in pre-period based on controls;
- $\mathbf{X}_{d,t}$: vector of county controls - pop. density; white, and female pop (ln), share of high school and college educated; hh income (ln); unemployment rate; share of christians ;
- ϕ_d: county fixed effect;
- τ_t: year fixed effects;
- $\epsilon_{d,t}$: heteroskedasticity-robust error term clustered at the level of treatment, the DMA.

$\implies \delta_{0-2} =$ **coefficients of interest: the average treatment effect of the introduction of Sinclair bias within a county in relative year 0-2 of treatment.**

Lack of convincing evidence that Sinclair's later expansion influenced national political outcomes.

Change in the Republican two–party vote share
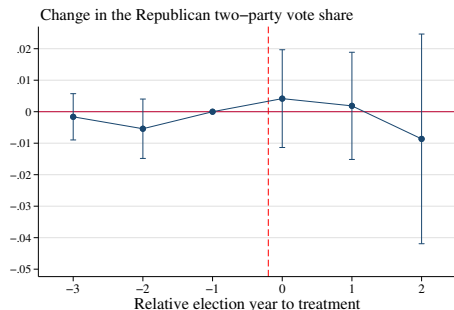
Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2008 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 19041, R2 = .88. Mean = 0.595(.153).

Rep. vote share among registered voters
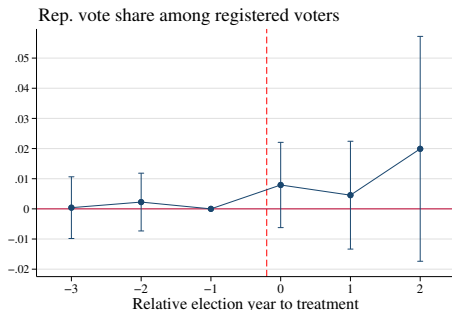
Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2008 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 17332, R2 = .855. Mean = 0.389(.121).

▸ Robustness: Dynamic effect graphs.

▸ Table.

Some evidence of a change in local political outcomes but not robust to considering vote shares

Change in the Prob(Rep. congress candidate won)
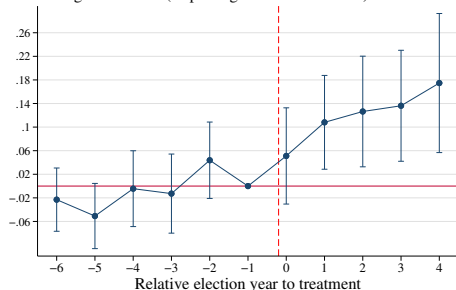
Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2008 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 37576, R2 = .472. Mean = 0.644(.479).

Change in the Rep. congress two–party vote share
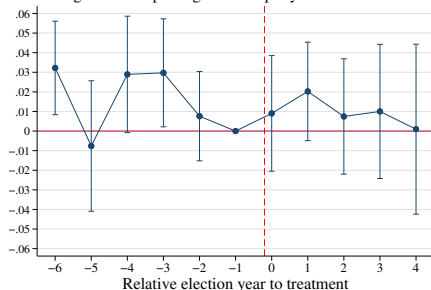
Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2008 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 37576, R2 = .472. Mean = 0.644(.479).

▸ Table.

Share of station viewership among DMA TV households, 2000
Diff: −0.0745 (0.0289)***

Treatment = Content   Treatment = Expansion
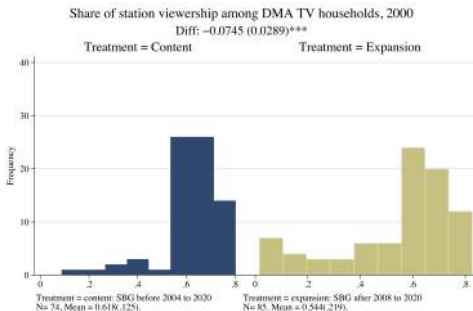
Selected characteristics by SBG acquisition group					
	Mean		SBG: Diff(Δ Content - Expansion)		
	Δ Content	Expansion	COEF	SE	N
Market characteristics:					
DMA index in 2016	56.667	102.000	-45.333***	3.246	87
Number of TV hhs in 000s in 2016	623.512	383.622	239.889***	27.181	87
Share of counties in swing states	0.108	0.131	-0.023***	0.004	1581

- ▶ **Lack of a clean experiment:** biases such as channel switching.
- ▶ Increase in tone and frequency of biased rhetoric since 2004 could have turned off viewers, in contrast to the more gradual change for the first group.
- ▶ **Lower viewership** where Sinclair acquired stations, both within and across DMA
- ▶ **Saturated media market:** Sinclair acquires stations in swing states, where, by time of purchase, news media is especially saturated with political content around elections.

Examples of Sinclair's pro-conservative bias

	Year	Description
"News Central" newscast	2002 - 2006	National news reports created at their Maryland headquarters and set to their stations to broadcast. Notably, the newscasts included a one-minute daily commentary called "The Point" by Mark Hyman, which gained notoriety for its controversial claims and rhetoric, such as calling the French "cheese-eating surrender monkeys."
Intended primetime airing of "Stolen Hour" partisan documentary	2004	Just prior to the 2004 presidential election, Sinclair planned to air the debunked anti John Kerry (the Democratic candidate) documentary during primetime on its stations. Critics were mounted a successful boycott of Sinclair's advertisers such that the company ultimately aired a shortened (and ad-free) version. Sinclair fired its Washington DC news bureau chief after he publicly resisted to the airing of the documentary.
Suppression of an episode of ABC's Nightline	2004	At a time of increasing criticism to Bush's Iraq War, Sinclair ordered its ABC affiliates to not run an episode of Nightline, a national prime time ABC news program, where the host read the names of every American soldier killed in the war up to that point. John McCain, a prominent Republican senator and Vietnam war veteran, called Sinclair's decision "a gross disservice to the public, and to the men and women of the United States Armed Forces" in a letter to Sinclair CEO David Smith.
Political commentary by Armstrong Williams	2005; 2016	Sinclair aired political commentary by Williams, although he was on the government payroll to promote Bush's education policies. The FCC fined the company $36,000 for failing to disclose this to viewers. Williams continued to provide political commentary while also the campaign advisor to Ben Carson who was a candidate for the Republican party nomination in the 2016 election. At the same time, Sinclair stations ran flattering news reports about Carson.
Airing of a false political attack ad against the 2008 Democratic presidential candidate, Barrack Obama	2008	Sinclair affiliates were the only to air a political ad linking Obama to the militant and radical founder of the Weather Underground, Bill Ayers. Obama responded to the ad by calling Ayers "somebody who engaged in detestable acts 40 years ago, when I was 8 years old." Both Fox News Channel and CNN declined to air the ad, due to legal concerns.
Corporate sponsor attire for news staff	2013	Sinclair issued jackets prominently featuring the logo of "L.L. Bean" a Maine-based outdoor clothing brand whose owners are large Republican donors for their Seattle based news staff. Both viewers and reporters complained about the obvious commercialization of their news.
"Terrorism Alert Desk"	2015	Daily segment of world terrorism-related news
Exclusive deal with the 2016 Trump presidential campaign	2016	Jarod Kushner (Trump's son in law) made a deal with Sinclair to give their reporters exclusive and additional coverage to the Trump campaign, in exchange for airing Trump's interviews without additional commentary. Smith, the company's CEO, admits telling the Trump campaign: "We're here to deliver your message." In the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, Sinclair stations aired 15 exclusive interviews with the Republican candidate, but none with the Democratic candidate.
Boris Epshteyn's "must run" political commentary	2017	Tri-weekly political commentaries that Sinclair newsrooms across the country are required to weave into their news shows. Previous clips praised President Trumps' trade policies and critiqued Democrats and other news outlets for being favorable to the Trump administration. Epshteyn, the current chief political analyst at Sinclair, is a former Trump campaign spokesperson and member of he White House press office.

Why 2004?

▶ Bankruptcy challenges prior to 2004 (debt load was a burden).

▶ Local news makes money: advertising revenue from local TV news can make up as much as 30% of a station's annual revenue (can be >50% if popular).

▶ Centralizing the news cuts costs.

    ▶ *"Of course, saving money along the way is a big part of [Sinclair News Central's] equation. And its creators want to give Sinclair's local news the look of a network newscast at a fraction of the cost."* (Adweek 2002)

▶ Belief that controversial emotional content makes people watch more.

    ▶ *"There are stories that ignite passion and we need to cover them that way...We want to get them to jump out of their chairs and pay attention. We want an active viewer rather than a passive viewer."* Managing editor of News Central to Adweek

Mentions of Sinclair vs. main competitor Nexstar

Mentions in NewsBank

- - "Sinclair Broadcast Group"
- - "Nexstar Media Group" OR "Nexstar Broadcasting Group"
— "Sinclair Broadcast Group" AND "conservative" AND "bias"
— ("Nexstar Media Group" OR "Nexstar Broadcasting Group") AND "conservative" AND "bias"

▸ Back.
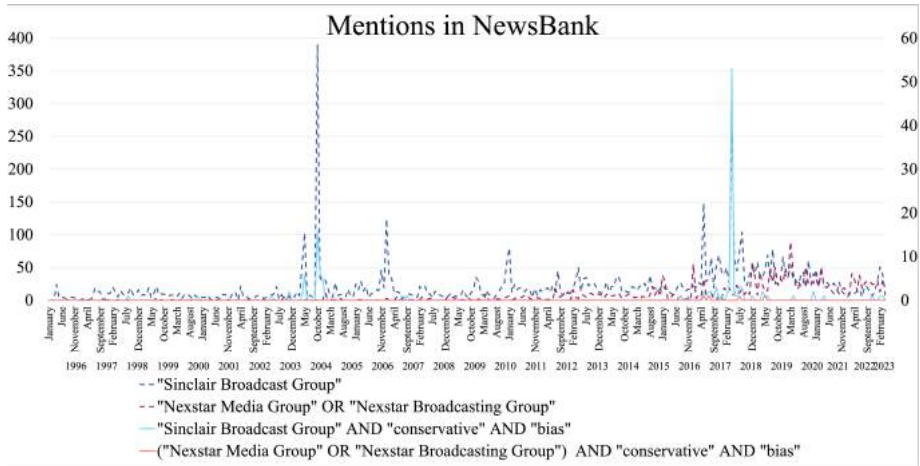
Determinants of local TV news viewership
American Trends Survey, 2014, Pew Research Center

Dependent variable:	Got news from Local TV in past week					
Estimation:	OLS			Probit		
	COEF	SE	N	COEF	SE	N
Age Group: 18-29	-0.184***	(0.028)	2,887	-	-	-
Age Group: 30-49	-0.037	(0.025)	2,887	0.295***	(0.096)	2,630
Age Group: 50-64	0.168***	(0.024)	2,887	0.647***	(0.096)	2,630
Age Group: 65+	0.115***	(0.028)	2,887	0.607***	(0.106)	2,630
Female	0.027	(0.023)	2,901	0.063	(0.064)	2,630
Hispanic origin	0.023	(0.042)	2,894	0.233*	(0.133)	2,630
Race: White	0.051*	(0.030)	2,869	-	-	-
Race: Black or African-American	0.000	(0.043)	2,869	0.091	(0.119)	2,630
Race: Asian or Asian-American	-0.230***	(0.063)	2,869	-0.331	(0.212)	2,630
Race: Mixed Race	-0.017	(0.061)	2,869	-0.085	(0.164)	2,630
Race: Or some other race	-0.006	(0.064)	2,869	-0.125	(0.193)	2,630
Completed high school or less	0.074***	(0.028)	2,898	0.199**	(0.084)	2,630
Completed some college	-0.031	(0.025)	2,898	0.071	(0.068)	2,630
Completed college	-0.042**	(0.021)	2,898	-	-	-
US Citizen	0.152**	(0.072)	2,900	0.394*	(0.217)	2,630
Married	0.078***	(0.023)	2,896	0.082	(0.072)	2,630
Protestant	0.104***	(0.024)	2,877	0.121*	(0.068)	2,630
Low income: 0-50k	0.001	(0.024)	2,763	-	-	-
Middle income: 50-100k	0.001	(0.012)	2,763	-0.042	(0.077)	2,630
High income: 100k plus	-0.002	(0.009)	2,763	-0.070	(0.090)	2,630
Republican	0.032	(0.027)	2,812	-	-	-
Democrat	0.006	(0.025)	2,812	0.041	(0.088)	2,630
Independent	-0.029	(0.024)	2,812	0.007	(0.081)	2,630

Slant of national broadcast news, by local TV affiliate

Ideological Placement of Each Source's Audience

Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...
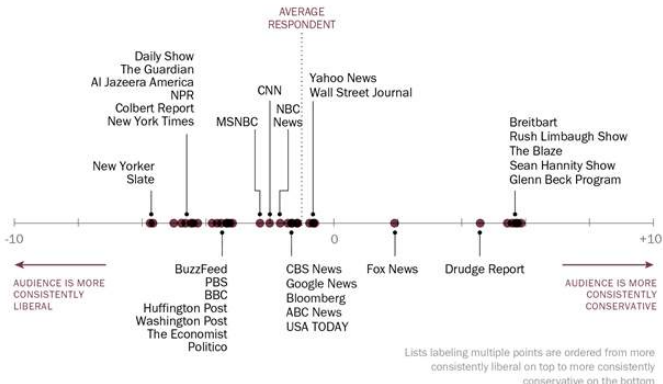
American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22. Based on all web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see About the Survey for more details.) ThinkProgress, DailyKos, Mother Jones, and The Ed Schultz Show are not included in this graphic because audience sample sizes are too small to analyze.

▸ Back

(a) Sinclair Broadcast Group Expansion, 1971 - 2020
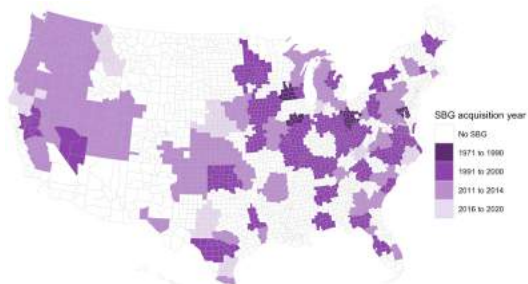
(b) Sinclair Broadcast Group Exits, 1971 - 2020
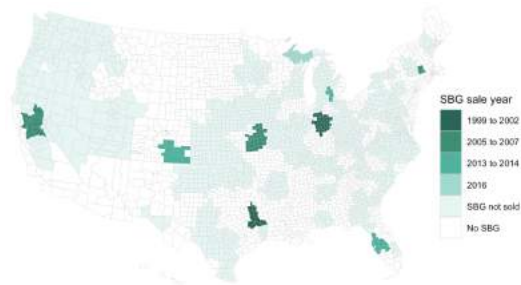
▸ Back

Trend in the naive difference by treatment group

Treatment= content: SBG 2004-2020
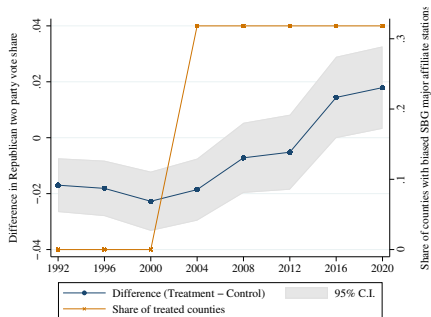
Treatment= expansion: SBG 2012-2020
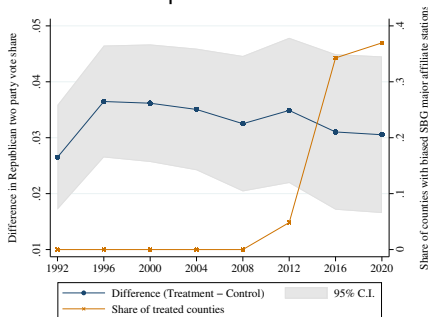
Trend in the naive difference by post 2004 treatment group

Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2008 to 2012
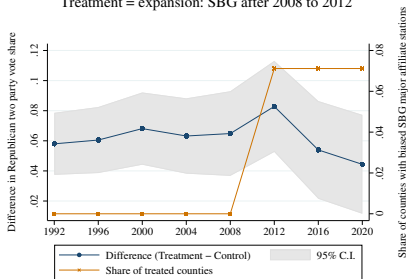
Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2012 to 2016
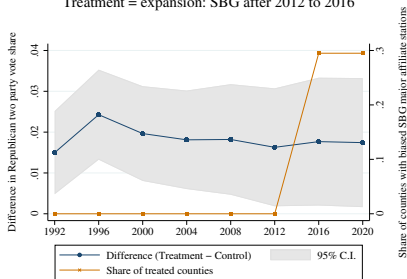
Treatment = expansion: SBG after 2016 to 2020
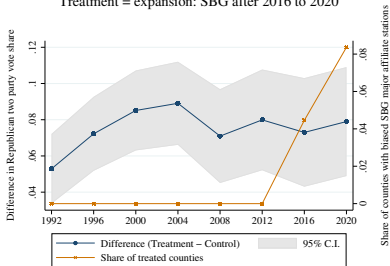
Demographic differences in year 2000

	Mean		T-test		
	SBG 2004	No SBG	No SBG - SBG 2004		
			COEF	SE	N
Population vars.:					
Population density (sq km)	0.066	0.127	0.061*	0.035	2202
Total population (ln)	10.404	10.262	-0.142**	0.064	2202
Population age 65 plus (ln)	8.455	8.296	-0.159***	0.060	2202
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	10.079	9.925	-0.154**	0.064	2202
Total female population (ln)	9.721	9.578	-0.143**	0.064	2202
Total white population (ln)	10.277	10.073	-0.205***	0.064	2202
Total asian population (ln)	4.789	4.809	0.021	0.104	2178
Total hispanic population (ln)	6.233	6.547	0.314***	0.096	2202
Socio-demographic vars.:					
People that completed high school (%)	0.362	0.340	-0.022***	0.003	2202
People that completed college (%)	0.155	0.169	0.014***	0.004	2202
Unemployment rate	0.043	0.044	0.001	0.001	2202
Log of household income	10.484	10.462	-0.023**	0.011	2202
Poverty rate	0.128	0.138	0.010***	0.003	2202
Religion vars.:					
Log of total religious adherents	9.683	9.593	-0.091	0.064	2201
Log of adherents of major religions	9.671	9.551	-0.120*	0.065	2201
Share of Christians among major religions	0.995	0.989	-0.006***	0.002	2202
Share of Protestants among major religions	0.299	0.262	-0.037***	0.008	2202
Share of Jewish among major religions	0.003	0.008	0.005***	0.001	2202

Balance test for all groups

Dep Var.:	Dummy for Sinclair major affiliate station in DMA in year							
Sample:	SBG acquired after 2008		SBG acquired after 2012		SBG acquired after 2016		Full: Staggered exposure	
	COEF	SE	COEF	SE	COEF	SE	COEF	SE
Population vars.								
Population density (sq km)	-0.002	(0.004)	0.000	(0.009)	-0.010***	(0.003)	-0.003	(0.004)
Total population (ln)	0.099**	(0.043)	-0.014	(0.023)	-0.076***	(0.029)	0.004	(0.014)
Population age 30 plus (ln)	0.116**	(0.048)	-0.015	(0.027)	-0.091**	(0.038)	0.005	(0.015)
Population age 65 plus (ln)	0.135***	(0.050)	-0.020	(0.045)	-0.131*	(0.067)	-0.002	(0.023)
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	0.109**	(0.046)	-0.014	(0.025)	-0.078**	(0.033)	0.003	(0.014)
Total female population (ln)	0.101**	(0.044)	-0.015	(0.024)	-0.079***	(0.030)	0.004	(0.015)
Total black population (ln)	0.165	(0.208)	0.054	(0.098)	0.278	(0.229)	0.039	(0.070)
Total white population (ln)	0.105**	(0.049)	-0.011	(0.024)	-0.024	(0.066)	0.001	(0.019)
Total other population (ln)	-0.095	(0.111)	-0.013	(0.063)	-0.135	(0.229)	0.095	(0.067)
Total asian population (ln)	0.018	(0.100)	-0.035	(0.039)	-0.012	(0.043)	-0.013	(0.028)
Total hispanic population (ln)	-0.080	(0.095)	-0.016	(0.060)	-0.060	(0.192)	0.038	(0.048)
Socio-demographic vars.								
People that completed high school (%)	-0.009	(0.008)	-0.008	(0.006)	-0.018	(0.015)	-0.003	(0.004)
People that completed college (%)	0.002	(0.003)	-0.002	(0.003)	-0.004	(0.007)	0.000	(0.002)
Unemployment rate	-0.001	(0.002)	-0.002	(0.001)	0.002	(0.003)	0.000	(0.001)
Log of household income	-0.006	(0.022)	-0.010	(0.008)	0.030**	(0.012)	-0.006	(0.007)
Poverty rate	-0.000	(0.005)	0.002	(0.002)	-0.006	(0.005)	0.003	(0.002)
Religion vars.								
Log of total religious adherents	0.117*	(0.061)	-0.006	(0.026)	-0.075**	(0.036)	-0.004	(0.016)
Log of adherents of major religions	0.932	(0.651)	-0.005	(0.036)	-0.092**	(0.046)	0.056	(0.078)
Share of Christians among major religions	-0.252	(0.178)	-0.004	(0.013)	0.004	(0.013)	-0.018	(0.022)
Share of Protestants among major religions	-0.037	(0.025)	-0.010*	(0.006)	-0.001	(0.008)	-0.004	(0.005)
Share of Jewish among major religions	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)	0.000	(0.000)	-0.000	(0.000)

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. All regressions control for county and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the DMA-level. Counties in DMAs sold by SBG after 2004 are excluded from the sample. SBG acquired after 2008, 2012, 2016 = 115, 628, 137 counties, respectively; No SBG = 1,502 counties.

Summary statistics for county level estimation sample

	(1) County				(2) County-CD Cell			
Sample:	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Outcome variables:								
Republican two party vote share	0.58	0.15	0.08	0.97				
Turnout as a share of registered voters	0.68	0.09	0.33	1.00				
Share of registered voters among voting age population	0.87	0.11	0.23	1.00				
Republican votes as a share of registered voters	0.38	0.12	0.04	0.97				
Republican all party vote share	0.55	0.16	0.00	0.96				
Republican candidate won election					0.63	0.48	0.00	1.00
Republican two party congressional vote					0.55	0.18	0.00	0.99
Treatment variables:								
Sinclair bias	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00	0.19	0.39	0.00	1.00
Sinclair bias treatment group	0.32	0.47	0.00	1.00	0.32	0.47	0.00	1.00
Population decline 2000 - 2016	-6.47	18.54	-131.53	42.92				
Standardized population decline 2000 - 2016	-0.01	1.01	-6.85	2.69				
Share of native born in 2000	0.97	0.05	0.49	1.00				
Standardized share of native born in 2000	0.06	0.97	-9.82	0.71				
Share of non-college educated in 2000	0.58	0.11	0.15	0.83				
Standardized share of non-college educated in 2000	0.05	1.01	-3.82	2.29				
Import pressure	1.27	0.97	-0.34	6.37				
Standardized import pressure	0.07	1.02	-1.62	5.43				
DCI score in year 2000	50.17	29.34	0.03	100.00				
Standardized DCI score in year 2000	0.01	1.02	-1.73	1.73				
Poverty rate in 2000	0.13	0.06	0.02	0.42				
Standardized overty rate in 2000	0.03	1.03	-2.08	5.14				
Average pre-treatment Rep. two party vote share	0.52	0.11	0.13	0.89				
Log of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA	2.63	5.28	0.00	14.09				
Share of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA	0.18	0.37	0.00	1.00				
Number of biased Sinclair stations in DMA	0.41	0.92	0.00	5.00				
Fox affiliate Sinclair station in DMA	0.21	0.41	0.00	1.00				
ABC affiliate Sinclair station in DMA	0.08	0.27	0.00	1.00				
CBS affiliate Sinclair station in DMA	0.03	0.17	0.00	1.00				
NBC affiliate Sinclair station in DMA	0.06	0.23	0.00	1.00				
WB affiliate Sinclair station in DMA	0.17	0.37	0.00	1.00				
Sinclair added on station in DMA	0.09	0.29	0.00	1.00				
Sinclair exited DMA	0.02	0.13	0.00	1.00				
Control variables:								
Population density (sq km)	0.11	0.78	0.00	28.01	0.25	1.38	0.00	28.01
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	10.00	1.43	3.50	15.84	10.45	1.75	3.58	15.85
Total female population (ln)	9.63	1.44	3.00	15.45	10.08	1.76	3.09	15.45
Total white population (ln)	10.12	1.43	3.69	15.80	10.55	1.71	3.81	15.80
People with no high school education (%)	0.21	0.11	0.01	0.65	0.20	0.10	0.01	0.65
People that completed high school (%)	0.35	0.07	0.10	0.71	0.34	0.07	0.10	0.74
People that completed college (%)	0.18	0.09	0.00	0.68	0.19	0.10	0.00	0.68
Unemployment rate	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.35	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.36
Log of household income	10.57	0.33	9.26	11.85	10.61	0.33	9.26	11.85
Share of Christians	0.98	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.97	0.08	0.00	1.00
Republican two party vote share trend from year 2000	1155.72	237.58	239.04	1881.06				
Pre-treatment prediction of Rep. pres. vote share	-0.54	0.91	-2.60	0.99				
Trend in registered voter turnout from year 2000	1282.83	167.17	708.50	2206.12				
Trend in share of registered voters from year 2000	1741.38	295.85	573.00	8357.25				
Trend in Republican registered share from year 2000	719.36	186.47	94.04	1692.12				
Trend in Republican all party vote share from year 2000	1119.75	235.91	7.05	1867.89				
Dummy for 2016 and later	0.25	0.43	0.00	1.00				
Pre-treatment prediction of Rep. congress vote share					-0.44	0.77	-2.44	1.02
Observations		17612				35966		

No evidence of polarization by prior partisanship of county.

	(1)
Dependent var.:	Republican Two Party Vote Share
	Partisanship: 1992-2000
Sinclair bias	0.0242*
(base level= Democratic county)	(0.0138)
Sinclair bias × Swing county	-0.0166*
	(0.0089)
Sinclair bias × Republican county	-0.0197
	(0.0149)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0556***
(base level= Democratic county)	(0.0087)
Sinclair bias × Swing county × Year ≥ 2016	-0.0270***
	(0.0064)
Sinclair bias × Republican county × Year ≥ 2016	-0.0627***
	(0.0088)
Observations	17,612
R-squared	0.901
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓
Pre-treatment prediction	✓
Demographic Controls	✓
Clusters by DMA	✓
Mean of pre-period vote share	0.521
SD of pre-period vote share	0.108
Mean of dependent var.	0.580
SD of dependent var.	0.148

Note: Partisanship of a county is the average of the two-party vote Republican vote share in 1992 through 2000. A Democratic county has an vote share of a range [.097, .484]. A swing county has a range [.484, .580]; a Republican county has a range [.581, .891].

▸ Back

Dynamic effect graphs on change in content (de Chaisemartin and D'Haultfoeuille, 2020)

Full controls (left), linear county trend only (right)

Full demographic controls and linear prediction.
DMA clusters. 50 bootstrap replications.

Treated sample = SBG bias exposure before 2004

No controls. Linear county trend.
DMA clusters. 50 bootstrap replications.

Treated sample = SBG bias exposure before 2004
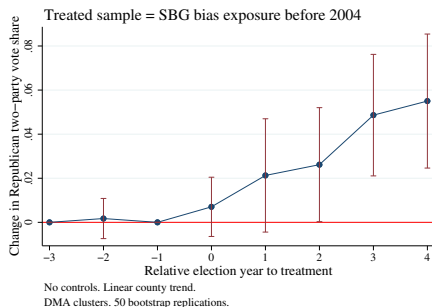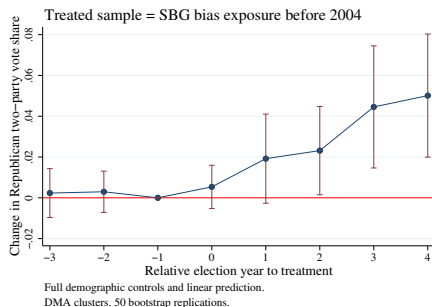
with full demographic controls and pre-treatment prediction: out of 5243 ATTs, all receive a positive weight.

▶ Back.

Dynamic effect graphs on expansion (de Chaisemartin and D'Haultfoeuille, 2020)

Full controls (left), linear county trend only (right)

Out of a weighted sum of 1738 ATTs., all receive a positive weight.

Table: Event Study results on change in content

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Dependent variable:	Republican two party presidential vote share						
1992 × Sinclair bias	0.0058	0.0042	0.0014	0.0102	0.0084	0.0034	0.0040
	(0.0091)	(0.0088)	(0.0067)	(0.0084)	(0.0083)	(0.0068)	(0.0068)
1996 × Sinclair bias	0.0046	0.0039	0.0024	0.0063	0.0054	0.0047	0.0053
	(0.0069)	(0.0068)	(0.0058)	(0.0074)	(0.0075)	(0.0066)	(0.0067)
2000 × Sinclair bias	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004 × Sinclair bias	0.0042	0.0049	0.0063	0.0037	0.0047	0.0058	0.0052
	(0.0069)	(0.0068)	(0.0070)	(0.0069)	(0.0069)	(0.0069)	(0.0067)
2008 × Sinclair bias	0.0155	0.0170	0.0198	0.0197	0.0214	0.0205	0.0188
	(0.0142)	(0.0142)	(0.0136)	(0.0135)	(0.0134)	(0.0126)	(0.0123)
2012 × Sinclair bias	0.0175	0.0198	0.0240*	0.0205	0.0228	0.0239*	0.0226*
	(0.0156)	(0.0155)	(0.0139)	(0.0145)	(0.0144)	(0.0127)	(0.0122)
2016 × Sinclair bias	0.0371**	0.0401**	0.0458***	0.0394**	0.0425**	0.0459***	0.0443***
	(0.0184)	(0.0186)	(0.0150)	(0.0169)	(0.0170)	(0.0143)	(0.0134)
2020 × Sinclair bias	0.0406**	0.0444**	0.0514***	0.0423**	0.0460***	0.0511***	0.0495***
	(0.0193)	(0.0195)	(0.0153)	(0.0166)	(0.0170)	(0.0143)	(0.0132)
Observations	17,616	17,616	17,616	17,612	17,612	17,612	17,612
R-squared	0.839	0.842	0.893	0.866	0.870	0.899	0.904
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment outcome trend		✓			✓		✓
Pre-treatment prediction			✓			✓	✓
Demographic Controls				✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.580	0.580	0.580	0.580	0.580	0.580	0.580
SD of dependent var.	0.148	0.148	0.148	0.148	0.148	0.148	0.148

Table: Event Study results on change in content, Congress

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable:	Republican candidate won election			Republican two party vote share		
1992 × Sinclair bias	-0.068	-0.084	-0.079	0.001	-0.031	-0.021
	(0.064)	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.020)
1994 × Sinclair bias	-0.036	-0.054	-0.047	0.016	-0.007	0.000
	(0.077)	(0.075)	(0.076)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.016)
1996 × Sinclair bias	-0.062	-0.076	-0.069	-0.026	-0.045**	-0.039*
	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.061)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
1998 × Sinclair bias	-0.075	-0.084	-0.073	-0.013	-0.026	-0.019
	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.062)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.021)
2000 × Sinclair bias	-0.016	-0.020	-0.022	-0.022	-0.027	-0.025
	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)
2002 × Sinclair bias	0	0	0	0	0	0
	.	.	.	.	.	.
2004 × Sinclair bias	-0.019	-0.020	-0.019	0.003	0.010	0.010
	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
2006 × Sinclair bias	0.029	0.032	0.048	0.023	0.036**	0.038**
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
2008 × Sinclair bias	-0.008	-0.003	0.016	0.023	0.042*	0.045**
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)
2010 × Sinclair bias	0.013	0.021	0.038	0.018	0.043**	0.042**
	(0.051)	(0.049)	(0.050)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)
2012 × Sinclair bias	0.069	0.084	0.104*	0.002	0.035	0.034
	(0.062)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.021)
2014 × Sinclair bias	0.120*	0.139**	0.157***	0.004	0.045**	0.043**
	(0.064)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.021)
2016 × Sinclair bias	0.108	0.130**	0.152**	0.013	0.058**	0.056**
	(0.066)	(0.061)	(0.059)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.024)
2018 × Sinclair bias	0.137*	0.165**	0.188**	0.002	0.055**	0.052**
	(0.081)	(0.073)	(0.074)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.023)
2020 × Sinclair bias	0.129*	0.157***	0.183***	0.027	0.082***	0.078***
	(0.067)	(0.060)	(0.059)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.024)
Observations	35,972	35,972	35,966	35,935	35,935	35,929
R-squared	0.418	0.436	0.441	0.635	0.663	0.672
Clusters by DMA and CD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-CD Weights	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls			✓			✓
Pre-treatment prediction of vote share		✓	✓		✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.626	0.626	0.626	0.552	0.552	0.552
SD of dependent var.	0.484	0.484	0.484	0.184	0.184	0.184

Sinclair persuaded 3x more of its potential audience in 2016/2020 vs. 2008/2012.

Time period	Persuasion rate	95% C.I.s		$v_T - v_C$	e_T	d	t_T	t_c
2004 to 2020	0.075***	[0.132	0.018]	0.029**	0.888	0.262	0.704	0.704
	(0.029)			(0.011)	(0.101)	(0.109)	-	-
2008 to 2012	0.047*	[0.109	-0.006]	0.022*	0.888	0.279	0.667	0.673
	(0.027)			(0.013)	(0.101)	(0.108)	-	-
2016 to 2020	0.144***	[0.227	0.060]	0.049***	0.888	0.240	0.698	0.688
	(0.042)			(0.014)	(0.101)	(0.119)	-	-

Persuasion rate (f): $f = \dfrac{(v_T - v_C)}{(e_T - e_C)(1 - r)} \times \dfrac{(1 - r)t_C t_T}{d}$

- ▶ $v_T - v_C$: estimated effect of Sinclair bias

- ▶ $t_C t_T$: product of the turnout rates in treatment and control counties

- ▶ d: the share of Dem. voters in the county = Dem. two party vote share $\times$ turnout

- ▶ e_T: average share of TV households that watched Sinclair before the change in content (i.e. in 2000) out of all TV households in DMA. Assume $e_C = 0$: no spillovers.

Benchmark: 12% for DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) and Gentzkow et al. (2011); Adena et al. (2015): 5.6 - 19.6%. ▶ Back.

Table: Event Study results on expansion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent var.:	Republican two-party vote share					
Treatment Sample:	Expansion: SBG 2012 - 2020					
Sinclair bias × RY -3	0.0020	-0.0048	-0.0016	0.0009	0.0009	0.0004
	(0.0046)	(0.0042)	(0.0044)	(0.0060)	(0.0060)	(0.0062)
Sinclair bias × RY -2	0.0001	-0.0115*	-0.0054	0.0031	0.0031	0.0023
	(0.0090)	(0.0059)	(0.0057)	(0.0059)	(0.0059)	(0.0058)
Sinclair bias × RY -1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sinclair bias × RY 0	0.0033	0.0020	0.0042	0.0098	0.0098	0.0079
	(0.0110)	(0.0108)	(0.0094)	(0.0096)	(0.0096)	(0.0085)
Sinclair bias × RY 1	-0.0013	-0.0033	0.0019	0.0045	0.0045	0.0045
	(0.0133)	(0.0126)	(0.0103)	(0.0120)	(0.0120)	(0.0108)
Sinclair bias × RY 2	-0.0201	-0.0232	-0.0086	0.0200	0.0200	0.0199
	(0.0236)	(0.0227)	(0.0201)	(0.0252)	(0.0252)	(0.0225)
Observations	19,048	19,048	19,041	17,338	17,338	17,332
R-squared	0.856	0.857	0.880	0.840	0.840	0.855
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment outcome trend		✓	✓		✓	✓
Demographic Controls			✓			✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.595	0.595	0.595	0.389	0.389	0.389
SD of dependent var.	0.153	0.153	0.153	0.122	0.122	0.121

Table: Event Study results on expansion using congressional outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent var.:	Republican candidate won election		Republican two party congressional vote	
Treatment Sample:	Expansion: SBG 2012 - 2020			
Sinclair bias × RY -6	-0.021	-0.023	0.031**	0.032**
	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Sinclair bias × RY -5	-0.052	-0.051	-0.009	-0.008
	(0.035)	(0.033)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Sinclair bias × RY -4	-0.016	-0.004	0.026	0.029
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Sinclair bias × RY -3	-0.029	-0.013	0.027	0.030*
	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Sinclair bias × RY -2	0.027	0.044	0.005	0.008
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Sinclair bias × RY -1	0	0	0	0
	-	-	-	-
Sinclair bias × RY 0	0.033	0.051	0.006	0.009
	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.019)	(0.018)
Sinclair bias × RY 1	0.088*	0.108**	0.017	0.020
	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.017)	(0.015)
Sinclair bias × RY 2	0.104*	0.126**	0.001	0.007
	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.020)	(0.018)
Sinclair bias × RY 3	0.110**	0.136**	0.004	0.010
	(0.055)	(0.057)	(0.023)	(0.021)
Sinclair bias × RY 4	0.134**	0.175**	-0.006	0.001
	(0.066)	(0.071)	(0.027)	(0.026)
Observations	37,586	37,576	37,548	37,538
R-squared	0.468	0.472	0.684	0.690
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-CD Weights	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls		✓		✓
Pre-treatment outcome trend	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by DMA and County-CD Cell	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.644	0.644	0.564	0.565
SD of dependent var.	0.479	0.479	0.188	0.188

▶ Back.

Event study results on Republican vote share as a % of registered voters

Full controls (left), no controls(right)

Rep. vote share among registered voters
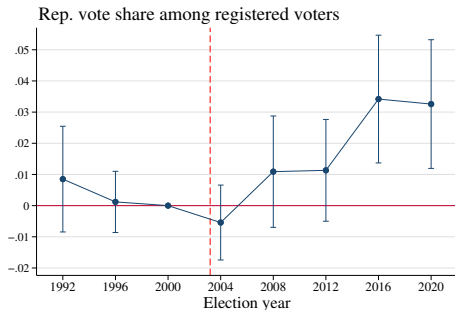
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 15465, R2 = .854. Mean = 0.375(.116).

Rep. vote share among registered voters
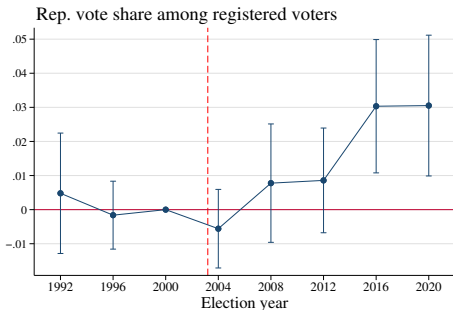
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2020
90% CIs. N= 15967, R2 = .837. Mean = 0.375(.116).

▸ Back

Table of results on content: Voting mechanisms

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable:		Voter turnout			Share of registered voters	
1992 × Sinclair bias	-0.0133	-0.0133	-0.0133	-0.0076	-0.0074	-0.0092
	(0.0121)	(0.0124)	(0.0118)	(0.0151)	(0.0149)	(0.0143)
1996 × Sinclair bias	-0.0092	-0.0093	-0.0095	-0.0082	-0.0085	-0.0091
	(0.0086)	(0.0087)	(0.0087)	(0.0081)	(0.0085)	(0.0082)
2000 × Sinclair bias	0	0	0	0	0	0
	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004 × Sinclair bias	-0.0075	-0.0084	-0.0093	0.0122	0.0124	0.0127
	(0.0086)	(0.0087)	(0.0087)	(0.0080)	(0.0079)	(0.0080)
2008 × Sinclair bias	-0.0013	-0.0016	-0.0024	-0.0029	-0.0008	-0.0032
	(0.0111)	(0.0109)	(0.0107)	(0.0115)	(0.0102)	(0.0102)
2012 × Sinclair bias	0.0009	0.0013	0.0016	0.0003	0.0047	-0.0012
	(0.0118)	(0.0118)	(0.0117)	(0.0155)	(0.0137)	(0.0135)
2016 × Sinclair bias	0.0108	0.0107	0.0107	-0.0058	-0.0012	-0.0078
	(0.0121)	(0.0121)	(0.0120)	(0.0161)	(0.0141)	(0.0140)
2020 × Sinclair bias	0.0109	0.0098	0.0114	-0.0124	-0.0073	-0.0156
	(0.0111)	(0.0110)	(0.0109)	(0.0193)	(0.0161)	(0.0160)
Observations	15,967	15,468	15,465	15,965	15,466	15,465
R-squared	0.778	0.774	0.779	0.744	0.764	0.786
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment outcome trend		✓	✓		✓	✓
Demographic Controls			✓			✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.680	0.680	0.680	0.868	0.867	0.867
SD of dependent var.	0.0920	0.0900	0.0900	0.108	0.109	0.109

▸ Back.

Sanity checks on treatment intensity

Dependent variable:	Republican two party presidential vote share		
Log of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA	0.0011		
	(0.0008)		
Log of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA $\times$ Year $\geq$ 2016	0.0024***		
	(0.0007)		
Share of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA		0.0135	
		(0.0113)	
Share of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA $\times$ Year $\geq$ 2016		0.0331***	
		(0.0097)	
Number of biased Sinclair stations in DMA			0.0082*
			(0.0044)
Number of biased Sinclair stations in DMA $\times$ Year $\geq$ 2016			0.0101***
			(0.0038)
Observations	17,612	17,612	17,612
R-squared	0.899	0.898	0.898
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓
County and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment prediction	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.580	0.580	0.580
SD of dependent var.	0.148	0.148	0.148

Individual level surveys

American National Election Study (ANES): ▸ Descriptives and balance

- ▶ nationally-representative cross-section of eligible voters
- ▶ spans presidential election years 1948 - 2016
- ▶ continuity dataset of pooled cross sections with harmonized variables from 1970
- ▶ covers topics on a wide range of political issues and actors.

Cooperative Election Study (CES): ▸ Descriptives and balance

- ▶ cross-section of U.S. adults
- ▶ weights to account for matching and post-stratification
- ▶ spans election years 2006 - 2020
- ▶ conducted online by YouGov
- ▶ dataset of demographic and political information and a policy preferences dataset

▸ Back.

Demographic differences: ANES respondents, 1992-2016

	Mean		T-test		
	SBG 2004	No SBG	No SBG - SBG 2004		
			COEF	SE	N
Age	48.611	48.155	-0.456	0.322	14730
Female	0.552	0.534	-0.018*	0.009	14873
Married	0.495	0.495	-0.000	0.009	14846
White non-Hispanic	0.711	0.637	-0.073***	0.009	14798
Black non-Hispanic	0.190	0.158	-0.032***	0.007	14798
Hispanic	0.058	0.150	0.093***	0.006	14798
Other or multiple races, non-Hispanic	0.042	0.054	0.012***	0.004	14798
Completed grade school or less	0.029	0.030	0.001	0.003	14759
Completed high school	0.369	0.340	-0.029***	0.009	14759
Completed some college	0.327	0.314	-0.013	0.009	14759
Completed college	0.276	0.316	0.040***	0.009	14759
Income group: 0-33 pctl	0.352	0.315	-0.037***	0.009	14905
Income group: 34-94 pctl	0.549	0.565	0.016*	0.009	14905
Income group: 95-100 pctl	0.033	0.052	0.019***	0.004	14905
Protestant	0.567	0.458	-0.109***	0.009	14853
Member in a union	1.851	1.846	-0.004	0.007	14829
Parents are immigrants	0.091	0.209	0.118***	0.007	14835

Balance tests: ANES respondents, 1992-2016

	Dependent variable:	Dummy for Sinclair bias availability	
	COEF	SE	N
Individual level:			
Age	0.569	(0.823)	15,018
Female	0.033*	(0.019)	15,164
Married	-0.029	(0.026)	15,136
White non-Hispanic	0.011	(0.031)	15,087
Black non-Hispanic	0.020	(0.029)	15,087
Hispanic	-0.025	(0.017)	15,087
Other or multiple races	-0.007	(0.008)	15,087
Completed grade school or less	-0.019	(0.014)	15,046
Completed high school	-0.053**	(0.026)	15,046
Completed some college	0.034	(0.022)	15,046
Completed college	0.037	(0.026)	15,046
Income group: 0-33 pctl	0.033	(0.030)	15,196
Income group: 34-95 pctl	0.002	(0.030)	15,196
Income group: 95-100 pctl	-0.009	(0.014)	15,196
Protestant	-0.010	(0.029)	15,144
Member in a union	0.010	(0.018)	15,118
Parents are immigrants	-0.010	(0.074)	15,123
County level:			
Population density (sq km)	-0.170*	(0.102)	15,196
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	-0.122	(0.184)	15,196
Total female population (ln)	-0.128	(0.186)	15,196
Total white population (ln)	-0.216	(0.176)	15,196
Unemployment rate	0.003	(0.002)	15,196
Log of household income	-0.020	(0.032)	15,196
Completed high school (%)	-0.004	(0.009)	15,196
Completed college (%)	0.012	(0.013)	15,196
Share of Christians	0.013	(0.018)	15,196

Demographic differences: CES respondents, 2006-2020

	Mean		T-test		
	SBG 2004	No SBG	No SBG - SBG 2004		
			COEF	SE	N
Age	49.452	49.274	-0.056	0.061	377065
Female	0.552	0.539	-0.014***	0.002	377065
Married	0.559	0.532	-0.026***	0.002	375831
Separated	0.017	0.017	-0.000	0.000	375831
Divorced	0.109	0.110	0.001	0.001	375831
Widowed	0.047	0.047	0.001	0.001	375831
Single / Never Married	0.221	0.246	0.023***	0.002	375831
Domestic Partnership	0.047	0.047	0.001	0.001	375831
Race: White	0.799	0.706	-0.090***	0.002	377065
Race: Black	0.107	0.123	0.017***	0.001	377065
Race: Hispanic	0.043	0.097	0.052***	0.001	377065
Race: Asian	0.012	0.027	0.014***	0.001	377065
Race: Native American	0.008	0.007	-0.000	0.000	377065
Race: Mixed	0.016	0.021	0.005***	0.001	377065
Race: Other	0.015	0.016	0.002***	0.000	377065
Race: Middle Eastern	0.001	0.002	0.000***	0.000	377065
Hispanic origin	1.980	1.962	-0.017***	0.001	291972
Completed grade school or less	0.033	0.031	-0.003***	0.001	377009
Completed high school	0.299	0.264	-0.035***	0.002	377009
Completed some college	0.333	0.341	0.009***	0.002	377009
Completed college	0.335	0.363	0.029***	0.002	377009
Low income: 0-50k	0.520	0.480	-0.041***	0.002	312105
Middle income: 50-100k	0.373	0.376	0.004*	0.002	312105
High income: 100k plus	0.107	0.144	0.038***	0.001	312105
Religion: Protestant	0.428	0.365	-0.061***	0.002	349250
Religion: Roman Catholic	0.187	0.225	0.039***	0.002	349250
Religion: Mormon	0.008	0.010	0.002***	0.000	349250
Religion: Eastern or Greek Orthodox	0.004	0.006	0.002***	0.000	349250
Religion: Jewish	0.015	0.031	0.016***	0.000	349250
Religion: Muslim	0.004	0.006	0.002***	0.000	349250
Religion: Buddhist	0.007	0.009	0.003***	0.000	349250
Religion: Hindu	0.002	0.003	0.001***	0.000	349250
Religion: Atheist	0.048	0.050	0.002**	0.001	349250
Religion: Agnostic	0.055	0.057	0.002*	0.001	349250
Religion: Nothing in Particular	0.178	0.172	-0.007***	0.001	349250
Religion: Something Else	0.065	0.064	-0.001	0.001	349250
Union Member	0.245	0.251	0.007***	0.002	377065
No health insurance	1.896	1.887	-0.007***	0.001	325705
Home Ownership	1.370	1.405	0.033***	0.002	351218
Parent of Young Children	1.746	1.748	0.004**	0.002	349377
Unemployed	0.069	0.078	0.008***	0.001	377065
Military Status (None)	1.590	1.566	-0.021***	0.002	376998

Balance tests: CES respondents, 2006-2020

Dependent variable:	Dummy for Sinclair bias exposure after 2016		
	COEF	SE	N
Individual level:			
Age	0.025	(0.286)	376,954
Female	-0.007	(0.006)	376,954
Married	-0.001	(0.008)	375,720
Separated	0.000	(0.002)	375,720
Divorced	0.005	(0.004)	375,720
Widowed	-0.004	(0.003)	375,720
Single / Never Married	-0.005	(0.007)	375,720
Domestic Partnership	0.005	(0.003)	375,720
Race: White	0.023***	(0.008)	376,954
Race: Black	-0.001	(0.006)	376,954
Race: Hispanic	-0.010***	(0.003)	376,954
Race: Asian	-0.013***	(0.004)	376,954
Race: Native American	0.002	(0.002)	376,954
Race: Mixed	-0.001	(0.002)	376,954
Race: Other	-0.000	(0.001)	376,954
Race: Middle Eastern	0.000	(0.000)	376,954
Hispanic origin	-0.005*	(0.003)	291,879
Completed grade school or less	-0.005	(0.006)	376,898
Completed high school	0.004	(0.009)	376,898
Completed some college	0.004	(0.006)	376,898
Completed college	-0.003	(0.006)	376,898
Low income: 0-50k	-0.011	(0.007)	312,012
Middle income: 50-100k	0.011*	(0.006)	312,012
High income: 100k plus	0.000	(0.004)	312,012
Religion: Protestant	-0.007	(0.006)	349,139
Religion: Roman Catholic	-0.010*	(0.006)	349,139
Religion: Mormon	0.001	(0.001)	349,139
Religion: Eastern or Greek Orthodox	0.000	(0.001)	349,139
Religion: Jewish	-0.002	(0.001)	349,139
Religion: Muslim	-0.002	(0.001)	349,139
Religion: Buddhist	-0.000	(0.001)	349,139
Religion: Hindu	-0.001	(0.001)	349,139
Religion: Atheist	0.004	(0.004)	349,139
Religion: Agnostic	0.007***	(0.003)	349,139
Religion: Nothing in Particular	0.008	(0.007)	349,139
Religion: Something Else	0.002	(0.003)	349,139
Union Member	0.001	(0.006)	376,954
No health insurance	-0.009	(0.007)	325,594
Home Ownership	0.000	(0.010)	351,109
Parent of Young Children	0.001	(0.007)	349,266
Unemployed	0.003	(0.004)	376,954
Military Status (None)	0.002	(0.008)	376,887
County level:			
Population density (sq km)	-0.157	(0.124)	376,954
Voting age (age 20 plus) population (ln)	-0.014	(0.025)	376,954
Total female population (ln)	-0.010	(0.026)	376,954
Total white population (ln)	-0.001	(0.024)	376,954
Unemployment rate	0.001	(0.002)	376,954
Log of household income	-0.010	(0.008)	376,954
People that completed high school (%)	-0.003	(0.002)	376,954
People that completed college (%)	0.000	(0.002)	376,954
Share of Christians	0.001	(0.003)	376,954

ANES Results on change in content

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Dependent variable:	Voted for Republican presidential candidate					Voted for Republican congressional candidate				
1992/1996 × Sinclair bias	0.0008	-0.0023	-0.0006	0.0072	0.0117	0.0000	-0.0147	-0.0249	-0.0177	-0.0063
	(0.0571)	(0.0552)	(0.0546)	(0.0540)	(0.0536)	(0.0892)	(0.0779)	(0.0772)	(0.0814)	(0.0784)
2000 × Sinclair bias	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004 × Sinclair bias	0.0291	0.0361	0.0525	0.0479	0.0497	-0.0113	-0.0040	-0.0288	-0.0358	-0.0324
	(0.0779)	(0.0772)	(0.0622)	(0.0611)	(0.0611)	(0.0714)	(0.0688)	(0.0677)	(0.0691)	(0.0679)
2008/2012 × Sinclair bias	0.0472	0.0389	0.0340	0.0446	0.0437	0.0540	0.0354	0.0456	0.0625	0.0584
	(0.0418)	(0.0420)	(0.0451)	(0.0435)	(0.0438)	(0.0632)	(0.0559)	(0.0516)	(0.0511)	(0.0506)
2016 × Sinclair bias	0.0922**	0.0822*	0.0863*	0.0880**	0.0878**	0.1238*	0.0991*	0.1059**	0.1143**	0.1115**
	(0.0442)	(0.0473)	(0.0454)	(0.0436)	(0.0439)	(0.0662)	(0.0565)	(0.0509)	(0.0522)	(0.0508)
Observations	11,675	11,675	10,728	10,728	10,728	8,623	8,623	7,936	7,936	7,936
R-squared	0.0619	0.0790	0.219	0.221	0.222	0.103	0.143	0.258	0.258	0.262
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by Congressional District						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment vote share prediction		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
Individual controls			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
County Controls				✓	✓				✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.357	0.357	0.355	0.355	0.355	0.460	0.460	0.458	0.458	0.458
SD of dependent var.	0.479	0.479	0.478	0.478	0.478	0.498	0.498	0.498	0.498	0.498

▸ Back to results

▸ Back to robustness

ANES (1992-2016): Presidential and Congressional results, no controls

Change in the prob(Voted for Republican Pres. candidate)
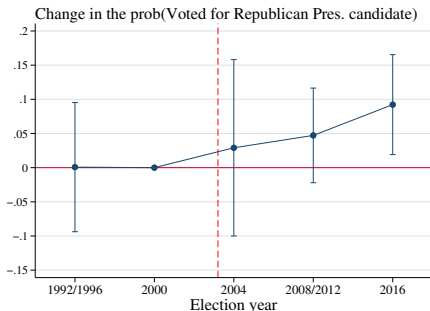
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2016
90% CIs. N= 11675, R2 = .062. Mean = 0.357(.479).

Change in the prob(Voted for Republican Cong. candidate)
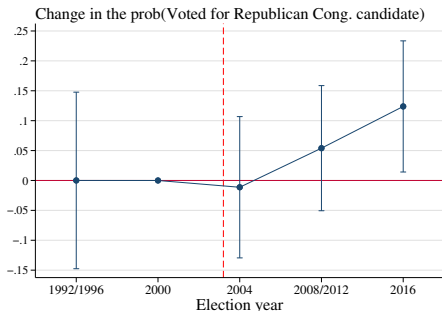
Treatment = content: SBG before 2004 to 2016
90% CIs. N= 8623, R2 = .103. Mean = 0.460(.498).

▸ Back

ANES (1992-2016) Table: Racial inequality PCA score

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PCA Score		Disagree:		
	Racial inequality	Blacks Gotten Less	Conditions Make it Difficult	Blacks Should Have	Blacks Must Try
Dependent var.:	attitudes score	than They Deserve	for Blacks to Succeed	Special Favors to Succeed	Harder to Succeed
Sinclair bias	0.0296	0.0059	0.0395	0.0362	0.0247
	(0.0231)	(0.0421)	(0.0453)	(0.0255)	(0.0257)
Sinclair bias × College educated	-0.0271	-0.0030	-0.0357	-0.0395	-0.0510
	(0.0345)	(0.0279)	(0.0359)	(0.0367)	(0.0364)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0641**	0.0795**	0.0595	0.0198	0.0438
	(0.0299)	(0.0388)	(0.0434)	(0.0226)	(0.0361)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × College educated	-0.0382	-0.0820	-0.0259	0.0011	-0.0392
	(0.0660)	(0.0649)	(0.0728)	(0.0601)	(0.0523)
Observations	5,352	7,236	8,209	8,010	7,631
R-squared	0.206	0.125	0.0970	0.138	0.155
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA & Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Trend	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual & County Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.703	0.717	0.548	0.798	0.664
SD of dependent var.	0.356	0.450	0.498	0.402	0.472

▸ Back.

	(1)	(2)
Dependent variable:	Feeling thermometer towards Republican Presidential Candidate	
Sample	Non-college educated	College-educated
1992/1996 $\times$ Sinclair bias	3.4569	-2.0145
	(2.6325)	(3.6343)
2000 $\times$ Sinclair bias	0	0
	-	-
2004 $\times$ Sinclair bias	-1.2776	2.3630
	(2.8602)	(3.7395)
2008/2012 $\times$ Sinclair bias	5.3475***	-6.0753*
	(1.9330)	(3.2251)
2016 $\times$ Sinclair bias	10.9209***	-4.7681
	(2.4663)	(3.3248)
Observations	9,402	4,200
R-squared	0.189	0.251
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Pre-treatment vote share prediction	✓	✓
Individual controls	✓	✓
County Controls	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	47.01	44.85
SD of dependent var.	29.82	31.45

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent variable:	Identifies as			
	Republican	Conservative	Republican	Conservative
Survey:	American National Election		Cooperative Election	
Sinclair bias	0.0637**	0.0322		
	(0.0291)	(0.0370)		
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0145	0.0259	0.0218**	0.0017
	(0.0212)	(0.0270)	(0.0098)	(0.0086)
Observations	13,754	10,425	232,277	222,185
R-squared	0.193	0.105	0.201	0.148
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment vote share prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual and County Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.361	0.393	0.363	0.357
SD of dependent var.	0.480	0.488	0.481	0.479

ANES Results on change in content

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Policy type:	Republicanism				Populism			
	PCA score:				PCA score:			
	Small government	Less redistribution	Prefer most: cuts to domestic spending	Prefer least: taxes to spending cuts	Disillusionment with government	Disagree: Own opinions matter	Agree: Isolationism	Thermometer: Republican Pres. candidate
Dependent variable:								
Survey:	American National Election		Cooperative Election		American National Election			
Sinclair bias	0.0435**	0.0436**			0.0249	-0.0209	0.0077	0.7384
	(0.0219)	(0.0174)			(0.0156)	(0.0229)	(0.0283)	(1.1375)
Sinclair bias × College educated	-0.0445*	-0.0285			-0.0204	-0.0305	-0.0148	-0.9896
	(0.0264)	(0.0291)			(0.0153)	(0.0263)	(0.0279)	(1.8395)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0320	0.0028	-0.0106	0.0023	0.0077	0.0048	-0.0166	6.5264***
	(0.0214)	(0.0250)	(0.0146)	(0.0098)	(0.0184)	(0.0267)	(0.0280)	(2.0187)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × College educated	0.0541	-0.0347	0.0031	0.0026	-0.0119	-0.0029	0.0828*	-6.5192*
	(0.0367)	(0.0388)	(0.0020)	(0.0017)	(0.0221)	(0.0459)	(0.0452)	(3.4520)
Observations	10,860	9,754	101,318	101,318	12,731	13,737	12,973	13,612
R-squared	0.181	0.141	0.292	0.363	0.0750	0.0640	0.0700	0.196
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual and County Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.418	0.318	0.109	0.128	0.606	0.301	0.313	46.34
SD of dependent var.	0.398	0.312	0.312	0.335	0.304	0.459	0.464	30.35

Notes: **Column 1** is of agreement with (1) "Free market can handle economy (vs government)"; (2) "Less government better (vs government should do more)." **Column 2** is of agreement with (1) "Decrease federal spending on poor"; (2) "Decrease federal spending on welfare"; (3) "Should worry less about how equal people are." **Column 3** is of agreement with (1) "Federal Government run by few interests"; (2) "Not satisfied with democracy in the US"; (3) "Federal Government wastes tax money a lot." **Column 4** is a binary variable agreeing with "Agree: Better off if U.S. Unconcerned with Rest of World."

▸ Back

Effect on components on PCA score of support for small government, ANES Respondents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PCA Score	Agree:		
Dependent var.:	Small government attitudes score	Free market can handle economy (vs govt	Government is too involved	Less Government
Sinclair bias	0.0435**	0.0494	0.0378	0.0364
	(0.0219)	(0.0301)	(0.0351)	(0.0276)
Sinclair bias × College educated	-0.0445*	-0.0641**	-0.0602*	-0.0115
	(0.0264)	(0.0278)	(0.0361)	(0.0316)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0320	0.0019	0.0107	0.0797***
	(0.0214)	(0.0349)	(0.0230)	(0.0304)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × College educated	0.0541	0.0988**	0.0696	-0.0027
	(0.0367)	(0.0448)	(0.0498)	(0.0494)
Observations	10,860	11,099	11,151	11,154
R-squared	0.181	0.0990	0.120	0.162
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓
County and Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.418	0.336	0.473	0.444
SD of dependent var.	0.398	0.472	0.499	0.497

Effect on components on PCA score of support for less redistribution, ANES Respondents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PCA Score		Agree:	
	Less redistribution	Cut spending	Spend less	Worry less about
Dependent var.:	attitudes score	the poor	on welfare	how equal people are
Sinclair bias	0.0436**	0.0391***	0.0516*	-0.0010
	(0.0174)	(0.0143)	(0.0284)	(0.0305)
Sinclair bias × College educated	-0.0285	-0.0022	-0.0045	-0.0087
	(0.0291)	(0.0235)	(0.0312)	(0.0382)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016	0.0028	-0.0104	0.0196	0.0014
	(0.0250)	(0.0187)	(0.0292)	(0.0372)
Sinclair bias × Year ≥ 2016 × College educated	-0.0347	-0.0198	-0.0551	-0.0376
	(0.0388)	(0.0351)	(0.0597)	(0.0498)
Observations	9,754	13,592	13,587	9,953
R-squared	0.141	0.0800	0.115	0.115
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓
County and Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.318	0.132	0.426	0.516
SD of dependent var.	0.312	0.339	0.495	0.500

Effect on components on PCA score of disillusionment with government, ANES Respondents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PCA Score		Agree:	
Dependent var.:	Disillusionment with govt attitudes score	Dissatisfied with U.S. democracy	Government benefits few	Federal govt. wastes taxes
Sinclair bias	0.0249	0.0358*	0.0110	0.0385*
	(0.0156)	(0.0203)	(0.0205)	(0.0226)
Sinclair bias × College educated	-0.0204	-0.0118	-0.0035	-0.0640**
	(0.0153)	(0.0237)	(0.0205)	(0.0285)
Sinclair bias × Year $\geq$ 2016	0.0077	-0.0124	0.0081	0.0171
	(0.0184)	(0.0313)	(0.0253)	(0.0232)
Sinclair bias × Year $\geq$ 2016 × College educated	-0.0119	0.0172	0.0126	-0.0406
	(0.0221)	(0.0395)	(0.0353)	(0.0421)
Observations	12,731	13,754	12,769	13,687
R-squared	0.0750	0.0800	0.0610	0.0710
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓
County and Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.606	0.210	0.763	0.655
SD of dependent var.	0.304	0.408	0.425	0.475

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent variable:	Voted for Republican Presidential Candidate			
Survey:	American National Election		Cooperative Election	
Log of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA	0.0027			
	(0.0023)			
Log of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA $\times$ Year $\geq$ 2016	0.0034**		0.0018**	
	(0.0014)		(0.0008)	
Share of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA		0.0284		
		(0.0311)		
Share of pre-bias Sinclair viewership in DMA $\times$ Year $\geq$ 2016		0.0451**		0.0240**
		(0.0196)		(0.0108)
Observations	10,689	10,604	175,565	175,565
R-squared	0.223	0.222	0.271	0.271
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment vote share prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual and County Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.355	0.355	0.449	0.449
SD of dependent var.	0.478	0.478	0.497	0.497

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Dependent variable:	Voted for Republican				
	presidential candidate		congressional candidate		
Number of years exposed to Sinclair bias	0.0036**		0.0046***		
	(0.0014)		(0.0016)		
Sinclair bias × 2014					0.0128
					(0.0195)
Sinclair bias × 2016		0.0379***		0.0377***	0.0506**
		(.0092)		(.0143)	(0.0216)
Sinclair bias × 2018					0.0328*
					(0.0174)
Sinclair bias × 2020		0.0387***		0.0270**	0.0397**
		(0.0105)		(0.0112)	(0.0177)
Observations	175,565	70,390	131,289	131,289	131,289
R-squared	0.271	0.263	0.257	0.257	0.258
Clusters by DMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clusters by Congressional District			✓	✓	✓
DMA and Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment vote share prediction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dependent var.	0.449	0.442	0.455	0.455	0.455
SD of dependent var.	0.497	0.497	0.498	0.498	0.498