

# The Role of Minority Journalists, Candidates, and Audiences in Shaping Race-Related Campaign News Coverage

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## Abstract

The question of whether press coverage of racial/ethnic minorities has improved remains. This study tackles it by examining (a) how journalists' race/ethnicity affects campaign news coverage of race-related issues and (b) whether the nature of coverage is moderated by minority candidates and the racial composition of audiences. We pair local news coverage of 3,400 state legislative candidates with news data from 663 news outlets. We find newsroom diversity by itself does not influence the coverage of race-related issues. But in areas with large numbers of minority audiences, media outlets with diverse newsrooms are significantly more likely to cover race-related issues.

## Keywords

race-related issue, newsroom minority, minority audience, state legislatures

Despite claims of a postracial society, a review of contemporary media content underscores the complexities of covering race, immigrants, and cultural diversity. According to some metrics, press coverage of racial and ethnic groups and issues has improved.

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According to others, it has not. For example, Dixon and Williams (2015) find that Blacks are underrepresented as violent perpetrators of crimes on network and cable news shows, whereas Chavez (2013) and Valentino, Brader, and Jardina (2013) conclude stereotypical coverage of minority groups persists. One possible prescription for improving coverage of race and related policy issues is increased diversity in newsrooms (Grose, 2006; Mills, 1997; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). While newsroom minority numbers are still disproportionately low when compared with the country's population (Gold, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2014), the proportion of non-White journalists has tripled over the last three and a half decades (3.95% in 1978 to roughly 13% in 2015; American Society of News Editors [ASNE], 2015). And there is some evidence that journalists of color are often assigned to cover race-related issues due to their ethnic identity, racial life experience, and regular engagement with racial communities (Nishikawa, Towner, Clawson, & Waltenburg, 2009; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007).

What is less clear, however, is whether these assignments have an effect on news coverage of race-related issues. How does diversity in the news reporting staff influence campaign news coverage of racialized issues, that is, policy or social issues that have been frequently attached to a racial group by political and mediated communication? Many policy issues are now "infused with symbolic group cues" (Valentino, 1999, p. 296). For example, evidence suggests that White women are more likely to be welfare recipients than Black women, but the issue of welfare has been racialized by politicians and the press. In the campaign context, racialized issues have been shown to implicitly prime audiences and prospective voters about race, activating group sentiment (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002).

Past research on racial discourse in news reveals patterns of "modern racism," where both explicit and implicit references to people of color are combined in problematic ways. Modern racism is defined as a more general and diffuse "anti-black affect" (Sears, 1988, p. 56), combined with continued disaffection over the continuing claims on White resources and sympathies, rancor rooted in an attachment to traditional American, individualist values, and in a conviction that racism has disappeared (Entman, 1990). Mainstream news also privileges dramatic, episodic framing of race, focusing on interracial conflict, violence, and individuals; this displaces evidence of racial comity and the role of institutional and social-level factors (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Iyengar, 1990). As a result of these patterns of media practice, many issues have become "racialized." Crime, for example, is an issue often attached to African Americans while immigration is primarily linked to Latinos.

This study thus focuses on news coverage of race-related and racialized issues, exploring its relationship with several race-related factors including newsroom diversity, minority candidates, and ethnic audiences. Indeed, the selection and presentation of news, and of political news in particular, is often a product of the interplay between journalists, political actors, and audiences (e.g., Cook, 1998; Petrova, 2011; Zaller, 1999). News content is shaped by several factors such as the tastes of the market (e.g., Abrajano & Singh, 2009; Branton & Dunaway, 2008; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Hamilton, 2004; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), news values (Cook, 1998; Ettema & Peer,

1996; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978), and/or the expectations of political actors (e.g., Bennett, 1991; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006; Roberts & McCombs, 1994). This article examines whether newsroom diversity influences campaign coverage and whether this influence is moderated by race and ethnicity of candidates and audiences.

Specifically, this study uses data drawn from 663 newsrooms across 14 states in 2012 and uses logistic regression analysis to explore the relationship between the presence of minority journalists in newsrooms and media coverage of race-related issues in legislative election campaigns. It also explores whether this influence is moderated by (a) candidate race and ethnicity and (b) the racial composition of market audiences. Our expectations are drawn from theories of how minority journalists might differ in perspective from their White counterparts, media coverage of race-related issues, news norms and routines, and the economic incentives of news making.

## **Minority Journalists and Race-Related Issue Coverage**

As Adams and Cleary (2006) point out, the issue of newsroom diversity has been explored since the 1960s, mainly in the form of descriptions of staffing levels in newsrooms and hiring, retention, and promotion issues (Bodinger-de Uriarte & Valgeirsson, 2015; B. Clark, 2017; Meyers & Gayle, 2015). A smaller body of work examines the impact of diversity—especially the impact of minority journalists on audiences (see Mastro, 2017 for a review) and news content. For example, although a number of articles in newspapers and magazines have documented the impact of minority reporters on news in recent years (see, for example, B. Clark, 2013; Coffey, 2013; Deggans, 2012; Spayd, 2015; Stewart, 2015; Sui & Paul, 2017), scholarly work on how minority journalists affect news coverage has not advanced much after the mid-2000s (some mid-2000s examples include Owens, 2008; Zeldes & Fico, 2005; Zeldes, Fico, & Diddi, 2007). Overall, this work agrees that covering race-related issues is both socially responsible (Mastro, 2015; Rivas-Rodriguez, Subervi-Velez, Bramlett-Solomon, & Heider, 2004) and profitable because racial and ethnic populations constitute a large proportion of U.S. audiences, which ratchets up their appeal as targets for advertising. These factors may also drive mainstream news media to maintain a racially diverse pool of journalists (Mills, 1997; Rivas-Rodriguez et al., 2004).

There are a number of reasons to link racial/ethnic minority reporters to intensified coverage of race-related issues. First, race is an important determinant for news selection (Husband, 2005; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007; Tolley, 2015). This is consistent with the conventional wisdom that individual characteristics may affect reporters' selection of news stories (Craft & Wanta, 2004; McGowan, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) such that minority reporters are more inclined to cover issues related to people who share the same ethnic background. Second, due to active engagement with ethnic communities, minority journalists are sometimes more aware of what is going on among ethnic populations; and they also know where and how to find out such issues (Mills, 1997). This reduces the cost of seeking out news on minority-related issues, making race-related stories a routine beat for minority reporters, especially under tight deadline pressures.

These two reasons also explain the practice of “racial profiling,” a phenomenon whereby—fairly or unfairly—minority reporters are assigned to cover ethnic groups and minority-related issues (Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007) under the perception that due to their identity, life experiences, and regular engagement with racial communities, they are better able to cover these communities than White reporters (Nishikawa et al., 2009; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). Through teamwork, minority journalists may influence their White colleagues to produce more coverage of minority-related issues (Shafer, 1993).

Competing studies, however, suggest that minority journalists may not have an impact on media coverage of race-related issues. First, reporters’ professional journalistic identity often overrides ethnic identity (Husband, 2005; Matsaganis & Katz, 2014; Nishikawa et al., 2009). Regardless of ethnicity, journalists are required to follow the universal “news norms and routines” that define their profession. Minority journalists are more likely to follow journalistic norms (Nishikawa et al., 2009) of neutrality and fairness rather than inject their own perspectives into stories. The routine use of other journalistic norms such as prominence, importance, and timeliness may make minority and White reporters act in the same way when selecting news. With career objectives in mind, minority reporters may feel constrained in choosing news stories (Rivas-Rodriguez et al., 2004), especially in mainstream newsrooms where White editors are in charge of news decisions (Mills, 1997). Some minority journalists may even resent being assigned to cover stories on minority communities or race-related issues (Shafer, 1993), fearing that being pigeonholed as a “minority issues” reporter might damage their chances of employment and promotion in mainstream newsrooms (Rivas-Rodriguez et al., 2004). Thus, the employment of minority staff in newsrooms does not necessarily increase coverage of race-related issues (Ankney & Procopio, 2003).

In sum, extant literature suggests support for two opposing hypotheses. First, a null hypothesis: we should expect to see no difference in coverage of race-related issues between news media with more or fewer minority journalists in the newsroom. Second, in line with the conventional claim that journalists are the primary selectors of topics and frames for news stories (e.g., Armstrong, 2004; Gans, 1979; Zelizer, 2004), we might expect news media’s coverage of race-related issues to be explained in part by diversity in newsrooms. Given these two competing arguments, we propose the following research question:

**RQ:** How is racial and ethnic diversity in the newsroom related to media coverage of race-related issues?

## **Minority Journalists and Coverage of Minority Candidates**

Media coverage of minority candidates has historically been different relative to coverage of White candidates. Coverage of minority candidates often emphasizes their race as something newsworthy in itself, and frames their candidacy as “unique” or historical (Major & Coleman, 2008; McIlwain, 2011; Terkildsen & Damore, 1999; Wu

& Lee, 2005; Zilber & Niven, 2000). Coverage also tends to focus on racial blocks among the electorate and whether groups are more or less like the candidate because they belong to the same race/ethnicity (Caliendo & McIlwain, 2006; McIlwain, 2011; Reeves, 1997). This draws attention away from minority candidates' issues, focusing instead on traits (Sylvie, 1995). When minority candidates run, coverage often focuses disproportionately on race-related issues (Schaffner & Gadson, 2004), fueling the assumption that minority candidates have narrow policy interests.

These coverage patterns differ in substance and tone depending on the race of the opponent, the electoral district, and the competitiveness of the election. In biracial elections—that is, those elections where at least one candidate is a minority—the media make more frequent references to ethnicity/race as compared with all-White candidate races (Caliendo & McIlwain, 2006; Reeves, 1997). In biracial elections, the news coverage also has a higher likelihood of mentioning the partisanship of the minority candidate (Terkildsen & Damore, 1999) and the race of voters (Caliendo & McIlwain, 2006) as mentioned above. The proportion of race-related issue coverage increases when the minority candidate is discussed in comparison with other nonminority candidates than when he or she is the sole subject of the story (McIlwain, 2011). Wu and Lee's (2005) content analysis of the news coverage of three biracial races in California in the late 1990s showed that coverage was more likely to mention minority voters' support for the minority candidate, and the likelihood of the minority candidate looking out for the interests of minority voters in the event of being elected to office. White candidates, on the contrary, were depicted as likely to enjoy the support of the majority and reflect the interests of the majority White population as well as minorities.

Extant studies examine various election contexts to demonstrate that the presence of minority candidates affects media coverage in various ways, but we do not yet have empirical evidence as to how newsroom factors such as the race of journalists affects election coverage. A handful of studies have drawn upon group identity theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to examine the effect of minority journalists on various issues (Coleman, 2003, 2011). Overall, we know that while the male-centric newsroom culture tends to marginalize women's voices (Ross & Carter, 2011), the presence of women and minority journalists in the newsroom amplifies the voices of women and minorities. Compared with male reporters, women tend to quote more women (Freedman & Fico, 2005) and minorities as sources, and give them more air time (Zeldes & Fico, 2005), though audience demographics (Zeldes et al., 2007) and organizational factors such as whether a television station is a broadcast or cable network can alter this pattern (Zeldes, Fico, & Diddi, 2012). The assumption is that minority journalists will hold fewer negative stereotypes and more positive attitudes toward people of their own racial group and will also identify more strongly with people who share similar ideologies, beliefs, and social class. This will lead to more positive portrayals of individuals who most strongly resemble them.

The evidence for this assumption, however, is mixed. Coleman (2011) examined the differences in moral judgment among Asian American, Hispanic, and Black journalists and found these journalists were not likely to evaluate members of their in-groups more positively than Whites. But an earlier study (Coleman, 2003) conducted

among White journalists indicated race-based differences in evaluation of sources. Studies examining the impact of other group identity factors such as gender have found that women and men journalists tend to cover races for legislative and executive offices differently (Grabe, Samson, Zelenkauskaitė, & Yegiyani, 2011; Meeks, 2013), though others have shown that men and women do not focus on gender-specific topics during presidential debates (Turcotte & Paul, 2015). We propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** The effect of newsroom diversity (**RQ**) is moderated by the race of candidate such that minority journalists' coverage of minority-related issues is more likely in campaigns involving minority candidates.

Because our primary outcome variable is news selection rather than news presentation, we propose racial subjects and racial audiences as moderators rather than main predictors. We contend that newsroom characteristics play the most influential role in selecting news issues; but this news selection procedure may be less affected solely by subjects or audiences.

## **Ethnic Audiences and News Coverage**

Demand-side economic theories of news show that news content is shaped by the geographic location of a newspaper and, by extension, the demographic composition of its audience (Zeldes et al., 2007). The media function as profit-driven economic entities dependent on advertising dollars and audience demand. As a result, the quality, focus, and substance of news coverage shift in accordance with readers' tastes (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Hamilton, 2004). Increased competition and a need for profitability drives newspapers to try new ways of drawing and retaining more readers. Because broader audiences typically demand less-information, high-entertainment news content, news outlets shape their content accordingly. Audience tastes can negatively affect the quality of news (Arnold, 2004) though the presence of minority audiences can help increase the number of minorities quoted as expert sources (Zeldes et al., 2007).

A large body of work demonstrates that the political orientation of audiences can also determine the slant and substance of news coverage (Abrajano & Singh, 2009; Baron, 2006; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010). Generally, journalists uphold the idea of objectivity and balance while gathering news. This objective works best when the audience is heterogeneous with diverse tastes and interests because journalists do not need to slant the news or censor unpopular views from fear of alienating heterogeneous audiences. However, when the market is homogeneous and audiences hold similar views, the media often tailor their coverage to appeal to the maximum number of people in the market (Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005). Coverage is often biased to suit audience beliefs (Baron, 2006; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010) or to focus more on those issues that are known to be of importance to the audience.

Perceptions of audience beliefs are also influenced by the racial and ethnic composition of market audiences. Branton and Dunaway (2008) find that Spanish-language newspapers tend to focus more on immigration news than English-language newspapers. They also find that Spanish-language newspapers frame the issue more positively as compared with their English counterparts. The slant of immigration news coverage also differs with spatial proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border and is affected by a large proportion of Latino audiences in the market (Branton & Dunaway, 2009). Because immigration is important to audiences living in border proximate towns, newspapers in those towns were more likely to cover the topic than those located elsewhere. Similarly, local newspapers were likely to frame their immigration coverage negatively to appeal to their readers unless their market was comprised substantially of Latinos. Eshbaugh-Soha and Balarezo (2014) find that Spanish-language newspapers are more likely to cover President Obama positively than English network news. When Latinos viewed Obama's immigration policies favorably, Spanish-language coverage was positive; but when the policies were viewed as negative, the tone of coverage shifted in response to the change in audience views.

Drawing from the above discussion, the volume of race-related issue coverage will vary depending upon the racial composition of audiences. News coverage depends heavily on the racial characteristics of audiences (e.g., Fowler, Hale, & Olsen, 2009) and of story subjects (e.g., Caliendo & McIlwain, 2006; McIlwain & Caliendo, 2008; Reeves, 1997). We expect the influence of minority journalists on race-related issues coverage to be conditional on minority candidates and minority audiences. In the context of state legislative elections, in particular, the race of candidates and audiences may moderate news media's desire to cover race-related issues. Thus, we propose that

**H2:** The effect of newsroom diversity (**RQ**) is moderated by the race of audiences, such that minority journalists' coverage of race-related issues is more likely in areas with larger minority audiences.

Finally, we explore the three-way interaction effect between minority reporters, minority candidates, and minority audiences in race-related issue coverage. We expect that the influence of minority journalists in newsrooms on race-related campaign coverage is moderated by minority candidates running for office and the composition of the racial audiences such that

**H3:** The effect of newsroom diversity (**RQ**) is moderated by both the race of candidate and the race of audiences such that coverage of race-related issues is most likely where there are higher proportions of minority journalists, a minority candidate running, and a large proportion of minorities in the target audience.

In addition to the effect of minority reporters, minority candidates, and minority audiences, several other factors may influence the coverage of race-related factors. First are election-level factors such as candidate incumbency and race of the opponent. Incumbent candidates are known to get qualitatively different coverage relative to

challengers (Trent & Friedenber, 2000). As incumbents are well-known, enjoy easy media access, have a track record of accomplishments, and better chances of winning, they get covered more often and more positively as compared with challengers who might have poor name recognition and media access. In addition, extant studies suggest that biracial races attract increased media attention on racial issues than races where both candidates are White (McIlwain, 2011). The race of the opposing candidate could alter content as opposed to contests where both candidates are White.

The gender—of the candidate, reporter, and audiences—could also affect the nature of coverage. Women candidates, especially women of color, often get negative and less frequent coverage than their White or male counterparts (Bystrom, 2006; Gershon, 2013). Similarly, scholars have noted gender differences among reporters with respect to news content and reporting style. Women and men journalists differ in their coverage of executive and legislative offices (Meeks, 2013); women journalists are likely to use more women sources (Zoch & Turk, 1998); and quote them in more prominent positions in the newspaper (such as headlines) than men (Armstrong, 2004). As a result of these differences, we expect the gender of the reporter to have an impact on the coverage of candidates. We also expect audience gender to influence content. Men as news consumers are more interested in hard news and international affairs than women (Hamilton, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2008). Men also tend to be more conservative than women (Norrande & Wilcox, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2015) and to have higher levels of racial resentment (e.g., C. Clark & Clark, 2009), and there is limited evidence that males have more negative attitudes toward immigration generally (e.g., Dunaway, Branton, & Abrajano, 2010; Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993). Content may vary according to the proportion of males in the audience.

Finally, newspapers with large circulations tend to have bigger newsrooms and more news gathering resources, which could influence the quality and nature of coverage (Dunaway, 2011). Thus in this study, we control for candidate incumbency and opponent candidate's race. We also control for the gender of the reporter, and candidate, as well as the gender composition of the audience. Finally, we control for newspaper circulation size.

## **Data and Method**

Data for this project come from a number of sources. We start with a list of 14 states that have a relatively large Latino and Black population and held elections in 2012. These states are AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, IL, MI, NC, NM, NV, NY, OH, PA, and TX. Future research will incorporate all states, however; the time-intensive nature of coding race/ethnicity for every candidate limited this study to 14 states with relatively sizable Latino and Black populations. Other minority population states, such as MD, NJ, LA, and VA, did not hold state legislative elections in 2012.

Our selection of these states—and the 663 local newspapers circulated within those states—was determined by what states are covered in the Candidate Emergence in the State Project (Juenke & Shah, 2016), which is a database of state legislative candidates and thus allow us to create a list of candidates running for state legislative office. This

dataset drives the selection of our electoral contests and newspapers for examination because it includes detail on each state legislative candidate's race, gender, and other characteristics.<sup>1</sup> These data cover all the candidates running for state legislative offices in both the upper and lower chambers of statehouses and are much more difficult to gather and come by relative to news outlet data and population statistics (see Juenke & Shah, 2016).

After selecting our 14 states and identifying the 663 newspapers within them, we utilize the 2012 ASNE Newsroom Census data to gather information about the racial composition of the newsroom. Next, we use Access World News (Newsbank, Inc.)—a most comprehensive archive of over 400 local newspapers in the United States that allows us to capture an extensive election coverage from a diversity of news outlets from different states—to draw a sample of news articles covering each state legislative candidate. Following extant work on campaign news coverage, we isolate our search to coverage occurring between September 1 and Election Day. Then we utilize an R script to execute the search and download news articles using each candidate's first and last names as keywords. In an effort for an exhaustive search, we use “OR” between all candidates' names so that our search captures articles mentioning either only one candidate or multiple candidates.

### *Variables and Measurements*

Our dependent variable, (*Race-related issue coverage*), is a dichotomous variable that captures whether a news article about a state legislative candidate covers one or more race-related issues. Here we focus on how words have been attached to race, rather than how different ethnic groups perceive the effects of a given issue. For example, certain social agendas and policy measures—such as welfare, affirmative action, and immigration—are yoked to people of color, even though on their face these issues are color-neutral. This effectively racializes these issues (e.g., Chavez, 2001; Gilens, 1999). To capture both racialized and race-related issues, we first utilize previously used and tested dictionaries. For example, Squires and Jackson (2010) used Concordance to compute frequencies of words and phrases explicitly and implicitly related to race, racial identity, and racial politics, including issues such as immigration, food stamp, and welfare (see Online Supplement B for a full list of the race-related issue dictionary). Second, we take advantage of Python and Lexicoder's (Daku, Soroka, & Young, 2015) dictionary-based functions to capture whether each news article covered any of these race-related issues. Lexicoder 3.1.3 is a multiplatform content analysis software package for the automated content analysis of text. It provides word counts and allows dictionary-based searches for words and phrases as well as keywords in context. As this study is mostly interested in volume of coverage, Lexicoder is an appropriate software for our analysis. Moreover, despite concerns about computerized coding's validation of complex human language (Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy, 2015), Lexicoder's dictionary-based automatic analysis is found to produce valid coding results that are in line with human (expert) coding (see Young & Soroka, 2012). This is largely because “with a well-defined and

comprehensive dictionary, a basic word count can provide a powerful and reliable analysis of the topical and affective composition of a text” (Young & Soroka, 2012, p. 208), especially in our case where the semantic patterns are less a concern (see Lacy et al., 2015). The resulting dependent variable is dichotomous and measured at the news article level, with 1 signifying that the news article covers at least one race-related issue and 0 indicating that it covers none.

Our main independent variable (*%Newsroom minority*) captures the racial/ethnic composition of newsrooms in each of the 663 newspapers. The 2012 ASNE Newsroom Census provides the percentage of reporters of each ethnicity, and we compute the variable *newsroom minority* as the total percentage of African American, Latino, Asian American, Indian Native, and multiracial reporters in the newsroom.

The first moderating variable, (*White candidate*), captures the race/ethnicity of state legislative candidates running for office during the 2012 election cycle in the 14 states. The Candidate Emergence in the States Project (Juenke & Shah, 2016) provides a list of the candidates and their race (see Online Supplement A for details of the coding process). This dummy variable is measured on the candidate level, capturing whether a candidate is White versus other ethnicities (e.g., Latino, African American, Asian, and multiracial).

The second moderating variable, (*%Minority audience*), captures the racial composition of audiences in each newspaper’s circulating market. Specifically, as newspapers’ primary targets are voting-age adults, this variable is measured as the total percentage of minority audiences (including African American, Latino, Asian American, Indian Native, and multiracial) by state legislative district.

In addition, we include a set of control variables that may also affect news media campaign coverage of race-related issues. The first three variables are measured at the candidate level and come from the Candidate Emergence in the States Project (see Online Supplement A for details of the coding process). The first variable (*Incumbent*) captures whether a state legislative candidate is incumbent, with 1 representing *yes* and 0 representing *no*. The second variable, (*Minority opponent*), captures whether the state legislative candidate is competing with a minority candidate in the race, with 1 representing a minority opponent and 0 representing a White opponent. The third variable, (*Female*), captures whether the state legislative candidate is a woman (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).

Another set of control variables relate to other characteristics of news outlets and that of their target audiences. First, (*Circulation*) is drawn from the 2012 ASNE Newsroom Census data to capture whether a newspaper has a circulation of 10,000 and over (0 = *circulation less than 10K* and 1 = *circulation bigger than 10K*), which is measured at the news organization level. For all newspapers included in this study, a circulation of 10K is the median, thus we chose it as the cutoff.<sup>2</sup> The second control variable, (*%Male reporter*), captures the percentage of men reporters in the newsroom, which is also drawn from the 2012 ASNE Newsroom Census data and measured at the news organization level. The other variable, (*%Male audiences*), captures the percentage of male adults in each state legislative district’s voting-age population and is measured at the state legislative district level.

As several studies suggest, the race of editors and media owners can also affect race-related issue coverage. These factors were not controlled in this study, however, due to the intensive search for hundreds of newspapers; also, there are few data on the racial characteristics of news editors. Thus, the effect of minority editors will be examined in our other article utilizing different news coverage data.

Overall, our data set includes 5,670 news articles<sup>3</sup> for 1,414 state legislative candidates, which are drawn from 663 newspapers circulated in 14 states during the 2012 election cycle (September 1 to Election Day). Table 1 provides the measurement and descriptive statistics.

## Results

This study examines the influence of three variables—minority reporters, minority candidates, and minority audiences—on the news media’s likelihood of covering race-related issues, while controlling for the effect of candidates’ gender and incumbency status, the race of candidates’ opponent, the news media’s circulation size, and the number of male reporters and male audiences.<sup>4</sup>

### *Models and Analysis*

We begin with a baseline model to explore the influence of minority reporters on newspaper coverage of race-related issues (**RQ**). We then examine whether and how this relationship is moderated by the race of the candidate (**H1**) and the proportion of minority audiences (**H2**).<sup>5</sup> In addition, we explore whether there is a three-way interaction between minority reporter, minority candidate, and minority audiences (**H3**). Given the large number of zero values in our dependent variable, we employ both rare event logistic regression and conventional logistic regression models to predict the news coverage of minority-related issues. As both models provide very similar results, we report results from the conventional logistic regression models in this section.

The unit of analysis for our dependent variable is news article. As discussed above, our predictors are measured on multiple levels, including news organization level, candidate level, and state legislative district level. This use of nested data may pose problems of homoskedasticity and the associated estimates. Hence, we cluster all models by the combination of three nesting variables—news organization, legislative candidate, and state legislative district—to correct for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. Specifically, we utilize Stata’s `group ()` command to generate a cluster variable that is the combination of these three nested variables. Clustering on groups of news organization, candidate, and state legislative district is a restrictive way to correct for the dependence of error terms as it doesn’t account for serial correlation over time. However, as the observations for analysis in this study are drawn from the same time period (year), serial correlation is not necessarily a concern here. Also, it is because we attribute correlated error terms mostly to autocorrelation within different groups rather than to serial correlation. Despite that, we conducted multilevel logistic regression analysis with state, news organization, and candidate as the group

**Table 1.** Variables, Measurement, and Descriptive Statistics.

	Variables	Measurement and source	Level	Descriptive statistics
Dependent variable	Race-issue coverage	Article covers at least one race-related issue (0 = no and 1 = yes); Access World News	News article level	I = 6.14% O = 93.86%
Independent variable	%Minority reporters <sub>a</sub>	The proportion of minority journalists in each newspaper; drawn from the 2012 ASNE Newsroom Census data	Newspaper level	Range = 0-1 M = 0.43, SD = 0.45
Moderating variables	%Minority audiences <sub>a</sub>	The proportion of minority audiences (voting-age populations only) in each newspaper's circulating/target state legislative district	State legislative district level	Range = 0-0.96 M = 0.23, SD = 0.24
	White candidate	Whether candidate is White (0 = no; 1 = yes); coded expertly (see Online Supplement A)	Candidate level	I = 72.36% O = 27.64%
Control variables	Minority opponent	Whether candidate's opponent is minority (0 = no; 1 = yes); Candidate Emergence in the States	Candidate level	I = 8.56% O = 91.44%
	Incumbent	Incumbent candidate (0 = no; 1 = yes); Candidate Emergence Project		I = 50.14% O = 49.86%
	Female	Whether candidate is female (0 = no, 1 = yes); coded expertly (see Online Supplement A)		I = 18.27% O = 81.73%
	Circulation > 10K	Newspaper circulation greater than 10K (0 = no, 1 = yes). 2012 ASNE	Newspaper level	I = 37.11% O = 62.89%
	%Male reporters <sub>a</sub>	The proportion of men reporters in newsroom. 2012 ASNE Newsroom Census data		Range = 0.43-1 M = 0.61, SD = 0.20
	%Male audiences <sub>a</sub>	The proportion of male adults in each state legislative district's voting-age population	State legislative district level	Range = 0.44-0.57 M = 0.49, SD = 0.01

Note. All variables are dichotomous except for those with "a" subscript, which are continuous variables and are logged to curve for skewness. All descriptive statistics are drawn from models without interaction terms. ASNE = American Society of News Editors.

**Table 2.** Logit Models Predicting Coverage of Race-Related Issues ( $N = 2,102$ ).

	Baseline model (RQ)	Interaction Model 1 (H1)	Interaction Model 2 (H2)	Interaction Model 3 (H3)
Minority reporter percent <sub>a</sub>	-1.47 (0.95)	-1.13 (1.08)	-2.29 (1.01)*	-3.28 (1.20)
White candidate	0.02 (0.22)	0.14 (0.31)	0.03 (0.22)	-0.31 (0.39)
Minority audience percent <sub>a</sub>	0.59 (0.59)	0.60 (0.60)	-0.49 (0.75)	-1.28 (0.93)
Minority Reporter × White candidate	—	-0.44 (0.68)	—	1.34 (1.09)
Minority Reporter × Minority audience	—	—	4.00 (1.69)*	6.68 (2.28)**
White Candidate × Minority audience	—	—	—	1.42 (1.45)
Minority Reporter × White Candidate × Minority audience	—	—	—	-4.68 (3.53)
Incumbent	0.30 (0.18)	0.30 (0.18)	0.29 (0.18)	0.31 (0.19)
Female candidate	0.21 (0.22)	0.20 (0.22)	0.22 (0.22)	0.23 (0.22)
Minority opponent	0.35 (0.31)	0.34 (0.31)	0.33 (0.31)	0.31 (0.31)
Circulation > 10K	-0.64 (0.44)	-0.64 (0.44)	-0.63 (0.44)	-0.64 (0.44)
Male reporter percent <sub>a</sub>	-0.60 (0.80)	-0.58 (0.80)	-0.63 (0.79)	-0.65 (0.79)
Male audience percent <sub>a</sub>	9.76 (2.79)***	9.89 (2.81)***	10.70 (2.84)***	11.01 (2.89)***
Constant	4.17 (1.99)*	4.18 (1.98)*	5.02 (2.03)	5.46 (2.08)**
Wald $\chi^2$	24.73**	24.77**	29.07**	31.93**
Pseudo $R^2$	.02	.02	.03	.03

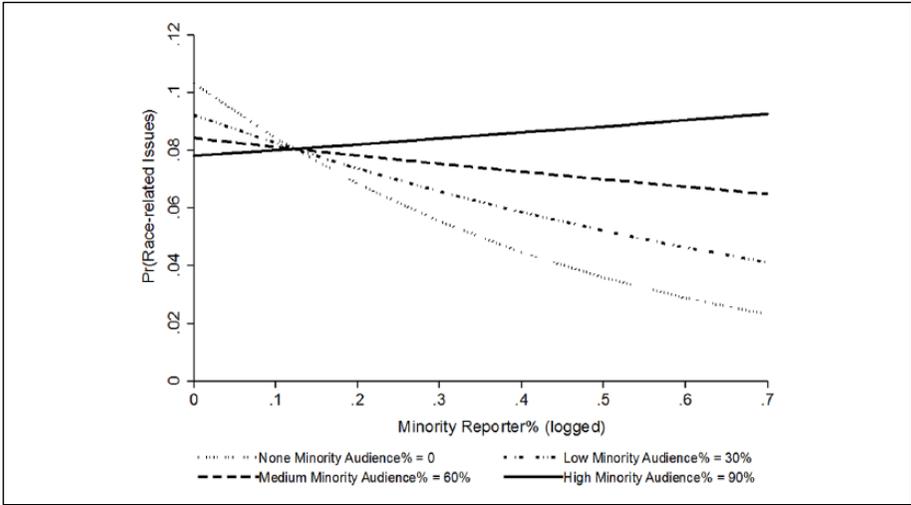
Note. All variables are dichotomous except for those with “a” subscript, which are continuous variables and were logged to curve for skewness. All models are clustered by group (newspaper, candidate, and state legislative district). Entries are coefficients with robust standard error in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  are drawn from two-tailed tests.

variables, which reveals largely the same results as these clustered models reported here. Thus, our results and findings are quite robust.

### Results and Findings

Recall that our research question (RQ) explores whether %newsroom minority explains news outlets’ likelihood of covering minority-related issues. As shown in the “Baseline Model” in Table 2, the coefficient on “minority reporter percent” is not statistically significant; thus, there is no evidence to support the argument that the percent of minority journalists in the newsroom predicts coverage of race-related issues. Nor did we find support for the two-way interaction effect between %minority journalists and minority candidates (H1) or the three-way interaction effect among minority journalists, candidates, and audiences (H3), as displayed in Table 2.



**Figure 1.** Predictive race-related issue coverage, by minority reporters (logged) and minority audience (logged).

Note. As shown in Table 1, the “Minority Audiences” variable ranges from 0% to 96%, with a mean of 23%. We display percentages 0%, 30%, 60%, and 90% to fully represent this range here.

However, there is a strong interaction effect between percent minority reporters and percent minority audiences (**H2**), as “Interaction Model 2” in Table 2 shows (Minority Reporter × Minority audience:  $b = 4.00, p < .05$ ). As Figure 1 illustrates, for newspapers with a small percentage of minority audiences (i.e., 30% and below), as the proportion of minority reporters in newsrooms becomes larger, the likelihood of covering race-related issues becomes smaller. For those with a medium percentage of minority audiences (i.e., 60%), such negative influence of minority reporters slightly weakens. And for newspapers with a large number of minority audiences (i.e., 90%),<sup>6</sup> as the percentage of minority reporters in newsrooms become larger, the likelihood of covering minority-related issues increases accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

These findings reflect a tension identified in extant research: the tension between racial and ethnic identity versus a journalistic professional identity (see Husband, 2005). Despite their ethnic background, minority journalists are constrained by their career objectives, which operate within the context of organizational structures and journalistic norms and routines (Husband, 2005; Nishikawa et al., 2009). Unless there is a specific reason to do so that is driven by the broader needs of the news organization, minority reporters may lack sufficient incentive to focus more on race-related issues. Moreover, reporting by minority journalists may reflect a concerted effort to avoid being pigeonholed into covering race-related issues (see Nishikawa et al., 2009). In an economically strained industry where general assignment reporters are more in demand, being viewed as a niche journalist may not be advisable for career mobility and advancement. That these are the underlying causes of the

negative relationship between minority reporter and race-related issues is supported by the fact that it disappears once minority audiences reach a critical mass, at which point it is suddenly beneficial to the news organization as a whole to cover race-related issues.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, while we hypothesized three conditional relationships (**H1**, **H2**, and **H3**), our analysis only revealed support for **H2**, such that minority journalists' coverage of race-related issues is more likely in areas with larger minority audiences. Together, these findings suggest that the race of candidates is not an influential factor in the news media's selection of race-related issues. The racial composition of the target audience, on the contrary, has a stronger influence, indicating that the news media's profit-oriented structure takes into account audience tastes—in this case, minority audiences—while deciding news content.

Though not a focus of this study, it is notable that minority candidates are not related to a larger likelihood of race-related issue coverage than White candidates. These findings suggest that news coverage of candidates at the state legislature level may not focus disproportionately on their race. One might also view this as a positive sign that minority candidates are not constrained to minority-related issues when covered by the news media. However, as it is unclear how affiliation to race-related issues may affect voters' recall of or attitude toward minority candidates, more research is needed to explore the implications of this finding.

Notably, a variable we include as a control (*%Male audience*;  $b = 9.76, p < .001$ ; see "Baseline Model" in Table 2) drives much of our findings. In the context of a study about election coverage and diversity among candidates, newsrooms, and audiences, this may seem counterintuitive. In the context of the broader literature on the economics of news, however, it is not. In his seminal study on the economics of news, Hamilton (2004) finds the percentage of men consuming political news online beats the percentage of women by an average of 11 points across age groups. Men consistently prefer harder news than women, and news outlets are aware that the heaviest consumers of political news are older White males. The topics and framing of political news coverage often reflect the preferences and tastes of this demographic as a result. For example, the local demand for hard news drives more local newspaper coverage of poverty, Medicaid, campaign finance reform, AIDS, HIV, and the environmental protection agency (Hamilton, 2004).

## Discussion and Conclusion

We find ourselves as a nation spending more time talking about race, ethnicity, immigration, and culture, often within a political context. This is reflected in the news we see. In this project, we examine three factors behind campaign news coverage, including newsroom diversity, minority candidate, and minority audiences.

We did not find any evidence that newsroom diversity drives campaign coverage of race-related issues (**RQ**). Like other work, this highlights the competing values journalists face. Although a diverse newsroom is expected to influence the coverage volume of race-related and racialized issues (Gross, Craft, Cameron, & Antecol,

2002; Pease, Smith, & Subervi, 2001), we find no difference between coverage from news media with more or fewer minority journalists in the newsroom. This is consistent with previous studies that find minority journalists often avoid championing for their communities (Nishikawa et al., 2009) such that minority journalists in newsrooms do not necessarily increase or decrease coverage of race-related issues (Ankney & Procopio, 2003).

The race of candidates does not appear to be an influential moderator when examining the relationship between newsroom diversity and race-related issue coverage (**H1**), nor did the presence of a minority candidate drive campaign coverage of race-related issues (see Baseline Model, Table 2). Although news production is often a process where political actors may exert an influence on news media (e.g., Petrova, 2011), it is apparently not the case here.

Perhaps more important is that the presence of a large minority audience is related to the impact of minority journalists on coverage of race-related issues (**H2**). The presence of minority journalists in newsrooms increases the coverage of race-related issues *if* they are in a market context characterized by a large proportion of minority audiences (i.e., 90%, see Figure 1). The implication of this is that pressure for race-related reporting is a blend of both reporters' racial and ethnic identities and the economically driven norms and routines of journalism, where the selection of news stories is made largely with presumed preferences of audiences in mind. Although minority journalists may avoid confining themselves to the coverage of minority-related issues, they are expected to cover topics that appeal to the audiences' tastes to boost profit margins. This can translate into increased coverage of race-related issues in contexts with high proportions of minority audiences. As a growing body of work on influences on news content has clearly shown, perceptions of market audience preferences largely informed by demographic or political traits shape newsroom behavior and news content in meaningful ways (Coffey, 2013; Hamilton, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Campaign news is certainly no exception (Dunaway, 2008; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004).

Our study yields fascinating variability based on the size of minority audiences. As displayed in Figure 1, in areas with no or low presence of minority audiences (i.e., 30% and below), an increase in the number of minority reporters decreases the media's coverage of race-related issues. This may reflect minority journalists' tendency toward mainstream patterns of coverage commonly designed to appeal to majority White audiences and no particular incentive to cover race-related or racialized issues. This too, is consistent with the economic theories of news making (Hamilton, 2004). The negative effect of %minority reporters greatly reduces as the portion of minority audience increases from 30% to 60% (see Figure 1), reflecting an overriding need to be responsiveness to audiences.

A few caveats are in order. As this article examines legislative races, our findings are applicable to media coverage of campaigns but may not apply to news coverage in general. Second, our models include a limited number of factors—namely, the racial composition of the audience, the race of the candidate, and newsroom diversity—from among the myriad factors that affect news production. A news organization that has a

history of diversity training initiatives might function differently from one that does not. Similarly, our data do not account for the fact that minority reporters are themselves trained and constrained by existing organizational and institutional structures, some of which may contain and reinforce historical patterns of racism, which may affect their reporting process and willingness and ability to affect change. In addition, our models inform more about correlations between these three factors than causation. Though we can theorize regarding causal ordering, our method does not allow an explicit demonstration of it. In other words, though we find that the race of the reporter, the race of the candidate, newsroom diversity, and audience composition are *related* to the coverage of race-related issues, we cannot demonstrate that these factors *cause* the media to focus more on racial issues in legislative elections. Last but not least, despite many advantages regarding the dictionary-based automatic coding technique, that is, high efficiency and reliability (e.g., Lewis, Zamith, & Hermida, 2013; Young & Soroka, 2012), one critical limitation is the precision in identifying “relevant” content (Lacy et al., 2015). Specifically, this precision criterion measures whether an article really deals with a given issue rather than simply passing the mention of a word (e.g., crime). Although our human check of sampled articles revealed reasonable validity of automatic coding (see Online Supplement C), this did not completely erase the potential for error. To address remaining concerns, we took the additional step of subjecting our entire sample (5,670 articles) to an additional round of human coding, which we used to exclude articles that were (a) not about the legislative candidates in our sample, (b) not about the election, or (c) duplicates. After removing these articles, we replicated our models and our results—both the statistical significance and expected directions—remained largely unchanged (see Online Supplement D).

Despite limitations, our study offers several contributions. First, our results support the robustness of economic theories of news and the emerging body of research demonstrating the power of audiences to influence news content (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Hamilton, 2004; Iyengar et al., 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In a world of fragmenting media and the increasing pressure to target content in narrow ways, our study draws attention to another venue of content that can be shaped by audience demographics—and in moments in which the stakes may be high as minority candidates run for office. Our study also advances theory by expanding beyond common applications of economic theories of news and market-based explanations of content to scenarios that are of interest to scholars in two other important areas of work: (a) research investigating campaign news coverage of minority candidates and the races in which they run and (b) research investigating whether and how racial and ethnic diversity in the newsroom influences coverage of minority group members and the political and social issues that affect them. To our knowledge, our study is among the first to use original data on candidate, newsroom, and audience demographics to try and understand how these operate in tandem to influence race-related issue coverage in campaign news.

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## Notes

1. The “expert coding” of race, ethnicity, and gender of candidates was conducted by two individuals, and 100% of the sample was double-coded and cross-checked for intercoder reliability. We found coder agreement on 98% of the cases and report a kappa coefficient  $k = .90$ .
2. We also ran models using the full-range categorical media circulation variable (1 = *less than 5K*, 2 = *5-10K*, 3 = *10-25K*, 4 = *25-50K*, 5 = *more than 50K*) and our substantive results remained unchanged. These additional models and results are located in Online Supplement D.
3. Notably, while Access World News offers web edition articles and articles from blogs, these online news stories are excluded for analysis. This is primarily because online media often reprint news articles published by the other news outlets, which cannot represent the preference of their newsrooms. In addition, including web-based articles potentially biases our sample given that Newsbank does not appear to archive the web-based articles for all newspapers in their database. Thus these 5,670 news articles here are only from print newspapers.
4. While we focused our analysis on the general minority population, we also examined the same hypotheses among each specific ethnic group, that is, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, respectively. As these race-specific models revealed no statistically significant results, we didn’t report them here.
5. Given the concern that communities with high-minority populations might also have more minority journalists, we checked for the correlation between the percentage of minority journalists and that of minority population ( $r = -.01$ ), which suggests a very weak relationship.
6. As shown in Table 1, the “%Minority Audiences” variable ranges from 0 to 0.96, with a mean of 0.23. We take four appropriate percentages 0%, 30%, 60%, and 90% to fully represent this range.
7. To validate the robustness of our findings, we conducted more conservative analyses by excluding irrelevant cases and our results remained unchanged. See Online Supplement C & Online Supplement D.
8. Another possibility—one we think less likely given the conditional effect of minority audience size—is that the negative relationship between minority reporter and coverage of race-related issues is driven by a bias in our dictionary toward *stereotypically defined* race-related issues. If news media have historically associated race with a particular set of issues based on racial stereotypes, minority journalists may choose to purposively avoid focus on these policy arenas. Again, we think this possibility is somewhat ruled out by the conditional effect of minority audience size.

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