



Contact: Katie Steiner, Communication Associate, Engaging News Project
(512) 475-7074, katie.steiner@austin.utexas.edu

STRATEGY-RELATED LOCAL ELECTION COVERAGE RECEIVES MORE PAGE VIEWS, BUT AUDIENCES SPEND MORE TIME WITH ISSUE-FOCUSED STORIES

When it comes to news coverage of local elections, coverage of campaign strategy receives more page views than news stories without it. Audiences, however, spend more time on pages of issue-focused stories than those not mentioning any issues, according to a new report from the Engaging News Project and the American Press Institute.

The Engaging News Project partnered with the [American Press Institute](#) to examine local news coverage of the 2016 primaries by eight newspapers across six states. We analyzed the campaign coverage characteristics included in articles about local, state, and federal contests and compared it to traffic data from API's analytics tool [Metrics for News](#). This project was funded by a grant from the Democracy Fund.

When looking at the two basic types of election reporting – “voter guide” stories that examine candidates’ issue positions and values, and “strategy” stories that analyze campaign tactics and who’s ahead in the race – we found that as the number of strategy components increased in a story, so too did the page views for that story.

Although the number of page views was higher for strategy stories, the average time on page was higher for voter guide stories. We found that articles that mentioned more issues received greater time on page with readers.

Other findings include:

- The number of issues mentioned in news articles declined as the primary election approached, a potential challenge for informing voters who may not pay attention until the late moments of a campaign.
- Readers spent more time on stories focused on state and local campaigns (i.e. governor, city council) than they did with stories on federal races (U.S. Senate and House).
- Articles with clickbait-style headlines that withhold information seemed to backfire, getting fewer page views than articles with traditional headlines.

“Our results show that while campaign-related content does get more clicks, readers spend more time with issue-focused content,” said Dr. Joshua Scacco, faculty research associate with the Engaging News Project and an assistant professor at Purdue University. “As we head into the final month of the

election, I hope that our findings will influence the way news outlets cover local elections, and that they will be encouraged to publish more articles that focus on the issues.”

“Decisions about how to cover campaigns are often based on habits or personal instincts. But we can all learn from hard data about how readers actually engage with this important work,” said Jeff Sonderman, deputy director of the American Press Institute. “It’s clear in this study that readers are intrigued by the inside tactics of campaigning, but they also soak up the substantive issue coverage that journalism should aspire to. We think journalists should make room for both, and think about the different audiences for each type of coverage.”

The Engaging News Project provides research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at engagingnewsproject.org

The American Press Institute conducts research, training, convenes thought leaders and creates tools to help chart a path ahead for journalism in the 21st century. Learn more at americanpressinstitute.org