

5-2022

Without Local Newspapers, Can We Save Our Democracy? An Analysis of Political Culture, Voter Turnout, and Civic Engagement

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2022.POL.ST.02>

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Reinhard, Julia, "Without Local Newspapers, Can We Save Our Democracy? An Analysis of Political Culture, Voter Turnout, and Civic Engagement" (2022). *Political Science & International Studies | Senior Theses*. 9.
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2022.POL.ST.02>

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**Without Local Newspapers, Can We Save Our Democracy?
An Analysis of Political Culture, Voter Turnout, and Civic Engagement**

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts
In Political Science

Department of Political Science & International Studies
Dominican University of California
May 5, 2022

Abstract

Since the 1830s, newspapers have been accessible to all members of the public in the United States regardless of socio-economic status. Newspapers are important political information providers. Local journalists provide invaluable expertise for the community they serve about community-level problems, local elections, and help hold government accountable. If news organizations cannot afford to sustain a local newspaper and its staff, the result is a news desert for the community. While recent research has examined the decline of local newspapers, little has been done on how the decline of local newspapers affects civic engagement and voter turnout across the United States. To what extent do local newspapers contribute to civic engagement? Using Daniel Elazar's (1966) typology of a state's political culture, this thesis hypothesizes that moralistic states have fewer news deserts, higher voter turnout, and higher civic engagement than individualistic and traditionalistic states. This thesis did not find a clear distinction of moralistic states being the highest in voter turnout, in civic engagement, and lower in news desert concentration, but it appears that moralistic states have higher voter turnout in the 2014 midterm election across the board and have news deserts growing at the slowest rate compared to the individualistic and traditionalistic typologies. The health of our democratic republic requires civic engagement, and people need access to quality information to participate and cast their ballots.

Table of Contents

I.	<i>Introduction</i>	1
II.	<i>Background</i>	3
III.	<i>Literature Review</i>	9
IV.	<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	15
V.	<i>Methodology and Data Collection</i>	19
VI.	<i>Findings and Analysis</i>	22
A.	<i>Prevalence of News Deserts Nationwide</i>	22
B.	<i>Voter Turnout Change Pre-News Deserts (2002) and Post News-Deserts (2006)</i>	23
C.	<i>Voter Turnout Nationwide by Typology</i>	25
D.	<i>Civic Engagement</i>	28
E.	<i>Evaluating Both Voter Turnout and Civic Engagement</i>	35
VI.	<i>Conclusion</i>	38
	<i>Bibliography</i>	44
	<i>Appendix</i>	48

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many folks at Dominican University of California who have inspired, supported, and taught me a great deal during my time at Dominican. I especially thank Alison Howard for her unwavering guidance. From my freshman year to the culmination of this thesis, Alison has been an invaluable mentor; on this research specifically, Alison dedicated countless time to give me feedback and I am indebted to her commitment as my thesis advisor. I also want to extend my thanks to my peers Christina Pathoumthong and Allison Kustic for their encouragement. Christina was a sounding board for me throughout the writing process, and Allison thoughtfully passed along any news articles she came across that were relevant to my research in addition to checking in on my progress. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents whose financial support enabled me to attend Dominican.

I. Introduction

“Editors of Kansas City’s Northeast News opted for an unusual choice for the front page of Wednesday’s issue: They left it blank. It was not a printing error, [. . .] the six-member staff kept its front page empty, a warning sign to the community about what might come if it ceased publication.¹”

The decline of local newspapers is not a new phenomenon given the arduous economy of the news industry; however, financial hardships have been augmented by the digital age and the rise of social media platforms as news providers and as an advertising market. Kansas City’s *Northeast News* is one of myriads of local newspapers struggling to generate enough revenue to keep its paper in publication to continue to serve the local community’s information needs. Since the 1830s with the advent of the penny press, newspapers have been accessible to all members of the public in the United States regardless of socio-economic status.² With the invention of the Internet, the economy of the news media industry was forever changed, and local newspapers have been the most adversely affected. The Internet enabled new media platforms to develop and in turn collapsed the primary source of funding that local newspapers have depended on for decades—ad revenue.³ As a result, local newspapers have been struggling to sustain themselves, many shuttering all together and leaving their community a news desert.⁴

Newspapers are important political information providers; they supply information to the public on a myriad of issues such as governmental oversight, community-level problems, and

¹Meryl Kornfield, "Kansas City Newspaper Sends a Warning with a Blank Front Page," *Washington Post*, 25 March 2021 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2021/03/25/blank-front-page-local-newspaper/>.

²Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (New York: Longman, 2017), 207-208.

³Travis N., Ridout, *New Directions in Media and Politics* (Taylor & Francis, 2019), 80-94.

⁴If a news organization cannot afford to sustain a local newspaper and its staff and leave a county without a newspaper in the region.

coverage of local elections.⁵ Additionally, local journalists provide invaluable local expertise and are considered more trustworthy by much of the public over national newspapers. This highlights their value in our democracy while the media has largely become a polarizing subject, and news organizations tend to have niche audiences that are choosing news sources that are likely to reinforce political beliefs that individuals already believe.⁶

There is consensus that quality information is needed to equip voters to make decisions, hold officials accountable, and participate in civic life, and that the media plays a role in informing the public about political and social events. There is some disagreement about how important the media's role is in educating the electorate about how they can participate, but there is agreement overall that public participation is essential to the health of our democratic republic. Political consequences of not having local newspapers includes not having sufficient oversight of local government officials, and limits citizens access to their elected officials' actions.

This paper aims to evaluate how residents' (of various U.S. states) access to a local newspaper impacts their levels of voter turnout and civic engagement: *to what extent do local newspapers contribute to civic engagement?* Using Daniel Elazar's (1966) typology of a state's political culture this thesis hypothesizes that: (1) populations within a news desert are less civically engaged than populations who do not live in a news desert; (2) populations within a news desert have lower voter turnout than populations who do not live in a news desert.

First, background information about the news landscape and the media and democracy will be outlined. Second, the literature review will be presented regarding the role local

⁵Philip M. Napoli, Sarah Stonbely, Kathleen McCollough, and Bryce Renninger, "Local Journalism and the Information Needs of Local Communities," *Journalism Practice*, 4, 2016, 373-395, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2016.1146625

⁶WNYC Studios, "R.I.P. The Local Rag," *No News is Bad News*, 8 May 2020, <https://www.wncstudios.org/podcasts/otm/episodes/local-news-on-the-media>.

newspapers play in democracy and the phenomenon of news-deserts. Third, Elazar's theory of state political culture will be described and implemented as the theoretical framework. Fourth, the methodology for survey data collection will be explained for state level voter turnout and civic engagement of three states per political culture typology (with varying numbers of news-deserts across the selected states). Lastly, the findings and analysis will be discussed and areas for future research will be suggested.

II. Background

The penny press had a tremendous influence on Jacksonian democracy and the expansion of US into the West-- information gap closed across the country.⁷ Overtime, what used to be very partisan print news from the Hamilton versus Jeffersonian era, evolved to fit a market for news that had a larger audience that wanted more objective journalism. This shift from 19th century press was supported by political parties to the early 20th century model based on ad sales. Furthermore, as the country grew and migration westward increased, mass audiences for news and new tech to help with distribution also increased.⁸

The Associated Press (*AP*) was founded in 1846, and this led to a traditional form of documentary report, story form, and adversarial reporting. There was competition between tabloids and highbrow press at the turn of 20th century, but by the 1920s the U.S. had more educated people dominating the affluent middle class which led to decreased tabloid readership. Today, *AP* is the dominate wire service that the news media depends on in addition to *Reuters*.⁹

The next main shift in the news industry came post World War I with the rise of public relations, there was the development of an objective journalism code to serve the public to

⁷Darrell M. West, *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment*, (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), 14-17.

⁸Darrell M. West, *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment*, 26-27.

⁹Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 158-159.

maintain democracy. This objectivity standard has been questioned ever since its creation, but overall print news sources have held themselves to this standard. This shift led to the defining of legacy media as print news, today we consider print news to be traditionally printed sources (newspapers for example, are print sources even if published online as well).

Print news drives all other news coverage (including television (TV) and radio), and this is important on the local scale, not just nationally. Print news is defined as sources that have historically been physically distributed via printing and mass distribution: newspapers. Without strong print sources, TV and radio have less to pull from when creating their own content for their audiences. Legacy media will not disappear entirely, but its dominance of the system is being tested by the digital age. Most serious news in the digital world is from legacy news organizations who need the ad content/market that is on digital platforms.¹⁰ For example, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* are three legacy media national newspapers that have transitioned from solely print publications to being published online as well. The local news industry is now desperate for any ad revenue it can generate online with the declining popularity of buying ads in the local paper.

The media business has changed dramatically with the invention of the Internet, smaller web-based groups are filling in investigative journalism gap that legacy media has struggled to fill.¹¹ The legacy media has trouble competing with digital natives because digital news platforms have experience with creating buzz-driven content and producing visually pleasing and accessible content. Digital platforms also having better odds of keeping up with the constant news cycle than legacy media that must follow certain professional standards¹²

¹⁰Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 184-188.

¹¹Lance W., Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 148-152.

¹²Travis N., Ridout, *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 293-308.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in further challenges for local news organizations. Many local newspapers could no longer afford to retain all their journalists and the rate of subscribers decreased during this period because of how COVID-19 affected the economy. Therefore, the role of local reporters to maintain oversight was largely lacking during the height of COVID-19 in 2020, and this was damaging for communities that needed to feel connected despite being physically distanced for safety.¹³

Why have newspapers not maintained their value nationwide as an essential part of our democracy? As the news industry has struggled economically, the amount of serious political information that is being published has gone down while misinformation has skyrocketed. Profit maximization is the number one priority, particularly with non-independent news organizations. As a result, journalism has become tainted in the eyes of some as not being objective information providers which is an unfortunate categorization that some make of an entire industry. Most journalists believe that they are providing a paramount service to the public through their work.¹⁴ To complicate matters, the government does not hold organizations accountable for failing to meet public service standards of journalism. Disinformation is rampant online, and Congress wrestles with how much they can or should regulate Big Tech and hyper-partisan groups to protect credible local news organizations as the public goods that are a means of public service to the electorate.¹⁵

The deregulation outcomes from *The Telecommunications Act of 1996* led to significantly less local competition and mainly a few corporate giants controlling the market. Community

¹³ Mark, Glaser, "Local News 2021: How Newsrooms Can Rebound Post-Pandemic," *Local News 2021: How Newsrooms Can Rebound Post-Pandemic*, Knight Foundation, 15 Mar. 2021, <https://knightfoundation.org/articles/local-news-2021-how-newsrooms-can-rebound-post-pandemic/>.

¹⁴ Philip M. Napoli, Sarah Stonbely, Kathleen McCollough & Bryce Renninger, "Local Journalism and the Information Needs of Local Communities," *Journalism Practice*, 4, 2016, 373-395, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2016.1146625.

¹⁵ Travis N. Ridout, *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 87-94.

service standards have largely disappeared, conglomerates now enter communities with the aim of closing local programming (radio for example)—potential costs to public interest are not considered.¹⁶ This rise of local news media conglomerates threatens the ability of local outlets to drive their content; conglomerates can dictate top-down agendas that may inhibit coverage of local issues. Research has examined that a diverse collection of local newspapers controlled by various people and associations prevents conglomerates from gaining control over an essential political platform.

According to Alexis de Tocqueville, “[e]ach individual American newspaper has little power, but after the people, the press is nonetheless the first of powers.”¹⁷ This excerpt elucidates the power local newspapers have in our political system, and their role of informing the public and maintain oversight of government are two primary functions that are just as crucial today as they were during Tocqueville’s time. Another danger of dying local news organizations is the vacuum they often leave behind for hyper-partisan organizations to swoop in and fill the void which furthers misinformation and polarization. Fake local news sites funded by hyper-partisan groups that spread misinformation are rampant in our extremely partisan political climate.¹⁸

While misinformation is inevitable to some degree with the freedom that the Internet provides, misinformation giants posing as local news organizations undermine the credibility of local news organizations overall. These fake local news sites should be a growing cause of concern for Congress and the public as the country must confront assaults to our democracy and the legitimate news media.

¹⁶Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 191-194.

¹⁷Thomas David Bunting, “A Bible, an Ax, and a Tablet: Tocqueville’s Newspapers and Everyday Political Discourse,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 46 (4): 2017, 259. doi:10.1080/10457097.2016.1190600.

¹⁸Charles A. Johnson, “Political Culture in American States: Elazar’s Formulation Examined,” *American Journal of Political Science* 20, no. 3 (1976): 491-509, doi:10.2307/2110685.

Unequal rates of access to the Internet due to socioeconomic differences remains a barrier despite strides made during the COVID-19 pandemic to increase broadband access. For those who do not have access to the Internet but do pay for cable, TV news helps to inform individuals who lack regular Internet to browse online versions of print newspapers. But tuning in to TV news is not as comprehensive as reading the news. Therefore, this Internet gap leads to a knowledge gap which in turn results in a voting gap.

On the other hand, individuals who can afford to pay for local news often choose not to—and are therefore benefiting from access to local news without paying their share despite having the means. Journalism has historically been a for-profit business apart from some news organizations that are now recognized non-profits. Financial support for traditional news is key to keep local news organizations afloat. In 2019 the Pew Research Center found that nationally, revenue measured at: 69% from ads, 24% from audience, 7% from other, 1% from philanthropy. Additionally, only 30% of people who are 65 and older paid for local news in 2017. Around 16% of adults between the ages of 50-64 paid, and both ages 30-49 and ages 18-29 had percentages less than 10%.¹⁹

These statistics are discouraging, consumers need to step up and pay more for their news to change this balance—especially for local news. But without tax incentives and the economic challenges of living through the pandemic now in 2022, extra expenses from Americans for news subscriptions is a difficult ask for most. Overall, legacy media is not going away, but it needs to be supported somewhat by subscriptions. Journalists often must get stories approved by the editor and conflicts of interest can arise if their outlet is struggling.²⁰ An editor may prioritize

¹⁹ Mason, Walker, “Who Pays for Local News in the U.S.?” *Pew Research Center*, 12 Sept. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/12/who-pays-for-local-news-in-the-u-s/.

²⁰ Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 56.

profits over the story request because *who* is running ads and providing donations may be keeping their doors open. Potentially unfavorable coverage related to those financial backers is risky when a local paper does not have a high subscription base to fall back on, and they must pay their staff at the end of the day. Given this myriad of challenges, the local news industry needs federal assistance from the perspective of various stakeholders.

The reality that the local news industry is in trouble has been brought to the forefront of policymakers' minds with the shuttling of local newspapers across the country. Since 2005, approximately 2,200 local newspapers have closed, and the number of journalists dropped by more than half between 2008 and 2020.²¹ Journalists across the country have put pressure on Congress in addition to small local newspapers, and national newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, will often cover when local newspapers must shut down in addition to popular regional newspapers like *The Los Angeles Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*. The gravity of this issue has remained in the spotlight because the national journalist community, many of whom got their start working for local newspapers, are continuing to bring visibility to the struggling local news industry.

Interest groups, think tanks, and journalistic unions are stakeholders that have been pushing this issue to the forefront as well. The Knight Foundation has been the primary organization on gathering data and authoring reports on the challenges local news organizations are facing; their research is consistently cited by academics and journalists who are writing about the dangers of the collapsing industry. The Rebuild Local News Coalition is another interest

²¹Richard, Just, Whitney, Joiner, and Alexa, McMahon, "Local News Deserts Are Expanding: Here's What We'll Lose," *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 30 Nov. 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/interactive/2021/local-news-deserts-expanding/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most&carta-url=https%3A%2F%2Fs2.washingtonpost.com%2Fcar-ln-tr%2F35674e0%2F61a65ab29d2fdab56baa5352%2F596a4df1ae7e8a0ef33cd24f%2F10%2F73%2F61a65ab29d2fdab56baa5352.

group that is fighting to bring about solutions to the problems the local news industry faces. The coalition advocates for “locally-grounded and nonprofit community journalism [,]” and represents over 3,000 newsrooms nationwide.²² Another prominent group is the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the largest organization of journalists in the world. They represent “600,000 media professionals from 187 trade unions and associations in more than 140 countries.”²³ The IFJ is a key stakeholder given the number of journalists they represent and their advocacy for journalists’ rights.

Arguably the biggest stakeholder involved is the American public itself. When surveyed, the majority of Americans say they trust their local news organizations, but many do not realize that their local news organizations are likely facing immense financial burdens.²⁴ Additionally, for many Americans, the idea of paying for a subscription to their local newspapers is an expense that can be hard to justify with other expenses and the fact that can find *some* information elsewhere in the digital age. If the American public can force Congress to further examine the financial crisis of the local news industry, Americans across the country will gain more insight into the working of their local government and in turn be able to hold government officials at all levels accountable—which is essential for the health of our democratic institutions. The financial viability of local newspapers across the United States is not only an economic problem, but also a social/political problem that negatively impacts democratic society.

III. Literature Review

It is widely agreed upon amongst scholars that the local news industry is in peril, but there is debate about whether this declining industry is directly impacting voter turnout and civic

²²“About,” *Rebuild Local News*, <https://www.rebuildlocalnews.org/>.

²³“About IFJ,” *IFJ*, International Journalism Federation, <https://www.ifj.org/who/about-ifj.html>.

²⁴Mark Glaser, “Local News 2021: How Newsrooms Can Rebound Post-Pandemic.”

engagement. There is scholarly expertise on this issue from both political scientists and communication and media scholars. The political science school of thought has largely strived to evaluate whether local newspapers increase turnout and political accountability, if the number of local newspapers in an area correlate to turnout, and if local news coverage has an impact on civic engagement. The communication and media scholars have tended to focus on the quality of news being produced by local news organizations and the decline of professional journalists and the effects of these factors. Both schools of thought have merit, and some scholars have incorporated aspects of both fields into their research. For the purposes of this paper, the political science approach to determine if declining local news organizations causes lower turnout and civic engagement will be utilized.

Tocqueville asserts that “[t]he free press was not just for elites; it was a weapon for everyone in a democratic society. Anyone could make grievances publicly, rather than, say, through connections one might have in the government. The newspaper was a powerful political platform because all levels of society could read it.”²⁵ Putnam argues that the social fabric of the United States has been declining since 1950, Americans are largely “bowling alone” since 1980 and the odds of our democracy’s ability to solve the challenges we face is lower as result. The phenomenon that access to media, particularly local newspapers, strengthens social capital and in turn our democracy is a school of thought that many political scholars have continued to study since Putnam’s 1995 essay and subsequent book.²⁶ The above scholars all form their arguments centered around the notion that democracy is dependent on engaged citizens and diligent journalistic efforts to inform the electorate. However, Graber (2003) argues that democracy can

²⁵Thomas David, Bunting, “A Bible, an Ax, and a Tablet: Tocqueville’s Newspapers and Everyday Political Discourse,” 259.

²⁶Robert D., Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, 66-67.

persist despite citizens and media that fall short of expected performance and suggests that political culture may be more important than citizen wisdom and media excellence²⁷.

Several key studies find that local newspapers' coverage of issues does affect voter turnout. Rubado and Jennings (2020) find that cities and towns with shrinking newsrooms had "significantly reduced political competition in mayoral races and lower voter turnout."²⁸ With the absence of a local newspaper, an eligible voter was unlikely to be aware of a mayoral race and the positions of various candidates. Beyond negatively affecting local mayoral races, voter turnout and voter education is down across the board when local news coverage is suppressed because of financial strain. Hayes and Lawless (2015) find through a content analysis of newspaper coverage in every US House district during the 2010 midterms, and then an evaluation of survey data from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, that voters who were privy to less local newspaper coverage are less likely to be able to express opinions about House candidates in their district and less likely to cast vote in these races.²⁹ Additionally, Moskowitz (2020) demonstrates that local news coverage may reduce the likelihood of a voter casting a straight-ticket ballot based on party cues through their research. This is significant because an informed voter is an individual who does not have to depend on party identification as their sole reason for voting for a certain candidate.³⁰ Voters should have access to quality information from their local newspaper at the very least to be able to inform their own opinion

²⁷ Doris, Graber. 2003, "The Media and Democracy: Beyond Myths and Stereotypes." *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (1): 139-160. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.6.121901.085707.

²⁸ Meghan E., Rubado, and Jay T., Jennings, "Political Consequences of the Endangered Local Watchdog: Newspaper Decline and Mayoral Elections in the United States," *Urban Affairs Review* 56 (5): 2020, 1352. doi:10.1177/1078087419838058.

²⁹ Danny, Hayes, and Jennifer L., Lawless, "As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 447-62, April 2015, doi:10.1086/679749.

³⁰ Daniel J. Moskowitz, "Local News, Information, and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections," *American Political Science Review*, Volume 115, Issue 1. 114–129. doi:10.1017/S0003055420000829.

about various political candidates to vote. McCollough, Crowell, and Napoli (2016) found that local journalists are unique political information providers. Local journalists supply information to the public issues such as governmental accountability, community-level issues, and local elections; online delivery of local newspaper content did not inhibit the quality of information delivered. Digital access enabled higher readership in some communities.³¹

Karlsson and Rowe (2019) found that the lack of an editorial office should be considered as a reflection of decreased news value given that an editorial office serves as a symbol of local news presence. Additionally, the absence of an editorial office appears to have detrimental effects on media organizations as well as the citizenry that they serve-journalistic coverage and expertise is diminished. Lastly, with limited resources and declining presence of editorial offices, community news stories are especially lower in coverage and hyperlocal media struggles to fill the gap with their further limited resources and often lack of formal journalistic training. Although this research mapped Swedish municipalities, Karlsson and Rowe's (2019) findings are important because they reveal how the decline of local news coverage is a looming problem in other countries, not just in the U.S. In the introduction of the article, they mention how the decline of local newspapers and staff lay-offs are often reported in the Western world in negative stories, but that academia has often overlooked the importance of local news perspective and its effects on how democracy functions (including oversight of local politicians in particular).³²

Additionally, higher civic engagement levels are tied to local newspaper access in hyperlocal analyses. Shafer (2014) uses data from the 2008 and 2009 November supplements of

³¹Kathleen, McCollough, Jessica K., Crowell, and Phillip, M. Napoli, "Portrait of the Online Local News Audience," *Digital Journalism*, 5:1, 2016, 100-118, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2016.1152160.

³²Michael, Karlsson, and Erika Hellekant, Rowe, "Local Journalism When the Journalists Leave Town: Probing the News Gap That Hyperlocal Media Are Supposed to Fill," *NORDICOM Review* 40 (January 2019): 15-29. doi:10.2478/nor-2019-0025.

the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the United States Census Bureau, to examine the civic engagement of citizens in Denver and Seattle. The research provides a comparison of the year-over-year change in the civic engagement of citizens in cities that lost a newspaper in the intervening year as well as cities that did not lose a newspaper over the same period; the loss in civic engagement in Denver and Seattle was larger than the national trend.

Most of the literature surrounding local news' effects on political participation is centered around legacy media. However, television (TV) is another medium of local news that is explored in the literature. Print news coverage drives TV news, and at the local level, access to the local TV news may increase the likelihood of political participation in the community. For instance, Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel (2009) found that Hispanic voter turnout increased by five to ten percentage points, relative to non-Hispanic turnout, in media markets where Spanish-language local TV news became available; this is particularly relevant given the U.S.'s increasing Hispanic population.³³ Lastly, Althaus and Trautman (2008) examined if local TV markets appeared to affect voter turnout. In their analysis of election cycles between 1968 through 1990, they found that the increased size of a local TV market was associated with lower turnout (especially in midterm election years). This finding is rooted in the assumption that individuals in a larger local TV market will gain less knowledge about lower-ticket races than individuals living in an area with a smaller market.³⁴

Additionally, digital access to local news made available with the Internet is an area of the literature that requires more study. Napoli et. al (2017) studied local news coverage in

³³Felix, Oberholzer-Gee, and Joel, Waldfogel, "Media Markets and Localism: Does Local News en Español Boost Hispanic Voter Turnout?," *American Economic Review*, 2009, 99(5):2120-28. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.99.5.2120>.

³⁴Scott, Althaus, and Todd C., Trautman, "The Impact of Television Market Size on Voter Turnout in American Elections," *American Politics Research*. 2008; 36(6):824-856.

Newark, New Brunswick, and Morristown. First, they garnered statistics and qualitative descriptions of the infrastructure of each area. Next, they outlined the overall levels of journalism activity across the three places regarding output and performance measuring eight variables (i.e., original web stories/10k people). They also analyzed social media output versus output with legacy platforms. They summarize their methodological approach as documenting the quantity of journalistic sources located within a community (their infrastructure), the quantity of news stories/social media posts produced by these sources, and finally, the extent to which these stories/social media posts meet basic “quality” indicators. Moreover, they have a thorough level of quantitative analysis that measured substantial differences between community infrastructure as well as the differences amongst the output from online local news platforms in the New Jersey communities that were examined.³⁵

Moreover, from Tocqueville’s time to the present day, scholars have mapped various connections between media and democracy. Local news media, particularly local newspapers, are widely considered to be providers of quality information that can aide the electorate in pursuing political engagement such as making informed voting decisions. With the declining local newspaper landscape, the propensity of local TV news and digital platforms are increasing. These non-print platforms are not inherently bad; in fact, they often increase access to information originally published in local print media. However, if a local newspaper perishes, local TV and digital organizations are left without a steady stream of local reporting to pick up; this points to the question: without local newspapers, can the public be equipped with enough information to be active participants in U.S. democracy? The existing literature on the decline of local newspapers and how this has impacted voter turnout and civic engagement has largely been

³⁵Philip M. Napoli, Sarah Stonbely, Kathleen McCollough & Bryce Renninger, “Local Journalism and the Information Needs of Local Communities,” 389.

conducted at very localized scales such as the findings from Shaker (2014) and Hayes and Lawless (2015) which provides essential, in-depth micro-level data. However, this narrow scope is simultaneously a weakness because the literature does not give enough attention to how the decline of local newspapers has impacted voter turnout and civic engagement across the United States—most methodological frameworks have centered on a few cities or isolated urban areas in most cases. This thesis attempts to fill that gap by examining this topic on a macro-level.

IV. Theoretical Framework

Decades of research has shown that participation—voting and other forms of civic engagement—are essential for our democratic republic to thrive. To participate, the electorate needs information. This thesis argues that local newspapers are invaluable credible sources of information for the public. Reading one’s local newspaper provides context for community issues, local elections,³⁶ and broader coverage of state affairs as well as national news coverage to some extent. While there are a multitude of options with the Internet to stay informed about political issues, more options does not translate to more readership of credible news sources³⁷; local newspapers are largely considered to be trusted resources and follow journalistic standards that ensure factual reporting. Additionally, local newspapers are uniquely positioned to provide access to political information that is tailored to the community they serve.

Expanding on Shaker’s conclusion that the absence of local newspapers in Denver and Seattle was a factor in lower voter turnout and civic engagement levels,³⁸ this paper investigates

³⁶Danny, Hayes, and Jennifer L., Lawless, “As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections,” 454.

³⁷“For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital But Still Want Strong Community Connection.” Local News. Pew Research Center. 26 March 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2019/03/26/nearly-as-many-americans-prefer-to-get-their-local-news-online-as-prefer-the-tv-set/>.

³⁸Lee Shaker, “Dead Newspapers and Citizens' Civic Engagement,” 146.

the effects of news deserts and non-news deserts on voter turnout and civic engagement within various states across the U.S. Daniel Elazar's (1966) theory of political culture is employed to compare three states per typology that have historically differed in their likelihood to vote and their methods of engaging more broadly in democratic society.³⁹ While some assert that Elazar's typologies are too outdated given recent demographic shifts, Sharkansky's assessment found that although Elazar's framework does not utilize hard data and established statistical techniques, "it would be shortsighted to overlook the potential contribution of a sensitive observer." Furthermore, although Elazar's typologies does not lend itself to direct regression, the categorizations of political participation appear to remain true today⁴⁰.

However, the criticisms of Elazar's theory have merit with immigration and migration changes since 1966. Additionally, while the results from the 2020 Census have yet to be finalized by the Census Bureau due to delays caused from the COVID-19 and the 2020 Census being tied up in the courts, this thesis cannot obtain the most current data needed to draw a new comparison with Elazar's typologies. The poor economic situation of the local news industry is a nationwide crisis. The U.S.'s foundation as a nation of immigrants from various parts of the world led to the establishment of diverse states within the U.S., and in-line with our system of federalism and the notion of states' rights, there are historical demographic differences in U.S. states' political culture that continue to unfold to this day. Moreover, this paper recognizes that while demographics have shifted in the U.S., the culture of states has remained consistent overall-- in-line with Sharkansky's findings.

³⁹Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1966), 87-90.

⁴⁰Ira, Sharkansky, "The Utility of Elazar's Political Culture: A Research Note," *Polity* 2, no. 1 (1969): 83, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3234089>.

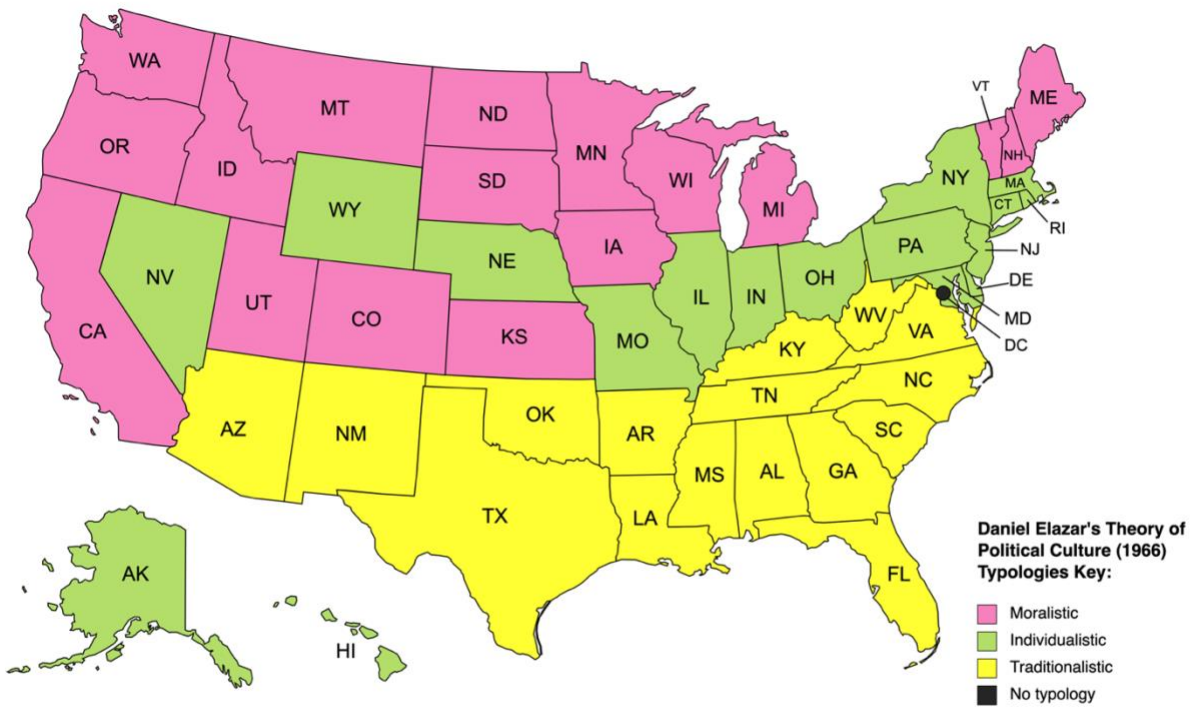
Elazar categorized the political culture of the U.S. into three typologies: moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic. The moralistic characterization originates from non-Puritan England and Germany—initially in the mid-Atlantic region of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey and later the middle portion of the U.S. Individualistic values originate from Puritans in upper New England; later the Scandinavians and Northern Europeans reinforced the Puritans' values. Traditionalistic culture originates from the southern portion of the United States-- in the upper regions of Virginia and Kentucky before spreading to the Deep South and the Southwest in conjunction with slavery. Elazar asserts that a state's political culture impacts its residents voting and civic engagement habits. This thesis utilizes Elazar's typologies to evaluate if differences in news deserts, voter turnout, and civic engagement rates appear to exist, or not, across typologies.

The type of political culture a state has effects how people view government, how they view the importance of voting and participating in their community. Those who live in Individualistic states view the government as a mechanism for addressing issues that matter to individual citizens. Voters tend to be loyal to party cues, and often will participate in non-voting activities if they are personally passionate about a cause. People who live in moralistic states are more likely to vote according to Elazar and be active participants beyond voting; they view the government as a means to improve society and to promote the general welfare. Inhabitants of Traditionalistic states view government as necessary to maintain the status quo, believe voting/participation is a privilege that not all should have. For example, lower voter turnout and more systemic barriers to voting (Jim Crow, literacy tests, voter ID laws, etc.) were mapped by Elazar when analyzing the typologies.⁴¹ Using Elazar's political culture theory this thesis analyzes a sample of nine states, three per typology, to explore whether there is a connection

⁴¹ Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States*, 87-93.

among a state’s political culture, the number of news deserts in a state (low, medium, high), voter turnout in a state, and civic engagement levels in a state. See Figure 1 for an illustration of Elazar’s national breakdown according to political culture. Nine states are analyzed in depth as a sample of Elazar’s U.S. political culture scale and the low, middle, and high ends of news desert counts: Minnesota, California, and Colorado are the moralistic states; Massachusetts, Illinois, and Nebraska are the individualistic states; Arizona, Kentucky, and Georgia are the traditionalistic states.⁴²

Figure 1: Map of Elazar’s Political Culture



Created with .mapchart.net

⁴²“Expanding News Deserts – Do You Live in a News Desert,” *UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media*, 2021 UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media, 12 July 2021, <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/>.

V. Methodology and Data Collection

The UNC Hussman School of Journalism's research unveils that all states have counties that only have one local newspaper and that many counties with only one newspaper are only able to sustain a weekly; a clear indication that sustaining local newspapers is challenging economically nationwide.⁴³ This research strives to evaluate why some states have significantly more news deserts than other states. Could a state's political culture affect the number of news deserts? This research provides a preliminary mapping of each U.S. state: their typology according to Elazar, the percent decrease of local newspapers statewide between 2004 and 2019⁴⁴, the percent decrease in newspaper circulation between 2004 and 2019, and statewide turnout in the 2014 midterm election. This 2014 midterm year was chosen because it was a historic year for low voter turnout; therefore, state by state variations will in theory be less prominent than in other years that were not historic lows nationwide. To enable comparison amongst the varying political cultures, midterm turnout rates, and civic engagement with the media, nine states are analyzed in-depth as a sample of Elazar's U.S. political culture scale and the low, middle, and high ends of news desert counts. Minnesota, California, and Colorado are the moralistic states; Massachusetts, Illinois, and Nebraska are the individualistic states; Arizona, Kentucky, and Georgia are the traditionalistic states.⁴⁵ Furthermore, while all U.S. states and their prevalence of news deserts are mapped, along with 2014 voter turnout rates, only the nine

⁴³A Dramatically Changed Landscape," *The Expanding News Desert*, UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media, 2016, <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/reports/rise-new-media-baron/changed-landscape/>.

⁴⁴"Voter Turnout in United States Elections." Ballotpedia, 2020. https://ballotpedia.org/Voter_turnout_in_United_States_elections.

⁴⁵"Expanding News Deserts – Do You Live in a News Desert.

state sample includes 2002 and 2006 midterm turnout data and examination of civic engagement⁴⁶ data.

The thesis uses survey data from Ballotpedia⁴⁷ and the United States Election Project⁴⁸ for voter turnout,⁴⁹ and data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) September 2019 Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement⁵⁰ to analyze comparisons across variables. Each state's political culture is identified through Elazar's classification. Next, through examining data from the UNC Hussman School of Journalism, this paper will delineate if state political culture appears to play a role in how many news deserts exist in the state. The UNC Hussman School of Journalism has studied the emergence of news deserts from 2004 to now, and their research is supported by the renowned Knight Foundation. From the UNC Hussman School of Journalism, this thesis compiles data for the following metrics for each U.S. state: the number of counties that are news deserts, the total number of counties, the percentage decrease in newspaper from 2004-2019, and the percentage decrease in newspaper circulation between 2004-2019. Lastly, data from WalletHub,⁵¹ created by Adam McCann, is utilized as a culminating lens for political engagement, a metric that combines various voter turnout data and civic engagement measures.

⁴⁶Civic engagement does not limit engagement by only people who fit the legal definition of being a citizen of the United States; this paper considers anyone residing in the United States as in reference to sample population data that is collected from the U.S. Census Bureau. Additionally, voting is often considered to be a form of civic engagement, but for this paper voting will be categorized as a separate entity.

⁴⁷"Voter Turnout in United States Elections." Ballotpedia, 2020.<https://ballotpedia.org/>.

⁴⁸"Voter Turnout." *United States Elections Project*. <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data>.

⁴⁹When a state's Voting Eligible Population (VEP) Total Ballots Counted was not available, the VEP for the Highest Office was used as the voter turnout rate.

⁵⁰"Volunteering and Civic Life." *CPS Supplement and Replicate Weights*. United States Census Bureau. 8 October 2021, https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-supp_cps-repwtg/cps-volunteer.html.

⁵¹Adam McCann, "Most and Least Politically Engaged States," *WalletHub*, 13 October 2021, <https://wallethub.com/edu/most-least-politically-engaged-states/7782>.

Moreover, this thesis is not utilizing a form of quantitative analysis, it uses simple calculations and as such no correlations can be determined. This research does provide a preliminary mapping of whether political culture appears to be a factor in driving the difference between states that have low numbers of news deserts and high political engagement concentrations, and conversely high numbers of news deserts and low political engagement across the U.S. This prediction that news deserts negatively impact political engagement nationwide is drawn from examining Hayes and Lawless (2020) findings that across fifteen years of reporting in over 200 local newspapers (along with voter turnout data, surveys, and interviews with journalists), vanishing local journalism has contributed to decreasing civic engagement; less coverage of local affairs results in less public knowledge of how to engage at the local level.⁵²

Civic engagement can be defined in many ways from an operational standpoint, engaging with the news media is one possible metric and this will be the primary unit of study in this thesis.⁵³ When evaluating civic engagement, the United States Census Bureau was the best source to draw from for the following reasons. (1) Overall, they are a trusted and respected by scholars for their methods of data collection (albeit they receive well-founded criticisms from some), (2) their steadfast commitment to sampling various communities throughout the country, and (3) their data is accessible for researchers that need data compiled through consistent sampling and survey techniques. Unfortunately, the Census Bureau is not able to survey every county within various U.S. states; therefore, this paper chose to use statewide data for this

⁵²Danny, Hayes, and Jennifer L., Lawless. *News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement*, (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 137.

⁵³Richard P., Adler and Judy, Goggin, “What Do We Mean by ‘Civic Engagement?’” *Journal of Transformative Education* 3, no. 3 (July 2005): 236–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344605276792>.

preliminary mapping of civic engagement across various political culture typologies. Shaker (2014) utilized the CPS Civic Life and Volunteering Supplement for his research of the Denver and Seattle metropolitan areas. Following Shaker's (2014) model, data was pulled from the Census Bureau's 2019 CPS September 2019 Civic Life and Volunteering Supplement. Earlier years of this CPS did not ask the question: "how often do you use the media for info on politics and society?"

VI. Findings and Analysis

A. Prevalence of News Deserts Nationwide

Using Elazar's theory of political culture, this thesis examined the amount of news deserts per typology. Moralistic states had 44 news deserts in total, individualistic states had 32 in total, and traditionalistic had 91 in total (See Table 1). It is significant that traditionalistic states have 91 total news deserts, and even when you add up the individualistic and moralistic states' new deserts, traditionalistic states still have 15 additional news deserts. To further examine this question of news desert prevalence, this paper garnered data from the UNC Hussman School of Journalism about the percent decrease in newspapers between 2004 and 2019. The moralistic typology had the highest number of states, ten total, with a less than 20% decrease in newspapers between 2004-2019, as opposed to five individualistic and six traditionalistic states. The individualistic typology had the highest total count of states with a 20% or greater decrease in newspapers, followed by traditionalistic with nine states and moralistic with seven states. Lastly, the individualistic typology had ten states with a 25% or greater decrease in newspapers between 2004-2019; this is huge compared to only four states in the traditionalistic typology and three for the moralistic typology. These numbers reveal that moralistic states have the slowest rate of news desert growth in terms of a trend. While

individualistic states may have the lowest total sum of news deserts across the three typologies, individualistic states have news deserts that are seemingly growing at the highest rate given that they have had the largest total decrease in newspapers between 2004 and 2019.

Table 1: News Desert Prevalence and Political Culture

Political Culture	Total # News Deserts	# Of States with < 20% Decrease in Newspapers btwn 2004-2019	# Of States with 20% or > Decrease in Newspapers btwn 2004-2019	# Of States with 25% or > Decrease in Newspapers btwn 2004-2019	News Desert Growth Trend Summary
Moralistic	44	10	7	3	Slowest rate
Individualistic	32	5	12	10	Highest rate
Traditional	91	7	9	4	Medium rate

B. Voter Turnout Change Pre-News Deserts (2002) and Post News-Deserts (2006)

Because 2004 is identified by the UNC Hussman School of Journalism as a landmark year of the beginning of the news desert phenomenon⁵⁴, this paper compares voter turnout from the 2002 midterm versus the 2006 midterm elections. Both elections likely had higher turnout than other midterm years given the height of engagement post 9/11 in 2002 and the rise of political discourse surrounding the Iraq war in 2006. This paper garnered 2002 and 2006 data for each state from Ballotpedia and the Election Project and the percent change in turnout was calculated between the two years; this percent change in turnout was either above or below the national average turnout in 2014. If the higher occurrence of news deserts nationwide as of 2014 was negatively impacting turnout across the U.S., this reality would reflect voter turnout percentages that were consistently less for each state in this thesis' sample of nine states (See Table 6).

⁵⁴“A Dramatically Changed Landscape.” *The Expanding News Desert*.

To do this comparative analysis, this thesis chose three states per typology based on the low, median, and high range of news deserts (See Appendix, Table 14) as previously stated in the methodology and data collection section. Arizona, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, have zero news deserts and in terms of voter turnout; in 2002 and 2006 Arizona was alone in being lower than the nationwide turnout in both election years. Arizona was also alone in being below the 2014 national voter turnout average of 36.70 %, with only 34.10% of turnout. The percent change in turnout between 2002 and 2006 was up by 2.3 points in Arizona, but this increase was still lower than the nationwide average of 36.70%. On the other hand, Massachusetts and Minnesota had a percent decrease in turnout between the 2006 and 2002 elections (See Table 2), but these states still had their 2014 turnout rates fall above the national average with 44.70% and 50.60% respectively.

For the medium and high news desert groupings, the data does not support consistent differences between voter turnout and political culture. For instance, Kentucky a traditionalistic state with four news deserts and individualistic Illinois with one news desert, both had higher turnout than the national average in 2004, 2006, and 2014. Moralistic California with two news deserts did not meet the national average turnout in 2004, 2006, or 2014. Lastly, moralistic Colorado with seven news deserts beat the national turnout average each year while individualistic Nebraska with also seven news deserts only beat the national turnout average in 2006 and 2014; traditionalistic Georgia with 28 news deserts did succeed in surpassing the national average in 2014 (See Table 2).

Table 2: Voter Turnout Comparison for 2002, 2006, and 2014 Midterms

STATE	# Of Counties = NEWS DESERTS	# Of counties	% Of counties without a newspaper	statewide turnout in 2002 (%)	> nationwide turnout of 40.50%	statewide turnout in 2006 (%)	> nationwide turnout of 41.30%	% Change in turnout btwn 2002 and 2006	statewide turnout in 2014	> nationwide turnout of 36.70%
Arizona	0	15	0	36.70	×	39.60	×	+2.3	34.10	×
Massachusetts	0	14	0	49.80	✓	49.30	✓	-0.5	44.70	✓
Minnesota	0	87	0	64.89	✓	60.50	✓	-4.39	50.60	✓
Kentucky	4	120	3.334	47.50	✓	44.20	✓	-3.3	44.90	✓
Illinois	1	102	0.98	42.80	✓	48.80	✓	+6	41.40	✓
California	2	58	3.448	37.30	×	41.20	×	+3.9	30.70	×
Georgia	28	159	17.610	35.40	×	35.10	×	-0.3	38.60	✓
Nebraska	7	93	7.526	39.90	×	48.80	✓	+8.9	41.40	✓
Colorado	7	63	11.112	46.60	✓	48.10	✓	+1.5	54.70	✓

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow=Traditionalistic

C. Voter Turnout Nationwide by Typology

Midterm elections historically have lower turnout nationwide compared to presidential elections which garner more public attention and therefore higher turnout. As a result, I decided to examine the 2014 midterm election results.⁵⁵ Each election has unique factors that may impact the turnout in any given year. For instance, the tragedy of 9/11 likely resulted in many more Americans turning out to vote in 2002 than in a typical midterm election, outrage surrounding the Iraq War led to higher than usual turnout in 2006 for a midterm year, and in 2018 political unrest turned out many Americans to the polls. 2014 was a historic low for turnout nationwide

⁵⁵“Voter Turnout in United States Elections.” *Ballotpedia*, 2020. https://ballotpedia.org/Voter_turnout_in_United_States_elections.

which is why it was selected as the metric for nationwide comparison. However, 14 states did have higher turnout than compared to the 2010 midterms, but these exceptions to the historic low trend all had one thing in common: all had a highly competitive governor's races or were viewed as consequential for determining the control of the Senate; which resulted in rampant outside spending on TV ads and intense news coverage which likely contributed to greater awareness that a midterm election was happening at all and drove voters to the polls. These states were Louisiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky, North Carolina, Florida, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Maine, Colorado, Arkansas, Texas, and Alaska.⁵⁶

An analysis of the data collected showed that moralistic states had the highest total number of states with midterm turnout above the national average of for the 2014 election⁵⁷ (See Table 3). Moralistic states lead with fifteen having turnout above the national average of 36.70%. This supports the moralistic value of actively participating in all aspects of democracy is remaining true in the case of turning out even during a historic low midterm year nationally. Meanwhile, individualistic states and traditionalistic states had a closer ratio of states that were greater than the nationwide turnout, eight and seven respectively. For example, only two moralistic states failed to meet the national average, California at 30.70% turnout and Utah at 30.30%; California is in the medium range of news deserts with two while Utah is on the high end with six news deserts. Looking at individualistic states, Delaware, New Jersey, and Ohio fell below the national average, but all have zero news deserts while Alaska has the highest turnout within the individualistic typology at 54.80% despite having thirteen news deserts. Additionally, several individualistic states with one or two news deserts did not meet the national average for

⁵⁶Gabriel Trip and Manny Fernandez, "Voter ID Laws Scrutinized for Impact on Midterms," *The New York Times* 18 Nov. 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/us/voter-id-laws-midterm-elections.html>.

⁵⁷Voter Turnout in United States Elections," *Ballotpedia*.

turnout: Hawaii, Indiana, Nevada, New York, and Pennsylvania. For traditionalistic states, Georgia narrowly surpassed the national average with 38.60% turnout despite have 28 news deserts. On the other hand, Texas (the state with the second highest number of news deserts) was almost ten points below the national average with only 28.30% turnout. There is variation overall when examining news desert concentration and turnout; Arizona fails to meet the national average with 34.10% turnout but has zero news deserts; meanwhile, Arkansas with also zero news deserts pass the national average with 40.30% turnout. For full lists of states that voted above the national average see Tables 4-6. Political culture appears to have influenced turnout in 2014 more so than the news desert rate because for each typology there are states with low total news deserts that still failed to meet the national average for turnout of 36.70%.

Table 3: News Desert Prevalence and Voter Turnout

Political Culture	Total # News Deserts across U.S.	# Of States with turnout above national average in 2014 midterm	News Desert Growth Trend Summary
Moralistic	44	15	Slowest rate
Individualistic	32	8	Highest rate
Traditionalistic	91	7	Medium rate

Table 4: Moralistic States

State	# Of News Deserts	Turnout in 2014	> than nationwide turnout
CA	2	30.70%	×
CO	7	54.70%	✓
ID	7	39.80%	✓
IA	0	50.30%	✓
KS	3	43.30%	✓
ME	1	58.70%	✓
MI	5	43.20%	✓
MN	0	50.60%	✓
NH	0	48.30%	✓
ND	2	45.00%	✓
OR	2	53.40%	✓
SD	3	44.70%	✓
UT	6	30.30%	×
VT	1	40.80%	✓
WA	1	43.10%	✓
WI	1	56.90%	✓
MT	3	47.50%	✓

Table 5: Individualistic States

State	# Of News Deserts	Turnout in 2014	> than nationwide turnout
AK	13	54.80%	✓
CT	1	42.50%	✓
DE	0	34.90%	×
HI	1	36.50%	×
IL	1	40.80%	✓
IN	2	28.70%	×
MD	0	42.00%	✓
MA	0	44.70%	✓
MO	3	33.60%	×
NE	7	41.40%	✓
NV	1	29.60%	×
NJ	0	32.50%	×
NY	1	29.00%	×
OH	0	36.20%	×
PA	2	36.50%	×
RI	0	42.40%	✓
WY	0	39.70%	✓

Table 6: Traditionalistic States

State	# Of News Deserts	Turnout in 2014	> than nationwide turnout
FL	5	43.30%	✓
NM	4	35.4%	×
NC	2	41.20%	✓
OK	5	30.00%	×
AL	3	33.20%	×
KY	4	44.90%	✓
LA	2	44.90%	✓
AZ	0	34.10%	×
GA	28	38.60%	✓
MS	1	29.0%	×
AR	0	40.30%	✓
SC	1	35.20%	×
TN	4	29.80%	×
TX	22	28.3%	×
VA	7	36.80%	✓
WV	3	32.00%	×

D. Civic Engagement

While civic engagement can be defined in a multitude of ways, this thesis measures civic engagement in terms of people paying attention to media regarding political and societal information. According to research regarding media and democracy, voters depend on media to equip them with facts about our political system and knowledge of current events.⁵⁸ While not all media entities are credible sources of information, the CPS Civic Life and Volunteering Supplement from 2019 strives to provide state data measuring people's tendency to tune in to

⁵⁸Danny, Hayes, and Jennifer L., Lawless, "As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections," 462.

media for information on politics and society by asking the question: “[In the past 12 months,] how often did [you/[NAME]] read, watch or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues?”⁵⁹ This question does not limit media to local newspapers, but it does provide insight into how various state populations tend to rely on the media as a provider of political information participation. Because of the U.S. Census Bureau's methods, the population of each sample is not equivalent which makes data comparison among states a bit challenging.

The question had several categories to record responses: “no answer,” “refused,” “don't know,” “not in universe,” “basically every day,” “a few times a week,” “a few times a month,” “once a month,” “less than once a month,” and “not at all.” Table 7 outlines the data gleaned from each of these categories. Table 8 is a pared-down version of the data portrayed in Table 7 and only includes columns for “basically every day,” “a few times a week,” and “not at all.” To make the illustration of these three response rates easier to interpret with varying sample populations per state, the percentage of the sample that answered, “basically every day,” “a few times a week,” and “not at all” was calculated by dividing the number of respondents for each of these answers by the total number of persons who were asked.

Among the first grouping of states (Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Arizona), there is not a huge difference between the percentages and people who read the news “basically every day.” Regarding the percentage of people who turn to the media a few times a week, Massachusetts is the lowest, but again only by a couple of percentage points. For those who answered “none at all,” the percentage points are only a few points off with Minnesota which has the highest percentage of people responding that they read the news.

⁵⁹“Attachment 7.” *Current Population Survey September 2019 Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement Technical Documentation CPS—19*. United States Census Bureau, 9, <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpssept19.pdf>.

For the California, Illinois and Kentucky grouping, California leads by around six percentage points for reading the news “basically every day” and leads by 15 points in the a “few times a week” and by 26 points in the not at all percentage when compared to Illinois. It is important to note that California had the highest total number of people surveyed at 8007 people while Illinois only surveyed 2518 people and Kentucky surveyed 1194 individuals. Kentucky had very low percentages across the board in terms of how often the populace used media for information on politics and society (See Table 7).

Colorado, Nebraska, and Georgia were the last grouping. Colorado and Georgia were very close in their percentage of people who read the news “basically every day.” In terms of “a few times a week,” all three states were nearly identical in their percentage, but when examining the numbers for “none at all,” Colorado had the lowest at around 3% compared to around 6% in Nebraska and 8% in Georgia. These numbers for the “not at all” categories may seem like small differences, but they do appear to reflect the nature of the differing media use across the political culture spectrum.

Table 7: CPS Responses Regarding Media Use

Selected Geographies	Total	No Answer	Refused	Don't Know	Not in universe	Basically every day	A few times a week	A few times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	Not at all
-> Total	21182	84	416	71	8928	6172	2190	867	316	399	1739
Minnesota	1288	2	9	4	505	445	156	67	10	21	69
Massachusetts	2023	5	40	12	859	632	213	67	29	30	136
Arizona	1568	5	16	6	603	488	181	81	28	35	125
California	8007	36	141	23	3585	2104	755	326	133	133	771
Illinois	2518	13	99	9	933	904	264	75	36	52	133
Kentucky	1194	2	34	3	398	305	147	69	26	44	166
Colorado	1165	4	13	8	628	278	118	42	18	17	39
Nebraska	1254	9	19	1	537	406	116	49	16	24	77

Georgia	2165	8	45	5	880	610	240	91	20	43	223
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Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow=Traditionalistic

Table 8: Narrow Lens of CPS Responses Regarding Media Use

Selected Geographies	Total	Basically every day (BED)	% Of sample BED	A few times a week (FTW)	% Of sample FTW	Not at all (NAA)	% Of sample NAA
-> Total	21182	6172	29.138	2190	10.339	1739	8.210
MN	1288	445	32.376	156	12.440	69	5.502
MA	2023	632	28.176	213	9.838	136	6.282
AZ	1568	488	31.122	181	11.543	125	7.972
CA	8007	2104	31.241	755	37.321	771	38.112
IL	2518	904	25.544	264	22.111	133	11.139
KY	1194	305	26.277	147	1.836	166	2.073
CO	1165	278	34.550	118	9.161	39	3.028
NE	1254	406	23.863	116	9.957	77	6.609
GA	2165	610	35.902	240	9.531	223	8.856

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow=Traditionalistic

Table 9 features almost identical data as Table 8, except for three additional columns for overall rank of a one to nine scale given that this thesis' sample is of nine states. These three columns include an assigned numerical ranking of one through nine based upon the percentages of each state's sample that responded with "basically every day," "a few times a week," or "not at all." Rankings one through five are highlighted in blue to provide a visual aid of the top five states for each ranking column. When examining Table 9, you can see that while California has the highest rank of "not at all" percentage, they are also number one in the percentage the "few times a week" category. California seems to be more civically engaged than Nebraska and Kentucky (which have median new desert rates like California with number one ranking of "a few times a week" combined with being ranked fourth for "basically every day;" it is relevant to

note that the CPS had a much larger sample of people surveyed in California than the other states in this thesis's sample of nine states. As a result, it seems like if California had had a more comparable sample as the other states sample populations, perhaps California would be ranked even higher in the basically everyday category. When examining the other moralistic states in Table 9, Colorado and Minnesota have higher rates of civic engagement. This conclusion can be drawn since Colorado and Minnesota ranked lower than fifth in the "not at all" ranking, but ranked in the top 5 for the "basically every day" category. Additionally, Minnesota appears to be more civically engaged than Colorado since the "few times a week" ranking for Minnesota is third while Colorado does not meet the above fifth threshold and lies at eight.

Interestingly, for the individualistic states: Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Illinois, none of the rankings stand out as indicative of high civic engagement in these states. Although Nebraska does appear to have the second highest percentage of people who turn to the media "a few times a week" for information, Nebraska came in second to last placement for the "basically every day" category" and was in the middle at #5 for "not at all." For Massachusetts, they did rank fifth in "a few times a week" category but this appears to illustrate average engagement with media. Illinois has the second highest percentage of sample that does not turn to the media at all for political information, and Illinois misses the one through five ranking for both the "basically every day" and "few times a week."

For the traditionalistic states, Arizona makes either the 4th or 5th ranking for all three categories. This indicates that Arizonans tend to turn to the media, and with having zero news deserts statewide this seems plausible that Arizona has engagement that is perhaps higher than other traditionalistic states that do have news deserts as well as individualistic states that have news deserts. Kentucky, even though they ranked very last in the percentage of people who

never turn to the media, did not rank high in the “basically every day” or “a few times a week” column. Georgia appears to have higher civic engagement than Kentucky, even though Georgia has significantly more news deserts. But while Georgia is number one in rank for percentage of sample that tunes into media “basically every day,” they are beneath fifth in seventh place for “a few times a week” and rank third in the amount of people who do “not at all” turn to the media.

Table 9: Overall Media Use

Selected Geographies	# Of news deserts	% Of newspaper decrease btwn 2004 and 2019	% Newspaper circulation decrease btwn 2004 and 2019	Total Sample Size	% Of sample BED	Overall Rank of BED	% Of FTW	Overall Rank of FTW	% Of sample “Not At All”	Overall Rank of NAA
-> Total				21182	29.138	N/A	10.339	N/A	8.210	N/A
MN	0	22	36	1288	32.376	3	12.440	3	5.502	7
MA	0	27	44	2023	28.176	6	9.838	5	6.282	6
AZ	0	25	37	1568	31.122	5	11.543	4	7.972	4
CA	2	24	45	8007	31.241	4	37.321	1	38.112	1
NE	7	33	31	1254	25.544	8	22.111	2	6.609	5
KY	4	10	36	1194	26.277	7	1.836	9	2.073	9
CO	7	16	56	1165	34.550	2	9.161	8	3.028	8
IL	7	9	36	2518	23.863	9	9.957	6	11.139	2
GA	28	21	48	2165	35.902	1	9.531	7	8.856	3

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow=Traditionalistic, Blue=1-5 ranking

Table 10 combines the “basically every day” and “a few times a week” percentage of samples numbers into one category to provide different ranks. This thesis decided to combine these categories because not all folks have the time to turn to the media every day but engaging with media a few times a week for political information is still considered fairly high engagement. California ranking number one points to how perhaps its moralistic categorization makes Californians inclined to turn to the media and be civically engaged. Although, this

participation from Californians is counter to the finding stated above that show that California has historically low voter turnout despite being a moralistic state. Illinois is ranked number two in the combined “a few times a week/basically every day,” but they are also number two in the not at all ranking which makes them appear to not have as engaged of a population. Georgia is similar falling in third place for each ranking. Minnesota on the other hand, ranks fourth in folks who engage every day or a few times a week and ranks beneath the number five benchmark in seventh for percentage of their population who does not turn to media at all for political information. Next, Colorado is at number five for tuning in, the median of this sample of nine states, and is number eight in the “not at all;” Colorado residents appear to engage with the media on a somewhat frequent basis. Moreover, Table 10 illustrates how broad generalizations about the influence of a states’ political culture cannot be made regarding civic engagement as defined in this thesis by using the CPS data. However, the moralistic states do appear to have higher civic engagement when compared to individualistic and traditionalistic states when weighing their rankings in the category of the percentage of their populations that do not turn to the media at all.

Table 10: Further Filtered Media Use

Selected Geographies	Total	# Of news deserts	% Of newspaper decrease btwn 2004 and 2019	% Newspaper circulation decrease btwn 2004 and 2019	% Of sample “Basically Every Day” + % of Sample “A Few Times a Week”	Overall Ranking Within Sample	% Of sample “Not At All”	Overall Ranking Within Sample
-> Total	21182	N/A	N/A	N/A	39.477	N/A	8.210	N/A
MN	1288	0	22	36	44.816	4	5.502	7
MA	2023	0	27	44	38.014	7	6.282	6
AZ	1568	0	25	37	42.665	6	7.972	4
CA	8007	2	24	45	68.562	1	38.112	1

NE	1254	7	33	31	33.82	8	6.609	5
KY	1194	4	10	36	28.113	9	2.073	9
CO	1165	7	16	56	43.711	5	3.028	8
IL	2518	7	9	36	47.655	2	11.139	2
GA	2165	28	21	48	45.433	3	8.856	3

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow= Traditionalistic, Blue= 1-5 ranking

E. Evaluating Both Voter Turnout and Civic Engagement

Sections A-D have outlined findings centered around voter turnout data from 2002, 2006, and 2014 midterms years, civic engagement data from 2019, and news desert data gathered from 2004-2019. Section E aims to provide a different lens in which civic engagement and voter turnout are measured together to produce a political engagement score that was graded on a 100-point scale, with 100 representing the most political engagement. Out of the nine-state sample, only Kentucky and Georgia fall beneath 1-25 in ranking, at 44th and 36th respectively. Colorado's ranking as the 3rd most politically engaged is interesting given its seven news deserts and may speak to its moralistic nature; Minnesota and California are ranking lower as moralistic states despite lower news desert rates than Colorado. Lastly, it is notable that Arizona with zero news deserts is the only traditionalistic state in the sample that is above rank 25th, and the fact that is ranked above individualistic Illinois with one news desert may point to how news desert play a role in citizen's ability to politically participate (See Table 11).

Table 11: News Desert Concentration and Political Engagement

State	# Of news deserts	% Of newspaper decrease btwn 2004 and 2019	Political Engagement ranking out of 100	Political Engagement Score 1-100 scale, 100 being highest
MN	0	22	15	60.18
MA	0	27	10	63.52
AZ	0	25	18	57.21

CA	2	24	16	60.12
IL	1	33	20	56.6
KY	4	10	44	40.02
CO	7	16	3	71.86
NE	7	9	17	59.87
GA	28	21	36	45.51

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow=Traditionalistic

When examining the nationwide data for the Political Engagement metric in (See Table 12), states' news desert rates, and the newspaper decrease percentage between 2004-2019 per state, do not show any consistent trends. However, the political culture typologies do reveal some interesting patterns. In the first through twenty-fifth rankings, twelve of the states are moralistic, ten are individualistic, and three are traditionalistic. Additionally, when looking at the Total Political Score column for states that have a score of fifty or above: thirteen are moralistic states, twelve are individualistic, and three are traditionalistic. Moralistic and individualistic states dominate political engagement according to WalletHub's metrics for political engagement.⁶⁰ This is interesting data given Elazar's theory of high political participation in moralistic states and secondly individualistic states as compared to traditionalistic states, and Sharkansky's assessment of Elazar's theory.⁶¹ Certain states may have outside influencing factors on their political engagement score that were not factored into WalletHub's analysis. For example, Virginia's proximity to Washington D.C. may make the population more civically engaged when its traditionalistic roots do not otherwise encourage widespread participation and the state has nine news deserts. Overall, the political engagement scores provided by WalletHub show trends that include data as recent as 2016-2020 which provides numbers that may be

⁶⁰Adam, McCann. "Most and Least Politically Engaged States."

⁶¹Ira, Sharkansky, "The Utility of Elazar's Political Culture: A Research Note," 83.

influenced by unusually high political participation with the polarizing 2016 and 2020 presidential elections in addition to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 12: Political Engagement and Newspaper Trends

State	Overall Rank	Total Score (out of 100)	# Of news deserts	% Newspaper Decrease between 2004 to 2019
ME	1	76.93	1	19
WA	2	76.32	1	11
CO	3	71.86	7	16
MD	4	71.7	1	52
WY	5	70.31	1	11
UT	6	68.4	6	35
OR	7	65.73	2	20
MT	8	65.16	3	6
VA	9	63.74	7	27
MA	10	63.52	0	27
NV	11	63.33	1	15
AK	12	61.94	13	20
NH	13	61.64	0	9
WI	14	60.55	1	28
MN	15	60.18	0	22
CA	16	60.12	2	24
NE	17	59.87	7	9
AZ	18	57.21	0	25
VT	19	56.92	1	7
IL	20	56.6	1	33
NC	21	54.14	2	22
CT	22	54.06	1	46
NY	23	53.04	1	40
ND	24	52.88	2	1
OH	25	52.56	0	39
MO	26	50.87	3	14
NJ	27	50.71	0	34
MI	28	50.37	5	26
FL	29	49.86	5	34
PA	30	49.41	2	29

RI	31	48.62	0	4
IA	32	47.76	0	17
DE	33	47.1	0	33
AR	34	46.24	0	22
KS	35	46.13	3	14
GA	36	45.51	28	21
OK	37	44.47	5	22
ID	38	44.43	7	21
LA	39	44.11	2	18
TX	40	42.02	22	31
IN	41	41.2	2	23
SC	42	40.8	1	14
SD	43	40.42	3	13
KY	44	40.02	4	10
TN	45	39.25	4	13
WV	46	35.12	3	15
AL	47	33.52	3	16
NM	48	32.67	4	22
MS	49	31.67	1	7
HI	50	29.27	1	38

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow= Traditionalistic

VI. Conclusion

“[A] government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”⁶²

Even though Elazar notes that the political culture in moralistic states promotes high likelihood of political participation, this research found that moralistic states do not have exclusively fewer news deserts than individualistic and traditionalistic states; in fact, individualistic states have the fewest collective number of news deserts. Additionally, moralistic states do not have exclusively higher voter turnout or civic engagement than individualistic and

⁶²“Jefferson's Preference for ‘Newspapers without Government’ over ‘Government without Newspapers’ (1787).” *Online Library of Liberty*, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/quote/jefferson-s-preference-for-newspapers-without-government-over-government-without-newspapers-1787>.

traditionalistic states. However, among the moralistic typology, fifteen states reached 2014 turnout statewide that was above the national average of 36.70%. Regarding civic engagement, it was interesting to see that California, a moralistic state, had low voter turnout in 2014 (CA with only 30.70% of the state turning out that year), but Californians appear to turn to the media for political information at high numbers (68.562% of the sample responded “basically every day” or “a few times a week” regarding media use).

Minnesota seems to be the most stable state in terms of having consistent voter turnout and civic engagement rates when compared to other moralistic states as well as individualistic and traditionalistic states that were sampled. This finding points to the need for further research to apply a regression model that could yield statistically significant or not statistically significant findings. However, it appears that the news desert count, the overall newspaper decrease rate, between 2004-2019, and the overall newspaper circulation decline rate between 2004-2019 may directly impact people’s access to political information in their state, and that political culture may impact people’s propensity to seek out newspapers despite potential access inequity at the local level. This paper asserts that local newspapers are a public necessity for political participation. A sufficient local media presence (no news deserts) appears to be somewhat connected to high turnout and civic engagement. Moreover, this paper did find that moralistic states appear to have news deserts growing at the slowest rate and that while individualistic states have the lowest total number of news deserts to date, they appear to be growing at the highest rate. Political culture and access to local news may be related, but further study is necessary.

Although this preliminary mapping of political culture, voter turnout, civic engagement, and news deserts, filled a gap in the literature of a nationwide examination of the effects of news

deserts, much can be done in future research to address questions that have yet to be answered in this area of study. For example, there are many factors that impact voter turnout and civic engagement, not just access to local newspapers. Future researchers should consider the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision of 2013, voting laws in each state, competitive races and ballot measures that may increase turnout in any given election year, as well as the classic demographics of age, income, and education level on voter turnout. Future research should examine each state's voting laws and other factors that may be able to further delineate if there are differences in certain traditionalistic states that have higher turnout than the nationwide turnout rate as well as for individualistic states that have higher turnout than the nationwide turnout rate.

My research did reveal that news deserts effect on voter turnout and civic engagement is a factor that should be further explored. The prevalence of news deserts is going to continue to grow, the local news industry is in a nationwide crisis that does not have an easy solution. The U.S. Congress has proposed a series of bills related to news deserts over the years. It is interesting that the current legislation introduced around news deserts is from members who represent individualistic states that have zero news deserts by and large.

Congressman Marc DeSaulnier (D-CA-11) introduced H.R. 6068 *Saving Local News Act* in late November of 2021. It is currently co-sponsored by six Democrats⁶³: Jamie Raskin (MD-8), David Cicilline (RI-1), Ed Perlmutter (CO-7), Joe Neguse (CO-2), James McGovern (MA-2), Eleanor Holmes (D-DC-At Large).⁶⁴ Interestingly, Maryland, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia all have zero news deserts. And while Colorado has seven news deserts,

⁶³"Text - S.1601 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Future of Local News Act of 2021," *Congress.gov*, Library of Congress, 12 May 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1601/text>.

⁶⁴Representative Holmes is a non-voting delegate since the District of Columbia is not a U.S. state.

it is a moralistic state. Additionally, H.R.3169 - Future of Local News Act⁶⁵ was introduced by Congressman Marc Veasey⁶⁶ (D-TX-33) in mid-May of 2021 and has five co-sponsors currently: Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1), Susan Wild (D-PA-7), Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA-11), Eleanor Holmes (D-DC-At Large), and Juan Vargas (D-CA-51). Pennsylvania is an individualistic state with two news deserts and California is a moralistic state with two news deserts. Lastly, the accompanying Senate bill, S.1601 *Future of Local News Act of 2021* was reintroduced by Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI), Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO), and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) in May of 2021 after previous attempts. Hawaii is individualistic with one news desert, and Colorado and Minnesota are moralistic states with seven and zero news deserts respectively. Overall, it is interesting to examine how the Congresspersons co-sponsoring these bills seem to not have a high news desert rate in the areas they represent which shows potentially how constituents of these representatives have awareness about the issue of access to local newspapers and may be pushing their representatives to act on the issue.

Additionally, future research could expand upon this initial mapping of media use in various U.S. states by examining if the next CPS of Civic Life and Volunteering has this repeated question or perhaps a new question that is more narrowly worded to identify newspaper use to find information on politics and society. And, the 2020 Census data should be utilized to account for population differences, as well as urban and rural distinctions at the county level, that may provide more insight into how many total people are living in a news desert within each U.S. state. Without the 2020 Census data readily available at this time this thesis was crafted, it was not feasible to try and randomly sample county data from a small number of counties that

⁶⁵“Text - H.R. 3169 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Future of Local News Act,” *Congress.gov*, Library of Congress, 12 May 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3169/text>.

⁶⁶Congressman Veasey’s congressional district makes up Dallas County and Tarrant County which are not news deserts; important to note since Texas is a traditionalistic state with twenty-two news deserts total.

the Census Bureau was able to gather data for, and in some states the Census Bureau was only able to survey two counties which did not provide enough shared number of counties to choose from to garner sufficient data.

Future research would apply some statistical evaluation, but this thesis is gathering data from multiple sources to develop a preliminary look at the intertwined variables of news deserts, voter turnout, and civic engagement. This research could be continued when the 2022 midterm results are released this November. Countywide data could be gathered for turnout along with increased access to 2020 Census data regarding population shifts since 2010. Future researchers should explore why individualistic states have news deserts growing at the highest rate. This is a warning sign of how this declining local news industry can drastically affect the electorate's access to information. It would be interesting for future researchers to continue this mapping of Elazar's political culture typologies with news desert data and voter turnout data to see if over the span of several more years, perhaps even the next couple decades, the original hypothesis that moralistic states would have voter turnout, more civic engagement, and a lack of news deserts. A question that future researchers must examine is: why are certain states are able to keep various local newspapers afloat while neighboring states with a different political culture typology may not be able to? Is this because the populace is more inclined to participate across the board? Does it come down to the median salary of a given county and the subscription rate to a local newspaper? These questions could be studied at a hyper-local, narrower county wide lens with the data that can be collected during the 2022 general election results.

This paper has many limitations given that it did not control for any variables, no regression was performed to yield any statistically significant or statistically insignificant data. Lastly, voting laws and societal behavior was greatly disrupted with the COVID-19 pandemic.

While we are moving past the pandemic stage in the U.S. at least for the time being, overall cultural norms have been challenged along with voting procedures during this strenuous time of public health crisis. This research focused on data that was gathered pre the COVID-19 pandemic, but in the decades to come it will be interesting to examine if the societal changes and adaptations that were needed during the pandemic remain. During the first two years of pandemic, states often created state and county public health policy based on their own microculture in response to a macro-level public health threat. Regarding expansions and limitations to voting and social isolation during the pandemic, many individuals chose to adhere to an insular reality for their safety. COVID-19 undoubtedly will continue to have effects on culture for years to come.

“[With the demise of the local news industry,] [f]or the national level, if you’re information seeking, the information rich get richer, and the information poor can check out altogether. At the local level, everybody’s getting poorer”⁶⁷

In closing, this paper encourages future researchers to ask the following: what is best way to define and measure civic engagement? Will local newspapers hit hard by COVID-19 be able to sustain themselves past 2022? Is it simply a matter of time before the number of counties with just one weekly paper left become news deserts? The ever-growing local news crisis is leaving pockets of the U.S. without access to basic local political information, and this is inhibiting the electorate’s ability to participate. Elazar’s political culture framework shows that moralistic states have news deserts growing at the slowest rate. In the coming years, it will be interesting to see if this trend remains consistent.

⁶⁷Jennifer, Hayes. “News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement. *The UVA Miller Center* video, 6:58 to 7:32. November 4, 2021. <https://millercenter.org/news-events/events/news-hole-demise-local-journalism-and-political-engagement>.

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Appendix

Table 13: Alphabetical List of Nationwide Data

STATE	TYOLOGY	# Of Counties That Are News Deserts	# Of counties	% Of counties without a newspaper	Newspaper decreases between 2004 and 2019 (%)	Newspaper Circulation Decrease Btwn 2004 and 2019 (%)	Political Engagement Overall National Ranking	Political Engagement Total Score (out of 100)	statewide turnout in 2014	Above or Below National Average
AL	Traditionalistic	3	67	4.478	16	34	47	33.52	33.20	×
AK	Individualistic	13	25	52	20	31	12	61.94	54.80	✓
AZ	Traditionalistic	0	15	0	25	37	18	57.21	34.10	✓
AR	Traditionalistic	0	75	0	22	31	34	46.24	40.30	✓
CA	Moralistic	2	58	3.448	24	45	16	60.12	30.70	×
CO	Moralistic	7	63	11.112	16	56	3	71.86	54.70	✓
CT	Individualistic	1	8	12.5	46	50	22	54.06	42.50	✓
DE	Individualistic	0	3	0	33	57	33	47.1	34.90	×
FL	Traditionalistic	5	67	7.463	34	51	29	49.86	43.30	✓
GA	Traditionalistic	28	159	17.610	21	48	36	45.51	38.60	✓
HI	Individualistic	1	5	20	38	60	50	29.27	36.50	×
ID	Moralistic	7	44	15.909	21	34	38	44.43	39.80	✓
IL	Individualistic	1	102	0.980	33	36	20	56.6	40.80	✓
IN	Individualistic	2	92	2.174	23	48	41	41.2	28.70	×
IA	Moralistic	0	99	0	17	14	32	47.76	50.30	✓
KS	Moralistic	3	105	2.857	14	36	35	46.13	43.30	✓
KY	Traditionalistic	4	120	3.334	10	36	44	40.02	44.90	✓
LA	Traditionalistic	2	64	3.125	18	40	39	44.11	44.90	✓
ME	Moralistic	1	16	6.25	19	39	1	76.93	58.70	✓
MD	Individualistic	0	24	0	52	63	4	71.7	42.00	✓
MA	Individualistic	0	14	0	27	44	10	63.52	44.70	✓
MI	Individualistic	5	83	6.024	26	45	28	50.37	43.20	✓
MN	Moralistic	0	87	0	22	36	15	60.18	50.60	✓
MS	Moralistic	1	82	1.220	7	35	49	31.67	N/A	✓
MO	Individualistic	3	115	2.609	14	25	26	50.87	33.60	×
MT	Moralistic	3	57	5.263	6	26	8	65.16	47.50	✓
NE	Individualistic	7	93	7.527	9	31	17	59.87	41.40	✓
NV	Individualistic	1	17	5.882	15	63	11	63.33	29.60	×
NH	Moralistic	0	10	0	9	7	13	61.64	48.30	✓
NJ	Individualistic	0	21	0	34	46	27	50.71	32.50	×
NM	Traditionalistic	4	33	12.121	22	34	48	32.67	35.40	✓
NY	Individualistic	1	62	1.613	40	63	23	53.04	29.00	×
NC	Traditionalistic	2	100	2	22	38	21	54.14	41.20	✓
ND	Moralistic	2	53	3.774	1	28	24	52.88	45.00	✓
OH	Individualistic	0	88	0	39	51	25	52.56	36.20	×
OK	Traditionalistic	5	77	6.494	22	32	37	44.47	30.00	×
OR	Moralistic	2	36	5.556	20	41	7	65.73	53.40	✓
PA	Individualistic	2	67	2.985	29	40	30	49.41	36.50	×

RI	Individualistic	0	5	0	4	54	31	48.62	42.40	✓
SC	Traditionalistic	1	46	2.174	14	23	42	40.8	35.20	×
SD	Moralistic	3	66	4.545	13	36	43	40.42	44.70	✓
TN	Traditionalistic	4	95	4.211	13	33	45	39.25	29.80	×
TX	Traditionalistic	22	254	8.661	31	43	40	42.02	28.30	✓
UT	Moralistic	6	29	20.690	35	45	6	68.4	30.30	×
VT	Moralistic	1	14	7.143	7	38	19	56.92	40.80	✓
VA	Traditionalistic	7	136	5.147	27	38	9	63.74	36.80	✓
WA	Moralistic	1	39	2.564	11	36	2	76.93	43.10	✓
WV	Traditionalistic	3	55	5.455	15	35	46	35.12	32.00	×
WI	Moralistic	1	72	1.389	28	39	14	60.55	56.90	✓
WY	Individualistic	0	23	0	11	34	5	70.31	39.70	✓

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow= Traditionalistic

Table 14: Nationwide Data Grouped by Political Culture and Organized by News Desert Range

STATE	# Of Counties that are NEWS DESERTS	# Of counties	proportion of counties without a newspaper	% Of counties without a newspaper	Newspaper decrease between 2004 and 2019 (%)	Newspaper Circulation Decrease Btwn 2004 and 2019 (%)	Political Engagement Overall National Ranking	Political Engagement Total Score (out of 100)	Voter Turnout 2014	Above or Below National Average
AR	0	75	0	0	22	31	34	46.24	40.30	✓
AZ	0	15	0	0	25	37	18	57.21	34.10	×
MS	1	82	0.012	1.212	7	35	49	31.67	29.0*	×
SC	1	46	0.0212	2.174	14	23	42	40.8	35.20	×
LA	2	64	0.03125	3.125	18	40	39	44.11	44.90	✓
NC	2	100	0.02	2	22	38	21	54.14	41.20	✓
AL	3	67	0.045	4.478	16	34	47	33.52	33.20	×
WV	3	55	0.055	5.455	15	35	46	35.12	32.00	×
KY	4	120	0.033	3.333	10	36	44	40.02	44.90	✓
NM	4	33	0.121	12.121	22	34	48	32.67	35.40	✓
TN	4	95	0.042	4.211	13	33	45	39.25	29.80	×
FL	5	67	0.075	7.463	34	51	29	49.86	43.30	✓
OK	5	77	0.065	6.493	22	32	37	44.47	30.00	×
VA	7	136	0.051	5.147	27	38	9	63.74	36.80	✓
TX	22	254	0.087	8.661	31	43	40	42.02	28.30	✓
GA	28	159	0.176	17.610	21	48	36	45.51	38.60	✓
DE	0	3	0	0	33	57	33	47.1	34.90	×
OH	0	88	0	0	39	51	25	52.56	36.20	×
MA	0	14	0	0	27	44	10	63.52	44.70	✓
MD	0	24	0	0	52	63	4	71.7	42.00	✓
NJ	0	21	0	0	34	46	27	50.71	32.50	×
RI	0	5	0	0	4	54	31	48.62	32.50	×
WY	0	23	0	0	11	34	5	70.31	42.40	✓
CT	1	8	0.125	12.5	46	50	22	54.06	42.50	✓
HI	1	5	0.2	20	38	60	50	29.27	36.50	×

IL	1	102	0.010	0.980	33	36	20	56.6	40.80	✓
NV	1	17	0.059	5.882	15	63	11	63.33	29.60	×
NY	1	62	0.016	1.613	40	63	23	53.04	29.00	×
IN	2	92	0.022	2.174	23	48	41	41.2	28.70	×
PA	2	67	0.030	2.985	29	40	30	49.41	36.50	×
MO	3	115	0.026	2.609	14	25	26	50.87	33.60	×
NE	7	93	0.075	7.527	9	31	17	59.87	41.40	✓
AK	13	25	0.52	52	20	31	12	61.94	54.80	✓
IA	0	99	0	0	17	14	32	47.76	50.30	✓
MN	0	87	0	0	22	36	15	60.18	50.60	✓
NH	0	10	0	0	9	7	13	61.64	48.30	✓
ME	1	16	0.063	6.25	19	39	1	76.93	58.70	✓
WI	1	72	0.014	1.389	28	39	14	60.55	56.90	✓
WA	1	39	0.026	2.564	11	36	2	76.32	43.10	✓
VT	1	14	0.071	7.143	7	38	19	56.92	40.80	✓
CA	2	58	0.034	3.448	24	45%	16	60.12	30.70	×
ND	2	53	0.038	3.774	1	28	24	52.88	45.00	✓
OR	2	36	0.056	5.556	20	41	7	65.73	53.40	✓
KS	3	105	0.029	2.857	14	36	35	46.13	43.30	✓
MT	3	57	0.053	5.263	6	26	8	65.16	47.50	✓
SD	3	66	0.045	4.545	13	36	43	40.42	44.70	✓
MI	5	83	0.060	6.024	26	45	28	50.37	43.20	✓
UT	6	29	0.207	20.690	35	45	6	68.4	30.30	×
CO	7	63	0.111	11.111	16	56	3	71.86	54.70	✓
ID	7	44	0.159	15.909	21	34	38	44.43	39.80	✓

Key: Pink= Moralistic, Green= Individualistic, Yellow= Traditionalistic