
CITIZENS' LOCAL POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA ACCESS

By Lee Shaker

Locally based media institutions that have been at the core of citizens' media environments for generations are facing an onslaught of new competition from new media. The twin goals of this article are to expand our understanding of the distribution of local political knowledge in general and to specifically examine the relevance of media access. The article suggests that media access does bear upon levels of local political knowledge and confirms that citizens who are knowledgeable about local politics do not mirror the profile of those who are knowledgeable about national politics.



Scholars have long argued that local media play a critical role in shaping citizens, communities, and the interactions between them.¹ Today, the local media outlets in this equation are facing significant challenges, and the local media environments they are a part of are changing rapidly.² In the midst of this shuffle, the creation and consumption of local political information (LPI) is threatened as major newspapers like the *Rocky Mountain News* collapse and others like the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* investigate an online-only future.³ This transition raises many compelling questions about the relationship among citizens, communication, and local politics.⁴

This article focuses primarily on exploring two issues: the distribution of local political knowledge throughout the population and the way that citizens' media access relates to levels of such knowledge. The first task is important because scholars do not have a clear understanding of who knows what about local politics. Bits and pieces of prior research suggest that local political knowledge differs from national political knowledge, but the nuances and generalizability of these divergences are not known. The second task is to examine the relationship between citizens' media access and their local political knowledge. Though studying media access does not directly address the decline of specific local media outlets, looking at citizens' access to various media is an indirect way of addressing the migration of media audiences. Thus, the relationship between citizens' home access to various media—newspaper delivery, cable or satellite TV, satellite radio, and the Internet—and

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their local political knowledge sheds light upon one way that the rise of new media may affect local politics. This article also examines national political knowledge—mainly to allow direct comparisons to the exploration of local political knowledge.

**Local
Political
Knowledge,
Media, and
Change**

The Importance and Distribution of Local Political Knowledge.

Political knowledge depends, in part, upon access to information about governmental actions, politicians' positions, and so on. Theoretically, it is important because the more citizens know about politics, the better their political behavior will reflect their best interests, the more meaningful their engagement will be, and the better democracy works.⁵ Though it is not clear how much knowledge citizens require to make rational political choices, even research that contends that relatively uninformed citizens can simulate the participation of the most informed suggests that at least *some* knowledge is needed.⁶ Empirical evidence, however, shows that at the national level citizens who are white, male, older, more interested, and more socio-economically advantaged are likely to be more knowledgeable than others.⁷

Prior research on local political knowledge, though somewhat sparse, suggests that there are divergences in who knows about national and local affairs.⁸ As a fragment of a larger project, Delli Carpini and Keeter examined the relationship between demographic factors and local-level knowledge using a survey of Richmond, Virginia.⁹ First, they found that the level of local political knowledge did not differ statistically across gender. Second, Delli Carpini and Keeter found that black respondents had higher levels of local knowledge than white respondents but lower levels of national knowledge.¹⁰ Similarly, in a study using data from Seattle, Moy and colleagues found that levels of local political knowledge did not differ across gender but that non-white respondents were more knowledgeable.¹¹

The Relationship between Media and Local Political Knowledge. It seems an almost *prima facie* truth that citizens' media diets must be related to their political knowledge. Yet the connection between media, political learning, and political knowledge is not clear.¹² A growing body of literature addresses this relationship. First, Eveland and his colleagues have scrutinized panel data and argued that citizens' news consumption has a causal impact upon their political knowledge.¹³ Barabas and Jerit offered compelling evidence that the volume, prominence, and breadth of mass-mediated political information are positively connected to citizens' knowledge.¹⁴ While citizens may certainly learn about local politics through direct experience and interpersonal communication, media are an important source of mobilizing information and conversational grist.¹⁵ Taken together, this research suggests that a causal relationship between media use and knowledge exists and that media which contain political information should be seen as a vital part of democracy.

When local affairs are studied, there is some support from survey-based research for the notion that local news media use is an important factor in predicting citizens' local political knowledge. The most direct

evidence comes from a study of the 1979 Columbus, Ohio, election that found positive correlations between three media usage variables—newspaper readership, viewership of local TV news, listenership to radio news—and knowledge of the mayoral and council candidates.¹⁶ Scheufele and colleagues found that newspaper use was significantly related to respondents' awareness of the existence of a local issue.¹⁷ Similarly, with a Seattle-area survey, another study found that using local media enhanced citizens' perceptions of knowledge.¹⁸ This vein of research indicates that a relationship between the consumption of mass-mediated LPI and local political knowledge is likely—but the prior research clearly leaves room for further exploration.

A related strand of research suggests that simply being able to access LPI is important to citizens' knowledge. Generally, higher levels of information about an issue in the media environment elevate citizen knowledge of the issue—regardless of citizens' levels of interest or capacity.¹⁹ For example, Delli Carpini and colleagues found a clear correlation between the availability of information about state politics in a city's media environment and the level of knowledge the city's residents had of state politics.²⁰ Similarly, Zukin and Snyder took advantage of a naturally occurring dichotomy in New Jersey's media environment to show differences in passive learning.²¹ In areas served by New York-based media, citizens learned about New York's mayoral campaign more than citizens in areas served by Philadelphia-based media—even though neither population had instrumental use for this information. Motivation and capacity are also critical factors in shaping what citizens glean from media (and knowledge gaps among citizens can be expected), but this body of research makes the case that the structure of citizens' information environments is an important issue in and of itself.²²

A Changing Media Environment. At the start of the twenty-first century, it is clear that the rise of electronic and “new” media are dramatically reshaping the ways that citizens seek and receive all sorts of information.²³ Circulation and survey data show that, at best, only about half of Americans read a newspaper (online or offline) regularly.²⁴ Viewership of local news is declining as well. In 1993, 77% of survey respondents reported regularly watching local news; by 2008, this figure was down to 52%.²⁵ Meanwhile, the number of Internet users continues to increase, reaching 73% of all American adults—approximately 55% of whom have broadband—at home today.²⁶

The near-infinite array of media choices now available to consumers forces local media into constant and direct competition with better-funded, more polished options.²⁷ Gone are the days when a viewer's choice at six or eleven was local news, local news, or a rerun of an old sitcom. Instead, the audience can easily click from a local broadcast network to the niche-targeted network most interesting to them or use the Web to find other appealing content. Such competition for an audience threatens the profitability of local news. Combined with the expectations of Wall Street, this profit pressure leads media conglomerates to run radio, television, and print outlets from a national platform that results in downsizing local news staffs, which erodes their ability to con-

tribute meaningfully to a community.²⁸ And, recent events in the newspaper industry show that the migration of audiences threatens even the existence of local media outlets.²⁹ So, both the quantity and quality of local news is threatened as the universe of media choices available to citizens increases.

As this transition in the media environment continues, it is possible that new, alternative sources of LPI might supplant traditional local news outlets. Some scholars and pundits voice optimism about the potential of new media.³⁰ There are some examples—like everyblock.com—of the use of technology to facilitate access to LPI. But, there is little evidence of the viability or adoption of these efforts. And, aside from macro-level circulation and ratings data, there has been little research into how citizens are getting LPI today. Though there is a trickle of research that examines the effects of new media on national political concerns, there is scant research of the possible effects of the changing media environment on local politics.

Hypotheses and Theory

This study draws upon two bodies of theory to elucidate our understanding of citizens' levels of local political knowledge. The basic theoretical approach invokes conceptualizations of information selectivity and salience to explain the relationship between demographic factors and local political knowledge. In addition, the theoretical consequences of choice are included to aid the examination of the relationship between citizens' media access and their local political knowledge.

Race, Gender, and Knowledge. The initial priority of this article is to replicate previously observed patterns of local political knowledge in the population—this time in Philadelphia, a city with nearly equal black and white communities (each group is about 45% of the city's total population). As previously discussed, these patterns differ markedly from those seen at the national level, and the data used here (and described below) allow for a direct comparison to illustrate these divergences.

One long-running thread of political science research holds that individuals are incapable of being universally informed about politics and instead focus on issues of personal or group relevance.³¹ Hutchings argues that—given properly conceptualized links between social groups and issue salience—knowledge specialization does exist among the citizenry.³² A pertinent example of this is found in an article by Bobo and Gilliam that reported that black citizens' group salience and, consequently, their attentiveness, was triggered when a black mayor was in office.³³ While controlling for demographic differences, they found that black citizens knew more about local politics when their community had a black mayor (because this signaled a political environment that would better serve their interests). This finding echoes Delli Carpini and Keeter's work in Richmond, Virginia, where black citizens were more knowledgeable overall about local politics than their white peers.³⁴ Here, the mayor was not black, but the city manager and superintendent of schools were, and black respondents were more likely to successfully name these officials than white respondents. In the election this

article dealt with, three of the five Democratic primary candidates were black, the Democratic nominee (and eventual victor, Michael Nutter) was black, and the term-limited incumbent mayor—John Street—was black.

Another example of a salience variation is the notion that mothers are particularly interested in the education of their children—primarily a local concern—and thus have a signature issue that drives local political knowledge and engagement.³⁵ This, in turn, prompts a different distribution of knowledge across gender at the local level than at the national level. Such issue salience differences, paired with the notion that local politics are more immediate and comprehensible than national affairs, ground the differences in the distribution of local and national political knowledge among the public predicted by **H1-2C**.

H1: National political knowledge will be higher among respondents who are white, wealthy, educated, older, and male.

H2A: Local political knowledge will not differ significantly across gender.

H2B: Local political knowledge will be greater among non-white respondents.

H2C: Local political knowledge will be greater among older, wealthier, and more educated respondents.

Media Access and Knowledge. The second set of hypotheses predicts the effects of home access to different media upon citizens' local and national political knowledge. As described above, prior research indicates that being situated in a media environment that contains specific political information is correlated with citizens' level of knowledge about these topics even when controlling for other explanatory variables. The recent proliferation of media allows citizens' media environments to be increasingly individualized. Given this, the choices citizens make to construct their own information ecologies become more relevant to the media environment-and-knowledge equation.

A small but useful body of work explores the implications of increasing media choice. In an experimental study, Atrre and Katz found that the mere increase of available television channels decreases the selection of news programming.³⁶ Further, they found that as choice increases, subjects were more likely to choose content from their preferred genre—a result that is consonant with Webster's prediction that increased choice would yield a narrowed media diet.³⁷ Prior has argued that the impact of access to more media choice on national political knowledge is moderated by individuals' preference for news versus entertainment programming.³⁸ He found that the distribution of national political knowledge in the population today suggests that a greater gap is forming between those who are very knowledgeable and those

who are not very knowledgeable, with fewer citizens occupying the middle ground.

As media choice increases, access to all kinds of information increases. Even if the mix of available information varies, greater media choice affords citizens greater access to national political information. The onus is on citizens to select the sorts of media and information to consume, which is what makes Prior's news or entertainment preference variable insightful. For LPI, the relationship between choice expansion and increased access to information is more tenuous. In the abstract, increased media access, particularly with the rise of the Internet, does expand the availability of LPI. But, as described above, the new media environment also poses major challenges to the production and consumption of LPI. With this in mind, an information preference variable may not be necessary in locating the effects of increased media access upon local political knowledge. Instead, greater media access may simply lead to lower levels of local political knowledge.

H4A-D specify the predicted effect of citizens' media access upon their local political knowledge. Macro-level media data indicate that a transition from locally based media to national media is underway. Citizens whose media environments expand to include more national news and entertainment, but not more local news, are likely to change their media diets accordingly.

Newspapers have long been the backbone of American local political communities, and **H4A** accordingly predicts a positive relationship between newspaper home delivery and local political knowledge.³⁹

In contrast with national political information, cable television does not offer a similar expansion of the available LPI. Though many cable systems provide some kind of bulletin board or television channel, the development of these resources has been anemic. Likewise, satellite radio contains no specifically local information other than brief traffic and weather updates. Consequently, **H4B** and **H4C** predict a negative relationship between access to multichannel TV or satellite radio and local political knowledge because the available LPI faces increased competition for citizens' attention.

Similarly, **H4D** predicts a negative relationship between home Internet access and local political knowledge. The rationale for this hypothesis is that though the Internet increases access to a world of information, LPI is a very small amount of what is available. Further, LPI shifts from center stage in the local newspapers or local TV news to a place in the chorus, where it is much less prominent.

H3: National political knowledge will not differ significantly among citizens with and without home delivery of a local newspaper, home access to cable (or satellite) TV, home or car access to satellite radio, or home access to the Internet.

H4A: Local political knowledge will be higher among citizens who have home delivery of a newspaper.

H4B: Local political knowledge will be lower among citizens who have cable (or satellite) television at home.

H4C: Local political knowledge will be lower among citizens who have satellite radio at home or in their cars.

H4D: Local political knowledge will be lower among citizens who have Internet access at home.

Methods

The analyses in this article use data from a random digit dialing (RDD) survey of 1,001 Philadelphians administered by SRBI of New York City. The survey was conducted from November 7 to 21, after the Philadelphia mayoral election, in order to reach citizens during a high-salience time for local politics. The election was for an open seat, and no major state or national elections took place that day. SRBI's interviewers were trained in advance, a live test of the instrument was performed, and calls were monitored at the outset to ensure that the survey was being properly conducted. The response rate, defined by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) as RR4, was 21.6%. This figure reflects refusals as well as non-contacts; given the increasing difficulty in completing telephone surveys the response rate was satisfactory, if not ideal.

Though citizens' local political knowledge is the primary focus of this piece, national political knowledge items were included in the survey and are analyzed as well. Identical regression models that predict local or national political knowledge are constructed for two reasons. First, since national political knowledge has been studied thoroughly, the extent to which the results of similar analysis from this dataset are in accordance with prior research confirms the reliability of the data used here. Second, and more important, differences between the national and local political knowledge models support the notion that local political knowledge is a unique substance that requires dedicated research.

This study tested the hypotheses using hierarchical multiple regressions in which the independent variables were entered into the model in two blocks that contain identical independent variables across both models. The first block contains demographic and political interest variables. The second block contains the media access variables, allowing for the determination of the cumulative contribution of the media access variables upon the prediction of the dependent variables after the other independent variables have been considered.

An overview of the survey sample suggests that it roughly approximated the population of Philadelphia.⁴⁰ In the regressions below, age ($M = 50.1$, $sd = 17.1$) is included as a continuous variable. Gender is included as a dichotomous 0-1 variable with male (48%) equal to 1. Income was coded into four categories ($M = 2.1$, $sd = 1.0$): less than \$30,000 (30%), \$30,000 to \$60,000 (40%), \$60,000 to \$100,000 (13%), and more than \$100,000 (13%).⁴¹ Race is included as pair of dichotomous

variables for black (45%) and other (9%) respondents with white (45%) respondents as the reference group. Finally, education is included as a five-point variable ($M = 2.9$, $sd = 1.2$): less than high school (9%), high school graduate (35%), some post-secondary education (26%), college graduate (18%), and some graduate school and beyond (13%).

National and local political interest variables are both included in the models below. Political interest has been shown to be a critical factor in predicting citizens' political knowledge, and its inclusion nods toward the importance of citizens' motivation.⁴² The national and local political interest variables are derived from a pair of four-point Likert-type items that range from "1 = not at all interested" to "4 = very interested." National political interest ($M = 2.9$, $sd = 1.0$) and local political interest ($M = 3.1$, $sd = .9$) are positively correlated ($R = .59$, $p \leq .001$) but are included separately in both models below as a test of their discriminant validity and to allow for direct comparison between the national and local political knowledge models.

Finally, four home media access variables are included: cable (or satellite) TV access, Internet access, delivery of a local newspaper, and home or car access to satellite radio. In the sample, 77% of respondents report having cable (or satellite) TV, 65% have Internet access, 38% have a local newspaper delivered, and 12% have satellite radio access. Each of these variables is included as a dichotomous 0-1 variable that equals 1 when respondents report having access. Collinearity statistics (tolerance and VIF) indicated that the simultaneous inclusion of all these variables (media access and demographic) was not problematic.

The two dependent variables are indices of local and national political knowledge that were adapted from prior research (see items in Appendix). Multiple-choice options were not provided. The mean of each respondent's answers (0 for an incorrect answer, 1 for a correct answer) was calculated in order to create the two indices. Both range from 0 (low) to 1 (high). On average, respondents scored slightly lower on the national political knowledge index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$, $M = .50$, $sd = .30$) than on the local political knowledge index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, $M = .52$, $sd = .29$).

Results

Bivariate Relationships. There are clear differences in the correlates of local and national political knowledge (Table 1). The correlations between the independent variables and national political knowledge largely conform to expectations. All of the basic demographic variables—race (white: $r = .31$; black: $r = -.20$; other: $r = -.10$), gender (male: $r = .17$), age ($r = .18$), income ($r = .38$), and education ($r = .43$)—are significantly correlated with national knowledge ($p \leq .01$) and in the direction anticipated. At the local level, two of these correlations are not present: there is no significant correlation along gender lines, and the correlation according to race is a mixed bag (white: $r = .18$, $p \leq .01$; black: $r = -.03$, N/S; other: $r = -.12$, $p \leq .01$). These relationships indicate that the predictors of political knowledge at the local and national levels may diverge in the regression models.

TABLE 1
Bivariate Correlations

Independent Variables	Local Political Knowledge	National Political Knowledge
White	.18**	.31**
Black	-.03	-.20**
Other	-.12**	-.10**
Male	.06	.17**
Age	.16**	.18**
Income	.31**	.38**
Education	.30**	.43**
National Interest	.35**	.47**
Local Interest	.38**	.32**
Newspaper Delivery	.24**	.17**
Cable/Satellite TV Access	.06	.05
Satellite Radio Access	.01	-.01
Internet Access	.17**	.22**

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$.

Among the media access variables, home newspaper delivery is positively correlated with both local ($r = .24, p \leq .01$) and national ($r = .17, p \leq .01$) political knowledge. Home Internet access is also positively correlated with both local ($r = .17, p \leq .01$) and national ($r = .22, p \leq .01$) political knowledge—though the relative strength of the relationships is inverted in comparison to those seen with home newspaper delivery. Neither cable TV nor satellite radio access has a significant correlation with either local or national political knowledge. Taken at face value, these correlations do not suggest any large departures in the way that media access relates to local versus national political knowledge.

National Political Knowledge. Table 2 provides the results of a hierarchical OLS regression predicting national political knowledge. Overall, the model presented here fits well: the final R^2 is 42.4%. The great bulk of the variance explained is captured by the demographic and interest block which has a partial R^2 of 41.7%.⁴³ The media access variables cumulatively make a small, but significant, contribution to the final R^2 of .6% ($p \leq .05$).

The findings here are largely consonant with prior research that depicts the relationship between demographic factors and national political knowledge.⁴⁴ **H1** is supported: national political knowledge is higher among respondents who are white, wealthy, educated, older, and male. Support for **H3**—the only other hypothesis that relates to national political knowledge—is strong but not quite as unequivocal. There is no significant difference in the level of national political knowledge among citizens who have home delivery of a local newspaper, cable (or

TABLE 2
OLS Regression Predicting National Political Knowledge

Independent Variables	National Political Knowledge <i>B (SE)</i>	β
Demographics & Interest		
Black	-.101 (.018)***	-.15
Other	-.102 (.032)***	-.09
Male	.083 (.017)***	.13
Age	.004 (.001)***	.18
Income	.026 (.005)***	.18
Education	.072 (.008)***	.26
National Political Interest	.077 (.011)***	.23
Local Political Interest	.022 (.011)	.06
R ² (%)		41.7***
Media Variables		
Newspaper Delivery	.007 (.018)	.02
Cable/Satellite TV Access	-.037 (.021)	-.05
Satellite Radio Access	-.047 (.027)	-.05
Internet Access	.042 (.021)*	.06
Incremental R ² (%)		.6*
R ² (%)		42.4
N		923

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

satellite) TV access, or satellite radio access and those who do not. However, citizens with home Internet access are significantly more knowledgeable about national politics ($\beta = .06, p \leq .05$) than those without such access.

Local Political Knowledge. The local political knowledge model in Table 3 also fits well, with an overall R² of 29.1%. The demographic and interest variables capture 27.3% of this variance; the media access variables' partial R² is 1.8% ($p \leq .001$). The first set of hypotheses relating to local political knowledge considers a series of demographic variables. **H2A**, which predicts that local political knowledge will not differ significantly across gender, is supported. **H2B** predicts that local political knowledge will be greater among non-white respondents; this hypothesis is not supported. Instead, there are no significant differences in local political knowledge across race (black: $\beta = .01, n.s.$; other: $\beta = -.06, n.s.$). Though this hypothesis is not fully supported, the divergence from the racial gap in knowledge seen at the national level should still be noted. **H2C** is supported, as older, wealthier, and more educated respondents are significantly more knowledgeable about local politics.

H4A-D predict the relationships between citizens' media access and their local political knowledge. **H4A**, which predicts that citizens who

TABLE 3
OLS Regression Predicting Local Political Knowledge

Independent Variables	Local Political Knowledge B (SE)	β
Demographics & Interest		
Black	.004 (.017)	.01
Other	-.057 (.031)	-.06
Male	.019 (.016)	.03
Age	.002 (.001)***	.15
Income	.026 (.004)***	.21
Education	.036 (.008)***	.15
National Political Interest	.014 (.011)	.05
Local Political Interest	.074 (.011)***	.24
R ² (%)		27.30***
Media Variables		
Newspaper Delivery	.066 (.018)***	.11
Cable/Satellite TV Access	-.040 (.020)*	-.06
Satellite Radio Access	-.044 (.026)	-.05
Internet Access	.039 (.020)*	.07
Incremental R ² (%)		1.80***
R ²		29.10
N		923

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

have a newspaper delivered to their home will be more knowledgeable about local politics than those who do not, is supported by the model in Table 3. A significant, *negative* relationship exists between cable TV access and local political knowledge ($\beta = -.06, p \leq .05$), supporting **H4B**. This result should be viewed in the context of three other points: first, there is no correlation between cable access and local political knowledge; second, the regression predicting national political knowledge did not find a similar result; third, there are significant, positive relationships between SES variables and both local political knowledge and cable access. Given these factors, the negative relationship between cable TV access and local political knowledge is a reversal, though it is not entirely unexpected.

Turning to **H4C**, there is no significant difference in the level of local political knowledge among citizens with or without satellite radio access ($\beta = -.05, n.s.$). And, there is a significant, positive relationship between home Internet access and the dependent variable ($\beta = .07, p \leq .05$). This relationship is the opposite of what **H4D** predicted. Though the effect size of the media access variables is modest, the partial R² of their block and their relatively large size in comparison to the values

seen in the national political knowledge model suggests that media access is a somewhat more important factor in citizens' local political knowledge.

Discussion and Conclusion

Prior researchers have depicted the contours of national political knowledge and, to a much lesser extent, local political knowledge. Though not all of the hypotheses were supported in this study, the results reported here reaffirm that local and national political knowledge are distributed throughout the population in different patterns. This discussion focuses solely upon local political knowledge and considers the implications of the results and some possible explanations for them.

First, in the model predicting local political knowledge, women and minority respondents closed the knowledge gaps that are observed at the national level: there were no significant differences in local political knowledge across race or gender. Because the pattern of local political knowledge in a community's population is non-generalizable and may be attributed to the unique features of that community, the repeated corroboration of similar local-level findings is notable. Philadelphia, the setting of this research, is starkly different in many ways (political culture, citizen make-up, media market) from Richmond,⁴⁵ Seattle,⁴⁶ or Madison.⁴⁷ The extent to which the predictors of local political knowledge are consistent across these settings—and consistently different from those of national political knowledge—bolsters the conclusion that local political knowledge is a qualitatively different substance than is national political knowledge. As such, it may be more akin to policy-specific knowledge that is driven by issue salience.⁴⁸

Perhaps most interesting are the findings that indicate that media access bears significantly upon citizens' local political knowledge. This affirms one of this paper's key underlying premises: changes in the media environment have tangible implications for local politics. The particulars of the effect of increased media access upon local political knowledge require additional explanation. First, home access to cable (or satellite) TV is negatively related to local—but not national—political knowledge. This conforms to the hypothesized predictions and is a reversal of what might be expected from the non-significant correlation between cable access and both local and national political knowledge. Because cable access is positively correlated with income ($R = .20, p \leq .01$) and education ($R = .07, p \leq .05$), the reversal in the regression model seems to be due to disentangling these interrelated variables. Though time spent with television has not decreased in recent years, viewership of local news has plummeted, and cable is one plausible culprit.⁴⁹ This trend does not bode well for the public's awareness of local affairs, and this finding suggests that there is a real problem.

This problem is exacerbated by the rapid decline of local newspapers. The results depicted a very strong relationship between home delivery of a local newspaper and local political knowledge. As these newspapers falter and perhaps even fail, it is realistic to wonder where citizens will get LPI. Without such information, they will certainly struggle to be knowledgeable about their communities. Though home Internet access

was positively related to local political knowledge in this study, the relevant content online is often driven by what is produced by local newspapers and TV newscasts. In other words, the problem wrought by increasing media access is not limited to only the citizens who opt for non-local content: their choices lead to a spiral that may result in the elimination of local choices for all citizens. The positive relationship between Internet access and local political knowledge may be grounds for cautious optimism—or it could be a spurious result that reflects the socioeconomic advantages of the people who have such access.⁵⁰ If the latter is true, the transition by citizens to new media outlets may have uniformly negative consequences for levels of local political knowledge. The negative bearing of cable TV access in this paper is the canary in the coal mine for such a scenario: it portends a society in which citizens are less knowledgeable about local affairs even if (and when) a viable model for producing local political information is successfully developed.

The research presented here extends scholarly knowledge of local political knowledge. Foremost among the findings is the relevance of citizens' media environments to their local political knowledge. This result—paired with the largely null finding at the national level—supports the premise that the proliferation of new media has unique and possibly negative consequences for local politics. There is a possibility that the expansion of LPI offerings online may be beneficial, but this outcome is far from assured.

Appendix and Notes follow.

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APPENDIX

Survey Items for Knowledge Indices

National Political Knowledge (% correct response)

1. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney? (68%)
2. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not? (34%)
3. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to override a presidential veto? (27%)
4. Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington? (60%)
5. Do you happen to know whether President Bush vetoed, or signed, a recent bill designed to increase spending for children's health insurance? (61%)

Local Political Knowledge (% correct response)

1. Do you happen to know what position Paul Vallas resigned from recently in Philadelphia?^a (41%)
2. Do you know what position John Timoney held in Philadelphia?^b (71%)
3. Do you happen to know why John Street did not run again for mayor in this election?^c (58%)
4. Can you tell me which Democratic candidate for mayor advocated for a "stop-and-frisk" gun policy during the primary campaign?^d (62%)
5. Can you tell me which Democratic candidate for mayor used his own money to fund his primary campaign?^e (14%)
6. Can you tell me who the Republican candidate for mayor was this year?^f (35%)
7. Can you tell me who won the general election for mayor?^d (82%)

^a Paul Vallas was the CEO of School District of Philadelphia for five years before resigning in 2007. Vallas is white.

^b John Timoney was the chief of police in Philadelphia from 1998-2001. Timoney is white.

^c John Street was the mayor of Philadelphia from 2000-2008. He is black and did not run because of term limits.

^d Michael Nutter, the victor of the 2007 Philadelphia mayoral election, strongly supported a "stop-and-frisk" policy. Nutter is black.

^e Tom Knox, who is white, spent \$8 million out of pocket on his bid for the Democratic bid and finished second.

^f Al Taubenberger, who is white, mounted a half-hearted campaign as the Republican candidate for mayor, finishing with 17% of the vote.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2. From the Henry Reeve Translation, revised and corrected. http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html (accessed March 11, 2009); Phyllis Kaniss, *Making Local News* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Robert E. Park, *Society* (New York: Free Press, 1955).

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40. The sample drawn for this study reflects the city of Philadelphia's population, though levels of education and income appear to be slightly high. For an overview of the city's demographics, visit <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/42/42101.html>.

41. In line with other survey research, 17% of respondents either did not know their annual household income or refused to answer the question. After a single-item imputation was used, an income response was available for 96% of respondents. An income for respondents that did not volunteer one was tabulated by substituting the mean income level of other respondents in the same zip code who did provide an income. Four percent of survey respondents provided neither an income nor a zip code and, consequently, are dropped from the multivariate analyses.

42. Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*.

43. National and local political interest are included in both regression models presented in this paper for two reasons. First, including both makes the two models identical aside from the dependent vari-

ables. This allows for clearer comparison. Second, including both interest measures is a way to check the construct validity of the dependent variable knowledge indices. Theoretically, local political interest should predict local political knowledge but not national political knowledge. Similarly, national political interest should predict national political knowledge but not local political knowledge. In the models presented in this paper, this is the case and some modicum of inferential confidence can be derived from this fact.

44. Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*.

45. Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*.

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50. There is a strong positive correlation between Internet access and income ($R = .40, p \leq .01$) and education ($R = .37, p \leq .01$). Income and education, as depicted in Table 1, are in turn strongly correlated with local political knowledge (income: $R = .31, p \leq .01$; education: $R = .30, p \leq .01$).

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