

Community Newspapers and Third-Party Candidates

John F. Kirch*

This article examines how the Washington Post and 11 daily newspapers in Virginia covered the 2013 gubernatorial campaign of Libertarian Robert Sarvis, who received 6.5 percent of the overall vote on Election Day. The study found that community newspapers with circulations under 50,000 provided a higher percentage of their news coverage to the third-party candidate than did the Post and the larger daily newspapers in Virginia.

Candidates who run for political office outside the traditional two-party system are usually ignored or ridiculed by the news media (Joslyn, 1984; Rosenstone et. al., 1996; Sifry, 2003; Stempel, 1969; Stempel & Windhauser, 1984; Stovall, 1985; Zaller & Hunt, 1994; Zaller, 1999). Minor-party contenders who garner some media attention commonly find themselves portrayed as spoilers or protest votes whose only role will be to tip the election in favor of the Democrat or Republican (Herrnson & Faucheux, 1999).

One form of news media that third-party candidates might find more hospitable could be the community newspaper – small weeklies and dailies that focus heavily on local news. Unlike their metropolitan cousins, these smaller publications are known for printing stories about all aspects of their community, whether it is a town council meeting or a neighborhood bake sale (Byerly, 1961; Gronewold, 1999; and Janowitz, 1967). Editors and publishers of smaller newspapers are seen as more connected to their audience, and they view their role as the main chronicler of everything that occurs in that community (Gladney, 1990; Jeffres et. al., 1999; Kennedy, 1974; and Lauterer, 2006). They are, in the words of Gronewold (1999, p. 1), “the last front porch in America,” one of the few institutions left that are dedicated to recording the history of a town, boosting civic pride, and bringing people together. Could this value system of inclusion spill over into election campaigns that involve third-party candidates? Are community newspapers – whether they operate in small towns or focus on specific urban neighborhoods – more receptive to covering political candidates who venture onto the campaign trail from outside the Democratic-Republican establishment?

This exploratory study takes the first step in answering this question by examining how small and large newspapers covered the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial campaign of Robert Sarvis, a Harvard-educated mathematician who mounted a serious third-party challenge as a Libertarian. The Virginia race makes a good case study because Sarvis campaigned throughout the state and received 6.5 percent of the vote, the largest percentage of any third-party gubernatorial candidate in the history of the South and the third largest total for a Libertarian in any state (Virginia State

* Dr. John F. Kirch is an assistant professor of journalism and new media at Towson University.

Board of Elections, Official Results, 2013. See also, “Virginia Libertarian for Governor Vote,” 2013; Beckel, 2013; Jacobs, 2013; Kirch 2016). Sarvis was also seen as a legitimate candidate by political pundits (Payne, 2013; Tuccille, 2013; Will, 2013) and Virginia voters, many of whom said they were looking for an alternative to Republican Ken Cuccinelli II and the eventual winner, Democrat Terry McAuliffe (Bouie, 2013; Dvorak, 2013; Miller & Rogers, 2013; Reinhard, 2013; Zito, 2013). Moreover, polls throughout the campaign indicated Cuccinelli and McAuliffe were deeply unpopular with the Virginia electorate while Sarvis was viewed positively by an estimated 65 percent of the voters (Quinnipiac Poll, October 10, 2013; Quinnipiac Poll, November 4, 2013). The central question this study seeks to answer is, did community newspapers respond differently than metropolitan newspapers to the candidacy of Sarvis or did they mimic the type of coverage provided by larger dailies? More specifically, did community newspapers provide a higher percentage of their coverage to Sarvis than metropolitan newspapers?

The study is important for two reasons. First, there is nothing in the literature that compares the differences between community and metropolitan newspaper coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates. This is a serious omission given the importance small newspapers play to many Americans (Lauterer, 2006; Miller et. al., 2012; Reader 2015). Second, third-party gubernatorial candidates are worth studying because minor parties have had more success at the state level than in national presidential contests (Kirch, 2008; Kirch, 2013; Lem & Dowling, 2006).

The study being reported here developed out of a larger content analysis of the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial election (see Kirch, 2016). The emphasis of the larger study was to examine the *overall news coverage* of the Libertarian compared to the Democrat and Republican while this study emphasizes how *community newspapers* covered Robert Sarvis compared to the *Washington Post* and Virginia’s biggest dailies. The larger study was not originally intended to examine a difference between community and metropolitan news coverage of a credible third-party gubernatorial candidate. However, it was determined that an analysis of community newspaper coverage should be conducted and then reported in a separate study when patterns emerged to suggest a difference in how local and metropolitan dailies were approaching the Virginia election campaign. Separating the analysis of community newspapers from the larger study allowed the researcher to (1) place more emphasis on the differences between community and metropolitan dailies, and (2) determine whether a larger study of community journalism and third-party candidates is warranted. A summary of the larger study’s results is reported later in this article to place the analysis of community journalism in its proper context.

Literature Review

Because most voters have little or no direct contact with political candidates, the news media play a vital role in bringing the world of politics to the electorate (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Lippmann, 1965; Patterson, 1980). However, while news organizations like to think of themselves as objective conveyers of information, scholarship shows the mass media is often an active participant in the political process. For example, the press legitimizes established political institutions (Blumler, 1978; Graber, 1997) and shapes the image of candidates through the use of news frames (Davis, 1994; Jamieson & Waldman, 2003; Joslyn, 1984; Patterson, 1980 and 1994; Zaller & Hunt, 1994). The news media also play a pivotal role in setting the nation’s political agenda (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). One way they do this is by telling voters which candidates they should consider and which candidates can be ignored (Davis, 1994;

Funkhouser, 1973; Graber, 1997; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Joslyn, 1984; McCombs, 2004; McLeod et. al., 1974; Patterson, 1980 and 1994; Shaw & McCombs, 1977; Weaver et. al., 1981; Winter, 1981). Entman (2007) pointed out that the news frames employed by journalists can “promote a particular interpretation” of an event (p. 164), while Ramsden (1996) said reporters are instrumental in telling the public “which policy issues to use as criteria to evaluate the candidates” (p. 66). These findings are backed by other studies that show how the news media – using a process known as priming – can determine (1) the parameters around which campaign issues are debated, and (2) which candidates are likely to win an election (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Entman, 1993; Golan & Wanta, 2001; Iyengar, 1987 and 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Kim et. al., 2002; Kioussis et. al., 1999; McCombs, 2005; Min, 2003; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Son & Weaver, 2005; and Weaver, 2007).

This last point is particularly true when it comes to third-party political candidates. Scholarship over the past 50 years has shown that independent and minor-party presidential contenders receive significantly less news coverage than Democrats and Republicans (Joslyn, 1984; Sifry, 2003; Stempel, 1969; Stempel & Windhauser, 1984; Zaller & Hunt, 1994; Zaller, 1999). In 1980, for example, the leading newspapers and news magazines gave Republican Ronald Reagan and President Jimmy Carter 10 times more coverage than all 11 third-party and independent candidates combined (Rosenstone et. al., 1996). In addition, events held by Carter and Reagan were 50 percent more likely to generate press coverage than events held by the most popular independent candidate, John Anderson (Stovall, 1985). Even Ross Perot, who received nearly 20 percent of the national vote as an independent for president in 1992, was only able to attract media attention because he had millions of dollars in personal wealth to spend on his election efforts (Gold, 1995; Rosenstone et. al., 1996).

Zaller (1999) has argued that these coverage patterns make it difficult for third-party candidates to win. He said that while “media coverage could ... reflect reporters’ anticipation of election results,” it is also possible that the coverage helps determine those results (p. 103). McLeod and Hertog (1992) pointed out that voters might be less likely to vote for a candidate who – according to the news media – has little chance of winning. Joslyn (1984) noted, “A candidate who is ignored will have a difficult time producing the voter awareness necessary for electoral success” (p. 12). Third-party candidates face similar challenges at the state level, with one study showing that third-party gubernatorial contenders during the 2002 campaigns in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Maine appeared in fewer stories, headlines, and lead paragraphs than their major-party counterparts (Kirch, 2013).

Scholars have posited several reasons why news organizations ignore third-party candidates. Zaller (1999) concluded that reporters will not cover minor candidates because they do not believe voters want to know about political contenders who have little chance of winning an election. Zaller found that reporters risk their credibility with the public and their professional standings with their colleagues if they consistently boost weak candidates who eventually fade from the political scene. Others have pointed out that third-party candidates receive less coverage because campaigns are covered like horse races in which only the leading candidates get attention from the news media (Adams, 1984; Atkin & Gaudino, 1984; Harmon, 2000; Patterson, 1994; Robinson & Sheehan, 1980).

Pirth (2004) found that third-party candidates receive less coverage than their major-party competitors because they do not have compelling stories that intrigue reporters. Others have shown that mainstream news organizations are ideologically predisposed to accept the two-party system as natural to American politics and don’t even think to cover third-party candidates

(Altschull, 1995; Gitlin, 1980; Hall, 1977; Kirch, 2015; Rachlin, 1988; Tuchman, 1978). Minor-party contenders are also ignored because they often are not qualified for the offices they seek (Collet, 1996; Rosenstone et. al., 1996), they represent small constituencies that generate little interest among the general population (Abramson et. al., 2000), they fail to build long-lasting coalitions that can seriously challenge the Democrats and Republicans (Berggren, 2005), and they run in a system that has traditionally and legally favored only two major parties (Dwyre & Kolodny, 1997; Lowi, 1999).

All but one of the studies cited here have examined press coverage of third-party candidates at the presidential level – and all of these studies focus on major news outlets like the national television networks or large metropolitan newspapers.[†] What has been left unexplored is how community newspapers cover third-party candidates at the state level, particularly for governor. This is significant because community newspapers account for most of the news media in the United States (Hatcher & Reader, 2012; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2015). For example, Miller et. al. (2012) reported that a majority of American adults believe that local news is important and use the community newspaper as their main source for local information. The National Newspaper Association (2010) has estimated that 150 million Americans read a community newspaper each week. In its 2013 readership study, the NNA (2014) reported that 67 percent of U.S. residents regularly read a daily or weekly community newspaper while 94 percent of survey respondents said their community paper was informative. The Pew Research Project reported that 72 percent of American adults “are quite attached to following local news and information, and local newspapers are by far the source they rely on for much of the local information they need” (quoted in Reichman et. al., 2015).

Gubernatorial races are worth exploring because minor-party candidates have had more success at the state level than they have had running for president (Lem & Dowling, 2006). While no candidate from a minor party has occupied the White House, independent and third-party contenders won 13 gubernatorial elections in the 20th century, including such notables as Lowell Weicker of Connecticut in 1990, Angus King of Maine in 1994, and Jesse Ventura of Minnesota in 1998 (Gillespie, 1993; Gold, 2002; Reiter & Walsh, 1995). More recently, third parties have organized serious challenges for governor in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and Virginia over the past 16 years (Ballotpedia, 2016; Gillespie, 2013; Jacobson, 2014; Kirch, 2008; Kirch, 2016).

Determining what constitutes a “community newspaper” can be difficult. Early scholarship on the subject defined community journalism simply as weekly newspapers in small towns or urban neighborhoods that focused on local news (Byerly, 1961; Edelstein & Larsen, 1960; Janowitz, 1967; Rogers, 1942; Vidich & Bensman, 1958). More recently, the National Newspaper Association (2016) has defined community newspapers as publications committed to covering all aspects of a specific community, whether it is a geographic place or a political, social, racial, or religious group (see also Stamm & Fortini-Campbell, 1983). Others have defined community newspapers in terms of circulation. The newspaper association’s annual readership survey focuses on people who read newspapers with circulations of 15,000 or less (see 2014 report) while Lauterer (2006) described community newspapers as weekly or daily publications with circulations under 50,000.

[†] The one study that did examine minor-party coverage at the gubernatorial level used large daily newspapers as the unit of analysis (Kirch, 2013).

Of all the definitions, though, the one consistent aspect that has been mentioned since at least the 1950s is the community newspaper's propensity to stress local news at all costs. Quoting the late CBS newsman Charles Kuralt, Lauterer (2006) said that community newspapers are "relentlessly local," adding that they are "the heartbeat of American journalism" and "journalism in its natural state" (p. 2-3). Studies show that local newspapers, whether they are in small towns or big city neighborhoods, help connect people and maintain a sense of community (Edelstein & Larsen, 1960; Lauterer, 2006; Terry, 2011; Yamamoto, 2011). Lowrey et. al. (2008) describe community journalism as "intimate, caring, and personal" (p. 276), adding that local newspapers tell the running stories of their communities while holding local institutions accountable to those communities. Local journalists, Glascock (2004) said, "become more involved in a community's affairs" and "become more active in finding solutions to community problems" (p. 30-31). Other scholarship has found that community newspapers contribute to social cohesion and lead to greater community involvement among readers (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; Jeffres et. al., 2007); act as watchdogs of local government (Jeffres et. al., 1999); emphasize consensus over internal community conflict (Janowitz, 1967; Olien et. al., 1968); provide more issue-oriented campaign coverage than larger newspapers, which tend to focus on the horse race (Shaker, 2011); and stress community leadership (Gladney, 1990; Gronewold, 1999). At times, Hindman (1998) said, urban neighborhood newspapers become advocates of democracy, "giving power to the powerless" and providing a forum for voices that are often ignored in the mainstream press (p. 28). Byerly (1961), who was one of the first to coin the term community journalism, summed it up this way: "Community newspapers have something that city dailies lack – nearness to people" (p. 25).

Local newspapers also cover politics differently than national news outlets. In his study of the 1992 Democratic presidential primary season, Meyrowitz (1995) identified a difference between what he called "national journalistic logic" and "local journalistic logic." His study analyzed news coverage of Democratic presidential candidate Larry Agran, the former mayor of Irvine, California, who failed to get on the media's agenda even though he was outpolling more well-known Democrats in the days leading up to the 1992 New Hampshire primary. In interviews with reporters, Meyrowitz found that national news organizations look for reasons to exclude candidates from coverage because they do not have the resources to cover everyone. National editors and reporters, Meyrowitz concluded, take their cues on whom to ignore from party professionals and by examining each candidates' financial resources to determine who has a serious chance of winning the horse race.

Unlike reporters at large news organizations, Meyrowitz said, local reporters are much more likely to write about all of the candidates in a race in an attempt to broaden the public debate. He said local news organizations also face financial constraints that limit the number of stories they can dedicate to each candidate, but he said local journalists cover campaigns "through the filter of 'community events'" and determine which candidates to cover based on "the local public's reaction to candidates" as well as the insights of local politicians and academic experts (Meyrowitz, 1995, p. 51). While national journalistic logic focuses on the horse race, he said, local journalistic logic is moved by the strength of a candidate's ideas and whether that candidate is campaigning in the newspaper's circulation area.

This is not to suggest that community newspapers are perfect. Byerly (1961) himself said that the connection local newspapers have toward their communities is a source of great strength as well as their great weakness. They have been criticized for acting as promoters of their towns rather than as honest brokers of information. They have been called "the backyard junkheap of

American journalism” (Lacy et. al., 1989, p. 39), “chroniclers of local minutia” (Morton, 1990, p. 57), and institutions that avoid the uncomfortable position of reporting conflict that might alienate their readers. Donohue et. al. (1995), for example, demonstrated that community newspapers often protect local elites, acting as guard dogs of community leaders rather than watchdogs of government. In their study of how four Texas newspapers covered the U.S. Department of Energy’s 1984 decision to use a site in the state’s panhandle for a nuclear waste dump, Schweitzer and Smith (1991) found that small newspapers were more susceptible to community pressures and often reflected the sentiment of the community on major issues rather than challenging local leaders when they battle outside forces like the federal government.

The digital era has complicated the notion of community. As Hatcher and Reader (2012) pointed out in the inaugural issue of *Community Journalism*, “‘Community’ is no longer defined exclusively in terms of proximity or social homogeneity” and “journalism is no longer defined as the work of professionals delivering ‘the news’” (p. 2). Instead, the authors argue, community journalism is the study of how journalism both reflects and facilitates culture. In an age in which the media landscape is in upheaval, Hatcher and Reader say, individuals can belong to multiple “mediated communities” in which they share common interests and goals with people from all corners of the globe (p. 3). In addition to geographic location, the authors said, community can be built around ethnic groups, short term goals, or an affinity for certain people or concepts – all of which can be covered by journalists and community members themselves through blogs, social media, and other digital sources. Lowrey et. al. (2008) concur, arguing that community can be defined as shared meanings between individuals who have no geographic connection. They conceptualized community journalism as a process, saying “media should help reveal and make understandable the community structure by informing residents of facilities, spaces, and events and how to use them” (p. 289).

Stamm (1985) noted that communities can be viewed through two dimensions: territory and institutions. Individuals, he said, identify with both a physical place and the institutions that provide them with services, such as the government or a church. While local newspapers could help bring people together as part of one large community, Stamm (1985) said various subgroups use internal communication devices like newsletters to connect members together in a way that the mass media cannot.

But geography is not completely dead. Rosenberry (2015) analyzed the websites of Irish community newspapers and found that even in the digital era, the local press maintained strong coverage of local events, including sports, government, politics, community history, and local land development. The author concluded that local websites continue to fulfill the classic functions of community journalism by covering a geographic location and local institutions.

In a survey of online news readers in Arizona, Mersey (2009) found that citizens feel a stronger connection to their geographic community than they do to various online communities. Community newspapers, whether in print or digital format, are the main source for this local news, Mersey said. As the author put it: “Geography matters to citizens and to journalism... The challenge of local newspapers in light of dwindling circulation figures nationwide is to stay geographically relevant” (p. 357).

Research Questions

Given the importance of community newspapers in the media landscape and the dearth of scholarship on press coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates, this study seeks to answer

three research questions using the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial candidacy of Libertarian Robert Sarvis as its test case:

RQ1: What percentage of their overall coverage did community newspapers provide to Libertarian Robert Sarvis' 2013 gubernatorial campaign, and how did this compare to the percentage of coverage that large newspapers provided the Libertarian?

RQ2: Did community newspapers provide equal coverage of Sarvis and his major-party opponents, or did they follow the well-documented pattern of giving Democrats and Republicans more coverage than third-party candidates?

RQ3: What was the nature of the third-party coverage provided by community and metropolitan newspapers? In other words, how was Sarvis portrayed in the community and metropolitan press, and was there a difference between how different newspapers covered Sarvis' issue positions?

Methodology

The study is a content analysis of the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial election in which Democrat Terry McAuliffe defeated Republican Ken Cuccinelli and Libertarian Robert Sarvis. The analysis examined every staff-written article published about the campaign in the *Washington Post* (circulation 507,465) and 11 daily newspapers in Virginia between Sept. 4 and Nov. 6. The analysis included daily newspapers that published at least one staff-written article about the campaign in the fall. The state newspapers included *The Virginian-Pilot* of Norfolk (circulation, 145,785), *Richmond Times Dispatch* (110,732), *The Roanoke Times* (78,797), the *Daily Press* of Newport News (59,200), the *Daily News-Record* of Harrisonburg (26,887), *The News & Advance* of Lynchburg (26,300), *The Daily Progress* of Charlottesville (21,510), the *Daily News Leader* of Staunton (16,873), the *Register & Bee* of Danville (14,692), *The Progress-Index* of Petersburg (10,152), and *The News Virginian* of Waynesboro (6,015). The newspapers and their circulation figures were identified using the 91st edition of the *Editor & Publisher International Data Book* for 2012. The amount of coverage varied depending on each newspaper's size, with the *Post* publishing 107 staff written articles about the gubernatorial campaign and the *Progress-Index* printing one staff written piece.

Overall, 332 news stories were examined by three coders. The stories were published in daily newspapers from every region of Virginia and included publications from large metropolitan areas to rural communities. News stories were identified by conducting a Lexis-Nexis search using each candidate's name and the terms "gubernatorial" and "governor." Stories were coded on a variety of variables, including the newspaper that published the story, the date the story was published, and where the story appeared in the newspaper (front page, inside page, etc.). The study coded for whether a candidate appeared in a headline or lead paragraph, whether the story outlined each candidates' issue positions, and whether the candidate or other sources were quoted in the story. The articles were also coded for adjectives that reporters used to describe each candidate, such as Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, conservative, liberal, underdog, spoiler, and others. An issue position was coded as "present" if it appeared in the same paragraph as the candidate and was clearly associated with that candidate's policy proposals. The

same coding scheme was used for adjectives. To make the data more manageable, the newspapers were categorized based on their circulation. Because the *Washington Post* was five times larger than the largest Virginia newspaper, it was placed in a category by itself. The four state newspapers with circulations of 50,000 or greater were defined as “large regional newspapers” while publications with less than 50,000 were labeled “community newspapers.” This definition of community newspaper comes from Lauterer (2006).

The three coders underwent a training session to familiarize them with the code book. In addition, two practice sessions were held before formal coding began to ensure that the coders agreed on how each variable was operationalized. Ten percent of the stories – or 35 articles – were analyzed by all three coders to test intercoder reliability using Krippendorff’s alpha. Results obtained an alpha of between .830 and .874 for the variables reported here. This is within the acceptable agreement rate described by Krippendorff (2004) for content analyses. One variable (whether a McAuliffe campaign official was quoted in the story) had an alpha of .791, which is considered less reliable. Several variables (such as whether McAuliffe, Cuccinelli, or Sarvis were mentioned in the story) had an alpha of 1.0. Variables with alpha’s below .791 were not included in this analysis because they were considered unreliable. The analysis did not include a comparison of where a candidate appeared in the newspaper (front page or inside page) because a Pearson chi test indicated no statistical significance in the results for this variable.

Results of Previous Study of Virginia’s 2013 Gubernatorial Campaign

As mentioned earlier, this exploratory study on community newspapers and third-party candidates grew out of a larger content analysis that examined overall news coverage of the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial campaign. The larger study included a comparison of how Democrat Terry McAuliffe, Republican Ken Cuccinelli II, and Libertarian Robert Sarvis were portrayed in the *Washington Post* and the 11 Virginia dailies. The larger study used the same coders and variables as the analysis of community newspapers reported here.

The larger study found that McAuliffe and Cuccinelli appeared in more stories, headlines, and lead paragraphs than Sarvis. For example, McAuliffe appeared in 97.9 percent of the news stories in the study period, Cuccinelli appeared in 96.4 percent, and Sarvis appeared in 39.8 percent. More telling was the number of times each candidate was mentioned. Cuccinelli’s name appeared 3,047 times while McAuliffe’s name appeared 2,980 times, for an average of about nine mentions per candidate, per article. Sarvis’ name appeared 489 times, or less than two times per article. Put another way, Cuccinelli received 47 percent of all candidate name mentions in the coverage period, McAuliffe received 46 percent, and Sarvis .08 percent. The major-party candidates appeared in far more headlines and lead paragraphs than the Libertarian. McAuliffe’s name was used in 39.2 percent of the headlines and 48 percent of the leads; Cuccinelli’s name was used in 33.1 percent of the headlines and 48 percent of the leads; and Sarvis was mentioned in 4.5 percent of the headlines and in 5.4 percent of the leads. Sarvis and his campaign were far less likely to be quoted by the Virginia press than McAuliffe, Cuccinelli, and their respective campaign officials. For example, Cuccinelli was quoted in 22.9 percent of the stories, and his campaign officials were quoted in 24.4 percent; McAuliffe was quoted in 19.6 percent of the stories while his campaign officials were quoted in 23.8 percent; and Sarvis was quoted in 9 percent of the stories that were studied while officials from his campaign were quoted in 1.5 percent. There was no difference in the rate at which each candidate was quoted when they appeared in a story. For example, of all the stories in which Sarvis was mentioned, he was quoted

in 22.7 percent of the cases. By comparison, Cuccinelli was quoted in 23.8 percent of the stories in which he was mentioned and McAuliffe was quoted in 20 percent (see Kirch, 2016 for full results).

Results

Community newspapers gave Sarvis a higher percentage of their overall coverage than did the large regional newspapers and the *Post* (see Table 1). For example, the seven community newspapers combined published 32 staff-written articles about the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial campaign, with Sarvis being mentioned in 26 of them, or 81.3 percent of the articles. By contrast, Sarvis was mentioned in 23, or 21.5 percent, of the *Washington Post* articles and in 83, or 43 percent, of the large regional dailies. The comparison reached statistical significance, using Pearson’s chi square ($p < .01$). The same pattern emerged when calculating the total number of times each candidate was mentioned in each type of newspaper. The *Post* mentioned McAuliffe by name 2,980 times, for an average of 12.2 times per article. Cuccinelli was mentioned in the *Post* 3,047 times, or 12.4 times per article, and Sarvis was mentioned 125 times in the *Post*, or 1.16 times per article. In the regional newspapers, McAuliffe was mentioned 1,469 times, or 7.6 times per article, Cuccinelli was mentioned 1,498 times, or 7.7 times per article, and Sarvis was mentioned 268 times, or 1.4 times per article. The community newspapers mentioned McAuliffe 205 times, for an average of 6.4 times per article, Cuccinelli 212 times, or 6.6 times per article, and Sarvis 96 times, or 3 times per article. Put another way, Sarvis received 4.5 percent of all the candidate name mentions in the *Post*, 8.2 percent of the name mentions in the regional newspaper articles, and 18.7 percent of the name mentions in the community press.

Table 1: Overall Coverage Patterns of Robert Sarvis by Newspaper Type

| Newspaper Type | Percentage of stories Sarvis mentioned | Percentage of stories Sarvis mentioned in headline | Percentage of stories Sarvis mentioned in lead paragraph | Average number of times Sarvis mentioned per story |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Washington Post | 21.5% | 2.8% | 2.8% | 1.16 |
| Large Regional Dailies | 43% | 3.6% | 5.2% | 1.4 |
| Community Newspapers | 81.3% | 15.6% | 15.6% | 3 |

Sarvis also appeared in a larger percentage of the headlines and lead paragraphs in the community newspapers than he did in the larger dailies. Sarvis was mentioned in a headline in 15.6 percent of the stories that appeared in the seven community newspapers, but only 2.8 percent of the stories that appeared in the *Post* and 3.6 percent that appeared in the large regional papers. A chi-square test result of $p < .01$ indicated statistical significance. The same was true with leads. Community newspapers mentioned Sarvis in the lead paragraph in 15.6 percent of the stories while he appeared in lead graphs in 2.8 percent of the *Post* stories and 5.2 percent of the large state papers. The results reached statistical significance with chi-square of $p < .05$.

There also appears to be a correlation between newspaper size and whether Sarvis was quoted in a news story (see Table 2). The *Post* quoted Sarvis in 3.7 percent of the stories, while large regionals quoted him in 10.4 percent and community newspapers in 18.8 percent. The chi-square of $p < .05$ reached statistical significance. By contrast, McAuliffe was quoted in 20.6 percent of the stories in the *Post*, 20.2 percent in the large regionals, and 12.5 percent in community newspapers; Cuccinelli was quoted in 18.7 percent of the *Post* stories, 24.9 percent of the large regional newspaper stories, and 25 percent of the community newspaper articles. However, the percentage of times each major-party candidate was quoted in the press did not reach statistical significance.

Table 2: How Often Each Candidate was quoted in Newspapers

| Newspaper Type | Terry McAuliffe (D) | Ken Cuccinelli (R) | Robert Sarvis (L) |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Washington Post | 20.6% | 18.7% | 3.7% |
| Large Regional Dailies | 20.2% | 24.9% | 10.4% |
| Community Newspapers | 12.5% | 25% | 18.8% |

Although community newspapers provided more coverage to Sarvis than did the large state papers and the *Post*, they followed a similar pattern of giving the major-party candidates more coverage than the Libertarian (see Table 3). While Sarvis appeared in 81.3 percent of the news articles in the community press, McAuliffe was mentioned in 90.6 percent of the stories, and Cuccinelli was mentioned in 93 percent. The numbers for McAuliffe were statistically significant ($p < .01$), but Cuccinelli's were not ($p < .657$). Likewise, the Democrat and Republican appeared in a higher percentage of headlines and lead paragraphs than Sarvis in the community newspapers. While Sarvis was mentioned in 15.6 percent of the headlines and 15.6 percent of the leads in the community newspapers, McAuliffe was named in a headline in 25 percent of the stories that appeared in the community newspapers and 40.6 percent of the lead paragraphs. Cuccinelli was mentioned in a headline in 28.1 percent of the stories and in the lead in 40.1 percent. However, the numbers for the major-party candidates did not reach statistical significance. Although community newspapers mentioned Sarvis more times per article than the regional newspapers and the *Post*, the major-party candidates still received twice as many name mentions per article in community newspapers as Sarvis.

Table 3: Community Newspaper Coverage of all Three Gubernatorial Candidates

| Candidate | Percentage of stories candidate is mentioned | Percentage of headlines each candidate appears | Percentage of lead paragraphs each candidate appears | Average number of times each candidate is mentioned per story |
|---------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Terry McAuliffe (D) | 90.6% | 25% | 40.6% | 6.4 |
| Ken Cuccinelli (R) | 93% | 28.1% | 40.1% | 6.6 |
| Robert Sarvis (L) | 81.3% | 15.6% | 15.6% | 3 |

Newspapers at all levels avoided adjectives to describe Sarvis in the articles in which he appeared. In almost every case, the *Washington Post* and the 11 Virginia dailies used only Sarvis' party label as the adjective to describe him. The *Post* referred to Sarvis as an unknown candidate in 17.4 percent of the stories in which the Libertarian was mentioned, while the large regionals used this adjective in 1.2 percent of the cases. Community newspapers never referred to Sarvis as unknown. The variable reached statistical significance at $p < .01$. None of the other adjective variables that were tested – ideology, spoiler, protest vote, occupation, leading candidate, underdog, wild card, long shot, populist, college graduate, or political novice – reached statistical significance. Community newspapers devoted a higher percentage of their coverage to Sarvis' issue positions than did the large dailies. According to the findings, Sarvis' issue positions appeared in 12.5 percent of the stories that appeared in the community press but only 8.3 percent of the state dailies and 3.7 percent in the *Post*. This measure did not reach statistical significance, however, with a chi-square test result of $p < .166$.

Conclusion

This exploratory study provides some preliminary insight into how community newspapers approach campaigns involving third-party gubernatorial candidates. Specifically, the results suggest that small, local newspapers are more open to covering nontraditional candidates than their metropolitan cousins. RQ1 asked how much coverage community newspapers provided to Sarvis compared to the *Washington Post* and the four large regional dailies in Virginia. As the study noted, Sarvis appeared in a higher percentage of the stories that were published in newspapers with circulations under 50,000 than in the state's larger newspapers and the *Post*. The Libertarian appeared in a higher percentage of the headlines and lead paragraphs in the community press than he did in the five larger newspapers, and he was quoted in a higher percentage of news stories that appeared in the community press than he was in articles published in the larger newspapers. RQ2 asked whether community newspapers provided equal coverage to Sarvis and his major-party opponents. The study suggests that while community newspapers paid more attention to Sarvis than larger publications, the smaller news organizations still wrote more articles about the Democrat and Republican than about the Libertarian.

Finally, RQ3 was designed to examine the nature of the coverage Sarvis received in community newspapers versus metropolitan dailies, focusing on how well the news media reported on the Libertarian's issue positions as well as the adjectives that were used to describe him. As the results suggest, community newspapers focused more on Sarvis' position on issues, such as taxes, gun control, and others, than the larger dailies. None of the newspapers analyzed used adjectives other than Sarvis' party label to define him, although the *Post* referred to Sarvis as an unknown candidate in a higher percentage of stories than did the regional and community newspapers.

There could be several reasons why community newspapers provided a higher percentage of their coverage to Sarvis than the larger newspapers. First, community newspapers may be more responsive to community needs given that editors and reporters are closer to their readers and understand what their audience wants. This is consistent with Meyrowitz's (1995) conclusion that community newspapers cover election campaigns under a concept he dubbed "local journalistic logic" in which reporters take their cues about which candidates to cover from local political leaders as well as the voters in their communities. Second, because they are

“relentlessly local” (Lauterer, 2006), community newspapers may be more willing to cover a third-party candidate when he or she comes to town because it means more for their communities than it does for larger cities. This conclusion ties back to some of the hallmarks of community journalism, particularly its tendency to chronicle the history of a community (Lowrey et. al., 2008) and stress its nearness to people (Byerly, 1961). Third, the unassuming Sarvis may have attracted more attention from community newspapers because they are more consensus-driven in that they want to include all voices in the political debate. Meyrowitz (1995) came to a similar conclusion in his study of the 1992 Democratic presidential primary while Finnegan and Viswanath (1988) and Jeffres et. al. (2007) have said that community newspapers help drive social cohesion.

Finally, community newspapers may have devoted more space to Sarvis – or any candidate for governor who came to their community – because it is the one chance local reporters get to cover the gubernatorial race. Unlike the larger dailies, journalists at community newspapers are not on the campaign trail every day. If they have any ambition to cover big-time politics, local reporters would likely jump at the chance to cover a visiting politician for statewide office. This would allow local reporters to expand their portfolios as they try to advance their careers by pursuing jobs at larger news organizations.

Although preliminary, these results have ramifications for third-party candidates and journalists. Given that community newspapers are more prone to covering minor-party contenders, gubernatorial candidates from smaller parties should target newspapers in small towns as part of their campaigns. The study suggests that it would behoove third-party candidates to create media strategies in which they hold events in geographic locations that are covered by community newspapers, develop relationships with small-town reporters and editors, grant regular interviews with local reporters at small newspapers, and highlight policy proposals that impact specific communities that are served by community media. The study should also be a wakeup call for reporters at large newspapers that they are not serving the electorate’s needs by ignoring serious third-party candidates, especially in races like Virginia in 2013 when the public was looking for an alternative voice to the two unpopular major-party contenders. Reporters should recognize that by ignoring minor-party candidates they are limiting rather than expanding political discourse and helping the Democrats and Republicans maintain their control on power.

The study is limited, though. In all, only 32 staff written articles appeared in Virginia’s community newspapers during the 2013 gubernatorial election. While the results suggest a difference in how small and large newspapers cover minor parties, the sample is too small to form any conclusive judgments. Further research should include a much larger sample of community newspaper coverage by examining how local publications in several other states covered serious third-party gubernatorial contenders. These studies should examine the frequency in which a third-party candidate appears in stories, headlines, and lead graphs as well as how often minor-party contenders are quoted in stories. Of particular interest would be to examine whether a community newspaper’s propensity to cover issues rather than poll numbers (see Shaker, 2011) plays any part in why third-party candidates receive more coverage in these publications. In other words, if large newspapers ignore third-party candidates because they operate under a horse-race paradigm in which only the likely winners are deemed newsworthy, do third-party candidates become inherently more newsworthy when the contest element is removed and news coverage is focused more on educating voters about the issue positions of the candidates? This question is relevant in the context of community newspapers because smaller publications typically do not have the resources to conduct their own polls and have to find other

ways to cover campaigns beyond just the horse race. In addition, a quantitative survey of reporters at different sized newspapers might also be conducted to identify any attitude differences between journalists at large and small newspapers toward minor parties. Such a survey could build on the “local journalistic logic” concept developed by Meyrowitz (1995) and expand his thesis beyond minor candidates within a major political party by viewing it through the context of third-party challengers.

The goal of this preliminary analysis was to determine whether enough evidence exists to justify a larger study in how community newspapers cover third-party gubernatorial candidates. The answer is yes. The current study is a first step in understanding the differences between metropolitan dailies and local newspapers when it comes to covering dissent. It is the first study to indicate that community newspapers may be more open to third-party challenges than their larger metropolitan cousins. The study sheds light on the specific missions of different sized newspapers, and it opens the door to a potentially new avenue of scholarship.

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