Partisan News Before Fox: Newspaper Partisanship and Partisan Polarization, 1881-1972
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Newspaper Partisanship and Partisan Polarization, 1869-1992

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Abstract

How do partisan media affect polarization and partisanship? The rise of Fox News, MSNBC, and hyper-partisan outlets online gives this question fresh salience, but in this paper, we argue that the question is actually not new: prior to the broadcast era, newspapers dominated American mass communication. Many of these were identified as supporting one party over the other in their news coverage. While scholars have studied the composition and impact of the partisan press during their 19th-century height, the political impact of the gradual decline of these partisan papers remains relatively under-examined. The unnoted vitality and endurance of partisan newspapers (which constituted a majority of American newspapers until the 1960s) represents a huge hole in our understanding of how parties communicate. As a consequence of this omission, scholars have ignored a potentially vital contributing factor to changing patterns of partisan voting.

In this paper, we examine both the degree and influence of partisanship in historical newspapers. We begin by content analyzing news coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1885-1986 and the *Atlanta Constitution* from 1869-1945. To avoid problems of selection bias and the absence of a neutral baseline of coverage in the coded news, we focus on a subset of partisan news for which we have access to neutral coverage of a full population of potential stories: the obituaries of U.S. Senators. By coding whether and how the papers covered the deaths of these partisans over time, we are able to systematically test for bias. We then collect information on newspaper editorial stances from Editor and Publisher's Annual Yearbook to examine the impact of newspaper partisanship on voting patterns in presidential elections from 1932-92. Specifically, we test whether the proportion of partisan news outlets in a given media market explains changes in the rate of polarized voting.

"...in the process of our vast economic expansion we have failed to remedy one of our serious shortages—the shortage of Democratic newspapers. I hope that some day soon this shortage will be overcome... I am sure that you realize that when I say Democratic newspapers, I don't mean violent, partisan, distorted newspapers, like so much of the Republican press. Democrats don't want that kind of press nor do the American people" (Harry Truman, quoted in the Los Angeles Times 1955)

"[the] tradition in this country of a press that oftentimes is opinionated. The golden age of an objective press was a pretty narrow span of time in our history. Before that, you had folks like Hearst who used their newspapers very intentionally to promote their viewpoints. I think Fox is part of that tradition — it is part of the tradition that has a very clear, undeniable point of view. It's a point of view that I disagree with. It's a point of view that I think is ultimately destructive for the long-term growth of a country that has a vibrant middle class and is competitive in the world" (Barack Obama, quoted in Wenner 2010).

Introduction

How do partisan media affect polarization and partisanship? This question has become particularly salient with the rise of Fox News, MSNBC, and other media outlets perceived as favoring one ideology over another. However, as President Obama observes in the above quote, for much of its early history American mass communication was dominated by opinionated news, and particularly by newspapers that supported one party over the other in their news coverage. While scholars have studied the composition and impact of the partisan press during their 19th-century height, the political impact of the gradual decline of these partisan papers remains relatively under-examined. Consequently, scholars have neglected a potentially vital contributing factor to changing patterns of partisan opinion and voting.

In this paper, we examine both the content and the influence of partisanship in historical newspapers. In so doing, we will answer two overall research questions. First, how did the partisanship of newspapers affect the **content** – that is, *selection* and *presentation* -- of news ? Second, how did changes in the prevalence of partisan news outlets correspond to changes in partisan voting behavior in specific news markets? Specifically, does the decline of partisan

newspapers help explain the rise of so-called split-ticket voting?

To address our first question, we analyze the content of news coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1885-1986 and the *Atlanta Constitution* from 1869-1945. To avoid problems of selection bias and the absence of a neutral baseline of coverage in the coded news, we focus on a subset of partisan news for which we have access to neutral coverage of a full population of potential stories: the obituaries of U.S. Senators. By coding whether and how the papers covered the deaths of these partisans over time, we are able to systematically test for bias. Our results show widespread—albeit not universal—partisan bias in the selection and presentation of the obituaries of Republican and Democratic senators.

In the second part of the analysis, we collect information on newspaper editorial stances from *Editor and Publisher's Annual Yearbook* to construct a quadrennial database of newspaper party self-identification from 1932 to 2004 for 66 key counties across the country. We then match these data to county-level presidential and congressional vote totals. Based on these data, we describe the decline of explicitly partisan newspapers over time and find evidence that the rise of non-partisan news helps explain the rise of ticket-splitting and decline of consistent partisan voting.

American Partisan Media: A Quick Historical Overview

In contrast to modern disavowals, political parties and the press were deeply intertwined from almost the beginning of the American Republic. Until the rise of the "penny press" in the mid-19th Century, most American newspapers had symbiotic relationships with political parties and governmental officials (Cook 1989, Hamilton 2004, Schudson 1978). Such partisan papers

often received tidy financial inducements, patronage, loans, printing contracts, circulation assistance and other benefits as a consequence of their party boosterism, providing a stable source of income in a volatile market (Smith 1977).

With the introduction of the penny press, these reliable subsidies were soon dwarfed by the vast commercial opportunities offered by a mass advertising revenue model (Schudson 1978). Hamilton (2004) highlights the rise of independent newspapers in the 19th Century in the United States. He finds that papers identifying themselves as independent or leaning-independent (that is, independent, but supporting one of the parties) exploded from only around 13% of the papers in the top 50 markets in 1870 to around 47% in 1900.

The rapid decline in partisanship (and the incentives to pursue economies of scale in each marketplace) identified by Hamilton during this time period would seem to imply that partisan papers would be at death's door at the dawn of the 20th Century. However, as Table 1 illustrates below, far from disappearing from the American scene, a majority of American papers still explicitly identified themselves as favoring one of the two political parties a half century later.[1] Only after 1950 did partisan papers slowly begin to fade from the news scene.

[Table 1 around here]

Of course, relying solely on newspapers to report their partisan self-identification leaves open the possibility that the news outlets could choose to market themselves to consumers as "fair and balanced," while actually skewing their coverage differently. As we have

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[1] In its annual yearbooks (titles vary), *Editor and Publisher* lists salient details of every English-language daily newspaper published in the United States, including location, circulation, publishing schedule, and (most importantly for our purposes), self-identified party affiliation.

demonstrated elsewhere (Baum and Groeling 2009), consumers discount news they believe is biased in line with an outlet's perceived political outlook. This provides an incentive to assert nonpartisanship. Indeed, Lawrence (1928: 894) argues that such self-identifications undercount the influence of ideology on news decisions:

> "Every time you send a questionnaire to newspapers listed in the newspaper directory, and ask them for their political affiliations, they invariably reply 'independent'; and there is no way to get away from that classification... [M]uch as we might not like to admit it, the news content of the newspapers of today depends to no small extent on the editorial policies of those papers... and hence a very good thing is frequently relegated to some inside page or the waste-basket if it is favorable to the cause they are opposing, while the meritorious thing about the candidate they are supporting is usually put on the first page and given all the prominence necessary. That is a very important factor in political campaigns."

This logic would tend to lead one to distrust news outlets proclaiming ideological independence in their coverage, but presumably outlets that did identify as partisan would be more credible in their claims, as they have no obvious incentive to commit a "Type II" misrepresentation (that is, claiming bias where there is none). However, even among those self-identified partisan papers, it remains unclear whether their identification should be taken to apply to news content, or limited to content labeled as commentary or editorials. Even in contemporary news, some outlets like the *Wall Street Journal* argue that the very clear ideology

of their editorial page has no bearing on their news content.[2]

Thus, while newspaper-provided party affiliations do provide some potentially useful information, it is not yet clear what implications they hold for actual news content. In the next section, we discuss the difficulty scholars face in trying to measure partisan bias in media content—especially from a historical context—as well as our methodological solution to this problem.

Difficulties in Measuring Partisanship in News

Beyond more mundane problems like securing access to news content, the difficulty and expense of mounting a major content analysis, challenges getting such research placed in top journals, etc., researchers face two main challenges: the Unobserved Population problem (Groeling and Kernell 1998), and Subjectivity.[3]

Unobserved Population:

When faced with allegations of media bias, journalists and news organizations often defend themselves by arguing that their coverage is a fair representation of reality, and that the accuser is just unhappy about the true state of the world (as comedian Stephen Colbert sarcastically put it,

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[2] Indeed, see Groseclose and Milyo (2005) for an empirical study that concludes that—despite their conservative editorial page, the *Wall Street Journal*'s news content was actually comparatively liberal.

[3] See Groeling (2013) for a more in-depth review of the current state of the art in empirical studies of media partisanship.

"reality has a well-known liberal bias" (Colbert 2006)). Similarly, longtime *CBS Evening News* anchor Walter Cronkite famously said, "Our job is only to hold up the mirror—to tell and show the public what has happened. Then it is the job of the people to decide whether they have faith in their leaders or governments" (quoted in Alan and Lane 2003, 139-40).

As it turns out, the so-called "mirror" claim is actually quite difficult to address empirically for one simple reason: in most news stories, only the news organizations that assembled the stories can view the "unobserved population" of *potential* stories not selected for distribution. Outside observers only view the final product of the newsgathering process, and not any "raw material" that ended up on the cutting room floor—a problem that is obviously exacerbated when one is considering bias in a historical context.[4]

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[4] As Groeling and Kernell (1998) put it, "[R]esearch based exclusively on content analysis of reported news commits the fallacy of drawing inferences from data that has been selected on the dependent variable. The issue of selection bias presents this research with a serious conundrum. How can it assess the representativeness of the sample when the population is comprised mostly of stories that were never reported and thereby elude observation?" (1067) D'Allessio and Allen (2000) make a similar point when they pessimistically conclude that such biases might be unknowable, observing "If one considers the universe of all stories as a population and the list of those that are covered as a sample, the presumption is that, because the 'sampling' procedure is carried out by individuals with opinions, the selection therefore will be biased. This is only a presumption, however, as the 'population' is not only unknowable but unidentifiable. What would be 'all the news in the world?' And, in the absence of population data, although it is safe

Subjectivity:

Differing perceptions of story content might arise from differences in the content of news, or might instead reflect prior attitudes regarding the bias of that source. Because of well-documented cognitive biases—such as confirmation and disconfirmation biases, selective perception, anchoring, attention bias, the clustering illusion, and selective perception, among others—partisans might sincerely perceive news as biased against their preferred stance, even when it is actually unbiased (see Hastorf and Cantril 1954; Dalton et al. 1998). Baum and Gussin (2007) experimentally altered a news story to appear to have originated from different outlets, including CNN and Fox. They found that "[M]erely by varying the identifying information in a news report from that of an outlet perceived as liberal (conservative) to one perceived as conservative (liberal), we induced participants to evaluate the report's content as significantly more conservative (liberal)" (26. Turner (2007) reports similar results in a separate study).[5]

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to presume that gatekeeping bias occurs, it is impossible to know, or even estimate, its magnitude." (136)

[5] The problem is exacerbated by the tendency of partisans to strategically allege bias. When a political figure is perceived to be the victim of biased coverage from a news organization, harmful messages from that organization are discounted and favorable messages are perceived as particularly credible (Baum and Groeling 2009). As VandeHei and Allen (2012) argue in an article on bias in the 2012 campaign, "Republicans cry 'bias' so often it feels like a campaign theme. It is, largely because it fires up conservatives and diminishes the punch of legitimate

In addition, aggregating disparate news content—particularly over time—presents unique challenges. For example, should news outlets (or researchers, more to the point) treat Benghazi, Watergate, and the Teapot Dome scandal as equivalent scandals? Is the passage of the Affordable Care Act equivalent in importance to the refusal to authorize U.S. participation in the League of Nations in 1920?

Measuring Partisan Bias Over Time Using Senator Obituaries

We address these methodological concerns by relying on a subset of partisan news with observable partisan content that is systematically comparable over time: the deaths of partisan figures (specifically United States senators). The party affiliations and dates of death of all senators are publicly archived, allowing us to know when such an event occurred, even if the newspaper in question chose not to cover it. Each senator's official Senate biography should also provide us with a nonpartisan, reasonably objective baseline against which to measure news coverage. Moreover, because there is a social norm to be generous to one's adversaries in death (to "speak no ill of the dead," as it were), such stories should provide an especially "hard case" for observing media bias, thus making any positive results that much more compelling.

Partisan Bias Sample and Method (LA Times and Atlanta Constitution)

As mentioned above, we examine historical news content from the *Los Angeles Times*

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investigative or narrative journalism." Several studies (Watts et al. 1999, Smith 2011, and Ladd 2012) suggest that elite criticism of the news media (particularly from conservative elites) has contributed directly to increased perceptions of media bias.

(regarded as Republican—at least until the 1960s),[6] and the Atlanta *Constitution* (identified with the Southern wing of the Democratic Party). We searched the ProQuest archive of each newspaper for news content mentioning the senator's last name within five words of their first name within two months of their death.[7] Our units of analysis were senators, and our sample included any senator who:

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[6] Halberstam (1979) says that from 1890 to 1960, "the *Times* was not just a voice of anti-unionism, but an outspoken, relentless instrument for all conservative policies and candidates, wedded to the Republican Party, but wary of the party lest it become too soft" (108). However, Halberstam argues that the leadership of the *Times* consciously tried to moderate its political stance beginning in 1960: "His first job, Nick Williams thought, was to separate the [*Times*] from the Republican Party, to gain some degree of independence in coverage of politics (old-time *Times* readers were stunned during the 1960 national campaign when the *Times* covered not just Richard Nixon but Kennedy as well; the idea of printing what a Democrat was saying about a Republican was unheard of)." (286). In support of Halberstam's conclusion, the *Times* no longer identified itself as Republican in the *Annual Yearbook* surveys in subsequent election years.

[7] We excluded advertisements, probate notices, letters to the editor, or labeled opinion content. We also required that the story mention the death of the senator in question. In some early cases, stories of the senators' grave illness appeared after they had actually died, and in others stories included in-passing mentions of the figure without reference to their death (e.g. quoting a saying, referencing a landmark dwelling, etc.).

- Had a last name that occurred in the first half of the alphabet

- Belonged to the Republican or Democratic party

- Died during the period covered by ProQuest for that newspaper[8]

We also collected controls for whether the senator had achieved a higher office, had a "boring" death (e.g. natural causes & out of office), geography (in relation to the newspaper), scandals (as noted by their official Senate bio) and the length of their official Senate biography. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for the senators and stories we coded. UCLA undergraduates independently conducted all content coding online under the supervision of graduate research assistants. Any evaluative coding represents agreement of at least two separate coders.

We have three main dependent variables. The first is **Sum of Stories**. This is simply a count of the total number of different stories we found for each deceased senator. If we did not find any stories about a senator in the sample, that counted as zero stories. The binary version of this variable is labeled Any Story. We expect that the Atlanta *Constitution* should be more likely to cover the death of Democrats than Republicans, with the opposite prediction for the *Los Angeles Times* (at least before 1960, when the *Times* is alleged to have shifted its political stance).

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[8] Note that full-text stories were not available for the Atlanta *Constitution* in time to be included in this study, so valence coding for that paper is based on the coding of headlines and (when available) abstracts. We are currently conducting a larger content analysis of more than 30 different partisan newspapers.

The second dependent variable is **Sum of Positive Stories**. This reflects the number of different stories, from the above total, where the coders had agreed that a positive evaluation of the senator had been made.[9] In the analysis that follows, this variable either excludes observations where no story at all was found for a particular senator (labeled as Sens with Story), or includes them with a value of zero (labeled as All Sens). The binary version of this variable is Any Positive. Again, the expectation is that the Constitution should be more favorable to Democrats, and the pre-1960 *Times* should be more favorable to Republicans.

Our final dependent variable is **Grieving**. For the *Los Angeles Times*, coders noted whether the story headline included any mention of an overt act demonstrating grieving (including mentions of crying, mourning, other emotions, or personally attending a funeral).[10] Here, we expect the *Times* to disproportionately highlight despair over the departure of Republicans, at least prior to 1960.

As mentioned above, we also identified various characteristics of the senators and papers that might be expected to influence story selection or content, including:

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[9] The coders were instructed to code any positive or negative items that occurred in the story, including quotes or sentiments from sources other than the reporter. They were instructed to treat as neutral any "resume"-type information (titles or positions held or accomplishments in office) unless they were presented with valenced adjectives. Coders also recorded whether the stories included any negativity, but so few did that that the insignificant results have been excluded here for brevity's sake. Speak no ill of the dead, indeed.

[10] The variable will be added to the Atlanta *Constitution* coding when we are able to access the full-text collection later.

- **Republican**: Our main explanatory variable, which takes a value of 1 if the senator was Republican, 0 if s/he was a Democrat.

- **Higher Office**: Takes a value of 1 if the senator at some point held a higher office (e.g. governor, vice president, president, a cabinet post, ambassador, or supreme court justice)

- **Boring Death**: This variable attempts to capture whether there might be anything particularly newsworthy about the senator's death, whether it be dying in office (producing interest regarding political implications, successors, etc.), or a particularly interesting circumstances of death (duels, murders, unusual diseases, etc.). Dying of old age while out of office counted as a 1, while dying in more interesting circumstances counted as zero.

- **Bio Length**: This is simply the number of characters in the official Senate biography for the senator. The expectation is that longer biographies should signal a more newsworthy career.

- **Scandal in Bio**: This takes a value of 1 if the official Senate biography mentioned a personal or professional scandal, affair, impropriety, or other highly embarrassing incident related to the Senator. As Table 2 shows, these were relatively infrequent. The expectation would be that such scandals might increase the amount of coverage, but decrease its favorability.

- **Californian**: [*Times* only] this takes a value of 1 if the senator represented

California; 0 otherwise. [11]

- **South:** (*Constitution* only) This takes a value of 1 if the senator represented Georgia or any of the states of the former Confederacy, 0 otherwise. This variable is also interacted with our main explanatory variable of interest (Republican) to test the notion that ideological differences in the northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party might lead to relatively different treatment of members of the same party. The expectation is that the *Constitution* would treat southern Democrats especially well.

- **Post 1960:** (*Times* only) As noted above, some have argued that the *Times* ceased favoring Republican political figures after 1960. We also interact this variable with our main explanatory variable of interest to test whether coverage of Republican and Democratic senators changes after 1960.

Results

Tables 3a (*Los Angeles Times*) and 3b (Atlanta *Constitution*) show the results of our statistical tests. Starting with the *Times*, most surprising is probably the exceptionally weak results for the dependent variables **Sum of All Stories** and **Any Story** (models 1 and 4 respectively): In contrast to what we find later for the *Constitution*, it seems clear that the *Times* determined which senators to cover based on criteria unrelated to our main explanatory

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[11] A separate variable accounting for senators from states neighboring California was tested and abandoned because of complete insignificance. California's apparent obliviousness to the affairs of neighboring states has a certain amount of face validity, we confess.

variables. According to these measures, the *Times* does not appear to be politically biased in which senators' deaths they choose to cover. We graphically illustrate the results from Model 1 in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 about here]

In contrast, the results for the remaining models suggest the *Times* does display bias in *how* it chooses to cover those senators, once they appear in its pages. Starting with Model 2, the pre-1960 *Times* included about one more positive story for every four departed Republican senators, relative to the valence in its obituaries of Democratic senators ($p<.05$). Perhaps more interesting, after 1960 that relationship appears to reverse entirely, with the interaction term wiping out the prior Republican advantage and replacing it with a significant pro-Democratic advantage of comparable size. Similar findings emerge in Model 3 (which repeats this regression analysis, but includes in the sample as 0 values instead of missing observations senators who did not have any *Times* coverage of their death), Model 5 (the binary dependent variable version of Model 3), and Model 6 (the binary dependent variable version of Model 2). Figures 2 and 3 graphically illustrate the results for the *Times* for Models 2 (including only senators with obituaries) and 3 (all senators included).

[Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Models 7 and 8, which examine how many headlines for a given senator mention grieving over their death, also show a similar pattern: prior to 1960, Republicans have a significantly (or, in Model 7, marginally significant at $p<.10$) greater emphasis of the sadness of their passing compared to Democrats. After 1960, the trend reverses, with Democrats being significantly more likely to be featured in the paper as the target of grieving than their Republican peers. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the results on the grieving dependent variable for

Models 2 (including only senators with obituaries) and 3 (all senators included).

[Figures 4 and 5 about here]

Table 3b shows surprisingly different results for the *Constitution*. Overall, the strikingly consistent pattern is that the paper treats northern Republicans and Democrats similarly, but (in every measure) treats southern Democrats significantly better than either group. In contrast, southern Republicans are treated significantly worse than southern Democrats in every model except 2b (though still marginally so, at $p<.10$) and 5b (insig.). Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the results for the *Constitution* for Models 2b (including only senators with obituaries) and 3b (all senators included), respectively. In order to facilitate comparison with the *Times* results, Figure 6 replicates Figure 1, graphically illustrating the results from Model 1 (total number of obituaries for all senators, comparing coverage of Northern and Southern partisans). Figures 7 and 8, in turn, replicate Figures 2 and 3, illustrating the results for the *Constitution* for the Sum of All Positive stories models -- Model 2b (including only senators with obituaries) and 3b (all senators included), respectively.

[Figures 6- 8 about here]

Discussion

This analysis produced some surprising results. In the case of the *Times*, the surprisingly unbiased story selection process (when combined with the apparently biased presentation of those stories) might suggest heavier reliance upon (and editing of) national wire service reports,

while the *Constitution* might reflect a more regional news emphasis.[12] Nonetheless, both analyses did produce substantial evidence that both newspapers produced biased coverage in favor of their "preferred" party. In the case of the *Times*, it is especially important to note the post-1960 reversal in slant that paralleled its change in self-described partisan affiliation. These results set the stage for the second half of this paper, which tracks the self-described partisan affiliation of newspapers in 66 different news markets across the country and uses that information to predict changes in partisan voting patterns.

Partisan News and Voting

The remainder of this paper explores one potential electoral impact of the emergence of a nonpartisan press: the impact of partisan and independent newspapers on partisan voting among the electorate. Specifically, we look at how the emergence of independent newspapers correlates with the divergence between presidential and congressional voting at the county level.[13]

From 1840 to 1900, the party that won the presidency also won control of Congress in 13 of 15 elections (Engstrom and Kernell 2005). From 1940 to the 2000, on the other hand, the party that won the presidency captured control of Congress in only 5 out of 13 elections. At the

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[12] And as a reminder, the *Constitution*'s content coding is based on an analysis of headline and abstract; adding in the content of the full stories should enhance the quality of the measures of positivity.

[13] Note that the partisan voting sample presented here was gathered in collaboration with Erik Engstrom of UC Davis for a project examining the causes and consequences of the decline of newspaper partisan affiliations.

district level a similar trend emerges. Whether looking at individual split-ticket rates (Burden

and Kimball 2002) or split presidential-congressional outcomes in districts (Brunell and

Grofman 2009), there is clear evidence of attenuation between presidential and congressional

voting in the post-World War II era (Jacobson 2001: 147).

While a number of explanations have been offered for this trend–from the weakening of

party organizations to the rise of incumbency–we explore the possible role of nonpartisan

journalism in this electoral development. We hypothesize that where partisan papers prevailed,

information was either dominated by one side or was the product of an adversarial process that

presented political information in overtly partisan terms, allowing a more consistent partisan

view of politics. In contrast, we hypothesize that relying solely on nonpartisan news sources

should have diminished the strength, frequency, and consistency of partisan news voters would

receive, decreasing the consistency of their partisan views, and ultimately in their voting

behavior.[14]

Units of Analysis

Our units of analysis are 66 representative cities that would later be the nucleus of a TV

market area (so-called Nielsen Designated Market Areas). To be included in our sample, the

core city of the market area could not share media with or be considered a suburb of another

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[14] See Baum and Groeling (2009) and Groeling (2010) for a discussion of how stories favored

by nonpartisan media can undermine the consistency of partisan communication, particularly

when one party controls Congress and the presidency.

nearby city or market.[15] Beginning in 1924, we gathered party affiliation, circulation, and publication information for each newspaper in these cities for each presidential election year until 2004.[16] Figure 9 charts the number of papers and their party affiliations in these 66 markets over time.

[Insert Figure 9 here]

Figure 1 echoes of the story shown in Table 1. Until the late 40s, within these markets about half of all papers were independent (54% or less). This figure increased gradually until 1960, after which the rate of expansion increased. By 2004 only 5% of the papers were still declaring a partisan affiliation, and by 2008 the *Editor and Publisher Annual Yearbook* no longer included data on party affiliations (the publication is now defunct).

Variables

The dependent variable for this analysis is the **gap**, or divergence, between presidential and congressional voting. For each county we take the absolute value of the difference between

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[15] Note that *Editor and Publisher*'s directory of papers apparently did not include party affiliations in its 1921 edition, and prior editions were unavailable, so we began our analysis with the 1924 presidential election cycle. There were actually over 100 DMAs that met our criteria (about half of the DMAs), but due to limited labor, we selected a random subset of 66 for analysis.

[16] Note that if a newspaper put out multiple editions per day under the same name, we counted it as a single paper. If the same company owned more than one paper published under different names in the same city, we counted each paper name separately.

the Democratic share of the presidential and congressional vote (i.e., |Democratic Presidential Vote$_{it}$ – Democratic Congressional Vote$_{it}$|). The county-level electoral data comes from ICPSR Study #8611 (Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1987). This dataset reports the percentage of votes received by presidential and congressional candidates for every county in the United States from 1840 to 1992.

The main independent variable is the **Percentage of Independent Newspapers** within each county. This is measured as the total number of independent newspapers in a county divided by the total overall number of newspapers in that same county. To control for county-specific levels of split-outcomes the model includes **DMA fixed effects**.

In addition, we also interact the DMA fixed effects with a dummy variable indicating whether the year is before or **after 1966**. This allows the county fixed effects to vary for the era before and after the Civil Rights Act. This will also help adjust for the electoral realignment brought on by the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, and the fact that Republican presidential nominees achieved a foothold in the South before their Congressional candidates.

We also control for electoral factors like whether a particular congressional race is **Uncontested**, the Democratic vote share of the prior **Midterm** election (to establish a baseline of partisanship for the county), the **National Presidential** popular vote (to help control for national tides in the election), and dummy variables controlling for region of the country.

Results

Column 1 of Table 4 presents a bare-bones model with the percentage of independent newspapers as the key independent variable (along with DMA fixed effects). In this stripped down model, we find a positive and significant ($p<.01$) coefficient for independent newspapers.

The coefficient corresponds to a 6.3% increase in the divergence of presidential and congressional votes as the independent variable moves from zero to one (i.e. from having no independent papers to having no partisan papers). The next column adds an interaction between the DMA fixed effects and a post 1966 dummy variable. Again the coefficient on the independent newspaper is significant ($p<.01$), and indicates a corresponding increase in divergence of 4.7%. So, in these simple models we find a significant correlation between the emergence of independent newspapers and split-ticket voting.

[Table 4 around here]

In the models shown in Columns 2 through 7, we add each of our independent variables sequentially. In every case, the coefficient for independent newspapers is positive and significant at $p<.05$ or better. In the fully-controlled model (7), moving from purely partisan newspapers to purely independent papers increased split-ticket outcomes by 3.4%.[17]

Discussion

While consistent with our predictions, these results must be treated with some caution. First, they do not firmly establish a causal direction. It is possible that instead of causing split-outcomes, independent newspapers were caused by the rise of more independent voters.

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[17] The significance of this coefficient drops somewhat, but this is not too surprising given the inclusion of television in the model: As we have argued elsewhere (Groeling and Engstrom 2009), the introduction of television is closely correlated with (and arguably causally related to) the emergence of independent papers, and thus one would expect an increase in the standard error. Nevertheless, the coefficient is still statistically significant.

However, we believe that the massive exogenous technological and economic changes to the news environment (primarily the rise of the new medium of television, which we argue elsewhere helps fuel the decline of newspaper partisanship) is a much more credible candidate as a trigger for societal change than changes in voting preference that have no other obvious trigger. Nonetheless, a more careful treatment of the time series elements of this analysis will assist us in sorting out causal direction. Second, our data are at the aggregate level. As a result, these findings might be vulnerable to a classic ecological fallacy. We are currently working to acquire higher-quality data correlating media choices with voting behavior across different media environments.

Conclusion

The aforementioned caveats notwithstanding, it seems clear that the influence of nonpartisan news had huge implications for party politics in the post-war era. However, beginning in the late 1980s, the market for political news began to shift again. Howard Fineman (2005) described the shift as follows:

> "The notion of a neutral 'mainstream' national media gained a dominant following only in World War II and in its aftermath, when what turned out to be a temporary moderate consensus came to govern the country….Still, the notion of a neutral, non-partisan mainstream press was, to me at least, worth holding onto. Now it's pretty much dead, at least as the public sees things."

Fineman's eulogy for his so-called "media party" might have been somewhat premature, but there is no question that recent years have seen a striking resurgence of news sources aligned with the parties. The increasing partisan activism across media (particularly in new

media) makes it clear that the old media's hegemonic dominance of both the rules and content of American news has been dramatically eroded. Rather than representing a horrifying new reality on the American scene, however, it seems to foretell a return to a prior equilibrium, with the post-war period notable chiefly as an exception to a central tendency in American news.

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Appendix: Cities in the Voting Sample

Los Angeles	Charleston, SC
Chicago	Boise, ID
Philadelphia	Sioux Falls, SD
Houston	Augusta, GA
Detroit	Lafayette, LA
Phoenix	Bakersfield, CA
Denver	Yakima, WA
Pittsburgh	Columbus, GA
Portland, OR	Amarillo, TX
Baltimore	Rockford, IL
Indianapolis	Topeka, KS
San Diego	Bangor, ME
Nashville	Panama City, FL
Columbus, OH	Binghamton, NY
Cincinnati	Gainesville, FL
Salt Lake City	Missoula, MT
West Palm Beach	Hattiesburg, MS
Las Vegas	Billings, MT
Oklahoma City	Elmira, NY
Memphis	Jackson, TN
Jacksonville	Rapid City, SD
New Orleans	Charlottesville, VA
Knoxville	Jonesboro, AR
Tulsa	Bowling Green, KY
Lexington, KY	Grand Junction, CO
Tucson	Laredo, TX
Honolulu	Eureka, CA
Omaha	Cheyenne, WY
Spokane	San Angelo, TX
Rochester, NY	Casper, WY
Chattanooga	St. Joseph, MO
Cedar Rapids	Zanesville, OH
Baton Rouge	Victoria, TX
Charleston, SC	Alpena, MI

Table 1:
Partisan Newspapers as a Proportion of All Daily Newspapers, 1940-2000
(source: Editor and Publisher Annual Yearbooks; includes "leaners")

	Democratic	Republican
1940 (n=1847)	25.9%	26.0%
1950 (n=1993)	25.5%	26.9%
1960 (n=1706)	21.3%	25.8%
1970 (n=1740)	16.7%	20.4%
1980 (n=1738)	9.1%	11.1%
1990 (n=1617)	4.9%	7.7%
2000 (n=1478)	3.1%	4.8%

Table 2:
Sample Population Characteristics

	Atlanta Constitution	Los Angeles Times
# Senators Searched	364	581
# Senators With Story Found	163	338
# Stories Coded	348	379
Earliest Senator Coded	1869	1885
Latest Senator Coded	1945	1986
Average Year of Death	1912	1930
Senators with >0 Stories		
Republican	44.8%	48.5%
Higher Office	20.9%	20.1%
Boring Death	68.1%	77.2%
Biography Length	814.1 characters	805.0 characters
Scandal in Bio	1.8%	3.0%
Number of Stories	2.13	1.41
Number of Positive Stories	1.47	0.62
Number of Negative Stories	0.09	0.14

	(1) Regress.	(2) Regress.	(3) Regress.	(4) Logit	(5) Logit	(6) Logit	(7) Regress	(8) Regress
	Sum of Stories (all sens)	Sum of Positive Stories (Sens w/ story)	Sum of Positive Stories (all sens)	Any Story (all Sens)	Any Positive (all Sens)	Any Positive (Sens w/ story)	Grieving (All Sens)	Grieving (Sens w/ story)
Republican	-0.038	0.261	0.077	-0.158	0.537	0.638	0.02	0.075
	(0.053)	(0.113)*	(0.042)^	(0.217)	(0.285)^	(0.265)*	(0.012)^^	(0.036)*
Post 1960	0.107	0.336	0.233	0.432	1.324	0.754	0.081	0.182
	(0.088)	(0.157)*	(0.071)**	(0.359)	(0.403)**	(0.365)*	(0.02)***	(0.05)***
Rep*Post1960	0.011	-0.547	-0.212	0.048	-1.186	-1.449	-0.095	-0.209
	(0.122)	(0.225)*	(0.098)*	(0.496)	(0.569)*	(0.527)**	(0.028)**	(0.072)**
Californian	-0.047	0.311	-0.059	-0.197	-0.442	0.279	-0.011	0.025
	(0.178)	(0.264)	(0.142)	(0.744)	(1.091)	(0.598)	(0.041)	(0.084)
Higher Office	0.085	-0.005	0.039	0.346	0.227	-0.109	0.016	0.067
	(0.066)	(0.123)	(0.053)	(0.269)	(0.321)	(0.288)	(0.015)	(0.039)^
Boring death	-0.095	-0.158	-0.087	-0.386	-0.534	-0.31	-0.042	-0.119
	(0.067)	(0.121)	(0.053)^^	(0.271)	(0.32)^	(0.281)	(0.015)**	(0.038)**
Bio Length	0	.0003	0	0	0.001	0.001	0.0000	0.0001
	(0)	(.0001)**	(0)^	(0)	(0)^	(0)**	(0.0000)	(0.0000)^
Scandal in bio	0.178	-0.283	0.101	0.752	0.565	-0.303	-0.03	-0.109
	(0.17)	(0.292)	(0.136)	(0.728)	(0.733)	(0.676)	(0.039)	(0.093)
Constant	0.494	0.287	0.139	-0.026	-1.857	-1.152	0.025	0.036
	(0.084)***	(0.156)^	(0.067)*	(0.341)	(0.423)***	(0.371)**	(0.019)	(0.05)
Observations	437	338	437	437	437	338	437	338
R-squared	0.004	0.037	0.028	0.016	0.044	0.048	0.04	0.06

Standard errors in parentheses. ^ significant at .10; * significant at .05; ** significant at .01, *** significant at .001, Two-Tailed Test

Table 3b:
Results of Tests for Partisan Bias
Atlanta Constitution (1868-1945); One Observation Per Senator

	(1b) Regress.	(2b) Regress.	(3b) Regress.	(4b) Logit	(5b) Logit	(6b) Logit
	Sum of Stories (all sens)	Sum of Positive Stories (Sens w/ story)	Sum of Positive Stories (all sens)	Any Story (all Sens)	Any Positive (Sens w/ story)	Any Positive (all Sens)
Republican	.110	.876	.348	-.143	.622	.345
	(.245)	(.553)	(.254)	(.267)	(.417)	(.355)
South	1.451***	1.815*	1.305***	.932**	1.212***	1.419***
	(.298)	(.594)	(.309)	(.332)	(.456)	(.383)
Rep*South	-1.926***	-2.836^	-1.784**	-1.566*	-1.092	-1.867*
	(.562)	(1.550)	(.582)	(.679)	(1.127)	(.866)
Higher Office	.680**	1.132*	.442*	.0389	.146	.106
	(.260)	(.548)	(.269(	(.290)	(.408)	(.334)
Boring death	-.369	.176	-.141	-1.088***	-.244	-.773***
	(.251)	(.472)	(.260)	(.284)	(.351)	(.298)
Bio Length	.0005^	-.0001	.0001	.001*	.0000	.0004
	(.0003)	(.0005)	(.0002)	(.0006)	(.0000)	(.0003)
Scandal in bio	-.051	.171	.122	-.768	[dropped]	.690
	(.744)	(.1648)	.771	(.827)		(.828)
Constant	.404	.294	.136	.113	-.617 (.533)	-1.561***
	(.358)	(.709)	(.371)	(.393)		(.463)
Observations	364	163	364	364	160	364
R-squared	0.108	0.050	0.053	0.081	0.037	0.079

Standard errors in parentheses. ^ significant at .10; * significant at .05; ** significant at .01, *** significant at .001, Two-Tailed Test

Table 4:
The Impact of Independent Newspapers on Split-Ticket Voting

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
% Ind.	0.064**	0.047**	0.039**	0.023*	0.023*	0.022*	0.022*
Newspapers	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Uncontested			0.246**	0.250**	0.239**	0.241**	0.241**
Race			(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
TV In DMA				0.077**	0.077**	0.076**	0.076**
				(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Midterm Dem					0.001*	0.001*	0.001*
Vote					(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Nat. Pres.						0.140*	0.140*
Vote						(0.069)	(0.069)
Midwest							-0.017
							(0.062)
South							-0.070
							(0.059)
Northeast							-0.047
							(0.048)
Constant	0.026	0.050	0.055	0.023	0.002	-0.075	-0.075
	(0.035)	(0.043)	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.052)	(0.052)
DMA Fixed Effects?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Post1966 Interaction?		X	X	X	X	X	X

|							
Observations	987	987	987	987	952	952	952
R-squared	0.35	0.44	0.59	0.62	0.64	0.64	0.64

Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable= |Dem. Presidential Vote % - Dem. Congressional Vote %|
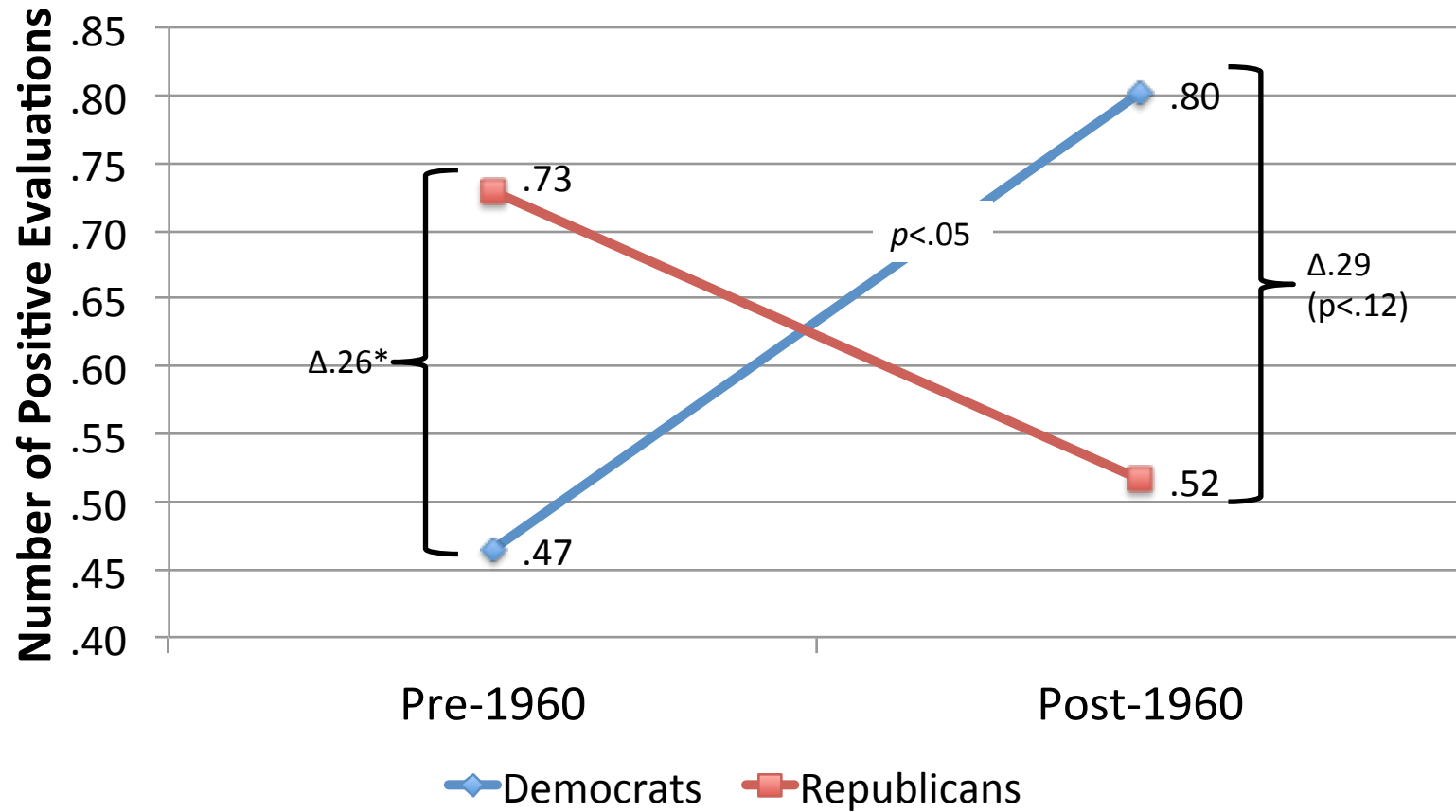* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%, One Tailed Test

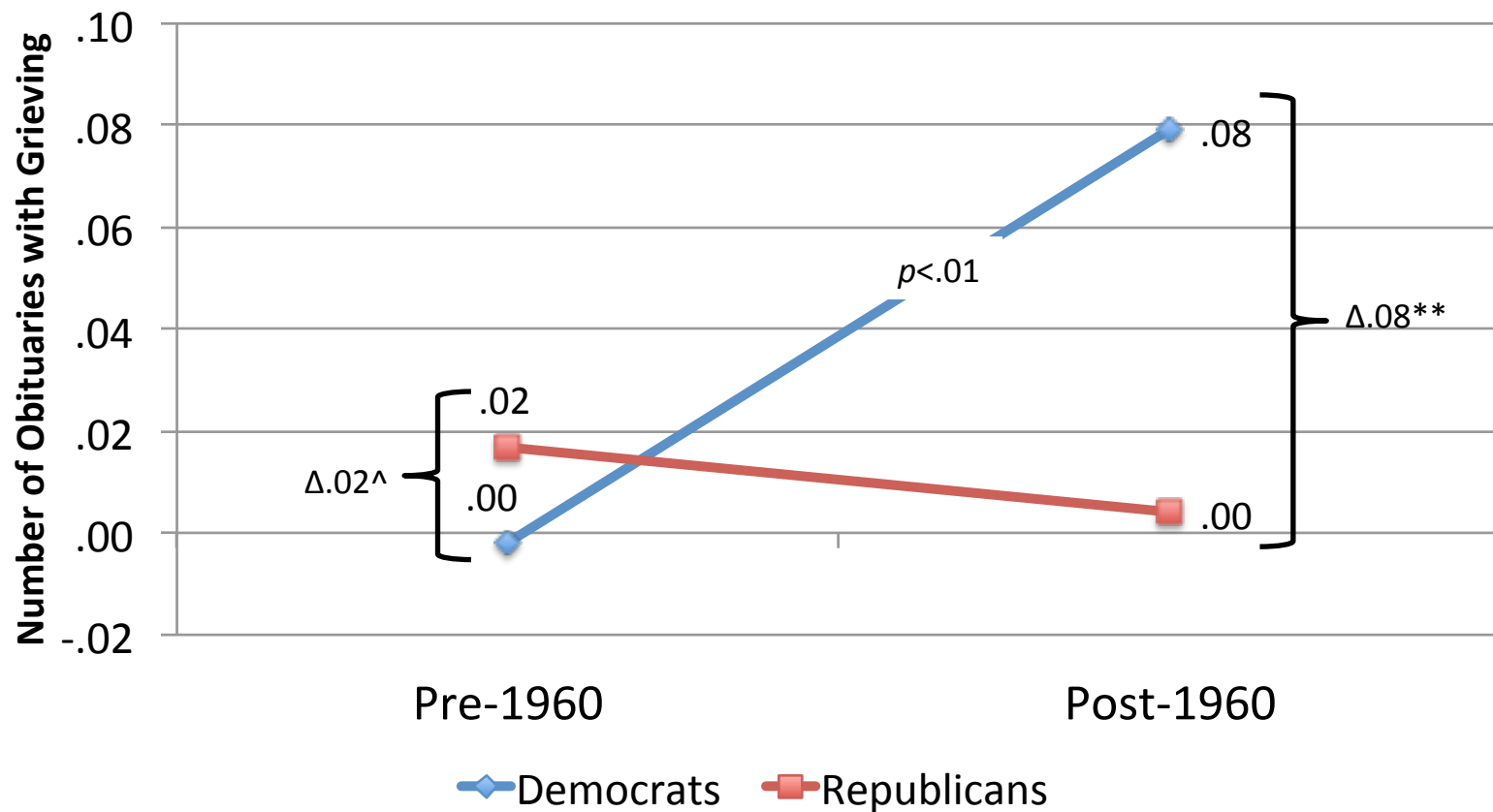FIGURE 1. Number of Obituaries in L.A. Times, by Party and Period (All Senators)
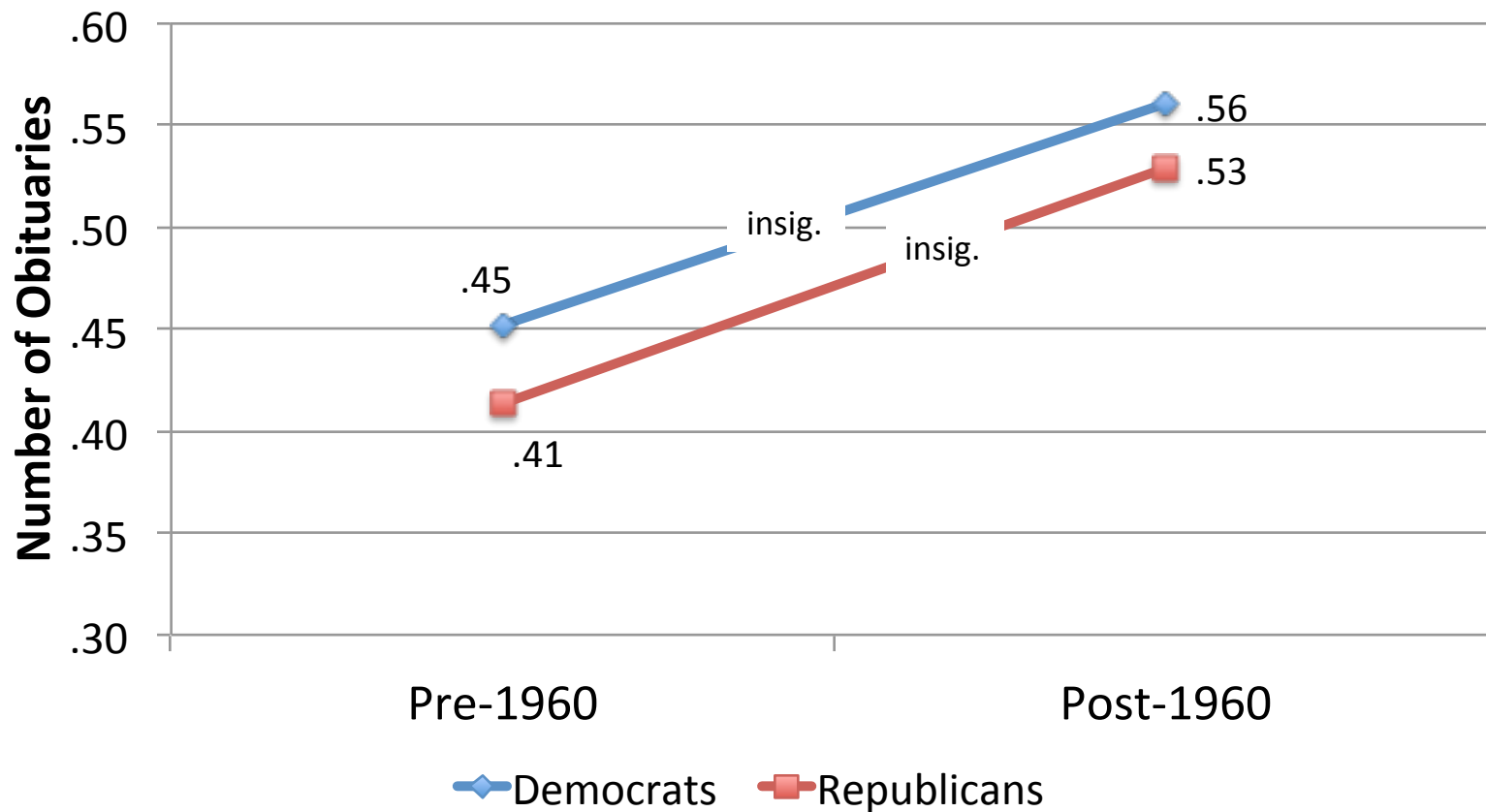
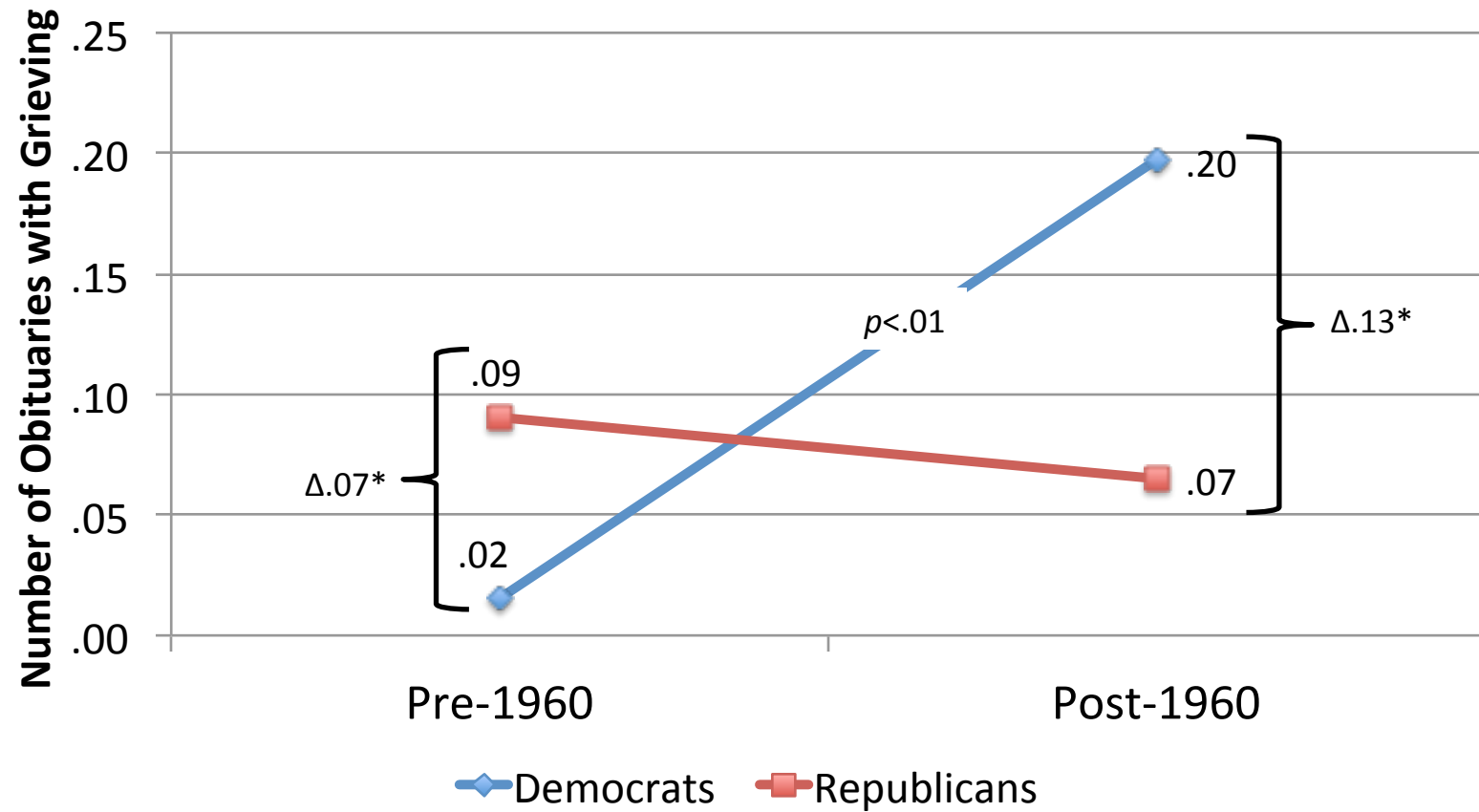FIGURE 2. Positive Obituaries in L.A. Times, by Party and Period (All Senators)
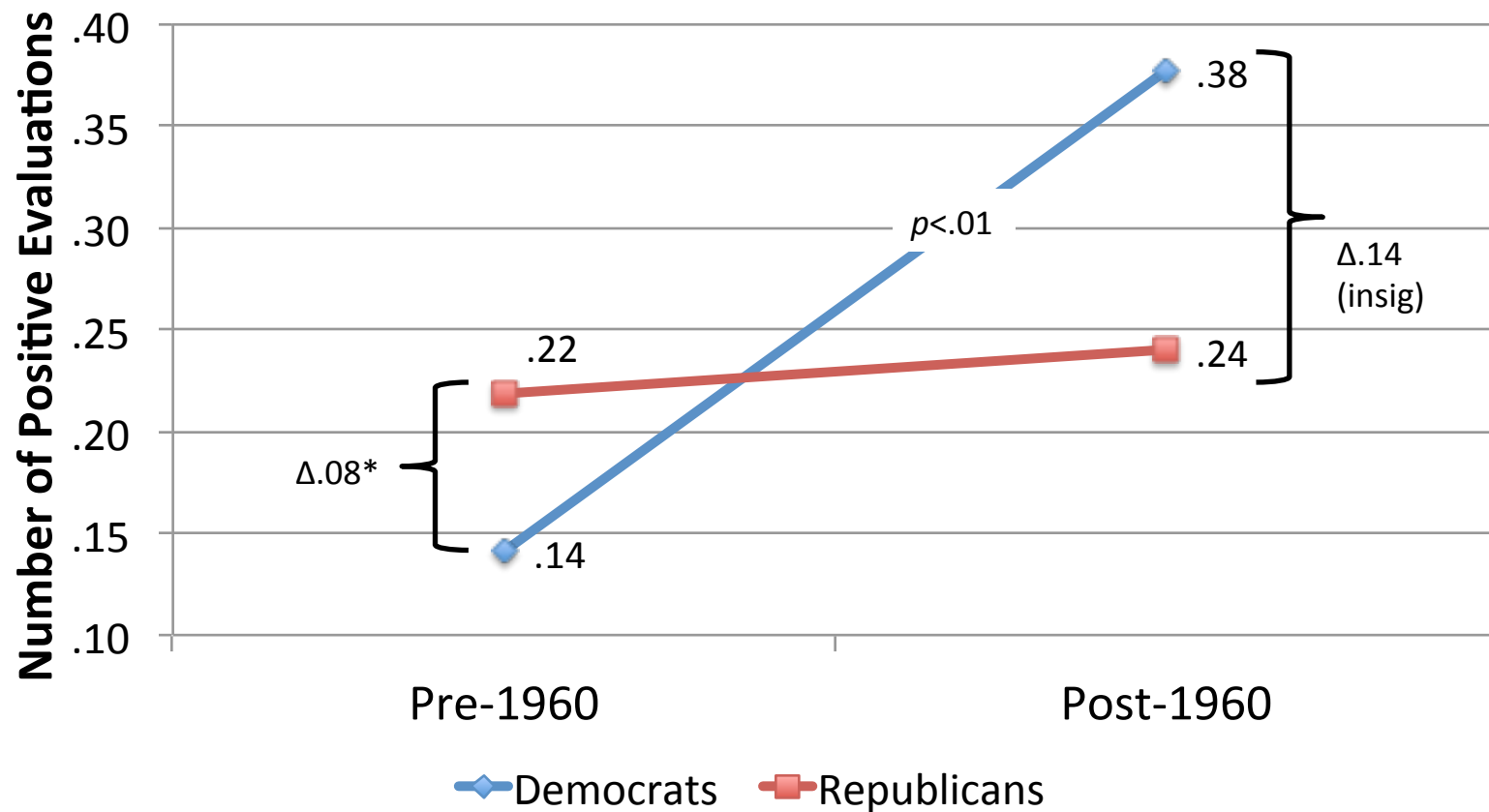
FIGURE 3. Sum of Positive Obituaries in L.A. Times, by Party and Period (Senators with Obituaries)

FIGURE 4. Presence of Grieving in L.A. Times Obituary Headlines, by Party and Period (All Senators)

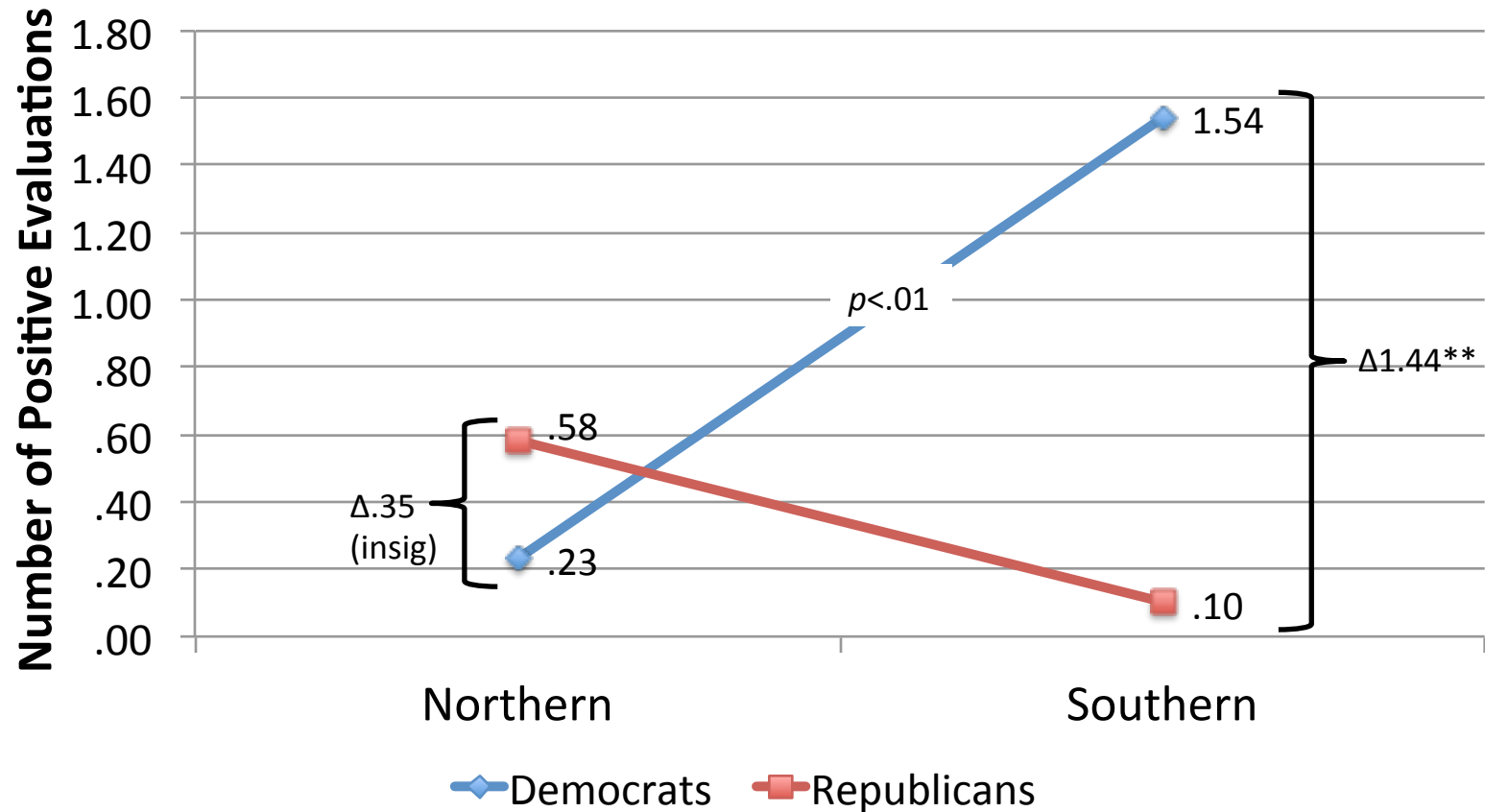FIGURE 5. Presence of Grieving in L.A. Times Obituary Headlines, by Party and Period (Senators with Obituaries)

FIGURE 6. Number of Obituaries in Atlanta Journal Constitution, by Party and Region (All Senators)
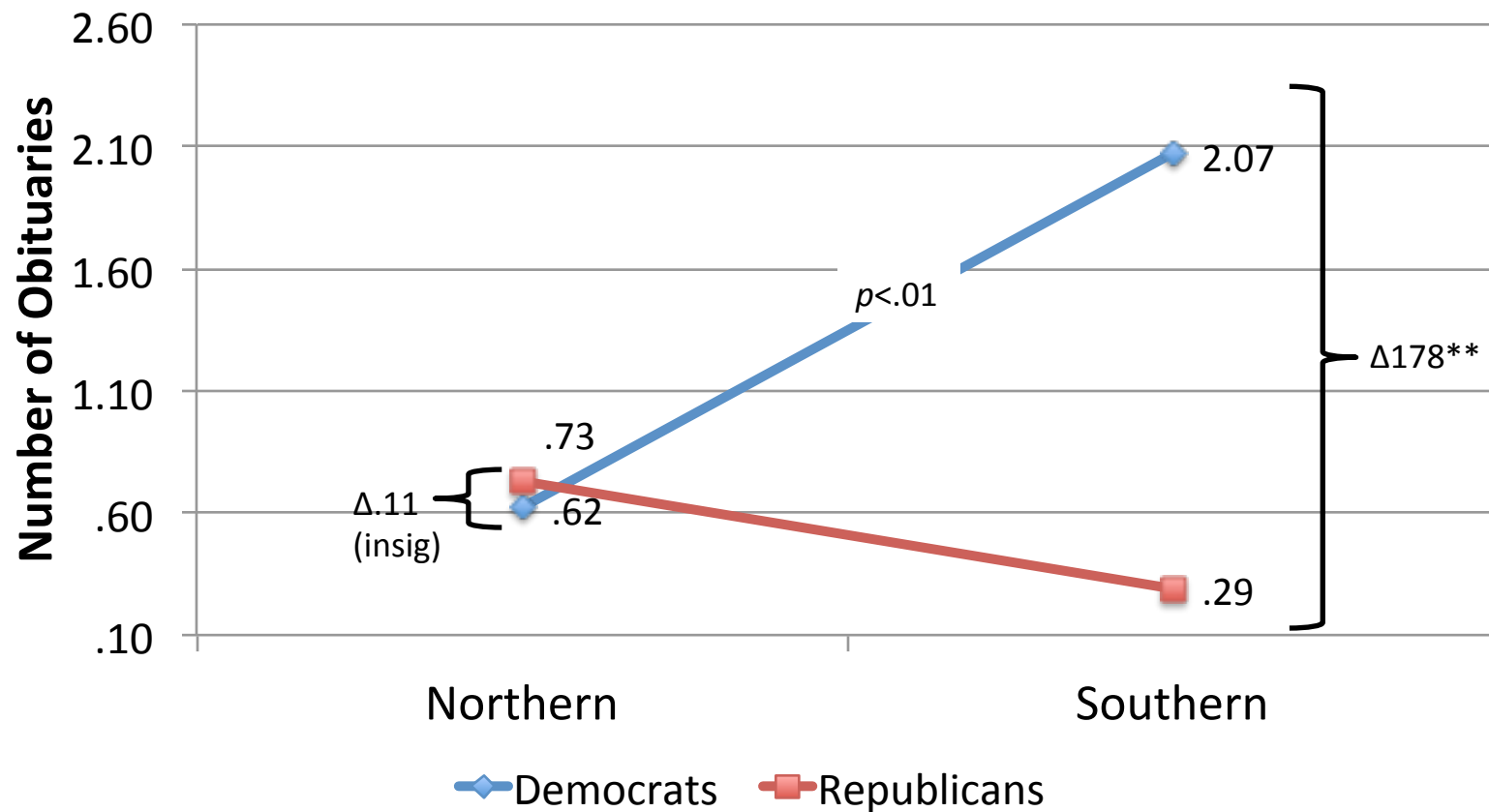
FIGURE 7. Positive Obituaries in Atlanta Journal Constitution, by Party and Region (All Senators)

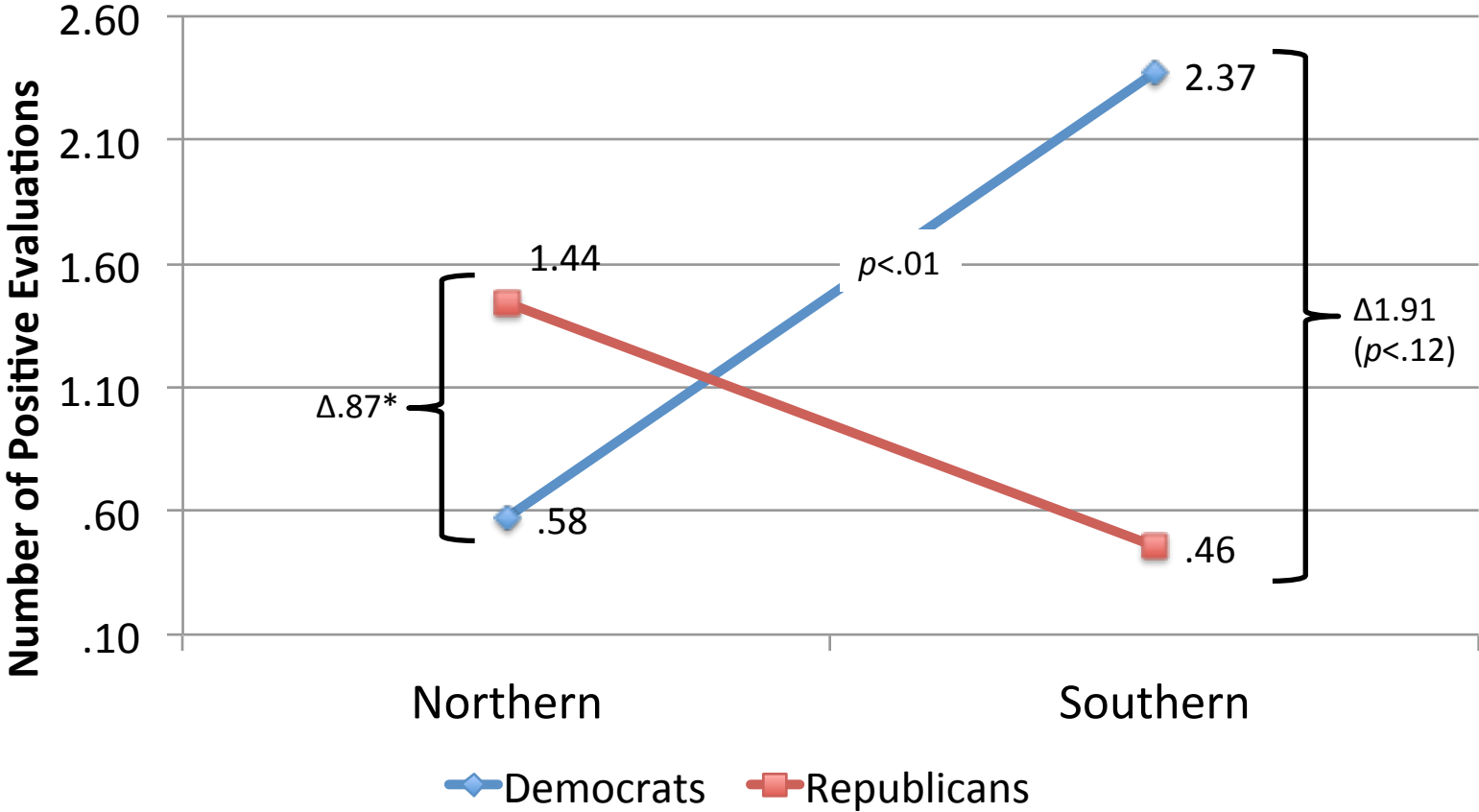FIGURE 8. Positive Obituaries in Atlanta Journal Constitution, by Party and Region (Senators with Obituaries)

Figure 9:
Partisan Affiliation of Newspapers in 66 Sample Markets