

# Did Newspaper Endorsements Affect the Outcome of the 1968 Election?

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Declaration of Interests: None

## Abstract

Richard Nixon won a narrow popular and electoral vote victory in 1968. This paper investigates whether newspaper endorsements, which heavily favored Nixon, were pivotal in his victory. Utilizing the shift in endorsements between 1964 and 1968, we find a sizable endorsement effect. This estimated effect was large enough to be pivotal: eliminating Nixon's endorsement advantage would have deprived him of an Electoral College victory, resulting in a contingent election. If newspapers had endorsed Humphrey at the same rates they endorsed Johnson in 1964, Humphrey would have won the Electoral College.

## Introduction

Richard Nixon's strained relationship with the American press was legendary. In a 1962 press conference following his failed Gubernatorial campaign, Nixon said to collected members of the press: "you don't have Nixon to kick around any more." When he won the Presidency six years later, his tone was little changed, with his office frequently accusing the media in general (and newspapers specifically) of having a "liberal bias". Greenburg (2008) argues that Nixon was a driving force behind the creation of the notion of a liberal media aimed at attacking conservative politicians. There is then no little irony that Nixon enjoyed massive support from the editorial pages of those American newspapers during both his 1968 and 1972 campaigns. The cumulative circulation of Nixon-endorsing newspapers was more than ten million copies greater than that of those that endorsed his opponents. Nixon's 1968 victory was narrow. His popular vote victory over Humphrey was only 0.7 percentage points. His 301 electoral votes meant that he needed almost every state-level victory he got to surpass the necessary 270 votes. Of 301 votes, 84 of them came from states that he carried by less than 3 percentage points.

In this paper, we ask whether the large Republican skew in newspaper endorsements was sufficient to swing the Electoral College to Nixon. To answer this question, we utilize the change in newspaper endorsements between 1964 and 1968, allowing us to use newspaper-level shifts to estimate their effects on readers' voting behavior. To do this, we created a novel dataset of newspaper endorsements in 1964-1968, which reveals that the size of the Republican advantage in 1968 en-

dorsements was larger than previously thought.

We find that newspaper endorsements increased the likelihood that a reader supported the Republican candidate by 8.5 percentage points. This point estimate, combined with the size of the Republican skew, means that Humphrey would have won if newspapers had maintained their 1964 endorsement patterns. If instead, newspapers endorsed Humphrey and Nixon at similar rates, no candidate would have reached 270, though Humphrey would have won the popular vote.

## Literature

The general question within the empirical literature on newspaper endorsements has shifted from whether or not newspapers persuade voters – studies have consistently found that they do – to identifying what mediating factors drive those effects, and whether the cumulative effects can be significant. Chiang and Knight (2011), Casas, Fawaz and Trindade (2016) and Sprick Schuster (2023) all found that newspaper endorsements can have a significant effect on political preferences. Both Chiang and Knight (2011) and Casas, Fawaz and Trindade (2016) found that “surprising” endorsements are more effective. Chiang and Knight (2011) go further in showing that, within their context cumulative effects of endorsements will be small because the relatively rare endorsements will have larger impacts than more common ones. However, Sprick Schuster (2023) showed that, within the context of mid-century American newspapers, ideological sorting was minimal, and many more readers were being exposed to endorsements that went against their prior leanings, making cumulative effects plausible.

This is consistent with research that has studied how newspapers arrive at their endorsement decision. Rather than trying to attract readers, endorsements are based on the ideology of publishers, and, to a lesser extent, editors. DeLuca (2024) found that, for example, a Democrat-leaning newspaper is more likely to endorse a moderate or left-leaning Republican candidate over an extremely conservative Republican. Endorsements are not bound by party lines, nor are they made to attract readership. By placing Nixon, Humphrey, and Wallace on a scale, newspapers were able to choose

which candidate, if any, to endorse.

To determine the effect of newspaper endorsements, we exploit a change in the pattern of newspaper endorsements between 1964 and 1968. In 1964, Goldwater received endorsements from 394 daily newspapers, while Johnson received 542 endorsements. The cumulative endorsement of the Johnson-endorsing papers was three times that of Goldwater-endorsing papers. But 1968 saw a shift in endorsements. Nixon received 757 endorsements to Humphrey's 154. By studying the effect of this change, our paper is similar to Ladd and Lenz (2009), who looked at a similar shift in 90s British media and Erikson (1976), who looked at the shift between 1960 and 1964 in American papers towards Democrats. They both find large persuasive effects of newspapers on voting behavior.

The reason behind these powerful persuasive effects is likely driven by the close attention newspaper readers pay to its content and the high frequency of endorsements themselves. Robinson (1972) looked at the perceived media bias of voters in the 1968 election. About 50 percent of the time, voters claimed that their newspaper endorsed one candidate over the other, more than any other media source. Additionally, it was found that the media endorsed primarily Nixon about 20 percent of the time. Robinson then compared the respondents' claims to the actual media that they consumed, finding that nearly 90 percent of the claims were found to be accurate. Ultimately, newspaper endorsements are memorable to voters.

## **The 1968 Election**

President Johnson dropped out of the race in March 1968 and endorsed Humphrey, his vice president. Johnson's withdrawal was a strategic attempt to avoid the nomination of the anti-Vietnam wing of the party in either Eugene McCarthy or Robert F. Kennedy, Sr. Following Kennedy's assassination in June, Humphrey won the nomination over McCarthy in a contentious convention. Though he won on the first ballot, he only earned 60.1% of the delegate votes. By comparison, the only other time that a nominee won the Democratic nomination without participating in the primaries was Kamala Harris's 2024 nomination. She earned 98.9% of the votes.

Leading up to the convention, polling showed Humphrey consistently ahead of Nixon, but he lost ground in September. The Gallup poll of September 29 showed Nixon leading by 15 percentage points. This gap narrowed to reflect a razor-thin margin on election day, with Nixon going on to win the popular vote by 0.7 percentage points.

Humphrey's drop in the polls coincided with a wave of newspaper endorsements for Nixon. Endorsements began appearing as early as August 30, when the Pottstown Mercury endorsed Nixon in a front-page editorial. The 17 papers of the Scripps-Howard chain endorsed Nixon on September 30, and Nixon continued to enjoy an advantage of newspaper endorsements through Election Day, including the endorsements of most of the nation's largest newspapers, such as the Dallas Morning News (September 29) the Los Angeles Times (October 13), and the Detroit Free Press (October 20). Sprick Schuster (2023) found that endorsements had a large and immediate persuasive effect on its readers of about 19 percentage points. It is possible that this shift in opinion polls was driven by newspaper endorsements.

The candidates were forced to respond to the assassination of Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the events of the Vietnam War, and the continuation of the Civil Rights movement via their campaigns. Humphrey was in clear support of the Civil Rights movement but his policies were criticized for too closely mirroring those of Johnson. Nixon was a man of "law and order" with plans to end U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. His platform closely aligned with the Republican Party Platform of 1968. Wallace was a candidate in stark contrast to Nixon. He spoke highly of the working class which helped secure the support of Southern states. However, his brash personality and running mate, Air Force General Curtis Lemay, made him an unattractive candidate to voters and newspapers alike. Lemay was a part of the team directly responsible for dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Figure 1 shows the state-level breakdown of newspaper endorsements in 1968, weighted by news-

paper circulation. Humphrey received the majority of endorsements in only a handful of states. In 12 states, Humphrey received zero endorsements. Of those newspapers that endorsed neither Humphrey nor Nixon, abstention was most common. While Wallace received some endorsements, most newspapers that chose to avoid endorsing a major party candidate endorsed no one. Only 11 papers endorsed a third-party candidate.

## Data & Empirical Framework

To create our dataset of newspaper endorsements, we started with the data from Gentzkow and Sinkinson (2014), which provides self-reported endorsement data from newspapers via *Newspaper and Publisher* surveys that were taken throughout the 1964 and 1968 campaigns. However, this data was incomplete and required supplementation. To do this, we used newspapers.com and individual newspaper archives, similar to the method used by Sprick Schuster (2023). Using this method, we found that the *Editors and Publishers* data was far from complete and contained multiple errors. For 1964, we found that responses for 276 of the 1740 newspapers surveyed were either missing endorsements that occurred or incorrectly reported the endorsements the papers made.<sup>1</sup>

Voting and newspaper readership data come from the 1968 American National Election Study (ANES). This survey asked respondents three questions that are critical for our identification strategy: how they voted in 1968, how they voted in 1964, and the newspaper they read for election coverage. We then use the change in newspaper endorsements between 1964 and 1968 to estimate changes in voter preferences between those two years. The choice of voters in 1968 is modeled as:

$$VoteRepublican_{i,1968} = \alpha + \beta Endorsement_{1968,i} + \omega X_i + e_i \quad (1)$$

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<sup>1</sup>These errors appear to be completely due to newspaper misreporting, not due to errors by Gentzkow and Sinkinson (2014). Newspaper may have been answering how they *generally* endorse, or how they endorsed in the previous election. Many of the 1968 errors were due to newspapers that endorsed Johnson in 1964 erroneously reporting that they endorsed the Democratic candidate in 1968.

$VoteRepublican_{i,1968}$  is equal to 1 if a respondent  $i$  voted for Richard Nixon in 1968, and 0 otherwise. This means that we are grouping Democratic, third-party, and non-voters together.  $Endorsement_{i,1968}$  is equal to 1 if the newspaper read by respondent  $i$  endorsed Richard Nixon for President in 1968, and 0 otherwise, similarly grouping Democratic endorsements, third-party endorsements, and non-endorsements together.  $X_i$  is a vector of observable voter characteristics (age, marital status, race, education level).

$\beta$ , the coefficient of our endorsement variable, will only yield unbiased results if the error term,  $e_i$ , is uncorrelated with our outcome variable. The biggest threat to this is the ideological sorting of readers to like-minded newspapers. Though Sprick Schuster (2023) showed that there was little evidence of ideological sorting during this period, we nonetheless attempt to address this threat of omitted variable bias.

We, therefore, use the fact that we can measure both the change in voter behavior between 1964 and 1968 *and* the change in the endorsement of their newspaper between those same years. This will allow us to difference out any time-invariant omitted variable, including any long-term sorting of readers to ideologically similar newspapers. We estimate the effect of newspaper endorsements using the following first difference model:

$$\Delta VoteRepublican_{i,1968} = \alpha + \beta \Delta Endorsement_{1968,i} + \omega X_i + e_i \quad (2)$$

Where  $\Delta VoteRepublican_{i,1968} = VoteRepublican_{i,1968} - VoteRepublican_{i,1964}$ . It is therefore the change in a respondent's vote between 1964 and 1968, taking on a value of +1 if the respondent did not vote for Goldwater in 1964 but did vote for Nixon in 1968, -1 if a voter voted for Goldwater but then did not vote for Nixon, and 0 if they voted for a Republican in both elections or neither election. Because  $X_i$  comes from responses in the 1968 election, we do not measure differences in these variables. However, this is done at little cost, since many of them (such as race) do not change over time, and for others (such as age) we could not use the change anyway,

since the difference would simply be 4 years for all respondents.

## Results

Of the 1,326 ANES respondents in 1968 who reported being eligible to vote in 1964, 26.24% of them reported voting for Barry Goldwater. 33.77% of this group reported voting for Richard Nixon in 1968. This is roughly similar to the nationwide trend. Goldwater received the votes of 24.2% of the voting-age population. Nixon received the votes of 27.2% of the population in 1968.

The changes in the voting behavior of ANES respondents is being driven by those who read newspapers that changed their editorial stance between 1964 and 1968 to favor Republicans. Figure 2 shows this shift across different categories of newspaper readers. Of those who read newspapers that did not change their endorsement status between 1964 and 1968, 26.9% reported voting for Goldwater in 1964, and 34.4% reported voting for Nixon in 1968, a 7.5 percentage point increase. But for those who read a newspaper that *changed* its editorial stance in 1968 in favor of Republicans, the shift towards Nixon is dramatic. 23.3% voted for Goldwater in 1964, but 39.9% voted for Nixon four years later. If this group had experienced the same 7.5 percentage point increase as other newspaper readers, only 30.8 percent of them would have voted for Nixon. This means that 9.1 percentage points more people voted for Nixon than we would have expected, had this group followed the same trend as other newspaper readers.

Table 1 shows the regression results from the first-difference equation. We find reading a newspaper that endorses a Republican candidate increases the probability that someone votes for that candidate by 8.53 percentage points. To determine the effect this shift had on voting outcomes, we need to determine where these additional Republican voters are coming from. Are they Democratic voters who are switching or people who are choosing Republicans instead of either third-party candidates or not voting at all?

Our results, shown in Columns 2 and 3 of Table 1, indicate that endorsements for Republicans



prevented a larger flow of voters from embracing third-party candidates or abstention. We find that a Republican endorsement does not decrease the likelihood that someone votes for the Democrat, as seen in Column 2. The point estimate is almost exactly zero, and we can rule out a moderately large effect. A value of -0.0853 is outside the 95% confidence interval, meaning that we can reject the hypothesis that Republican endorsements had a negative effect on Democratic votes of similar magnitude to the positive effect is had on Republican votes. Instead, it decreases the likelihood that a respondent fails to vote for either Republican or Democratic candidates. This means that the additional Republican votes are not coming at the expense of votes for the Democratic candidate.

The point estimate of 0.0853 means that for every 1,000 readers who are exposed to a Republican political endorsement, 85.3 more of them will vote for the Republican candidate. Since we find no negative effects on votes for the Democratic candidate, this will increase the vote margin between the Republican and Democrat by 85.3. If the votes were instead coming at the expense of the Democrat, this would increase the vote margin by 180.6. Using the shift in endorsements between 1964 and 1968, we can estimate how many more people voted for Nixon because of the aggregate shift in newspaper endorsements.

Figure 3 shows the state-level shift in newspaper endorsements between 1964 and 1968. It shows the change in the percent of newspapers, weighted by circulation, that endorsed the Republican. All but 6 states saw an increase in the share of papers endorsing the Republican candidate, and most states experience large shifts, with 17 states seeing shifts of more than 50%. This was also true of swing states. Of the 7 states for which we have data and for which Nixon and Humphrey were within 3% (WA, TX, MD, MO, NJ, OH, IL), the average rank of the percentage change was 14 among the 48 Continental U.S. states.

How then do we convert the marginal effect of endorsements to the general election results as a whole? To perform this analysis, we must first make assumptions that are informed by our results

thus far.

- A Republican newspaper endorsement increases the likelihood that a reader who relies on that newspaper for political coverage votes for a Republican by 8.53 percentage points.
- The number of people who rely on newspapers for political coverage is not the same as the circulation of the newspaper, but can be calculated using the method described by Sprick Schuster (2023). He showed that when you take into account the fact that 1) each copy of a newspaper is read by more than 1 person, and 2) not all newspaper readers rely on newspapers for political coverage, each copy of a newspaper was read for political coverage about an estimated 1.348 people in 1968.
- We will consider two counterfactual scenarios: first, what if newspapers maintained their 1964 endorsement strategies, and then what if newspapers endorsed Democrats and Republicans an equal number in 1968?

To see how this works, consider Missouri, which Nixon won by 20,488 votes. The total circulation of newspapers in Missouri was 1,853,741, meaning that  $1,853,741 * 1.348 = 2,498,842$  readers in Missouri read newspapers for political coverage. Using our dataset of newspaper endorsements, we find that the cumulative circulation of newspapers endorsing Republicans increased by 1,182,443 between 1964 and 1968, or an increase in readership of  $1,182,443 * 1.348 = 1,593,969$ . This means that the number of people who switched to voting for a Republican because of the change in newspaper endorsements was  $1,593,933 * 0.0853 = 135,962$ . This number is much larger than the 20,488 gap between Nixon and Humphrey, indicating that the shift in endorsement patterns between 1964 and 1968 was large enough to swing Missouri, and its 12 electoral votes, to Nixon.

In Table 2, we estimate the cumulative effects of newspaper endorsements for each state (excluding HI and AK) against the counterfactual of maintaining the same endorsement patterns as 1964. We find that if newspapers were endorsing in the same patterns as 1964, Nixon would have lost 2.5 million votes. He also would have lost 8 additional states, representing 141 electoral votes.

In all but one of these states, Humphrey came in second, with Wallace coming in second in Tennessee. This suggests that Nixon would have ended with 160 electoral votes, Humphrey winning the electoral college with 321 votes, and Wallace winning a 6th state with a total of 57 electoral votes.

But this counterfactual may be artificially increasing the likelihood that we find a Democratic victory. While this tells us how much of the shift between 1964 and 1968 can be attributable to newspaper endorsements, a return to 1964 endorsement patterns may not be a suitable counterfactual. By using 1964, a year in which an unusually large number of newspapers endorsed Democrats, we are using an uneven distribution of endorsements. Suppose that instead, we assume that, among the endorsing newspapers in 1968, endorsements were split evenly between Humphrey and Nixon. Using similar calculations as above, we again use Missouri as an example. We find that if we gave Nixon and Humphrey equal levels of 1968 endorsement in Missouri, it would decrease the cumulative readership of Nixon-endorsing newspapers by 568,857, resulting in a decrease in Nixon votes of  $568,857 \cdot 0.0853 = 48,523$ . Again, this would be sufficient to swing Missouri to Humphrey.

In Table 3, we consider what would have happened if endorsements in 1968 had been split evenly between Nixon and Humphrey. Under this counterfactual, 14.47 million fewer people would have been exposed to a Nixon endorsement. Given our 0.853 point estimate, Nixon would have lost 1.25 million votes, eliminating his popular vote edge. Humphrey would have won 4 more states than he actually did (Delaware, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio). These states had 67 electoral votes, and would not be enough for a Humphrey win, falling short with 258. But since Nixon would now have 234 electoral votes,<sup>2</sup> there would be no electoral college winner. This result would have triggered a contingent election, with the House of Representatives choosing a winner. Figure 4 shows the state-level shift in voting that would have occurred if newspapers in each state had endorsed Humphrey and Nixon with equal probability.

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<sup>2</sup>Or 235, if we assume that faithless elector Lloyd W. Bailey instead voted for Nixon.

Another, perhaps more straightforward, way of asking the relevant research question is: given the shift in newspaper endorsements, how large would the causal effects have to be to be pivotal in the 1968 election. One of the main contributions of this paper is the creation of the 1964-1968 endorsement data, which reveals a stronger Republican skew in 1968 than previously realized. Given the extant body of literature that has previously estimated the effect of endorsements, we can simply see if the effect necessary to make endorsements pivotal in 1968 is a reasonable one.

With a point estimate of 0.0853, we find that Delaware Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio were swung to Nixon because more newspapers endorsed Nixon. Given the endorsement shifts in each state, the causal effect would need to be at least 0.074 to have shifted Delaware, an effect of at least 0.063 would have shifted Illinois, an effect of at least 0.057 would have shifted Ohio, and 0.036 for Missouri. Ohio and Missouri had 38 electoral votes, sufficient to drop Nixon below the 270 needed for an Electoral College victory. Therefore, as long as newspaper endorsements increased the likelihood of voting for a candidate by 5.7 percentage points, newspapers persuaded enough voters to win Nixon the 1968 election.

The question then becomes: is a 5.7 percentage point effect plausible? Sprick Schuster (2023) found that a newspaper endorsement increased the likelihood that its readers state a support for a candidate by 19.9 percentage points. Ladd and Lenz (2009) found that endorsements had an effect equivalent to 8.6 to 14.0 percentage points on its readers. The 8.53 percentage point change found in our paper is plausible given what has been found in other contexts, and a 5.7 effect is smaller than any of the empirical estimates of causal effect. This also shows that we need not simply rely on the estimation strategy presented here to defend the claim that newspapers were pivotal in the 1968 election.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Throughout this analysis, we are making the implicit assumption that the newspapers are being read in the same state as the newspaper itself. Without this assumption, we would not be able to map circulation numbers onto state-level election results. However, this assumption is likely to hold. While Kinneman (1946) found that metro newspapers were often read in different towns or counties than the paper itself, the vast majority of a newspaper's circulation was local, within the metro area.

A contingent election would have led to unprecedented scenario in American politics. The 12th Amendment outlines the rules governing this. The 91st Congress, which was elected in the same 1968 election, would choose the winners: the House of Representatives choosing the President, the Senate choosing the Vice President. However, instead of Presidential votes being allocated based on House seats, each state's representatives would meet to cast a single ballot. Only the top three vote-getters (Nixon, Humphrey, Wallace) would be eligible, and the first one to receive 26 votes from the state delegations would become President.

Democrats had a majority in exactly 26 state delegation of House members. Republicans had the majority in 19. Five states were tied. If each of those 26 states supported Humphrey, he would have won the contingent election. However, each of the five states Wallace won had Democratic-majority delegations. Humphrey was unpopular in the South and didn't even come in 2nd place in two of the five Wallace states. Would the delegates in each of these states commit to voting for Humphrey?

But a Humphrey win in a contested election is still a plausible scenario, if for no other reason that both alternative scenarios, a Nixon or Wallace win, seem even less likely.<sup>4</sup> Nixon would have needed to earn the vote a 7 states without a majority-Republican delegation, and a Wallace win in the House would have a very low probability.

The Vice President would have been selected by the Senate, with each Senator having one vote. With 57 Democratic senators, it is likely that Humphrey's running mate, Edmund Muskie, would have earned the majority of the votes. However, 57 votes would not be enough to avoid a filibuster. In such a case, a Vice-Presidential vacancy is a possibility, especially given that compromise candidates are impossible. The Senate must choose between the top two vote getters (Muskie and

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<sup>4</sup>It is likely that any scenario with Humphrey getting substantially more votes would result in more down-ballot Democrats winning their races. If one or two more states with equal numbers of Republican and Democrat House members gained an additional seat, it is more likely that Humphrey would earn the needed 26 votes.

Spiro Agnew).

One secondary effect of a contingent election could have been a change in the rules governing the election of the executive branch. Sending the election to the House of Representatives may have led to anything from marginal changes to an overhaul of the election system entirely. By sending the election of the Vice President to the Senate, majority Democrats would have potentially had to have eliminated the filibuster to seat Muskie.

## Discussion

The 1968 Election and the 2024 Election hold many similarities. The 2024 Democrat candidate, Kamala Harris, is the first candidate to be placed on the ballot without a true primary election since Humphrey in 1968. It also featured the incumbent Democrat Vice President facing a well-known Republican whose last national campaign was a failed Presidential bid. But their campaigns are being carried out in a dramatically different media landscape than the one in 1968.

In 2016, Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, received almost no endorsements from the largest papers in the country. The Las Vegas Journal Review, the 45th largest newspaper by circulation, was the only newspaper with a circulation greater than 100,000 to endorse him. However, he won the election and ran again in 2020. That year, Trump received more endorsements than in 2016, while Biden received dramatically fewer than Clinton did four years prior. This was due to an acceleration of a trend of newspapers opting to not endorse a candidate at all. In the late stages of the 2024 campaign, this phenomenon has received increased attention due to both the L.A. Times and Washington Post, which have consistently endorsed the Democratic candidate over the past 30 years, making no endorsement.

This trend may be the result of decreased public trust in newspapers and increased polarization of news sources. The American public has experienced a gradual decrease in their trust of newspapers, while there is increasing evidence that news media presents news in ways that comport

with the political leanings of its readership (Pan, Qi, Wang, Lyu and Luo 2018). Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos specifically referenced this concern in defending his decision to quash the paper's planned endorsement of Harris. "We must be accurate, and we must be believed to be accurate. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but we are failing on the second requirement. Most people believe the media is biased."<sup>5</sup>

With newspapers removing themselves from the conversation and the changing media landscape, what has taken the place of these endorsements? The 2024 election cycle has seen podcasts take on an out-sized role in voter persuasion. Kamala Harris appeared on "All The Smoke" hosted by Matt Barnes and Stephen Jackson on September 30, Alex Cooper's October 6 episode of "Call Her Daddy", and Brene Brown's "Unlocking Us" podcast on October 28. Trump has appeared on Dave Ramsey's "The Ramsey Show" on October 2, Mark Calaway's "Six Feet Under" on October 21, and on "The Joe Rogan Experience" on October 26. This shift to a new kind of media gives voters the chance to get to know the candidates on a personal level beyond just understanding their policies. Hosts ask questions about hot-topic issues, but the main focus of these shows is to humanize the candidates.

But these appearances have not come with any explicit endorsement of either candidate. In fact, almost all of the hosts have included the disclaimer that they have invited both candidates on, welcoming conversations from the other side. Instead, there is ideological sorting based on which podcasts the candidates agree to appear on, and which ones they do not. Edison Research found that "Call Her Daddy" listeners are twice as likely to be Democrat as Republican, while listeners of "The Joe Rogan Experience" are more likely to be young and male. This highlights another difference between podcast appearances and newspaper endorsements. While research has found that newspaper endorsements are most effective when the readership leans the opposite political direction of the endorsed candidate (Chiang and Knight 2011; Sprick Schuster 2023), candidates appear to choose podcasts with an audience that is already likely to support them politically.

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/10/28/jeff-bezos-washington-post-trust/>

Whether this is a sound political strategy is an open empirical question.

## Conclusion

Though the role of the American newspaper has waned in recent years, it was the primary source of news for the voting public through much of the 20th Century. And while the newspaper endorsement has become less common, it was similarly a much-discussed a read component of Presidential campaigns. Through much of the 20th century, those endorsements were overwhelmingly in support of the Republican candidate.

Using the political shift in newspaper endorsements between 1964 and 1968, we find that readers of newspapers that changed their endorsement were much more likely to switch their own voting behavior. Regression analysis shows that reading a switching newspaper led to an 8.53 percentage point increase in the likelihood of voting for Nixon. This point estimate, combined with the scale of the Republican skew in endorsements, means that newspapers persuaded enough voters to be pivotal in Nixon's electoral college victory.

Throughout our analysis, we make several conservative assumptions. First, we assume that the effect of endorsements on the likelihood of Democratic votes is 0, which means our estimates of the effect of endorsements on the Republican/Democratic vote margin is half of what it could be. Second, our estimate of the number of readers per circulated copy of a newspaper, 1.348, is low. Typical measures of the "pass-along rate" for newspapers and magazines is typically above 2 (Atkin 1967; Simpson 2011). While Sprick Schuster (2023) obtained this 1.348 number from 1968 ANES respondents, it was the lowest number of readers per copy that he found in any of the years studied (1960-1980). Since the number of readers per copy doesn't likely fluctuate very much year-by-year, we could have instead used the average number that he found over his sample, 1.538. This would have increased the estimated cumulative effect of endorsements by 14%. Despite these conservative decisions, we still find newspapers to have been pivotal.

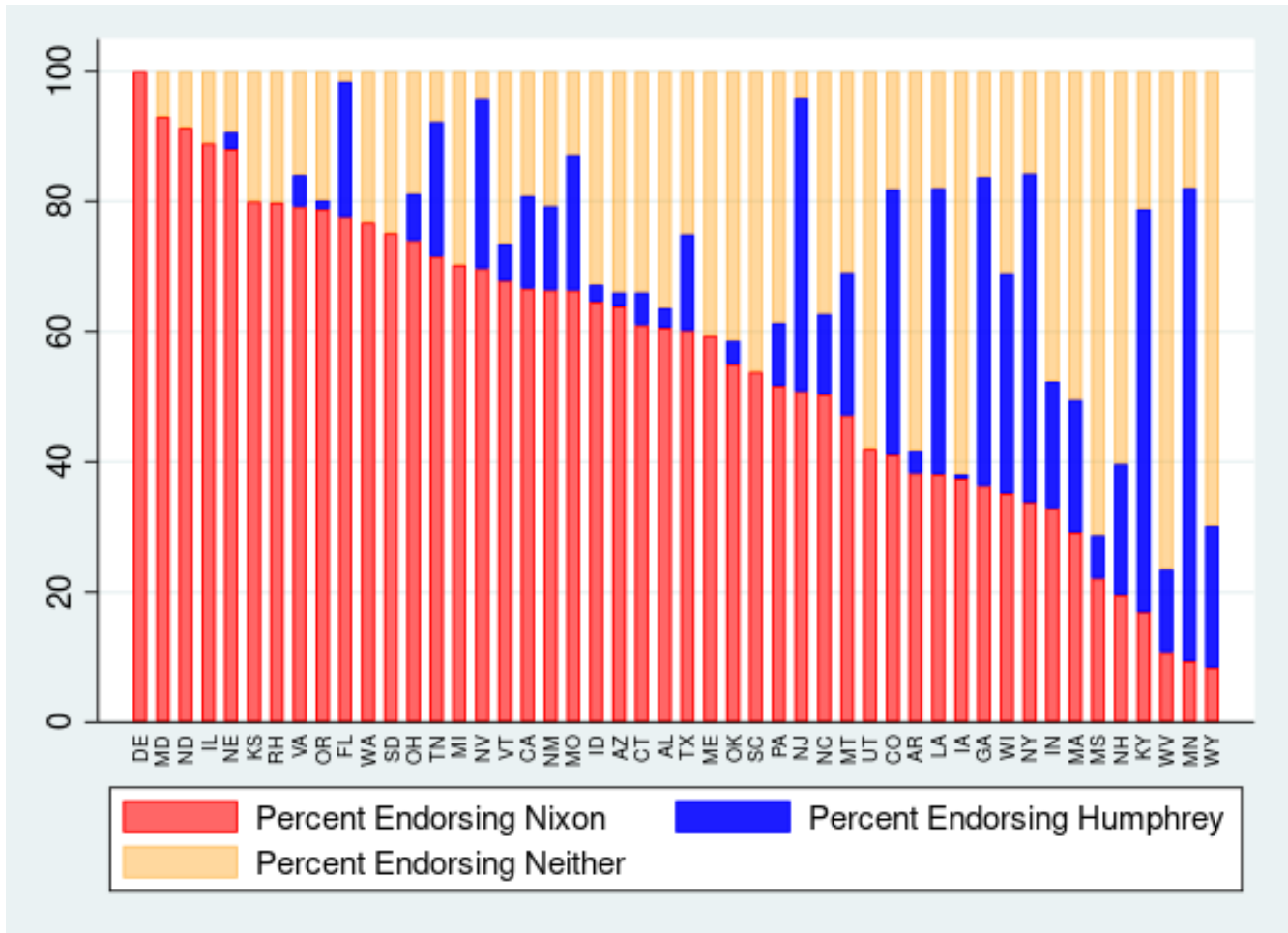


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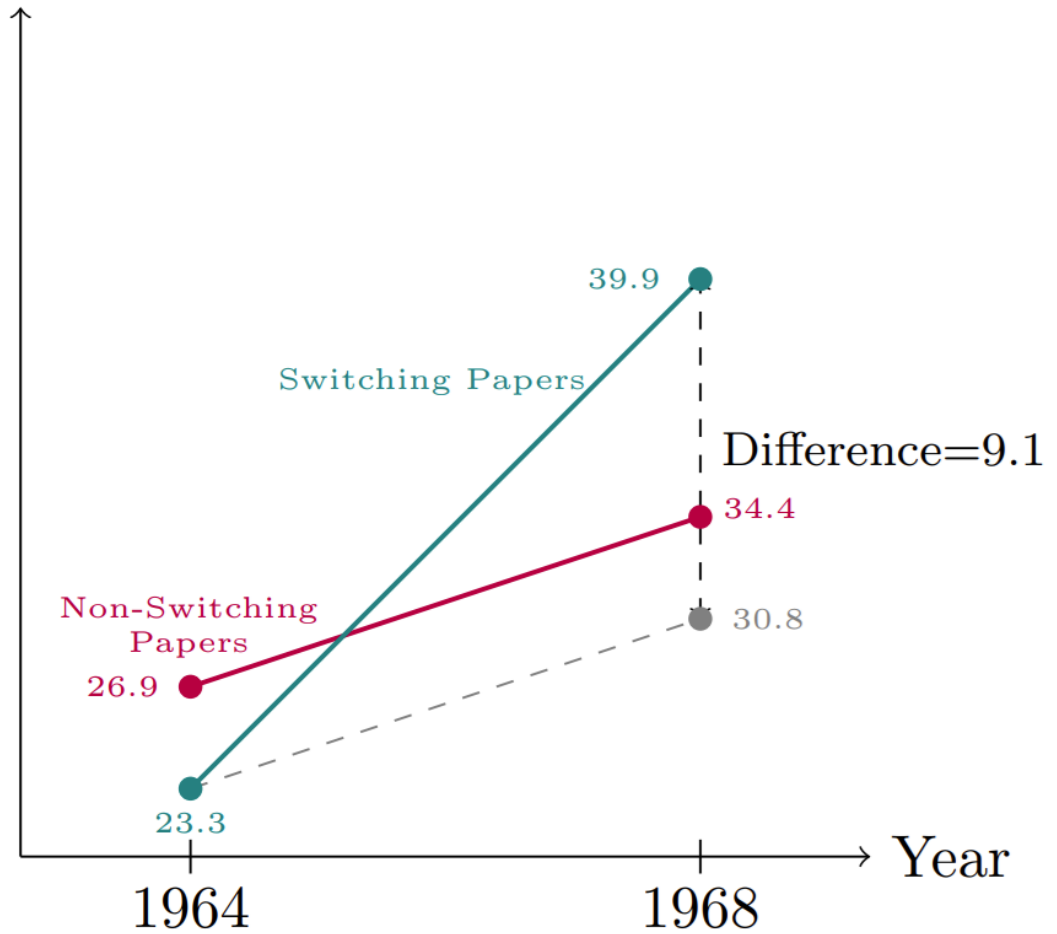
Figure 1: Percent of Newspapers Endorsing Candidates in 1968



Notes: Figure shows the percentage of newspapers, weighted by circulation, that endorsed Nixon in 1968, endorsed Humphrey in 1968, or endorsed neither in 1968.

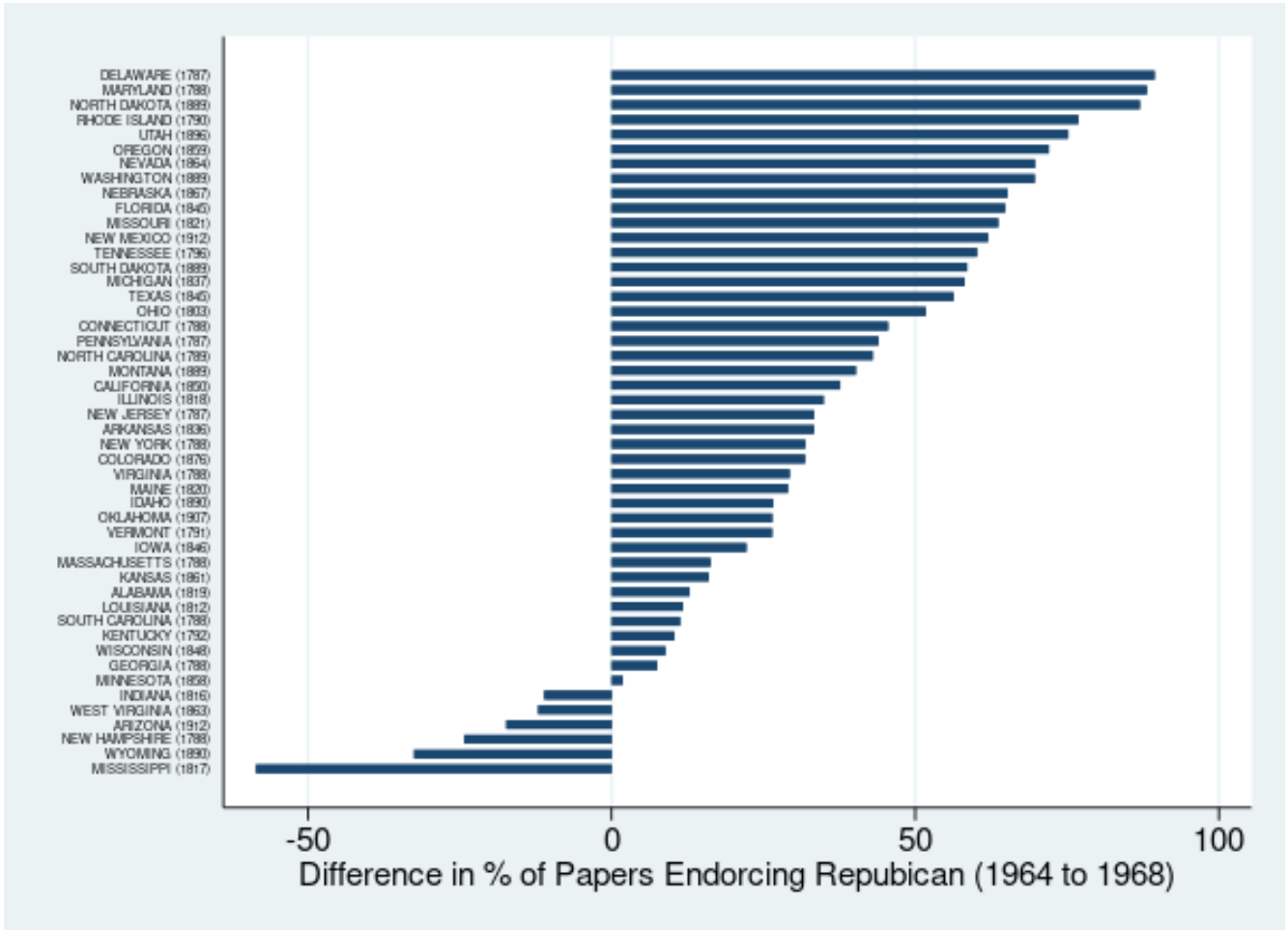
Figure 2: Change in Republican Support by Newspaper Type

% Voting Republican



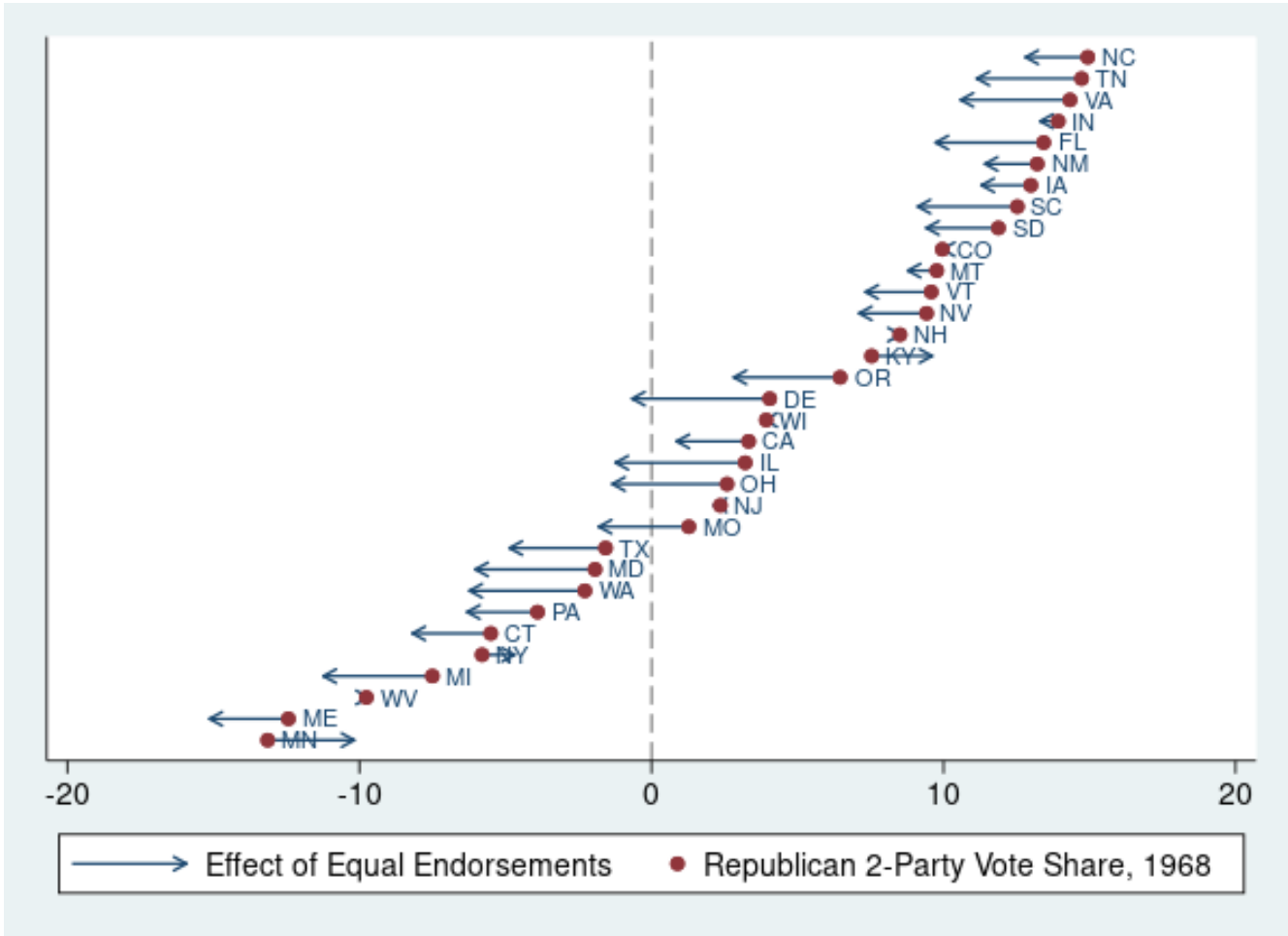
Notes: Figure shows the percentage of ANES respondents who votes for Goldwater in 1964 and Nixon in 1968, broken into two groups. “Switching Papers” is readers of newspapers that did not endorse Goldwater but did endorse Nixon. “Non-switching Papers” is readers of newspapers that did not change their position towards the Republican candidate. Either it endorsed the Republican in both years, or in neither year.

Figure 3: Aggregate Shift in Republican Newspaper Support by State



Notes: Figure shows the change in the percentage of newspapers, weighted by circulation, that endorsed Republicans between 1964 and 1968.

Figure 4: Effect of Equal Endorsements, 1968



Notes: Figure shows the shift that would have occurred to the Republican two-party share of each state's votes if newspapers had endorsed Nixon and Humphrey equally. Only states won by Humphrey or Nixon, and were within 15 percentage points of the two-party vote, are included

Table 1: Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	FD	FD	FD
Endorsement	0.0853** (0.0368)	0.0005 (0.0380)	-0.0901*** (0.0309)
Observations	715	715	715
R-squared	0.06	0.03	0.06
Demographic Controls	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Coefficients are from a first-difference regression. Robust standard errors, clustered at the newspaper level, in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Table 2: Counterfactual: Newspaper Maintain 1964 Endorsement Patterns

State	Readership $\Delta$	Endorsement Effect	Vote Margin	Electoral Vote $\Delta$	State	Readership $\Delta$	Endorsement Effect	Vote Margin	Electoral Vote $\Delta$
AL	-118,512	-10,109	-544,502	0	NE	-422,079	-36,003	150,379	0
AZ	6,450	550	96,207	0	NV	-124,317	-10,604	12,590	0
AR	-74,348	-6,342	-46,565	0	NH	40,604	3,464	24,314	0
CA	-2,752,453	-234,784	223,346	-40	NJ	-1,006,781	-85,878	61,261	-17
CO	-296,567	-25,297	74,171	0	NM	-165,664	-14,131	39,611	0
CT	-569,957	-48,617	-64,840	0	NY	-3,048,180	-260,010	-370,538	0
DE	-185,256	15,728	7,520	-3	NC	-714,480	-60,945	131,004	0
FL	-1,766,439	-150,677	210,010	0	ND	-212,724	-18,145	43,900	0
GA	-112,058	-9,559	-155,439	0	OH	-2,507,880	-213,922	90,428	-26
ID	-64,468	-5,499	76,096	0	OK	-345,504	-29,471	148,039	0
IL	-1,730,682	-147,627	134,960	-26	OR	-625,570	-53,361	49,567	-6
IN	515,232	43,949	261,226	0	PA	-2,388,610	-203,748	-169,388	0
IA	-307,414	-26,222	142,407	0	RI	-328,070	-27,984	-124,159	0
KS	-127,307	-10,859	175,678	0	SC	-107,165	-9,141	38,632	0
KY	-109,596	-9,349	64,870	0	SD	-66,208	-5,648	31,818	0
LA	-122,113	-10,416	-272,765	0	TN	-921,013	-78,562	47,800	-11
ME	-108,920	-9,291	-48,058	0	TX	-2,290,552	-195,384	-38,960	0
MD	-909,9762	-77,621	-20,315	0	UT	-146,347	-12,483	82,063	0
MA	-430,515	-36,723	-702,374	0	VT	-44,965	-3,836	14,887	0
MI	-1,934,151	-164,983	-222,417	0	VA	-423,330	-36,110	147,932	0
MN	-32,938	-2,810	-199,095	0	WA	-947,730	-80,841	-27,527	0
MS	236,310	21,157	-264,705	0	WV	89,703	-7,616	-66,536	0
MO	-1,593,969	-132,963	20,488	-12	WI	-165,345	-14,104	61,193	0
MT	-103,659	-8,842	24,718	0	WY	32,471	2,770	25,754	0
					<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-29,533,003</b>	<b>-2,519,165</b>	<b>464,234</b>	<b>-141</b>

Notes: Table shows the estimated change in the number of readers exposed to Nixon endorsements, the estimated effect of that change on voting behavior, and the loss or gain of Nixon electoral votes due to those effects if newspapers endorsed the candidate of the same party that they endorsed in 1964.



Table 3: Counterfactual: Newspaper Endorse Republicans and Democrats Equally

State	Readership $\Delta$	Endorsement Effect	Vote Margin	Electoral Vote $\Delta$	State	Readership $\Delta$	Endorsement Effect	Vote Margin	Electoral Vote $\Delta$
AL	-280,025	-23,866	-544,502	0	NE	-278,625	-23,766	150,379	0
AZ	-162,654	-13,874	96,207	0	NV	-38,904	-3,318	12,590	0
AR	-38,150	-3,254	-46,565	0	NH	342	29	24,314	0
CA	-1,960,826	-167,259	223,346	0	NJ	-68,682	-5,859	61,261	0
CO	-1,352	-115	74,171	0	NM	-71,152	-6,069	39,611	0
CT	-342,368	-29,204	-64,840	0	NY	795,460	67,852	-370,538	0
DE	-101,815	-8,685	7,520	-3	NC	-312,831	-26,684	131,004	0
FL	-751,038	-64,064	210,010	0	ND	-111,228	-9,487	43,900	0
GA	-73,094	6,206	-155,430	0	OH	-1,585,504	-135,244	90,428	-26
ID	-69,183	-5,901	76,096	0	OK	-301,219	-25,694	148,039	0
IL	-2,163,039	-184,507	134,960	-26	OR	-336,552	-28,708	49,567	0
IN	-158,249	-13,499	261,226	0	PA	-1,156,873	-98,681	-169,388	0
IA	-245,158	-15,513	142,407	0	RI	-170,024	-14,503	-124,159	0
KS	-355,671	-30,339	175,678	0	SC	-198,638	-16,944	38,632	0
KY	229,943	19,614	64,870	0	SD	-85,610	-7,302	31,818	0
LA	29,001	2,473	-272,765	0	TN	-390,267	-33,290	47,800	0
ME	-106,142	-9,054	-48,058	0	TX	-920,466	-78,515	-38,960	0
MD	-476,358	-40,633	-20,315	0	UT	-73,174	-6,242	82,063	0
MA	-121,803	-10,390	-702,374	0	VT	-44,279	-3,777	14,887	0
MI	-1,164,150	-99,302	-222,417	0	VA	-506,109	-43,171	147,932	0
MN	476,358	40,633	-199,095	0	WA	-524,171	-44,712	-27,527	0
MS	-31,357	-2,675	-264,705	0	WV	5,945	507	-66,536	0
MO	-568,859	-48,534	20,488	-12	WI	-10,453	-892	61,193	0
MT	-32,310	-2,045	24,718	0	WY	5,219	445	25,754	0
					<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-14,470,368</b>	<b>-1,254,139</b>	<b>-464,234</b>	<b>-67</b>

Notes: Table shows the estimated change in the number of readers exposed to Nixon endorsements, the estimated effect of that change on voting behavior, and the loss or gain of Nixon electoral votes due to those effects if newspapers in 1968 were equally likely to endorse Nixon and Humphrey.