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Supplementary Materials for

There is no liberal media bias in which news stories political journalists choose to cover

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This PDF file includes:

> Supplementary Text
> Tables S1 to S3
> Figs. S1 to S6

Table S1: Email Treatment Text

Subject:	Media Request
Salutation:	Dear [First Name] [Last Name]
Media Interview Request Text:	I'm working with Bryan Larson who is going to announce his candidacy for state legislature next week. We're reaching out to journalists who might be interested in Bryan and his candidacy. Would you be interested in sitting down with Bryan sometime next week to discuss his candidacy and his vision for state government? Thanks, Aaron Phillips
Bio Introduction	About Bryan Larson
Conservative Republican Treatment:	Bryan is a true conservative Republican who strongly believes that by following conservative values we can solve the problems that plague our communities, strengthen education, and increase economic prosperity. Bryan is a firm believer that we can only overcome the challenges we face by sticking to our conservative principles and not compromising our values. Bryan wants ensure that government isn't taken over by liberal radicals and strongly believes that his conservative voice in government will help prevent that from happening.
Moderate Republican Treatment:	Bryan is a moderate Republican who is interested in working across the aisle to help solve the problems that plague our communities, strengthen education, and increase economic prosperity. Bryan is a firm believer that we can only overcome the challenges we face by putting aside our partisan and ideological differences. Bryan wants ensure that government isn't taken over by extremists on both sides and strongly believes that his moderate voice in government will help prevent that from happening.
Moderate Democrat Treatment:	Bryan is a moderate Democrat who is interested in working across the aisle to help solve the problems that plague our communities, strengthen education, and increase economic prosperity. Bryan is a firm believer that we can only overcome the challenges we face by putting aside our partisan and ideological differences. Bryan wants ensure that government isn't taken over by extremists on both sides and strongly believes that his moderate voice in government will help prevent that from happening.
Progressive Democrat Treatment:	Bryan is a true progressive Democrat who strongly believes that by following progressive values we can solve the problems that plague our communities, strengthen education, and increase economic prosperity. Bryan is a firm believer that we can only overcome the challenges we face by sticking to our progressive principles and not compromising our values. Bryan wants ensure that government isn't taken over by conservative radicals and strongly believes that his progressive voice in government will help prevent that from happening.
Bio Conclusion:	Bryan has more than 20 years of experience owning and running a business in the community and knows what it's like to work hard. He believes in running a strong

	campaign and bringing that work ethic to the state legislature to make our community a better place. He and his wife Jennifer have three children.

Looking for Heterogeneous Effects by Perceived Newspaper Ideology

Does the political ideology of a news organization influence the probability of responding to a candidate for elected office? Some news organizations target readers of a particular political ideology. If so, it makes sense that a liberal news organization might encourage reporters to cover progressive candidates and to pay less attention to conservative candidates. Indeed, from recent research we know that after Sinclair Broadcast Group (SBG)— a publicly traded American telecommunications company with a long history of promoting conservative news—acquired local television news stations, the local news content had a more conservative message (Martin and McCrain 2019). Furthermore, journalists may simply choose to work for news outlets that are ideologically similar to themselves. If so, the probability of responding to a cross-ideologue (or ideologically-aligned) candidate may strongly be influenced by the ideology of the newspaper where they choose to work. Whether it is because the newspaper is catering to the demands of the audience, or some other reason, we might expect reporters working for liberal (conservative) newspapers to be more likely to respond to an interview request from a progressive (conservative) candidate for office. If this were the case, though we don't see ideological bias in the aggregate we might see polarization of what newspapers choose to cover.

To test this possibility, we use journalists' perceptions of their newspaper's ideology. In the survey of journalists, we also asked them to indicate the ideology of their own newspaper on a seven-point scale. Some may quibble with our measure of journalists' perceptions, rather than some other measure of newspaper ideology. Bakshy, Messing and Adamic (2015), Budak, Goel and Rao (2016), and Martin and McCrain (2019) have made noteworthy attempts to measure the political ideology of news outlets using content from the news or using members of the general public as experts. Unfortunately, they do not report measures for a number of newspapers included in our sample. Moreover, journalists who work at news outlets are better suited to rate the political ideology of their own news outlets than members of the general public. This is because newspaper publishers set news policy which is communicated to their staff through the socialized norms that exist in the newsroom. As a reporter discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of their status in the workplace as well as the norms and values of that workplace, they come to understand what is and is not appropriate for them to write in their news stories. They learn how the newspaper expects them to report on Democrats compared to Republicans and what stories are newsworthy compared to what should be ignored (Breed 1955). Because a news journalist's career depends on adapting to the norms of the newsroom of the newspaper where they work, they are the ideal experts on the political leanings of the newspaper at which they work. In this instance journalists' perceptions are the best measure of the political ideology of their news organization. If there is a moderating influence of newspaper ideology, it likely channels through journalists' perceptions of newspaper ideology, rather than some independent categorization of newspaper ideology that is divorced from journalists' perceptions. Here we compare whether treatment effects vary by whether a newspaper is perceived.

The results are in Figure S1. We do not find that a journalist's perception of the ideological leaning of their newspaper moderates the relationship between the ideology of the hypothetical candidate and the probability of responding to a media request. A campaign manager for a progressive (conservative) candidate is not treated differently by reporters depending on the political ideology of the newspaper.

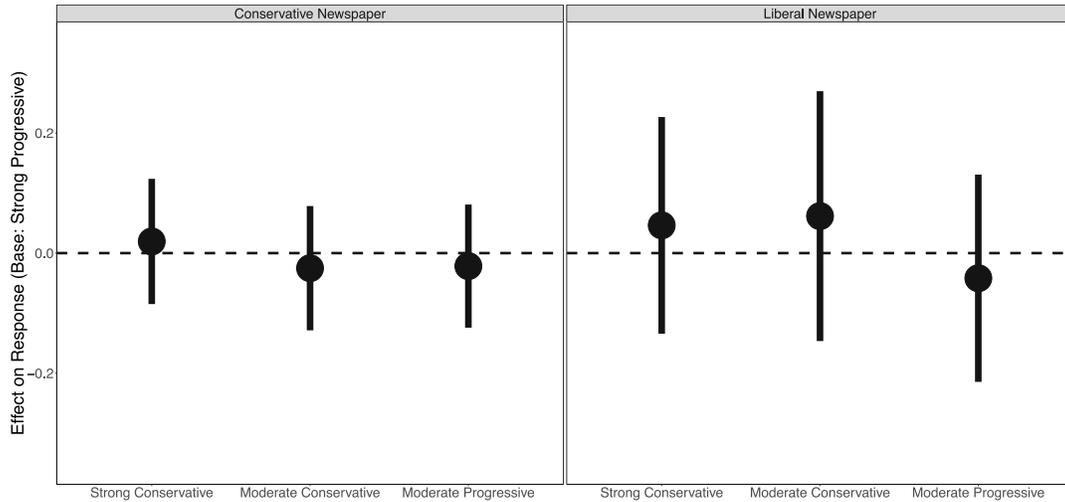Figure S1: Treatment Effects by Journalists' Perceived Newspaper Ideology

Figure displays the coefficients from a regression that benchmarks the three treatments listed to a strong progressive. Black lines are 95% confidence intervals; points are coefficient estimates. Model controls for journalist's position, topical focus, gender. Models are broken at their median values; hence, the model in the left includes newspapers marked as independents. Model N, left panel=722; Model N, right panel=202

One disadvantage of this approach is that we are only able to look for effects among those who answered the survey and this specific question about their newspaper. This makes us have less statistical power (as can be seen with the relatively large confidence intervals). Hence, in the paper section we use a different approach—to look for heterogeneities by the party composition of the surrounding area (from Presidential vote records) which has been shown to be strongly correlated with newspaper ideological slant (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010).

How Realistic is the Experiment?

There are strong theoretical reasons for observing the response rate we observe. We suspect that our overall response rate was on the lower (but not totally out of the ordinary) side of the correspondence study literature for two main reasons. First, the response rate looking low may have been driven (in part) by the fact that most correspondence studies are conducted on elected officials who (often) have staffs to help them respond to their emails. Most journalists do not have such a luxury; hence, the reference point to elected officials is a bit unfair. Given the time constraints and the lack of a supportive administrative infrastructure that elected officials have, we were not surprised to see the response rate that we did. Indeed, when viewed from the lens of the literature on surveys of elites—which although not exactly the same sort of correspondence that we were using, has the advantage of being conducted on our exact sample—our response rates seem about right to us. Compared to our own survey of journalists reported in the paper (which had a response rate of 11.3% and 13% among non-bouncers), our response rate of 18% (22% among non-bouncers) in the correspondence study seems about right to us. It may even be seen as being on the high side for those holding the occupation in study sample.

Second, the potential story that we presented to journalists is one that many of the local journalists in our sample report modest interest in or ability to cover. We confirmed this in a short one-question follow-up survey with the journalists in our sample in October of 2019. In this survey (response rate 9.8%, non-bounced response rate 13.1%), we asked journalists how interested they would be in covering several types of stories (on a 0-10 scale, with zero being never, ten being always, and five being sometimes) depending on the nature of the story, the presence of other on-going news stories, and the time to follow up on the story. In the survey, we found that journalists report being interested in covering many different types of stories (i.e. many responses are closer to 10 than 0) but that there was still meaningful variation in the types of stories journalists would likely be interested in. Many journalists report being much more likely to cover issues like a new mayor being elected (9.55/10), a local drug bust (8.03/10), and discrimination in the provision of local public services (7.53/10), or a local political scandal (9.35/10) than covering a candidate for state legislature. The journalists didn't say that it was totally out of the realm of possibility to cover a state legislative candidate (7.39/10). But they are more likely to cover a candidate for the state legislature than a higher-profile story (e.g. a candidate running for governor; 6.17/10). While it is feasible that the journalists in our sample would write about a candidate running for state legislature it appears that journalists have considerable flexibility about whether to cover this story. Moreover, this type of story sometimes gets trumped by more local matters. (We confirm this point in our conjoint study that was imbedded in our original survey, which we discuss in the next section.) In short, this story appears to be a story that is generally considered newsworthy, but is often crowded out by other news and can be subject to journalist discretion, exactly the type of story where gatekeeping biases would be likely to creep in.

These two factors (i.e. a lack of a staff and the type of request itself) help to explain (in part) why our response rate was on the lower side.

Ultimately, we argue that given our response rate is comparable to previous studies, varies in ways we would expect in theory, and has clear reasons for being at the level it is (most journalists not having staffs to help them answer their emails) all point to our response rate and experimental design being realistic.

Given this, we think our manipulation of a potential candidate running for office is actually, quite ideal, in looking for partisan-based gatekeeping bias if it is, indeed, there. It represents a potential story that receives a moderate level of attention in our sample and where journalists have some discretion when and whether to cover the story *even when* the story is assumed to be credible. Though our story would not have a directional impact on how the parties look (as in a scandal), this story still is very important given the vital role that media coverage plays for candidates for state legislature. Withholding coverage can be thought of as a powerful gatekeeping tool where partisan bias may come into play (Boydstun 2013;

Groseclose 2011), especially in elections where coverage is such a valuable electoral resource (Hassell 2018). Ultimately, we think testing for this form of partisan-driven gatekeeping by the media is vital to test and highly informative of levels of partisan coverage bias among journalists.

Replication of the Null Effect: Conjoint Experiment on Journalist Survey

As part of the survey of journalists described in the text, we implemented a conjoint experiment to uncover how candidate party affects the perceived newsworthiness of a candidate announcement. The conjoint tasks presented journalist respondents with two pairs of hypothetical candidates who were announcing their candidacy for governor in the state. We indicated to journalists that they were in a situation where the timing of the announcements, their location, and the staffing limitations of the paper are such that the newspaper is unable to have a reporter at both announcements. After displaying basic information about each candidate, we asked respondents to indicate which of the two candidate announcements they would send a reporter to cover in person. In addition to party identification, we also randomly varied the gender and race of the announcing candidate (through the use of names as is done frequently in the literature), the candidate's past electoral experience, their age, their occupation, the experience and connection of their campaign manager, and an excerpt from a hypothetical press release announcing the event where the candidate took a position on a particular issue. Table S2 shows an example of the descriptions of the candidates that the respondents were shown.

Table S2: Conjoint Experimental Presentation

Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Name:Latonya Gaines	Name: Matthew Anderson
Age: 28	Age: 67
Party: Democrat	Party: Republican
Past Electoral Experience: State Legislator	Past Electoral Experience: State Legislator
Occupation: Teacher	Occupation: Investor
Campaign Manager: Individual with little or no campaign experience but well-known and respected within party circles	Campaign Manager: Individual with little or no campaign experience whom you do not recognize in state or local political circles
Press Release Statement: "It is a great honor to announce that I am running for governor. I am running because our success and quality of life depend on our infrastructure and our aging infrastructure is struggling to meet the needs of our growing population. As governor, I will focus on maintaining and improving our roads and bridges to stay economically competitive and improve quality of life for our citizens."	Press Release Statement: "Today I am announcing that I am running for governor because we cannot afford to continue to mismanage state budgets in a way that harms future generations. As governor, I promise to guide the state by setting explicit priorities about how we should spend taxpayer money so that we can move our state forward responsibly."

Table S3 shows the full list of attributes and descriptors for the conjoint experimental tasks.

Table S3: Attributes and Descriptors for Conjoint Experimental Task

Name (Minority names italicized, Female names bolded):	***Alaliyah Booker;* Carly Schmidt**; **Carrie King;** Cole Krueger; *DeShawn Jefferson;* Dustin Nelson; ***Ebony Mosley;* Emma Clark;** Jake Clark; *Jamal Gaines;* **Jasmine Joseph***; **Jill Smith; Katelyn Miller; Katherine Adams;** *Keisha Jackson; Latonya Gaines; Latoya Rivers; LaShawn Banks;* Luke Phillips; **Madeline Haas;** Matthew Anderson; *Raven Korsey;* Steven Moeller; Tanner King; Todd Mueller; *Tremayne Joseph; Tyrone Booker; Tyreke Washington; Xavier Jackson*
Age:	28; 47; 67
Party:	Democrat; Republican
Past Electoral Experience:	No previous electoral experience; Mayor of a medium sized city; State Legislator
Occupation (Blue collar occupations italicized):	Attorney; Business Executive; *Factory Worker;* Investor; Nurse; *Receptionist; Restaurant Server;* Small Business Owner; Teacher
Campaign Manager Connections and Experience:	Individual with little or no campaign experience whom you do not recognize in state or local political circles; Individual with lots of campaign experience but not well connected within the party in the state; Individual with little or no campaign experience but well-known and respected within party circles; Individual with lots of campaign experience who is well-known and respected within party circles
Press Release Statement:	· "Today I am announcing that I am running for governor because we cannot afford to continue to mismanage state budgets in a way that harms future generations. As governor, I promise to guide the state by setting explicit priorities about how we should spend taxpayer money so that we can move our state forward responsibly." · "I want the people of the state to know that I'm in this race for governor because we need a strong education system that gives our children every opportunity to succeed. Right now too many of our young people are finishing school without having received the education they need. As governor, I will enact student-centered policies that will ensure that our children develop to their full potential." · "After serious deliberation, I am here to announce that I am running for governor. As public servants there is so much we must do. Right now our infrastructure system is aging and in a state of disrepair. As governor, I will make serious public infrastructure upgrades a priority. We must invest transportation projects to reduce congestion, improve safety, and promote opportunities for our state. A strong infrastructure can make a difference for our citizens, and I will work to provide that." · "My message today is simple. I am announcing my candidacy for governor because we need to put our state on a stronger financial

	foundation. As governor, I will take action to ensure that our government works more effectively. We need government to be more effective and efficient in how it spends its resources and as governor, I will make that happen." · "I am pleased and honored to announce my candidacy for governor because we have to have schools that ensure that our children receive the education that will prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. I will lead the challenge of tackling of failing schools head on and meet our responsibility to ensure that every child has access to an education that leads to a brighter future." · "It is a great honor to announce that I am running for governor. I am running because our success and quality of life depend on our infrastructure and our aging infrastructure is struggling to meet the needs of our growing population. As governor, I will focus on maintaining and improving our roads and bridges to stay economically competitive and improve quality of life for our citizens."

Figure S2 shows the results from our conjoint design comparing the coverage of Democrats to Republicans. As can be seen, there is no statistical difference between the Democrat or Republican conditions. If anything, journalists are more likely to cover Republican-oriented potential stories. However, this difference is not statistically significant at traditional levels (p=0.17). We can confidently rule out liberal media bias—i.e. effects where the Democrat is favored to the Republican.

Figure S2: Favorable Coverage Response by Party Treatment Condition
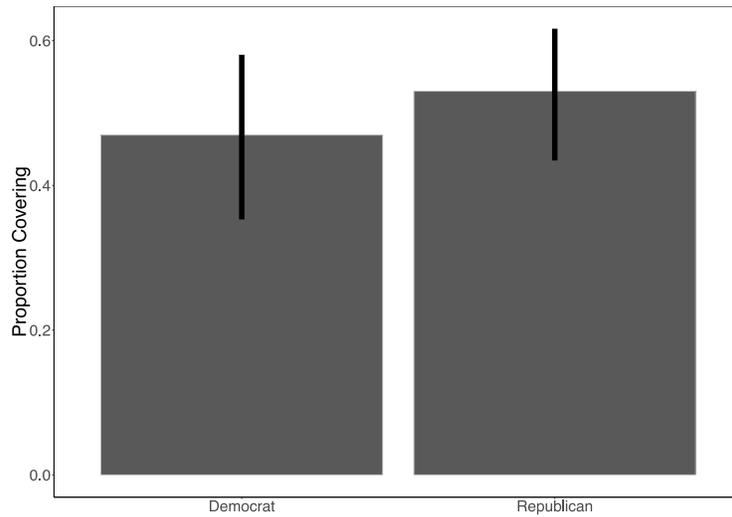
Figure displays favorable coverage indicated by the two partisan conditions in the conjoint experiment that was imbedded in our survey of journalists. Bars indicate mean levels; lines show 95% confidence intervals (p=0.17). Experimental N=3,276. As noted previously, the other conditions in the conjoint experiment had to do with the race, gender, candidate quality, social class, campaign manager connections and experience, and issue being addressed.

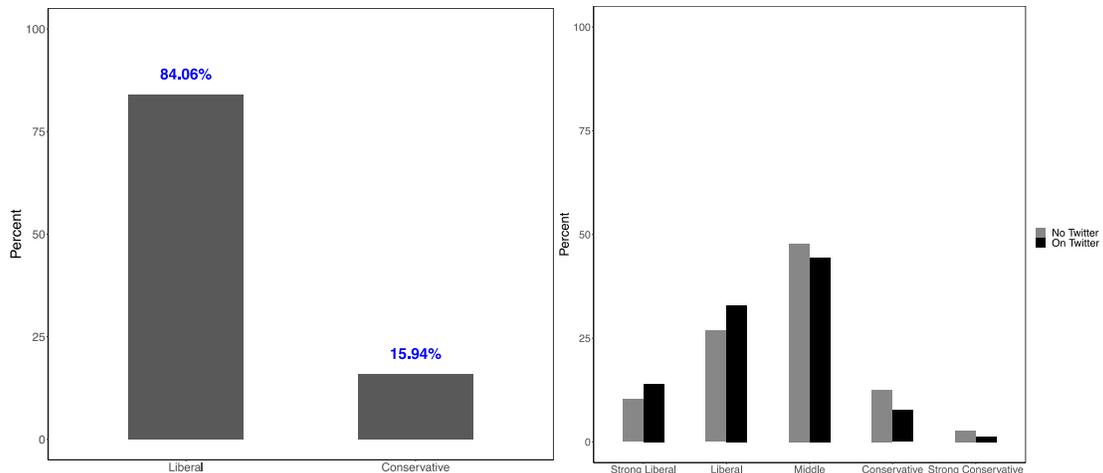Figure S3: Self-Reported Ideology and Twitter Usage

Figure S3 displays self-reported journalist ideology among twitter users (in the first panel) and by Twitter usage (in the second panel). In the second panel, darker bars are for journalists on Twitter; lighter bars are for journalists that are not on Twitter. Panel 1: N=276; Panel 2: N=944. As can be seen, journalists on Twitter are still overwhelmingly liberal (perhaps even more-so) as among journalists not on Twitter (see Figure 1).

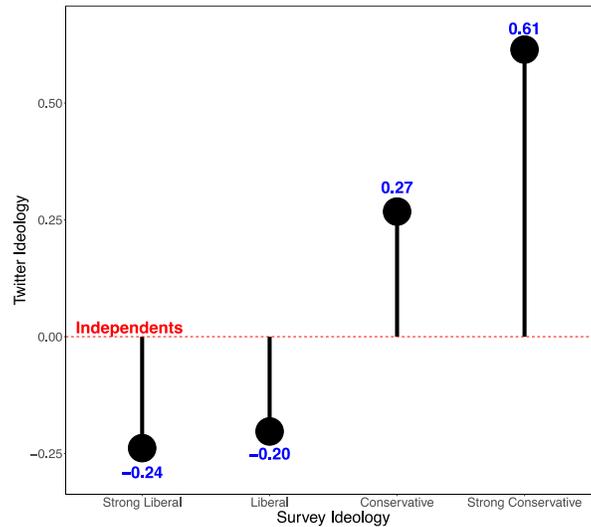Figure S4: Self-Reported Ideology and Twitter Ideology

Figure S4 displays Twitter ideology scores by survey ideology (among survey-responders). Results come from a linear regression model where Twitter ideology is the dependent variable and indicators for the four ideological conditions are included (with Independents being the left-out category—denoted by the red dashed line). N=496. As can be seen, there is a clear and large gradient in Twitter ideology scores by self-reported ideology.

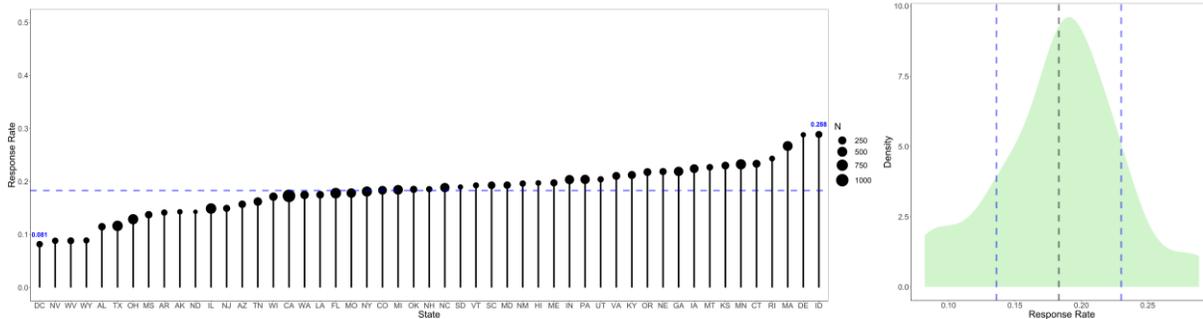Figure S5: Response Rate by State

Figure S5 displays response rates by state in two ways. The left panel reports response rates for all states with a lollipop chart. The points are sized by the number of journalists in a state. The **blue** dashed line shows our overall response rate (18.3%). The right panel shows the distribution of response rates. 38/51 states have response rates between 10 and 22 percent.

Though 46/50 states held state legislative elections in 2018, we did have 874 journalists (only 6% of the sample) in several states (LA, MS, NJ, DC, and VA) who received an email in a non-election year. We have performed this check and found that the response rates were, indeed, 13.6% (i.e. 2.5 percentage points) higher in states that held state legislative elections. This difference is substantively and statistically (p=0.031) significant. This check helps us show that the response rate increases with the realistic nature of the request.

Our effects do not change if we simply hold these states out of our estimation sample—the effects are all still small, not significant, and have confidence intervals that allow us to rule out even very modest forms of bias as shown in Figure S6. We think it justified to keep these states in our overall estimate as these requests could have been perceived as being from candidates running in 2019 and who had declared their candidacy very early on.

Figure S6: Treatment Effects from the Correspondence Study, Holding out Non-Election States
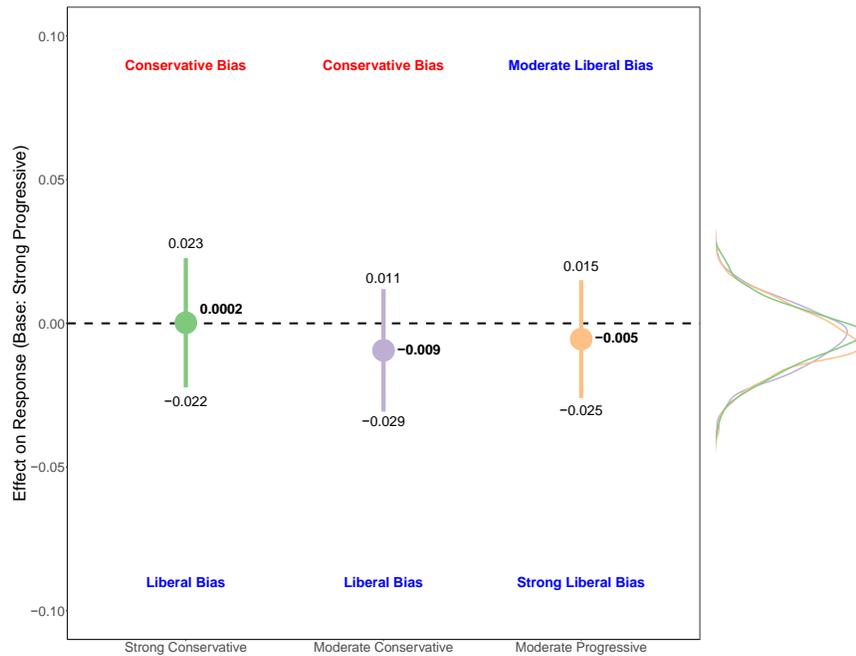

Figure S6 displays the coefficients from a regression that benchmarks the three treatments listed to a strong Progressive. Points are coefficient estimates. Lines surrounding points are 95% confidence intervals. Both are labeled in the figures. The figure also labels the direction of ideological biases in the figure---be they liberal or conservative. The distributions to the right show results from permutation tests that randomly shuffle the data and estimate a treatment effect for each shuffle. Model controls for journalist's position, topical focus, gender, the percent democrat in their constituency, and state fixed effects. Model N=13,443