

# Does It Matter Who Owns the Media? Evidence From Within-Market Media Ownership Consolidation

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## **Abstract**

Media ownership has become more concentrated in recent years, leading to concerns over media integrity and the nature of the information being passed on to the public. In this paper, we study the impact of broadcast television ownership consolidation on ideological preferences. To do so, we use a difference-in-differences design to examine the impact of within-market consolidation on election outcomes. Results show that within-market consolidation shifted vote share towards Democrats by 3-4 percentage points for both presidential and senate elections, and that this effect persists for at least 12 years.

**Keywords:** media consolidation, mergers, acquisitions, political preferences, media

**JEL:** H70, L82

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# 1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, the television broadcasting market has become increasingly concentrated as a result of the deregulation of media ownership rules by the Federal Communications Committee (FCC). While supporters of the deregulation argue that allowing consolidation would increase cost efficiency and the quality of the broadcast, critics worry that it would actually result in the opposite and detrimentally impact viewers in other ways. Of particular concern, in addition to broadcast quality, are media integrity, the diversity of viewpoints, and the nature of the information being passed on to the public. For example, by owning multiple TV stations, the owners can more easily impose their views on a larger portion of the population if they so choose.

Previous research has found that media ownership consolidation can impact coverage content as well as the political preferences of viewers (Martin and McCrain, 2019; Miho, 2020). But they have only focused on consolidation under Sinclair Broadcast Group, a large right-wing conglomerate. However, little is known about the effects of other kinds of ownership consolidation. One common type is within-market consolidation, where two or more stations in an area have the same owner. This could be due to both being purchased by a large conglomerate, or simply when two local stations merge. This paper will bridge this gap by looking at the impact of a very common type of consolidation within a media market where an entity becomes an owner of two TV stations.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, this paper asks whether within-market consolidation affects viewers and changes their preferences in a meaningful way. To answer this question, we estimate the effects of within-market consolidation on ideological preferences, which we assess by looking at election outcomes. We do so by linking broadcast station transaction records to election outcomes. We then identify effects using a difference-in-differences approach comparing viewers' political preferences in counties that did or did not experience within-market consolidation over time. The identifying assumption here is that the election outcomes of the treated and control counties would have changed in the same way if there had been no consolidation.

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<sup>1</sup>This type of consolidation is commonly referred to as a 'duopoly' in the broadcasting industry and was forbidden by the FCC until 1999. In this paper, we will refer to this type of consolidation as 'within-market' consolidation in order to separate it from the traditional definition of a *duopoly* in economics.

Our results indicate that within-market consolidation did shift viewers' ideological preferences. In particular, we find that within-market consolidation led to an increase in vote share of 3.3 percentage points for Democratic candidates along with a corresponding drop for Republicans. Dynamically, we find this effect persists for at least twelve years. For senate elections, which are more localized, results are larger in magnitude especially in the first four years. This suggests that (1) our estimates are consistent across multiple levels of government and (2) that the impacts of media consolidation are potentially stronger for local versus national outcomes.

In providing evidence on the effects of within-market consolidation of local TV stations, this paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, to our knowledge, we are the first to look at the impact of within-market consolidation of TV stations on the ideological preferences of viewers. One other paper has looked at within-market consolidation using a structural model to focus on the supply side effects and profitability (Stahl, 2016). Second, this paper complements studies that look at consolidation under Sinclair (Martin and McCrain, 2019; Miho, 2020). Relative to these, we focus on an entirely different kind of ownership consolidation. We also demonstrate that ideologies change in a broader context where it is less obvious that media slant would shift – unlike under a single, right-wing conglomerate.

Finally, this paper contributes to the large literature on the impact of media on viewers' political preferences. Based on this literature, we have evidence that exposure to slanted media can shift political preferences (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017; Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan, 2009). Particularly relevant to us is Snyder Jr and Strömberg (2010) which showed that local newspaper coverage increased constituents' recognition of their district's representative. If within-market consolidation changes local coverage, this could be one channel that explains our result. This story is also consistent with the larger and more immediate effects we see in senate elections, which are likely more reliant on local coverage relative to presidential outcomes.

## 2 Background

### *The rise of within-market consolidation of TV ownership*

In the US, the television industry is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). To ensure diversity of viewpoints and serve the needs of each local market, the FCC has established rules that limit the national share of media ownership, joint ownership of multiple stations, and cross-ownership across media types. In this paper, we will focus on the rules regarding joint ownership of TV stations. The FCC initially adopted a ‘TV duopoly rule’ in 1941. This rule prohibited an entity from owning more than one TV station in the same local market. In 1964, they amended the rule to also bar an entity from owning more than one TV station in an overlapped area. With this ‘TV duopoly rule’, owning multiple TV stations in the same local area was effectively banned in the US until 1999, when the FCC loosened the rule.<sup>2</sup>

In 1999, following the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the FCC relaxed the ‘TV duopoly rule’ to allow 1. joint ownership of two stations with overlapping coverage as long as they are not in the same market, and 2. joint ownership of two stations in the same market (colloquially called a ‘duopoly’) so long as eight unique station owners remain in the market and the four highest-rated stations remain under separate ownership. In 2003, the FCC loosened the rule even further and allowed joint ownership of up to 3 stations in large broadcast markets. Because of this, since the late 1990s, we have observed a steady increase in within-market consolidation that created a ‘duopoly.’ Figure 1 plots the number of proposed within-market consolidations over the years, and we can see that the number stayed relatively flat until at least 1996 when it started rising rapidly. In theory, we should not observe any joint ownership before 1999, but the FCC did grant exemptions to a handful of TV stations that were failing even before 1996. Additionally, since the FCC relaxed many other rules regarding TV ownership in 1996 through the Telecommunications Act of 1996, it is possible that we observe the number of joint ownerships increased starting in 1996 because the FCC was more lenient in granting exemptions.

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<sup>2</sup>People in the broadcasting industry regularly use ‘duopoly’ to refer to a case where an entity owns two TV stations in the same market. However, we note that what is referred to as a ‘duopoly’ here is very different from the traditional definition of *duopoly* in economics.

### **3 Data**

#### *TV ownership and transaction data*

To identify within-market consolidation, we need information on each TV station's ownership. We, therefore, obtained the data on the transactions of broadcast TV stations from BIA Advisory Services. These data contain the information on proposed buy and sell transactions of each local TV station in the US from 1950 to 2020. Included in the data are the TV station's call sign, affiliate, location, the type of broadcasting license, the date of proposal, the date of transaction, the proposed buyers, and the proposed sellers. We use the information in this data to identify the owner of each TV station and when the ownership was changing hands. Then with this ownership information, we are able to identify within-market consolidation in each period. In our analysis, for simplicity, we restrict our scope to only the stations that are affiliates of ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX and are the main signal providers, as these stations makeup most of the market.

#### *Election Data*

For the analysis, we use election outcomes to measure political preferences. We obtain election data from CQ Voting and Elections Collection. The data include county-level presidential election outcomes and county-level senate election outcomes. The presidential election outcomes span 1948-2016 while senate elections data is from 1968-2018. In particular, we are looking at three outcomes to identify the impact of within-market consolidation of TV stations. First, we look at Democratic vote share to gauge whether public opinion has shifted to the left. Then we look at Republican vote share to see whether there is any change in the support of right-wing politicians. Finally, we look at the margin of victory, which would inform whether within-market consolidation has caused the race to become more (or less) competitive.

## 4 Empirical Approach

As TV station consolidation was likely driven by profit maximization, we exploit the exogenous timing of ownership changes with a difference-in-differences approach to estimate the impact of media consolidation. Specifically, we compare the outcomes of counties that saw a consolidation(s) of their local TV stations to counties that did not, over time, using the following model:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \theta_x X_{it} + \beta I[\text{Consolidated county} \times \text{Post Consolidation}]_{it} + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

where  $Y_{it}$  is the outcome of county  $i$  in year  $t$ . The outcomes that we look at are presidential and senate election results, which we use as a measure of ideological preferences.  $\alpha_i$  is county fixed effects, which capture time-invariant county-specific characteristics that contribute to the voting outcome. Year fixed effects,  $\gamma_t$ , account for common shocks that affect all counties in year  $t$ .  $X_{it}$  is a matrix containing time-varying characteristics of county  $i$  in year  $t$ , such as population and unemployment rate.  $I[\text{Consolidated county} \times \text{Post Consolidation}]_{it}$  is a binary variable equal to one if county  $i$ 's local TV station(s) was consolidated and year  $t$  is post-consolidation. The *coefficient of interest* is  $\beta$ , which measures the effect of consolidation on outcomes. All standard errors are clustered at the media market level where treatment is assigned, allowing for correlation within a market over time. As with any difference-in-differences approach, the underlying assumption here is that, in the absence of TV station consolidation, the outcomes of counties that saw their local stations consolidated (treated counties) and counties that did not (control counties) would have changed similarly over time. We provide support for this assumption by conducting an event study that shows a common trend between the treated and control counties.

We also estimate the dynamic treatment effects of consolidation by splitting up the treatment effects into multiple post-periods. Specifically, we use the model shown in Equation 2.

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \theta_x X_{it} + \sum_{k \geq 1} \beta_k I[\text{Consolidated county}_i \times \text{Election \#}k]_{it} + u_{it} \quad (2)$$

where  $I[\text{Consolidated county}_i \times \text{Election\#}k]_{it}$  is a binary variable equal to one if the election in year  $t$  is the  $k$ -th election post consolidation for county  $i$ .<sup>3</sup> And  $\beta_k$  identifies the effect of consolidation on the  $k$ -th election post treatment. There are two major reasons for estimating the dynamic treatment effects. First, we anticipate that the effect could be dynamic. Political preferences tend to change gradually rather than abruptly. For example, the Pew Research Center (2018) reports that there has been no substantial shift in partisan affiliation in the US in more than two decades. Therefore, it is likely that the effects would be different in the short run and long run. Second, estimating dynamic effects with multiple post-periods allows us to include in the model county-specific linear time trends that are only estimated based on the preexisting trends and not the dynamic response to treatment (Wolfers, 2006). By including county-specific time trends, we can also verify that our estimates are not driven by pre-existing trends.

## 5 Results

### *The Effects on Presidential Election Outcomes*

We begin by examining the effects of within-market consolidation on ideological preferences. Using county-level election results to measure political preferences, we specifically look at the following three outcomes: Republican vote share, Democratic vote share, and margin of victory.

For each of the outcomes, we first conduct an event study to provide support for the parallel trend assumption required for the difference-in-differences method. We control for county fixed effects and year fixed effects in all the estimations. The estimates obtained here let us know whether the counties that have experienced within-market consolidation and those that have not ever diverged in any period prior to the consolidation. Figure 2 plots the dynamic difference-in-differences estimates for Democratic vote share, Republican vote share, and margin of victory in presidential elections. Notably, since our election data begin in 1948 and within-market consolidation only started in the

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<sup>3</sup>Since the presidential election happens every four years, the effects of consolidation in the first four years are captured in the first election post-treatment and are represented by  $\beta_1$ . The effects of consolidation in years 5-8 are captured in the second election and are represented by  $\beta_2$  and so on.

late 1990s, we are able to observe a very long pre-period. Lending support to our identifying assumption, all three panels in Figure 2 show strong evidence of common trends between counties that have experienced within-market consolidation and those that have not in the years preceding the consolidation.

Additionally, looking at the post-period estimates shown in Figure 2, it appears that within-market consolidation positively impacted Democratic vote share, and conversely, reduced Republican vote share in the presidential election. The figure also suggests that within-market consolidation reduces the margin of victory in presidential elections.

Next, we formally estimate the effects of within-market consolidation on presidential election outcomes and report the results in Table 1. We report the estimates from both the simplest difference-in-differences specification with only the basic county and year fixed effects (Columns 1, 3, 5) and the specification that includes demographic controls (Columns 2, 4, 6). The results from both specifications are similar and thus we will focus on the estimates from the specification with characteristic controls. The estimates indicate that within-market consolidation increased Democratic vote share in presidential elections by 3.31 percentage points, and conversely, decreased Republican vote share by 3.33 percentage points. Furthermore, the estimates also indicate an increase in competitiveness in presidential elections as the margin of victory decreased by 3.21 percentage points.

Table 2 reports the estimated dynamic treatment effects on presidential election outcomes. The effects on Democratic vote share are reported in Columns 1-3, Republican vote share in Columns 4-6, and margin of victory in Columns 7-9. For each outcome, the first column reports the estimates from a basic difference-in-differences model without controls, the second column includes controls, and the third column adds county-specific time trends.

Starting with short-term effects in the first row, the estimate from the specification with controls in column 2 indicates significant increases of 1.73 percentage points in Democratic vote share in the first four years. The estimates from the specification that allows county-specific time trends are shown in column 3. With this specification, the short-term estimate is still positive but becomes



smaller and no longer significant. Looking at medium-term and long-term effects, they are larger and robust across all specifications. Specifically, the estimate from the specification with controls in row 2 indicates that consolidation increased Democratic vote share by 3.68 percentage points in years 5-8. And although the effect size decreases when we include county-specific linear time trends in the model, the estimate remains positive and significant. For the longer-term effects, rows 3 and 4 show that they are similar to medium-term effects reported in row 2 across all specifications. While some estimates become marginally significant, the effect size and direction remain relatively the same as medium-term effects.

Overall, our estimates here suggest that the effects were smaller in the first four years, but then stabilized in the range of 3.68-4.76 percentage points from the fifth year onward. Additionally, the effects on Republican vote share mirror the effects on Democratic vote share. As for the margin of victory, although we estimate significant negative effects of 2.5-4 percentage points in all the periods when using the specification with controls, the estimates are all smaller in magnitude and become statistically insignificant when we allow for county-specific time trends. We, therefore, do not assert that within-market consolidation reduced the margin of victory or made the race more competitive.

### *The Effects on Senate Election Outcomes*

Next, we look at the impact of within-market consolidation on senate election outcomes. Doing so allows us to see whether within-market consolidation impacts public opinion on each party in a consistent way and across more localized levels of government. The main difference-in-differences estimates on senate election outcomes are reported in Table 3. The results here are similar to the results from presidential elections. Specifically, they indicate that within-market consolidation led to increases of 4.43 percentage points in Democratic vote share and decreases of 4.06 percentage points in Republican vote share in senate elections.

We report the dynamic treatment effects in Table 4. For consistency, we use four-year blocks which correspond to one presidential election in the analysis above, but here cover two senate elections in the same period. Starting with Democratic vote share, the estimates are robust across

all three specifications and indicate significant positive effects both in the short- and long-runs. The effects on the first two senate elections post-consolidation are reported in Row 1. In particular, the coefficient from our preferred specification in column 2 indicates a significant positive effect of 3.81 percentage points. Looking at the mid-term and long-term effects reported in Rows 2-4, we find that they are positive and larger in magnitude than the effects in the first four years. Specifically, the effects range between 4.69 - 5.04 percentage points and stay at this level for at least 12 years. Again, the effects on Republican vote share mirror the effects on Democratic vote share.

All in all, our result on senate elections here is consistent with what we observe in presidential elections. It indicates that within-market consolidation increased Democratic vote share and decreased Republican vote share. Furthermore, in the first four years, the effects on senate elections are twice as large as the effects on presidential elections and more robust. Similar to the presidential elections, we do not have strong results to conclude that there are significant impacts on the margin of victory.

## **6 Discussion and Conclusion**

We study the impact of within-market consolidation of TV stations by exploiting the location and timing variation of mergers and acquisitions. Using a difference-in-differences approach with county-level election outcomes that we linked with consolidation information, we are able to estimate the effects of within-market consolidation on ideological preferences. Our results indicate that consolidation resulted in increases in Democratic vote share and decreases in Republican vote share in both presidential and senate elections. Although, the effects appear to be larger and more immediate on senate elections than presidential elections, the effects on both elections persist for at least twelve years. These results are robust to the inclusion of controls and county-specific trends, suggesting that our estimates are not driven by the change in demographics or a difference in trends between the treated and control counties.

Our result shows that it does matter who owns TV stations. Within-market consolidation might not change the menu of TV stations available to the viewers, but it does affect the viewers, in particular their ideological preferences, through other channels. For example, one such channel could be that consolidation shifts the slant of the coverage leftward. This could be true if the entities that led the consolidation lean left-wing.

Alternately, another channel could be that consolidation resulted in changes in local coverage, leading to changes in consumer preferences. The consolidation of the newsrooms and the decrease in competition in the local market, seeing as now these two stations are of the same owners, could be the driving cause. Additionally, if the consolidation makes TV stations shift away from local coverage, it would explain why we estimate larger and more immediate effects on senate election as senate candidates rely on local coverage more than presidential candidates. This would also be consistent with Snyder Jr and Strömberg (2010) which found that constituents were less likely to recognize and able to judge congress members who were less covered by local newspapers.

Two channels could potentially explain the larger and more immediate effects on senate elections. First, since senate candidates rely more on regional and local coverage than presidential candidates, if the consolidation of local TV stations changes their coverage, senate candidates will always be more affected by the consolidation than presidential candidates. Second, because senate elections are held twice as often as presidential elections, we are more likely to observe senate elections in the third year and fourth year post-consolidation than presidential elections. Therefore, mechanically, the short-term effects (1-4 years) on senate elections likely reflect the effects in the third and fourth years post-consolidation more than the short-term effects (1-4 years) on presidential elections.

Our result contributes to the literature on the impact of media consolidation. Closest to us are Martin and McCrain (2019) and Miho (2020). They looked at the effects of acquisitions by Sinclair Broadcast Group and reported that the takeovers shift both the coverage and the political preferences of viewers rightward. Our findings apply to a more general and common case of within-market consolidation ('duopoly'). They show that even the more general consolidation, not focused

on Sinclair, can impact viewers' preferences and change the political landscape in the long run.

This paper also adds to the evidence of the impact of television. Many studies have looked at the effects of exposure to a particular type of media (Chen and Yang, 2019; Trudeau, 2016; Kearney and Levine, 2015; La Ferrara, Chong, and Duryea, 2012; Kearney and Levine, 2019; Lindo, Swensen, and Waddell, 2020; Cornelson, 2018). In particular, DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007); Martin and Yurukoglu (2017); Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan (2009) looked at the effects of media slant and found significant effects on voting behaviors. Our result complement these papers and suggest that not only does exposure to certain content matter, but exposure to a less noticeable change from ownership consolidation also impacts viewers in a meaningful way.

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# Figures

Figure 1: Number of stations that were owned by an entity that also owned at least one more station in the same market (based on proposed transactions)

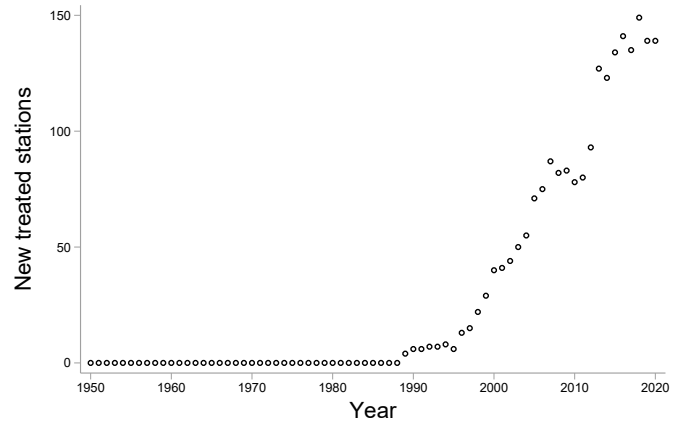
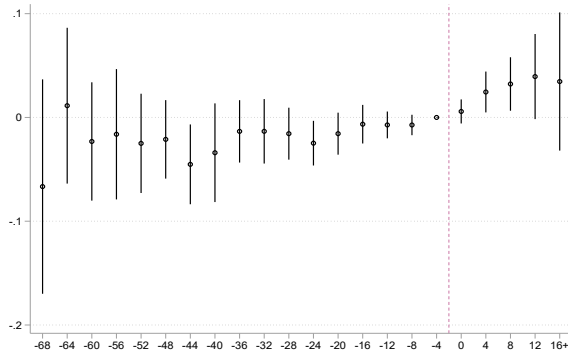
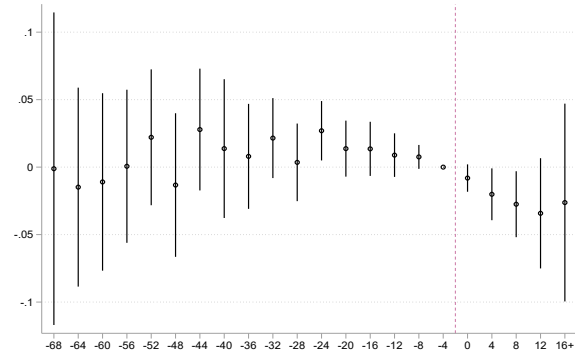


Figure 2: Dynamic Difference-in-Differences Estimates on Presidential Election Outcomes

Panel 1: Democratic Vote Share



Panel 2: Republican Vote Share



Panel 3: Margin of Victory

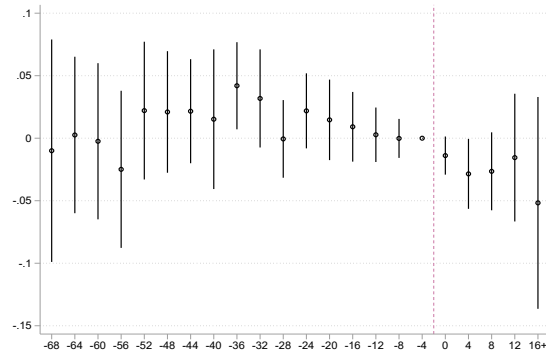
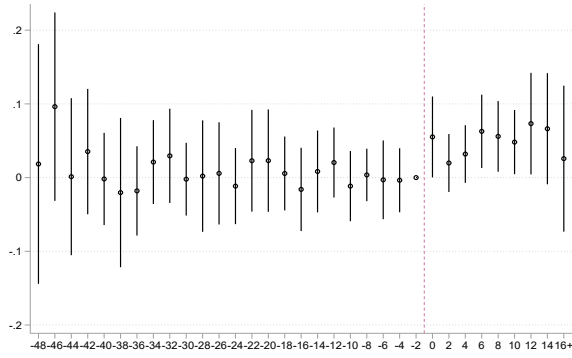


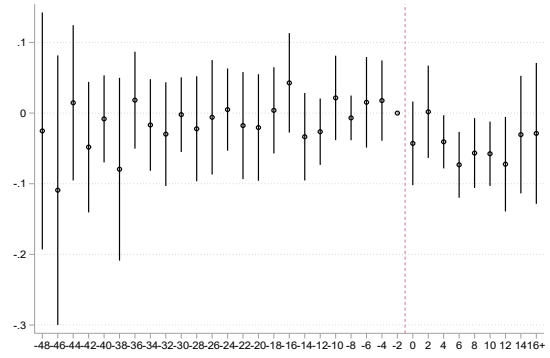


Figure 3: Dynamic Difference-in-Differences Estimates on Senate Election Outcomes

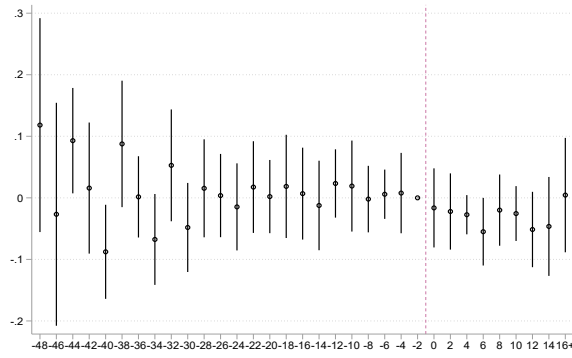
Panel 1: Democratic Vote Share



Panel 2: Republican Vote Share



Panel 3: Margin of Victory



# Tables

Table 1: Effects of Within-Market Consolidation (Duopoly) on Presidential Election Outcomes

	Dem. vote share	Dem. vote share	Rep. vote share	Rep. vote share	Margin of victory	Margin of victory
Local Consol. X Post	0.0385** (0.0149)	0.0331*** (0.0113)	-0.0301* (0.0160)	-0.0333*** (0.0109)	-0.0356** (0.0162)	-0.0321** (0.0126)
Observations	55,582	35,600	55,715	35,600	55,573	35,595
Outcome mean	.42	.401	.529	.554	.247	.249
Population controls		Y		Y		Y

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level.

Table 2: Dynamic Effects of Within-Market Consolidation (Duopoly) On Presidential Election Outcomes

	Dem. vote share	Dem. vote share	Dem. vote share	Rep. vote share	Rep. vote share	Rep. vote share	Margin of victory	Margin of victory	Margin of victory
Effect 0-3 years	0.0217** (0.0109)	0.0173** (0.0085)	0.0046 (0.0066)	-0.0177 (0.0119)	-0.0212** (0.0085)	-0.0090 (0.0071)	-0.0249* (0.0142)	-0.0235** (0.0117)	-0.0024 (0.0113)
Effect 4-7 years	0.0402*** (0.0150)	0.0368*** (0.0126)	0.0225** (0.0100)	-0.0302* (0.0158)	-0.0349*** (0.0120)	-0.0211** (0.0096)	-0.0401** (0.0187)	-0.0386** (0.0159)	-0.0137 (0.0169)
Effect 8-11 years	0.0484*** (0.0174)	0.0430*** (0.0143)	0.0225* (0.0119)	-0.0379** (0.0177)	-0.0414*** (0.0137)	-0.0214* (0.0126)	-0.0385** (0.0187)	-0.0333** (0.0164)	-0.0002 (0.0210)
Effect 12+ years	0.0534** (0.0265)	0.0476** (0.0189)	0.0294* (0.0156)	-0.0420 (0.0292)	-0.0452** (0.0187)	-0.0266 (0.0184)	-0.0444 (0.0295)	-0.0388* (0.0234)	-0.0145 (0.0350)
Observations	55,582	35,600	35,600	55,715	35,600	35,600	55,573	35,595	35,595
Outcome mean	.42	.401	.401	.529	.554	.554	.247	.249	.249
Population controls		Y	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y
Area linear time trend			Y			Y			Y

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level.

Table 3: Effects of Within-Market Consolidation (Duopoly) on Senate Election Outcomes

	Dem. vote share	Dem. vote share	Rep. vote share	Rep. vote share	Margin of victory	Margin of victory
Local Consol. X Post	0.0434** (0.0193)	0.0443** (0.0173)	-0.0400** (0.0184)	-0.0406** (0.0164)	-0.0306* (0.0174)	-0.0243 (0.0165)
Observations	48,935	44,668	50,047	45,752	49,415	45,143
Outcome mean	.465	.464	.517	.518	.266	.266
Population controls		Y		Y		Y

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level.

Table 4: Dynamic Effects of Within-Market Consolidation (Duopoly) On Senate Election Outcomes

	Dem. vote share	Dem. vote share	Dem. vote share	Rep. vote share	Rep. vote share	Rep. vote share	Margin of victory	Margin of victory	Margin of victory
Effect 0-3 years	0.0364** (0.0180)	0.0381** (0.0175)	0.0385*** (0.0137)	-0.0207 (0.0182)	-0.0219 (0.0174)	-0.0411** (0.0162)	-0.0212 (0.0228)	-0.0163 (0.0229)	-0.0424* (0.0250)
Effect 4-7 years	0.0468** (0.0187)	0.0469*** (0.0175)	0.0338*** (0.0126)	-0.0567*** (0.0175)	-0.0563*** (0.0162)	-0.0713*** (0.0179)	-0.0488** (0.0199)	-0.0441** (0.0182)	-0.0627*** (0.0240)
Effect 8-11 years	0.0489** (0.0208)	0.0504*** (0.0189)	0.0509*** (0.0139)	-0.0546** (0.0233)	-0.0555*** (0.0213)	-0.0756*** (0.0210)	-0.0256 (0.0206)	-0.0171 (0.0209)	-0.0390 (0.0350)
Effect 12+ years	0.0468 (0.0352)	0.0473 (0.0300)	0.0572** (0.0226)	-0.0416 (0.0339)	-0.0429 (0.0288)	-0.0785*** (0.0288)	-0.0303 (0.0273)	-0.0209 (0.0245)	-0.0516 (0.0450)
Observations	48,935	44,668	44,668	50,047	45,752	45,752	49,415	45,143	45,143
Outcome mean	.465	.464	.464	.517	.518	.518	.266	.266	.266
Population controls		Y	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y
Area linear time trend			Y			Y			Y

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level.