

# The Diffusion of Fact-checking<sup>†</sup>

## Understanding the growth of a journalistic innovation

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### Executive summary

How and why is political fact-checking spreading across journalism? The research presented in this report suggests that the challenge of disseminating the practice is significant — mere proximity does not appear to be sufficient to drive adoption. However, we find that fact-checking can be effectively promoted by appealing to the professional values of journalists.

Our first study considers whether journalists might emulate their colleagues in emphasizing fact-checking, following the practices of professional peers in the way that other journalistic innovations have disseminated. However, the practice does not appear to diffuse organically within a state press corps. While fact-checking coverage increased dramatically during the 2012 campaign, these effects were concentrated among outlets with dedicated fact-checkers. We find no evidence that fact-checking coverage increased more from 2008 to 2012 among outlets in states with a PolitiFact affiliate than among those in states with no affiliate.

However, it is possible to effectively promote fact-checking. In a field experiment during the 2014 campaign, we find that messages promoting the genre as a high-status practice that is consistent with journalistic values significantly increased newspapers' fact-checking coverage versus a control group, while messages emphasizing audience demand for the format did not (yielding a smaller, statistically insignificant increase).

These results suggest that efforts to create or extend dedicated fact-checking operations and to train reporters are the most effective way to disseminate the practice of fact-checking. While audience demand is an important part of the business case for the practice, newsrooms appear to respond most to messages emphasizing how fact-checking is consistent with the best practices and highest aspirations of their field.

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## Understanding the growth of fact-checking

Almost fifteen years after the launch of the first full-time political fact-checkers, observers still debate the merits of this new style of journalism, which focuses on evaluating the accuracy of public statements by political figures. There is less debate over the success of the fact-checking movement itself, however. Especially since 2010, a “global boom” in fact-checking has made this format increasingly common in political reporting in the U.S. and, increasingly, overseas (Kessler 2014).

Though precise figures are hard to come by, the available evidence tells a fairly dramatic story about the growth of fact-checking. One count early this year found 29 branded fact-checking ventures in the U.S., all but five of which were established since 2010 (Adair and Thakore 2015). Though dedicated, full-time fact checkers remain relatively rare, almost every major national newsroom has embraced the genre in some way. The list of outlets that engage in some form of fact-checking includes elite standard-bearers like the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Associated Press, and National Public Radio as well as USA Today, the three major broadcast networks, CNN, Fox, and MSNBC. In addition, scores of smaller news outlets at the state and local level offer fact-checks during elections or around major political events like the State of the Union address.

How has this new genre spread so quickly and what does it tell us about how the culture of journalism changes? A growing literature examines the effect of this style of reporting on everyday citizens, seeking to answer questions such as whether fact-checks convince people to reject misinformation and how they can be made more persuasive (see, e.g., Nyhan and Reifler 2010, 2012). Scholars have also begun to measure the effect of fact-checking on the behavior of politicians, finding some evidence that elected officials are more cautious when they know fact-checkers are watching (Nyhan and Reifler 2014). However, almost no research has considered the influence of fact-checking on another important audience: fellow journalists.

Understanding how and why the practice and content of fact-checking spreads among political journalists is a vital question. Dedicated fact-checkers have relatively small audiences by national media standards, but the effects of their work are greatly amplified when other reporters cite their verdicts and/or engage in fact-checking themselves. In some instances, fact-checkers can help to create a consensus on factual disputes, making it more likely that elites who repeat falsehoods on issues ranging from vaccine risks to birth certificates will be challenged by other journalists. Widespread coverage of fact-checkers’ conclusions also helps to increase the number of people who are exposed to corrective information, widening its audience beyond the relatively few who make the effort to visit fact-checking sites.

However, the effects of the fact-checking movement on other journalists are not necessarily clear. Some observers have worried that the rise of dedicated fact-checkers eases the

pressure on other journalists to evaluate the accuracy of politicians' statements, letting them "outsource" fact-checks to the specialists. Alternatively, however, the example set by professional fact-checkers and the increasing use of the format across the profession may encourage other reporters to question political claims in their own coverage. We seek to resolve this question by analyzing the spread of fact-checking as an innovation in professional practice.

### **Fact-checking as journalistic innovation**

The rise of fact-checking can be understood as the latest in a series of innovations to journalistic practice that have remade the news again and again since the birth of the modern newspaper. For instance, the news interview and the "inverted pyramid" format — two innovations that helped to define modern journalism — emerged in the U.S. in the final decades of the nineteenth century, changing occupational values and promoting a growing sense of journalism as a distinct calling separate from the political world. For journalists to directly question and quote political leaders was almost unheard of before the 1870s, but interviewing "took like wildfire" (as one reporter noted at the time) and by the early 1900s this once unseemly practice had become a basic tool of American news reporting (Schudson 2001).

Those reporting innovations set the stage for a much larger one: the rise of objective journalism, usually traced to the 1920s. That decade saw the formation of professional associations for reporters and editors, the adoption of formal codes of ethics based on fairness and impartiality, and the rapid spread of journalism schools promising to inculcate those values. But even as it embraced neutral, value-free reporting, the profession soon began to push in the opposite direction, claiming ever-more authority to make sense of the facts reporters assembled, especially in politics. A large body of research shows that print and broadcast journalism has become more assertive and analytical over time, especially since the 1950s (see, e.g., Barnhurst and Mutz 1997; Barnhurst 2003; Hallin 1992; Stepp 1999). One recent study found, for instance, that conventional straight-news reports claimed less than half of front-page stories in 2003, down from 85 percent a half-century earlier. Instead, more space was devoted to "contextual" reporting that interprets the world for readers through news analyses, trend pieces, and explanatory stories (Fink and Schudson 2014).

What accounts for this long "interpretive turn" in the news (Barnhurst 2014)? Scholars point to a mix of factors including the rising educational and class backgrounds of reporters, more and better social science data from the public sector, and a dramatic loss of trust in government agencies and officials, especially after Vietnam and Watergate. Within journalism, though, these shifts have been propelled by a series of professional movements that married new reporting tools to changing definitions of objectivity. "Interpretative reporting," first advanced in the 1930s, gained new force in later decades as a response to political leaders (most famously, Sen. Joseph McCarthy) who took advantage of journalistic neutrality to publicize

unsupported claims (Zelizer 1993). In the 1970s, “precision journalism” called for reporters to use computers and social science to penetrate more deeply into social and political life, while the “public journalism” of the 1990s tried to reconnect the news media to the needs and concerns of local communities (Rosen 1999). Despite their differences, these movements and others like them questioned narrow definitions of objective fact and promoted interpretation and analysis in place of recounting official actions and announcements.

Like those earlier movements, fact-checking ties new reporting techniques to an appeal to longstanding journalistic values. Journalists active in the fact-checking movement often present it as a response to so-called “he said, she said” news reports, arguing that the new genre is truer to journalism’s mission as a truth-seeker and political watchdog (discussed in Graves and Konieczna Forthcoming). Michael Dobbs, one of the first professional fact-checkers, made this clear in a report on the movement (2012): “In suggesting a ‘Fact Checker’ feature to the editors of the Washington Post in the summer of 2007, I was motivated in large part by a sense that Washington reporting had strayed away from the truth-seeking tradition... Truth-seeking and truth-telling were relegated to the sidelines of journalism, rather than assuming their rightful place, at the center.”

This history suggests that fact-checking can be seen as an innovation in journalism that offers a new approach to the media’s traditional Fourth Estate role. It invites a perspective not often applied to fields like journalism: the classic “diffusion of innovation” models used to study the spread of innovative tools, techniques, and ideas in fields ranging from agriculture to medicine. To examine how fact-checking spreads within the media, we carried out two large-scale quantitative studies that are described below. The first study examines whether the presence of fact-checkers in a state affected the practices of other political reporters, while the second tests the effects of different types of messages advocating the use of fact-checking.

## **Study 1: Examining the diffusion of fact-checking**

Why has fact-checking risen to prominence so quickly within journalism? One simple explanation is the power of example. Like professionals in any field, journalists pay close attention to what their peers are doing, especially at leading organizations. For instance, reporters and editors take cues from one another about what stories to cover and how to cover them, emulating approaches used by competitors or high-status publications (Boczkowski 2010). This pattern of emulation extends beyond daily editorial decisions to longer-term innovations in format or style. For instance, after the New York Times pioneered its expanded Op-Ed page in 1970, its major rivals and eventually newspapers around the country soon followed (Socolow 2010; Shaw 1975). Similarly, “adwatch” reports scrutinizing campaign commercials — a direct precursor of modern fact-checking — proliferated quickly across newspaper and TV newsrooms

Table 1: State PolitiFact partners in 2012

State	Affiliate organization(s)
Florida	Miami Herald/Tampa Bay Times
Georgia	Atlanta Journal-Constitution
New Hampshire	The Telegraph
New Jersey	The Star-Ledger
Ohio	The Plain Dealer
Oregon	The Oregonian
Rhode Island	The Providence Journal
Tennessee	Commercial Appeal/Knoxville News Sentinel
Texas	Austin American-Statesman
Virginia	Richmond Times-Dispatch
Wisconsin	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

in the 1990s (Bank 2007; Papper 2007). These innovations are also often further promoted and disseminated through mechanisms like journalistic prizes, journalism school curricula, professional conferences, and coverage in trade publications like the Columbia Journalism Review. This sort of recognition signals what is valued by the profession, helping to legitimate and institutionalize new practices.

The stylized account above appears to be generally consistent with the recent rise of fact-checking, but how can such patterns of professional influence be measured more precisely? The rapid spread of the PolitiFact brand suggests an interesting possibility. The St. Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) established PolitiFact as a national fact-checking site in 2007. The venture was highly visible during the 2008 presidential election and won a Pulitzer Prize for that coverage in 2009. The next year, PolitiFact began to license its brand and methodology to state-level media partners, eventually putting eleven partnerships in place before the 2012 presidential election. The full list of partner organizations is provided in Table 1.

The launch of PolitiFact's franchise model allows us to ask whether the expansion of fact-checking in the states affected the practice of other journalists. One possibility, consistent with the idea that fact-checking embodies a shift in journalistic values, is that other outlets in the states where PolitiFact affiliates were created would feel increased pressure to cover fact-checking or offer their own fact-checks. The example provided by a prominent new fact-checking venture might help to diffuse the innovative genre within a state by demonstrating the value and legitimacy of reporters directly questioning the accuracy of political claims. If so, we would expect to see fact-checking coverage disproportionately increase among competing news outlets in states where PolitiFact appeared.

An alternative hypothesis, however, is that the launch of a high-profile fact-checking venture could crowd out similar content at peer organizations. News organizations often seek to

differentiate themselves from competitors in the same market (Hamilton 2004). One outlet might dominate statehouse coverage, for instance, while another is known for its sports pages. It is therefore possible that a newsroom might actually be discouraged from undertaking a particular style of coverage that is associated with a rival. As a result, fact-checking coverage among outlets in PolitiFact states might instead be expected to *decrease* (or increase less) compared with outlets in states that lacked PolitiFact affiliates.

### **Research design and measurement approach**

To evaluate these hypotheses, we use an approach known as a difference-in-differences design, which accounts for likely differences in the prevalence of fact-checking or related factors between states as well as general changes in fact-checking coverage across time periods. Using this design, we estimate whether the *change* in fact-checking coverage between 2008 and 2012 *differed* between outlets in states with PolitiFact affiliates and those in states without affiliates. By comparing relative changes in this way, we can account for the likely possibility that state political cultures differ in important ways as well as the general increase in fact-checking coverage in 2012. It is important to note that this design assumes outlets in states with and without PolitiFact affiliates would have followed “parallel paths” in the absence of those affiliates. We help validate this approach below by comparing the change from 2004 to 2008, which indicates that the coverage patterns of the two groups moved roughly in parallel before the 2012 election in which the affiliates became active.

We sought to collect data on fact-checking coverage from a diverse sample of newspapers that included the largest publications in every state as well as other newspapers that are important due to their high circulation or political relevance. Outlets were selected for inclusion if they had one of the three largest circulations in their state or if they had a circulation of over 100,000 subscribers according to the *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* for 2007 (before the 2008 baseline data were collected), if they were located in the state’s capital city, or if they became a PolitiFact affiliate during the 2012 cycle. (USA Today was excluded because it is a national newspaper with no specific state or local market.) We then identified which newspapers meeting those criteria were available for the 2003–2012 period in the LexisNexis Academic, Proquest, and/or Access World News databases. The resulting set of 173 newspapers, which is provided in Table A1 in the Appendix, constitutes our sample. It covers 49 states and the District of Columbia, excluding only Hawaii, which lacked newspapers that were available in the databases we considered for the full period of the study.

Research assistants who were blind to the goals of the study ran the following search within each publication for the year periods concluding on Election Day 2004, 2008, and 2012 (e.g., November 3, 2003–November 2, 2004):

"factcheck" OR "fact-check" OR "fact check" OR "factchecks" OR "fact-checks"  
OR "fact checks" OR "factchecker" OR "fact-checker" OR "fact checker" OR  
"factcheckers" OR "fact-checkers" OR "fact checkers" OR "factchecking" OR  
"fact-checking" OR "fact checking" OR "factchecked" OR "fact checked" OR  
"fact-checked" OR Politifact OR factcheck.org

The outcome variable of the study is the number of articles returned by the search, which represents the total level of coverage of fact-checking by the newspaper in the twelve months prior to each of the last three presidential elections. (Extensive efforts to create a human coding system that would reliably identify the journalistic practice of evaluating the accuracy of politicians' statements were unsuccessful. As we discuss below, creating such a system is a difficult but important task for future research.)

To ensure that our results are valid, we performed two checks of the data. First, we conducted comparison searches between databases among newspapers available in more than one database and verified that they returned virtually identical numbers of articles, which indicates that the outcome variable is not influenced by the database in which the newspaper is archived. Second, we conducted a validity check of a random sample of 200 articles. We found that 73% of articles returned by the search discuss or mention political fact-checking. As long as this measurement error is uncorrelated with the predictors of interest (states with PolitiFact affiliates and the year before the 2012 election), it should attenuate our effect size estimates, making it less likely that we will find a statistically significant relationship.

## **Results**

The data we collected show how much more frequently fact-checking has been cited in media coverage before the last three presidential elections. Table 2, for instance, lists the newspapers that most frequently published fact-checking coverage during each election. To be included in the list of the top five outlets per election cycle, a newspaper only had to mention fact-checking or its variants 36 times in 2004 (Boston Globe) or 57 times in 2008 (Miami Herald). By 2012, however, inclusion on the list required 240 mentions — the total for the Washington Post, which barely made the list despite featuring the Washington Post Fact Checker, one of the three original dedicated fact-checking outlets along with FactCheck.org and PolitiFact at the St. Petersburg Times.

In general, the frequency that fact-checking was cited in the news grew rapidly over the course of these elections. As Figure 1(a) indicates, the mean number of articles per newspaper using “fact-check” or its variants or referring to dedicated fact-checkers grew from 8.5 in 2004 to 13.5 in 2008 and 43.6 in 2012. Though these totals of course represent only a tiny fraction of the articles that outlets published during these periods, the increases we find are substantial

Table 2: Most extensive fact-checking coverage by year

Newspaper	Year	Articles
Washington Post	2004	45
New York Times	2004	44
Los Angeles Times	2004	44
Charlotte Observer	2004	42
Boston Globe	2004	36
St. Petersburg Times	2008	185
Dallas Morning News	2008	90
Washington Post	2008	83
New York Times	2008	78
Miami Herald	2008	57
Tampa Bay Times	2012	1208
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	2012	446
Plain Dealer (OH)	2012	325
Atlanta Journal-Constitution	2012	263
Washington Post	2012	240

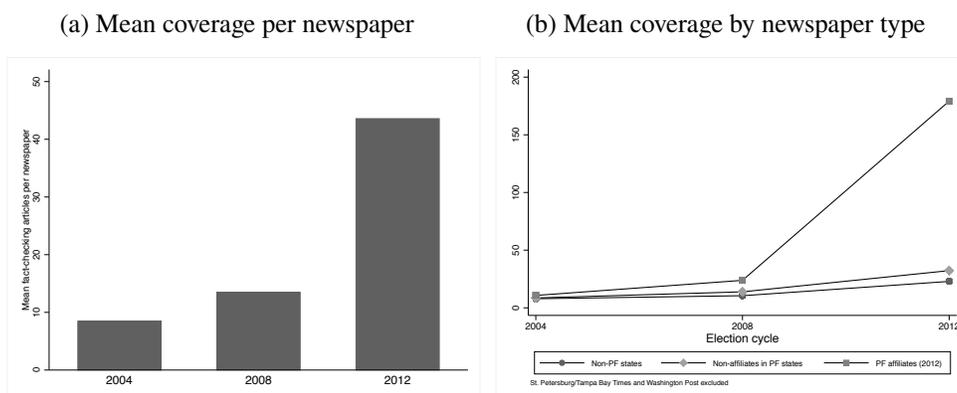
Number of articles returned by a keyword search for articles mentioning fact-checking or dedicated fact-checkers in a large sample of newspapers (see Table A1 in Appendix for full list).

in relative terms — coverage increased by more than 50% from 2004 to 2008 and by more than 300% from 2008 to 2012.

However, the fact that each of the top five newspapers in 2012 featured a dedicated fact-checker (the Washington Post or a PolitiFact-affiliated organization) also suggests that the growth in fact-checking was largest at this type of outlet. This impression is confirmed when we disaggregate the data in Figure 1(b), which shows that the growth in fact-checking coverage was largely driven by PolitiFact affiliates. (We exclude the Tampa Bay Times and Washington Post because they had already launched dedicated fact-checkers in 2008.) Importantly, however, fact-checking coverage did increase significantly even among unaffiliated outlets — from an average of 12 stories per outlet in 2008 to 26 stories per newspaper in 2012.

We are especially interested in whether fact-checking by PolitiFact affiliates during the 2012 campaign affected the coverage of other outlets in their states relative to 2008. Between 2004 and 2008, fact-checking coverage among these outlets appeared to increase at a similar rate to outlets in states that did not have affiliates in 2012, validating a key assumption of our design. As Figure 1(b) suggests, however, the presence of PolitiFact affiliates in a state did not significantly increase fact-checking coverage in 2012 among other outlets relative to a control group of outlets in states without affiliates. In short, the presence of a state fact-checker did

Figure 1: Growth in fact-checking coverage



Number of articles returned by a keyword search for articles mentioning fact-checking or dedicated fact-checkers in a large sample of newspapers (see Table A1 in Appendix for full list). The St. Petersburg/Tampa Bay Times and Washington Post were excluded from panel (b) because they launched dedicated fact-checkers at the national level during the 2008 election cycle.

not appear to crowd out fact-checking by other outlets, but it did not increase the prevalence of the practice either.

## Discussion

Two important limitations of the study design need to be taken into account when interpreting these results. The first limitation concerns our measurement of fact-checking coverage via the search approach described above as a proxy for the incidence of fact-checking. This approach was chosen because it is scientifically replicable and allows us to comprehensively analyze all coverage published during three separate years over a large number of newspapers. However, our measurement strategy cannot capture every aspect of journalistic influence — some patterns of incidental fact-checking inspired by state PolitiFact franchises may not be detected if they do not coincide with the use of the keywords we measure. (Also, as noted, measurement error may have attenuated what would otherwise be a significant effect.) A second limitation is our focus on the state-level expansion of one fact-checking venture as a source of influence. While the rollout of PolitiFact affiliates offers a valuable opportunity to use a rigorous research design, fact-checking may disseminate more successfully via other means.

Despite those caveats, the results support two broad conclusions. First, the study helps document the increased prominence of fact-checking within journalism. In particular, these results show that coverage of fact-checking has increased at the regional and state level, not just at the elite national news outlets that so visibly embraced the format. Though PolitiFact franchises account for much of the increase in 2012 (itself an important finding), fact-checking

coverage more than doubled even among unaffiliated outlets — an impressive level of growth considering that few of these smaller unaffiliated newspapers offered recurring fact-checking features or columns in 2012.

Second, the results indicate that the unveiling of a high-profile fact-checking venture by one news organizations has no immediate effect (either positive or negative) on fact-checking coverage by its rivals. The competitive dynamics among major news organizations may vary from state to state and of course include not just newspapers but television and radio outlets. Still, it is striking that the introduction of a PolitiFact franchise did not appear to change the baseline trend in fact-checking coverage among other outlets in those states compared with newspapers in states PolitiFact did not enter.

What do the results tell us about the influence of the fact-checking movement on other journalists? Our conclusion is that proximity alone is not enough to change the practices of journalists. The behavior of other outlets within a state press corps seems to be of limited importance relative to other mechanisms of influence such as cues from established industry leaders or a broader group of peer organizations. Our next study considers what approaches might be more effective in promoting fact-checking within journalism.

## **Study 2: What factors motivate fact-checking?**

While our first study tested the diffusion of fact-checking within states, our second study instead considers the motivations for engaging in or covering fact-checking. We specifically seek to test which professional or organizational factors motivate greater fact-checking coverage by political reporters and the outlets that employ them.

The history of journalistic innovations described above points to one possible answer — professional incentives. As we describe above, journalistic norms have shifted substantially over the last half-century toward more assertive and analytical styles of objective reporting. A reporter seeking status and recognition has very different professional examples and incentives today than even two decades ago. As elite news organizations deploy fact-checking and as trade journals and professional awards celebrate the genre, it is becoming not only acceptable but (arguably) desirable for status-conscious reporters to directly question claims made by the political figures they cover.

The fact-checking movement has been widely recognized within the profession as a needed change in reporting style that fulfills journalism's central mission. To take one notable example, the incoming public editor at the New York Times devoted one of her first columns in 2012 to formally embracing fact-checking as a legitimate and valuable form of objective news, distancing herself from concerns her predecessor had raised (Sullivan 2012). If the fact-checking movement appeals to the values of the profession and attracts recognition from one's

peers, then messages that celebrate the rise of fact-checking among the best-known and most-respected news organizations in the county may be especially effective in helping to promote the practice.

However, other factors influence journalists' decisions about what to cover and how to cover it — most notably, commercial considerations. Novel news formats and changes in reporting style respond not only to professional imperatives but also to the perceived desires of the news audience and advertisers. Some newspaper sections introduced in recent decades, such as the auto section, have been designed partly to provide new platforms for major advertisers. Other features are seen as ways to maintain loyalty among established readers (e.g., the crossword) or to win over new ones. There is evidence that the new fact-checking features and segments deployed in recent years have been a hit among news consumers; for instance, in one much-cited NPR listener survey, nearly three-quarters of respondents wanted to hear fact-checking on a daily basis (Schumacher-Matos 2012). Established fact-checkers often point to audience demand as a key justification for this style of news, emphasizing that it offers an unusually lively and entertaining form of political coverage and provides a valuable service by helping everyday readers to sort through complex political debates.

Concerns about journalism's professional mission and audience demand are not mutually exclusive, of course. News outlets clearly take both types of considerations into account when weighing whether to embrace fact-checking. That's why it is important to separately and rigorously test the importance of these competing explanations in pushing journalists and news outlets to fact-check.

The field experiment described below tests these theories by estimating the effect of messages that either highlight journalistic values and mission (referred to here as “supply” factors) or the popularity of the genre among news consumers (“demand” factors) on the prevalence of fact-checking coverage. We hypothesized before results from the study were available that the supply and demand treatments will generate more fact-checking coverage than the control condition and that the supply condition will generate more fact-checking coverage than the demand condition. We also identified three research questions in advance that could potentially alter the effect of our treatments: the amount of fact-checking coverage previously published in the newspaper (measured using the outcome variable from Study 1), having a fact-checking affiliate operating in the state during the 2014 campaign, and the presence of a competitive U.S. Senate or gubernatorial race (measured using Cook Political Report ratings of “tossup” or “leaning” on September 15, 2014). We thus also test whether the effects of our messages vary based on these factors below. (A full study preregistration was filed with EGAP on November 3, 2014. We summarize our results here using the approach described in that document but will report them in more detail in a forthcoming academic manuscript.)

## **Research design and measurement approach**

In our field experiment, we sent emails and letters to reporters at a randomly selected group of most of the nation's largest newspapers. These messages asked journalists to participate in a survey about fact-checking but also included different rationales for why reporters might want to engage in fact-checking. Reporters were randomly assigned to receive one of two types of messages or to a control group. Journalists at some outlets were sent correspondence highlighting the professional prestige and recognition that fact-checkers have received, while journalists at other outlets were sent correspondence that focused instead on the demand for fact-checking from the public. Finally, reporters at a third group of outlets were assigned to a control condition and received no correspondence from us. Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix present the text of the initial messages that were sent to reporters in the demand and supply conditions on September 22, 2014. Similar messages were sent by email on September 30 and October 17 and by mail on October 9 and 17.

To account for the possibility that our treatment would affect other reporters in the newsroom, our design actually assigned outlets to one of five conditions: a control condition, one of two low-saturation conditions in which half of the political reporters within the outlet were randomly assigned to receive a treatment messages emphasizing either demand or supply factors, or one of two high-saturation conditions in which all political reporters at the outlet received these messages. (Different versions of the treatment messages were never sent to reporters within the same news outlet. Technical details of the randomization will be described in a forthcoming academic manuscript.)

For our sample, we selected all newspapers with circulations over 100,000 from Study 1 that had articles written by staff members available in full-text electronic databases for 2014 after excluding outlets that met any of the following criteria: free or online-only publications, those for which reporter name and email contact information were not available, newspapers that are or had been PolitiFact affiliates or otherwise have a full-time dedicated fact-checker (the Washington Post), and the New York Times where Nyhan is a contributor. Finally, we excluded the Wall Street Journal, which had an unusually large number of qualifying reporters and as a result created balance problems in the randomization process. Table A1 in the Appendix lists the newspapers that were selected by this process.

For each newspaper in the resulting sample, the following search was conducted on an electronic text database in which the newspaper was archived (either LexisNexis Academic, Proquest, or Access World News) for the period of June 1–30, 2014:

election OR presidential OR Senate OR Senator OR Sen. OR Congress OR Congressman OR Congresswoman OR Legislature OR Legislator OR "House of Representatives" OR "State House" OR Capitol OR "state assembly" OR "general

assembly" OR "legislative assembly" OR assemblyman OR assemblywoman OR Democrat OR Republican OR Democratic OR DFL OR GOP OR governor OR Gov. OR Mayor OR constitution OR "city council" OR councilman OR councilwoman

Journalists from the outlets in question were included in the political reporter sample if they were found to have authored or co-authored three or more articles that included the search terms above excluding opinion articles. An examination of a sample of 100 reporters from 25 randomly selected outlets found that 81% of reporters were correctly coded as having written three or more political articles when each article was read by hand.

The final dataset consists of 1689 reporters at 82 newspapers. To assess the effect of the messages we sent, research assistants who were blind to treatment assignment ran the following search within each publication using an electronic database (either LexisNexis Academic, Proquest, or Access World News) for the period of September 22–November 4, 2014:

"factcheck" OR "fact-check" OR "fact check" OR "factchecks" OR "fact-checks"  
OR "fact checks" OR "factchecker" OR "fact-checker" OR "fact checker" OR  
"factcheckers" OR "fact-checkers" OR "fact checkers" OR "factchecking" OR  
"fact-checking" OR "fact checking" OR "factchecked" OR "fact checked" OR  
"fact-checked" OR Politifact OR factcheck.org

They they counted the number of qualifying news articles mentioning fact-checking or prominent factcheckers that were authored or co-authored by each reporter in the data during the study period. (Letters to the editor, opinion articles, and editorials were excluded.) These totals were then summed by newspaper.

## **Field experiment results**

We begin first by inspecting the distribution of our outcome variable, the level of fact-checking coverage observed during the 2014 general election campaign. Though this type of coverage grew significantly from 2004–2012 (as shown in Study 1), it remains relatively rare outside of newspapers with dedicated fact-checking operations, especially during the brief period we examined before a midterm election. Of the 1689 political reporters in our sample, 97% did not mention a variant of the term “fact-checking” or the name of a dedicated fact-checker in a news article during the September 22–November 4 study period (mean: 0.04; maximum of 9). Likewise, 51 of 82 outlets (62%) did not have a political reporter in our sample use one of our search terms in news coverage (mean: 0.9; maximum of 10).

Looking next at the average number of qualifying articles per day in Figure 2, we see a sharp increase in the amount of fact-checking over the first two weeks of the study period. The

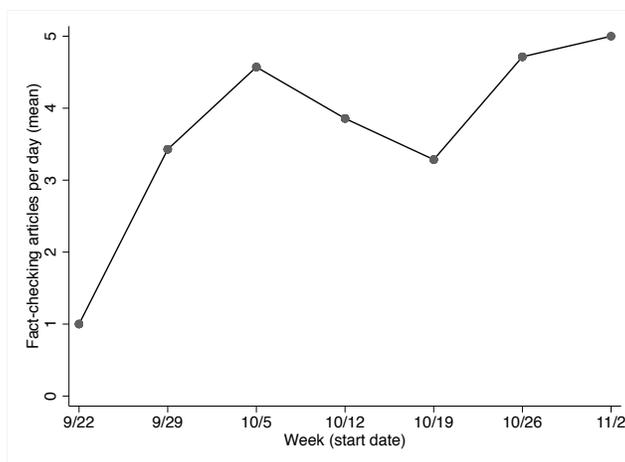
Table 3: Most extensive coverage of fact-checking

(a) Reporters			(b) Newspapers	
Name	Newspaper	Articles	Newspaper	Articles
Bruce Alpert	Times-Picayune (LA)	9	Times-Picayune (LA)	10
Teri Weaver	Post-Standard (NY)	4	Washington Times	8
Christopher Cadelago	Sacramento Bee	4	Sacramento Bee	5

Number of articles returned by a keyword search for articles mentioning fact-checking or dedicated fact-checkers written by political reporters at a large sample of newspapers excluding current or former PolitiFact affiliates or newspapers with dedicated fact-checkers (see Table A1 in Appendix for full list).

volume of coverage falls slightly during the middle of October before peaking around Election Day. (Note: The plot considers the average number of articles per day for each calendar week to account for the final week being truncated due to Election Day falling on a Tuesday.)

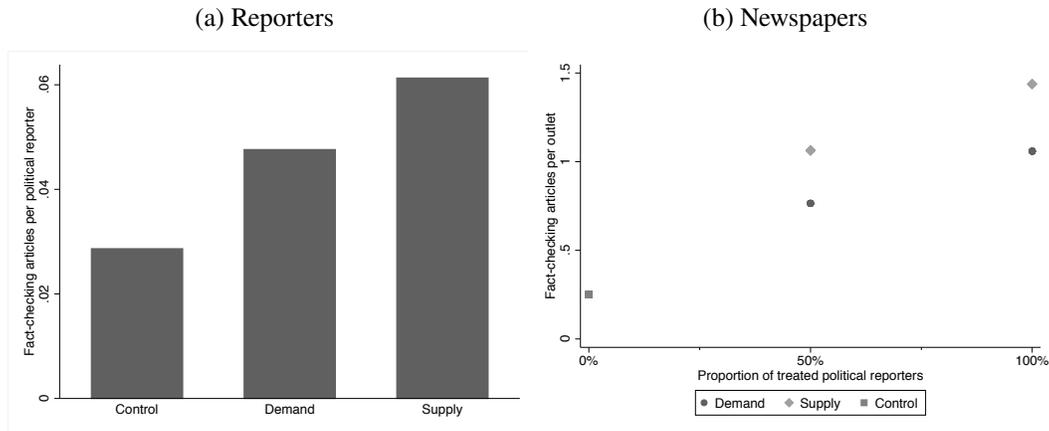
Figure 2: Fact-checking coverage: Fall 2014 campaign



Number of articles returned by a keyword search for articles mentioning fact-checking or dedicated fact-checkers written by political reporters at a large sample of newspapers excluding current or former PolitiFact affiliates or newspapers with dedicated fact-checkers (see Table A1 in Appendix for full list).

When we compare the prevalence of fact-checking between experimental conditions in Figure 3, our results suggest that the messages we sent helped generate additional fact-checking coverage compared to the reporters and newspapers in our control condition. (Our analysis does not find support for the possibility that these messages affected coverage by untreated reporters at the same outlet, but the estimates are imprecise so we report both individual- and outlet-level results below.) The reporter-level findings presented in Figure 3(a) are broadly consistent with our expectations. While the results fail to reach statistical significance, the av-

Figure 3: Experimental results



Means by experimental condition. Outcome variable is the number of articles returned by a keyword search for articles mentioning fact-checking or dedicated fact-checkers written by political reporters at a large sample of newspapers excluding current or former PolitiFact affiliates or newspapers with dedicated fact-checkers (see Table A1 in Appendix for full list). Treatment effect estimates relative to controls were statistically significant for the supply condition at the newspaper level but not for the demand condition or any of the reporter-level outcomes.

verage number of fact-checking articles is greater among political reporters who received the treatment messages than in the control group, especially among those who received the supply messages. A similar pattern is observed in Figure 3(b), which shows that total fact-checking coverage at newspapers increased as the level of saturation of treatment messages increased, particularly for outlets where political reporters were sent supply messages. These differences were statistically significant for newspapers that received the supply messages relative to control newspapers ( $p < .05$ , one-sided). The demand messages, by contrast, failed to significantly increase fact-checking coverage at either level of saturation (though the estimated treatment effects cannot be distinguished directly from the supply groups). While we cannot be certain, we suspect that our results are more precise at the outlet level because many reporters simply did not read the email or postal letters we sent. At a higher level of aggregation, we can more precisely estimate their effects. (We address this issue further in the discussion section.)

Finally, Table 4 shows the differences in fact-checking coverage between experimental conditions for the three contextual factors identified as research questions of interest: the prevalence of fact-checking in the newspaper in the 2012 data from Study 1 (the table uses a median split of 25 articles or more); whether a PolitiFact affiliate was present in the state or not in 2014; and whether a competitive gubernatorial or U.S. Senate race was underway. None of our estimated treatment effects vary significantly based on these contextual factors.

Table 4: Contextual differences: Newspapers

	N	Control mean	Demand mean	Supply mean
Low fact-checking in 2012	41	0.40	0.83	1.23
High fact-checking in 2012	41	0.00	1.00	1.26
No fact-checker in state	63	0.29	0.88	1.65
Fact-checker in state	19	0.00	1.00	0.22
No competitive Gov./Sen. race	52	0.10	1.00	0.85
Competitive Gov./Sen. race	30	0.50	0.75	1.92

Unweighted means by condition. Estimated treatment effects do not vary significantly based on contextual factors listed above. Outcome variable is the number of articles returned by a keyword search for articles mentioning fact-checking or dedicated fact-checkers written by political reporters at a large sample of newspapers excluding current or former PolitiFact affiliates or newspapers with dedicated fact-checkers (see Table A1 in Appendix for full list).

## Discussion

When interpreting these results, it is important to keep in mind the relationship between the experiment described here and the real-world mechanisms it is meant to examine. A long research tradition in social science relies on relatively weak “treatment” stimuli, like letters advocating fact-checking, to represent factors that might influence human behavior. Most often, these experiments measure outcomes under controlled conditions using an instrument calibrated to measure small effects like a survey. By contrast, our field experiment has the virtue of measuring the effect of our treatments on an actual journalistic outcome of interest under naturalistic circumstances. As a consequence, however, we are forced to measure the effect of a brief and artificial stimulus on the *actual* behavior of people contending with all of the forces encountered in everyday workplace life.

Given these limitations, the finding that fact-checking coverage increased significantly among newspapers whose reporters were sent the supply messages is striking. In absolute terms, the treatment yielded a relatively small effect — one additional article mentioning fact-checking over the six weeks studied compared to newspapers in the control group. However, this increase is substantively large given the extreme rarity of such coverage at the outlets studied, which did not have dedicated fact-checking operations and were more than likely than not to omit *any* mention of fact-checking otherwise. As noted above, many recipients likely skimmed or ignored the messages we sent them, diluting their effect and making it more difficult for us to find any detectable influence. This difficulty in reaching reporters is likely the reason that statistically significant effects were only detectable at the outlet level — where

a notable correspondence between saturation and coverage levels was observed — and not among individual reporters.

Finally, we would note that the comparison between what we've called demand and supply messages should be interpreted carefully. As we describe above, only letters and emails emphasizing core journalistic values yielded a statistically significant effect in fact-checking coverage relative to the control group, but we can not statistically differentiate the demand and supply conditions directly. Moreover, audience-focused messages might be especially effective in promoting the use of fact-checking to specific groups within journalism — for instance, when making a case for the format internally in meetings with editors and executives.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, these results highlight the promise of fact-checking as a journalistic innovation as well as the challenge of disseminating it. As the most active participants in the fact-checking movement frequently argue when evangelizing on behalf of the genre, this style of reporting speaks to core professional values in journalism. Our field experiment offers compelling evidence of the appeal of that message in newsrooms across the country.

However, we find no evidence that fact-checking disseminates effectively through its mere presence in a state's press corps. It may instead spread through other mechanisms of professional influence within journalism. Alternatively, the growth of fact-checking may be more directly attributable to the efforts of journalistic and academic entrepreneurs like PolitiFact's Bill Adair or FactCheck.org's Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Brooks Jackson.

These results also suggest an agenda for future research. One priority is to develop a reliable and replicable measure of the incidence of fact-checking in political news. Journalists themselves define what counts as a fact-check in different ways. The term may refer narrowly to stories which formally research a specific claim by a public figure or more broadly to any reporting which seems to challenge political rhetoric. Reporters assert the authority to cast doubt on a politician's claims through any number of choices which are not always apparent to the reader (or researcher): source selection, framing, story structure, tone of voice, etc. This subtlety and variety make reliable coding quite difficult and necessarily limited in what it can encompass. Nevertheless, creating such a measure is vital to understanding how frequently journalists assess the accuracy of statements by public figures and the mechanisms by which this practice spreads. Our results suggest that explicit fact-checking or coverage of the practice, while growing rapidly, is still relatively rare and heavily concentrated among outlets with dedicated fact-checkers. However, further research is necessary to validate this finding and determine what effects fact-checking is having on routine political coverage.

Precise measures of the incidence of fact-checking will also help in pursuing a second

major research priority: documenting the extent and the growth of this style of reporting across the news landscape, which includes broadcast and online outlets as well as print. It is well established that patterns of influences between media outlets can vary by platform and era. For instance, television newsrooms typically relied on newspaper coverage to develop daily news budgets in the broadcast era (e.g., Reese and Danielian 1989). Fact-checking may also spread in idiosyncratic ways in today's news ecosystem; to take just one possibility, cable news networks sometimes harvest research from dedicated fact-checkers to quickly produce lively video segments debunking political claims. Devoting greater attention to the wider news landscape will also help in assessing and comparing the success of individual fact-checks, which is necessary to understand which types of fact-checks are most influential on reporting of a given political claim.

Finally, our findings invite closer study of the mechanisms that govern the adoption of fact-checking within a newsroom. Are reporters more influential or the organizations for which they work? Alternatively, either level of analysis may be relevant depending on the particular style of fact-checking or pattern of journalistic influence in question. Reporter- and newsroom-level factors may also interact — certain sorts of organizational arrangements could, for instance, make it easier for individual reporters to hold politicians accountable for their claims.

Ultimately, though, the most significant implication of our research is that the fact-checking movement in journalism has much potential yet to be realized. Though the expansion of fact-checking in 2012 did not appear to spread to other within-state outlets, our field experiment suggests that a large numbers of reporters and news organizations are more receptive to fact-checking than their coverage might seem to indicate.

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## Appendix

Table A1: Newspaper sample

State	Newspaper	Headquarters city	Study 1	Study 2
Alabama	Birmingham News	Birmingham	X	X
Alabama	Huntsville Times	Huntsville	X	
Alabama	Montgomery Advertiser	Montgomery	X	
Alabama	Press-Register	Mobile	X	
Alaska	Anchorage Daily News	Anchorage	X	
Alaska	Fairbanks Daily News Miner	Fairbanks	X	
Alaska	Juneau Empire	Juneau	X	
Arizona	The Arizona Daily Star	Tuscon	X	X
Arizona	The Arizona Republic	Phoenix	X	X
Arkansas	Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	Little Rock	X	X
Arkansas	Times Record	Fort Smith	X	
California	Contra Costa Times	Walnut Creek	X	X
California	Daily News	Woodland Hills	X	X
California	Fresno Bee	Fresno	X	X
California	Investor's Business Daily	Los Angeles	X	X
California	Sacramento Bee	Sacramento	X	X
California	San Diego Union-Tribune	San Diego	X	X
California	San Jose Mercury News	San Jose	X	X
California	The Los Angeles Times	Los Angeles	X	X
California	The Orange County Register	Santa Ana	X	X
California	The Press-Enterprise	Riverside	X	
California	The San Francisco Chronicle	San Francisco	X	X
Colorado	The Denver Post	Denver	X	X
Colorado	The Gazette	Colorado Springs	X	
Connecticut	Connecticut Post	Bridgeport	X	
Connecticut	Hartford Courant	Hartford	X	X
Connecticut	New Haven Register	New Haven	X	
Delaware	Delaware State News	Dover	X	
District of Columbia	The Washington Post	Washington	X	
District of Columbia	The Washington Times	Washington	X	X
Florida	Daytona Beach News-Journal	Daytona Beach	X	X
Florida	Orlando Sentinel	Orlando	X	X
Florida	Sarasota Herald-Tribune	Sarasota	X	X
Florida	South Florida Sun-Sentinel	Fort Lauderdale	X	X
Florida	St. Petersburg Times/ Tampa Bay Times	Saint Petersburg	X	
Florida	Tallahassee Democrat	Tallahassee	X	
Florida	The Florida Times-Union	Jacksonville	X	X
Florida	The Miami Herald	Miami	X	
Florida	The Palm Beach Post	West Palm Beach	X	X
Florida	The Tampa Tribune	Tampa	X	X

**Table A1 – continued from previous page**

State	Newspaper	City (HQ)	Study 1	Study 2
Georgia	Gwinnett Daily Post	Lawrenceville	X	
Georgia	The Atlanta Journal-Constitution	Atlanta	X	
Georgia	The Augusta Chronicle	Augusta	X	
Hawaii	The Honolulu Star-Advertiser	Honolulu		X
Idaho	Lewiston Morning Tribune	Lewiston	X	
Idaho	Post Register	Idaho Falls	X	
Idaho	The Idaho Statesman	Boise	X	
Illinois	Chicago Sun-Times	Chicago	X	X
Illinois	Chicago Tribune	Chicago	X	X
Illinois	Daily Herald	Arlington Heights	X	X
Illinois	State Journal-Register	Springfield	X	
Indiana	Indianapolis Star	Indianapolis	X	X
Indiana	South Bend Tribune	South Bend	X	
Indiana	The Times	Munster	X	
Iowa	Quad-City Times	Davenport	X	
Iowa	The Des Moines Register	Des Moines	X	X
Iowa	The Gazette	Cedar Rapids	X	
Kansas	Hutchinson News	Hutchinson	X	
Kansas	Topeka Capital-Journal	Topeka	X	
Kansas	Wichita Eagle	Wichita	X	
Kentucky	Lexington Herald-Leader	Lexington	X	X
Kentucky	The Courier-Journal	Louisville	X	X
Kentucky	The Kentucky Post	Covington	X	
Louisiana	The Advocate	Baton Rouge	X	
Louisiana	Times-Picayune	New Orleans	X	X
Maine	Bangor Daily News	Bangor	X	
Maine	Kennebec Journal	Augusta	X	
Maine	Portland Press Herald	Portland	X	
Maine	Sun Journal	Lewiston	X	
Maryland	The Capital	Annapolis	X	
Maryland	The Sun	Baltimore	X	X
Massachusetts	Boston Herald	Boston	X	X
Massachusetts	Telegram and Gazette	Worcester	X	
Massachusetts	The Boston Globe	Boston	X	X
Michigan	Detroit Free Press	Detroit	X	X
Michigan	Lansing State Journal	Lansing	X	
Michigan	The Detroit News	Detroit	X	X
Michigan	The Grand Rapids Press	Grand Rapids	X	X
Minnesota	St. Paul Pioneer Press	St. Paul	X	X
Minnesota	Star Tribune	Minneapolis	X	X
Mississippi	Clarion-Ledger	Jackson	X	
Mississippi	Sun Herald	Biloxi	X	
Missouri	Jefferson City News-Tribune	Jefferson City	X	

**Table A1 – continued from previous page**

State	Newspaper	City (HQ)	Study 1	Study 2
Missouri	Kansas City Star	Kansas City	X	X
Missouri	Springfield News-Leader	Springfield	X	
Missouri	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	St. Louis	X	X
Montana	Billings Gazette	Billings	X	
Montana	Great Falls Tribune	Great Falls	X	
Montana	Independent Record	Helena	X	
Montana	Missoulian	Missoula	X	
Nebraska	Grand Island Independent	Grand Island	X	
Nebraska	Lincoln Journal Star	Lincoln	X	
Nebraska	Omaha World-Herald	Omaha	X	X
Nevada	Las Vegas Review-Journal	Las Vegas	X	X
Nevada	Las Vegas Sun	Las Vegas	X	
Nevada	Nevada Appeal	Carson City	X	
Nevada	Reno Gazette-Journal	Reno	X	
New Hampshire	Concord Monitor	Concord	X	
New Hampshire	New Hampshire Union Leader	Manchester	X	
New Hampshire	The Telegraph	Nashua	X	
New Jersey	Asbury Park Press	Neptune	X	X
New Jersey	The Record	Hackensack	X	X
New Jersey	The Star-Ledger	Newark	X	
New Jersey	The Times	Trenton	X	
New Mexico	Albuquerque Journal	Albuquerque	X	X
New Mexico	Santa Fe New Mexican	Santa Fe	X	
New York	Daily News	New York City	X	X
New York	New York Post	New York City	X	X
New York	New York Times	New York City	X	
New York	Newsday	Long Island	X	X
New York	Rochester Democrat and Chronicle	Rochester	X	X
New York	The Buffalo News	Buffalo	X	X
New York	The Journal News	White Plains		X
New York	The Post-Standard	Syracuse	X	X
New York	Times Union	Albany	X	
New York	Wall Street Journal	New York City	X	
North Carolina	News & Record	Greensboro	X	
North Carolina	The Charlotte Observer	Charlotte	X	X
North Carolina	The News and Observer	Raleigh	X	X
North Dakota	Bismarck Tribune	Bismarck	X	
North Dakota	Grand Forks Herald	Grand Forks	X	
Ohio	Akron Beacon Journal	Akron	X	X
Ohio	Dayton Daily News	Dayton	X	X
Ohio	The Blade	Toledo	X	X
Ohio	The Cincinnati Enquirer	Cincinnati	X	X
Ohio	The Columbus Dispatch	Columbus	X	X

**Table A1 – continued from previous page**

State	Newspaper	City (HQ)	Study 1	Study 2
Ohio	The Plain Dealer	Cleveland	X	
Oklahoma	The Lawton Constitution	Lawton	X	
Oklahoma	The Oklahoman	Oklahoma City	X	X
Oklahoma	Tulsa World	Tulsa	X	X
Oregon	The Oregonian	Portland	X	
Oregon	The Register-Guard	Eugene	X	
Oregon	The Statesman Journal	Salem	X	
Pennsylvania	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	Pittsburgh	X	X
Pennsylvania	The Morning Call	Allentown	X	X
Pennsylvania	The Patriot-News	Harrisburg	X	
Pennsylvania	The Philadelphia Daily News	Philadelphia	X	X
Pennsylvania	The Philadelphia Inquirer	Philadelphia	X	X
Pennsylvania	Tribune-Review	Pittsburgh		X
Rhode Island	The Providence Journal	Providence	X	
South Carolina	The Greenville News	Greenville	X	
South Carolina	The Post and Courier	Charleston	X	
South Carolina	The State	Columbia	X	X
South Dakota	American News	Aberdeen	X	
South Dakota	Argus Leader	Sioux Falls	X	
South Dakota	Rapid City Journal	Rapid City	X	
Tennessee	Knoxville News Sentinel	Knoxville	X	X
Tennessee	The Commercial Appeal	Memphis	X	X
Tennessee	The Tennessean	Nashville	X	X
Texas	Austin American-Statesman	Austin	X	
Texas	Fort Worth Star-Telegram	Fort Worth	X	X
Texas	Houston Chronicle	Houston	X	X
Texas	San Antonio Express-News	San Antonio	X	X
Texas	The Dallas Morning News	Dallas	X	X
Utah	Standard-Examiner	Ogden	X	
Utah	The Deseret Morning / Deseret News	Salt Lake City	X	
Utah	The Salt Lake Tribune	Salt Lake City	X	X
Vermont	Rutland Herald	Rutland	X	
Vermont	The Burlington Free Press	Burlington	X	
Vermont	The Caledonian-Record	Saint Johnsbury	X	
Vermont	The Times Argus	Barre	X	
Virginia	Richmond Times-Dispatch	Richmond	X	
Virginia	The Virginian-Pilot	Norfolk	X	X
Virginia	USA Today	Arlington	X	X
Washington	Seattle Post-Intelligencer	Seattle	X	
Washington	Seattle Times	Seattle	X	X
Washington	The News Tribune	Tacoma	X	X
Washington	The Olympian	Olympia	X	
West Virginia	Charleston Daily Mail	Charleston	X	

**Table A1 – continued from previous page**

State	Newspaper	City (HQ)	Study 1	Study 2
West Virginia	Charleston Gazette	Charleston	X	
West Virginia	The Herald Dispatch	Huntington	X	
Wisconsin	Green Bay Press-Gazette	Green Bay	X	
Wisconsin	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	Milwaukee	X	
Wisconsin	The Capital Times	Madison	X	
Wisconsin	Wisconsin State Journal	Madison	X	
Wyoming	Wyoming Tribune-Eagle	Cheyenne	X	

Figure A1: Initial demand treatment email



Dear Jason,

An important trend is changing political reporting – what *American Journalism Review* called the “fact-checking explosion” that “seeks to separate truth from fiction in political claims.”

People who read newspapers understand that politicians stretch the truth on the campaign trail. Fact-checking is a new form of accountability journalism that readers love because it give them the information they need to fight political misinformation and to make informed choices as voters.

Evidence suggests that fact-checking is extremely popular with print, broadcast, and online audiences. In an NPR survey, 90% of listeners rated fact-checking political claims as “very important.” Traffic to one well-known fact-checking website exceeded one million readers per day at some points during the 2012 campaign! In total, 11% of Americans said they read a fact-check during the last presidential election. Readers are eager for more fact-checking of public officials at every level of politics.

That demand is the reason nonpartisan fact-checkers like [PolitiFact](#) and [FactCheck.org](#) have built dedicated audiences of readers who come back time after time for their innovative efforts.

We're part of a team of researchers working with the American Press Institute. Our goal is to document how journalists in newspapers of every size are succeeding in attracting and engaging readers when they successfully incorporate fact-checking into their reporting. The American Press Institute will be tracking reader response to your newspaper to identify the fact-checking content that readers find most compelling during the 2014 campaign. We hope to be able to recommend your work to them.

For now, we would like to ask you to take part in a one-minute survey to see your response to readers' appetite for fact-checking. We will check back with you regularly between now and the election to find out whether your feelings about fact-checking have changed and how you are incorporating it into your reporting.

[Take the Wisconsin/Exeter Journalist Survey](#)

Clicking on the link to the survey means you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study (the “Wisconsin/Exeter Journalist Survey”). All of your responses will be confidential. Participation is completely voluntary – you may decline to participate, end participation in the survey at any time by closing your browser window, or refuse to answer any question. There are no risks or benefits from participating on the survey.

Sincerely,  
Lucas Graves  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Jason Reifler  
University of Exeter (UK)  
Centre for Elections, Media, and Participation

Email sent September 22, 2014 to journalists in the demand treatment condition.

Figure A2: Initial supply treatment email



Dear Jason,

An important trend is changing political reporting – what *American Journalism Review* called the “fact-checking explosion” that “seeks to separate truth from fiction in political claims.”

Reporters understand better than anyone how politicians stretch the truth on the campaign trail. Fact-checking is a new form of accountability journalism that the most effective reporters are using to fight political misinformation and give voters the information they need to make informed choices.

Nearly every major US news outlet fact-checked candidates in the 2012 race, including leading newspapers such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and the Associated Press as well as broadcasters like ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and National Public Radio. Dozens of smaller outlets did admirable fact-checking at the state and local level, including the Nashua Telegraph, Texas Tribune, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Seattle Times, and Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

To date, nonpartisan fact-checkers like [PolitiFact](#) and [FactCheck.org](#) have won more than a dozen major journalism awards – including a Pulitzer Prize – for their innovative efforts.

We’re part of a team of researchers working with the American Press Institute. Our goal is to recognize the best fact-checking in American newspapers and to help reporters see how top journalists in outlets of every size are successfully incorporating fact-checking into their reporting. The American Press Institute will be tracking coverage in your newspaper in order to identify the best examples of media fact-checking within the profession during the 2014 campaign. We hope to be able to recommend your work to them.

For now, we would like to ask you to take a one-minute survey intended to find out how you feel about fact-checking. We will check back with you regularly between now and the election to find out whether your feelings about fact-checking have changed and how you are incorporating it into your reporting.

[Take the Wisconsin/Exeter Journalist Survey](#)

Clicking on the link to the survey means you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study (the “Wisconsin/Exeter Journalist Survey”). All of your responses will be confidential. Participation is completely voluntary – you may decline to participate, end participation in the survey at any time by closing your browser window, or refuse to answer any question. There are no risks or benefits from participating on the survey.

Sincerely,  
Lucas Graves  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Jason Reifler  
University of Exeter (UK)  
Centre for Elections, Media, and Participation

Email sent September 22, 2014 to journalists in the supply treatment condition.