

# Who Cleans Up When the Party's Over?

The Decline of Partisan Media and Rise of Split-Ticket Voting in the 20th Century

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## Abstract

While scholars have studied the composition and impact of the partisan press during their 19th-century height, the political impact of the gradual decline of these partisan papers remains relatively under-examined. The unnoted vitality and endurance of partisan newspapers (which continued to constitute a majority of American newspapers until the 1960s) represents a huge hole in our understanding of partisan communication in the post-war era. As a consequence of this omission, scholars have ignored a potentially vital contributing factor to changing patterns of partisan voting.

This paper sets out to examine this relationship by constructing a quadrennial database of newspaper party self-identification from 1932 to the 2004 for 66 key counties across the country. We then match these data to county-level presidential and congressional vote totals. Based on these data, we describe the decline of explicitly partisan newspapers over time and find evidence that the rise of non-partisan news helps explain the rise of ticket-splitting and decline of consistent partisan voting.

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*"His first job, Nick Williams thought, was to separate the [Los Angeles Times] from the Republican Party, to gain some degree of independence in coverage of politics (old-time Times readers were stunned during the 1960 national campaign when the Times covered not just Richard Nixon but Kennedy as well; the idea of printing what a Democrat was saying about a Republican was unheard of)." (Halberstam 1979, 286)*

## **Introduction**

One only has to examine the *New York Times* bestseller list to conclude that partisan bias in the news is a major topic of public concern. Authors and pundits on the right and left have decried the rise of what they say is an increasingly blatant bias in the American news media. For their part, the news organizations in question have strenuously disavowed any such partisan bias, instead professing to simply present “fair and balanced” news.

In contrast to these modern disavowals, political parties and the press were deeply intertwined from almost the beginning of the American Republic. Until the rise of the "penny press" in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, most American newspapers had symbiotic relationships with political parties and governmental officials (Cook 1989, Hamilton 2004). Such partisan papers often received tidy financial inducements, patronage, loans, printing contracts, circulation assistance and other benefits as a consequence of their party boosterism, providing a stable source of income in a volatile market (Smith 1977).

With the introduction of the penny press, these reliable subsidies were soon dwarfed by the vast commercial opportunities offered by a mass advertising revenue model (Schudson 1978). Entrepreneurial publishers quickly abandoned their financial relationships with parties in favor of closer ties to their readers (Hamilton 2004).

However, even as newspapers became detached from their formal party ties, they were still quite partisan in much of their *coverage*. Despite the increasing professionalism of journalism as a discipline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Schudson 1978), large swaths of newspapers continued to remain stubbornly partisan well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Mott (1944) attempted to catalog the political leanings of papers for the nation's history thus far, including their largely anti-Roosevelt campaigning in presidential elections. In an appendix to their 1939 survey on press attitudes, *Fortune* magazine provided a fascinating "Five Minute Tour" of "press geography" in the United States. Region by region, identifying the major newspapers and their prevailing stands on the partisan issues of the day. For example, in their description of the papers of the Pacific Northwest, *Fortune* observed,

In the Northwest the character of the press is fairly well diversified. For example, there is the Seattle *Times*, which hasn't been able to stomach and which practically never backs a winning candidate or legislative issue. There is Hearst's Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, unlike any other Hearst paper anywhere, run by the President's son in law John Boettiger, who doesn't have to print anything from Hearst unless he feels like it- and who often does not feel like it. The *P-I* is the most pro- New Deal paper in the Pacific Northwest, is consistently on the popular side in local issues. In Spokane there are the *Spokesman- Review* and *Chronicle*, which, while they support many a New Deal enterprise (notably Grand Coulee), are heavily conservative- in a section of the state where conservatism and Republicanism seem to be on the upbeat.

One of the most famous partisan holdovers was the *Los Angeles Times*. Prior to the late 1950s, the *Times* had exemplified pro-Republican partisanship. In fact, Halberstam (1979) argues that from 1890 to 1960, "the *Times* was not just a voice of anti-unionism, but an outspoken, relentless instrument for all conservative policies and candidates,

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To the south there is the superbly edited Portland *Oregonian*, whose traditional Republicanism was approved by the voters, last fall when they returned Oregon to the Republican column. The *Oregonian* is becoming somewhat more liberal, and was the only important paper in the state to oppose flatly the anti-picketing bill- which the voters passed by a large majority. Its opposition, the *Journal*, is less out-spoken, pulls its editorial punches. Nominally Democratic, it has turned against the New Deal in most policies (Fortune 1939, 78).

Partisan affiliations were so overt that editors would attend conventions of like-minded partisan editors to coordinate their activities. For example, in 1955 former President Harry Truman spoke to the annual convention of the Indiana Democratic Editors Association and lamented that his party seemed to have a continuing disadvantage in news partisanship to the Republicans, lamenting that "in the process of our vast economic expansion we have failed to remedy one of our serious shortages—the shortage of Democratic newspapers. I hope that some day soon this shortage will be overcome" (*Los Angeles Times* 1955). Truman continued, clarifying (perhaps rhetorically) that "I am sure that you realize that when I say Democratic newspapers, I don't mean violent, partisan, distorted newspapers, like so much of the Republican press. Democrats don't want that kind of press nor do the American people" (*ibid.*).

wedded to the Republican Party, but wary of the party lest it become too soft" (108). The *Times* was famous for its enthusiastic boosterism of Republican candidates, especially Richard Nixon. Halberstam (1979) argues that during the 1950s, the *Times* gave Nixon "wonderful coverage, his every attack on the Reds printed, applauded, his deeds written large and heroically" (261).<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, we examine one of the more enduring mysteries in American politics: the decline of party-line voting and rise of independents in the post-war period. While some have previously linked the rise of so-called "split-ticket voting" to the weakening of party organizations, the rise of incumbency, or to the ability of candidates to make their appeals to voters directly through the new medium of television, here we present a

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, Nixon was not the only beneficiary of the *Times'* favorable coverage. Republicans across local, state, and national coverage could count on almost sycophantic coverage in the *Times'* pages. For example, in a front-page article titled "New Attorney General Quiet Guardian of Law: Simple in Word and Deed, Mr. Stone is Described as Man People Can Put Full Trust In," the *Times* goes to almost comical lengths in their effusive praise of what appears, in retrospect, to have been a fairly nondescript government figure (Bennett 1924). Stone, who describes himself in the story as "not much of a phrase-maker," confesses to "sawing wood" rather than attending to the reporter's first question. The intrepid reporter favorably interpreted this as indicating "a massive sort of repose [that] held him laconic through the visit." The headlines on the continuation of the article trumpet Stone as "quiet but forceful in all his utterances" and note that he "comes of [the] same sturdy race as [the] president." (3)

somewhat more nuanced view. In brief, we argue that rather than being the result of incumbency, weaker party organizations, or the more personal appeal and persuasive power of television, the most relevant change in the partisan informational environment in the postwar period was the slow supplanting of mainstream “partisan” media sources by ones that were independent for regulatory or economic reasons. Moreover, we argue that these changes were not primarily the result of the inherent superiority of or journalistic preference for such non-partisan, “independent” news, but rather due to broadcast regulations and changes in the news and advertising marketplace. This distinction holds important implications for the news marketplace going forward, in which prior economic and regulatory constraints will be significantly different than in the post-war period.

Our analysis proceeds as follows. First, we present a brief overview of news partisanship in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, beginning with data tracking self-identified newspaper party affiliations in the pre- and post-war eras. Using various measures of advertising revenues and competing media, we explore how and why partisan papers largely died out in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We then review the literature’s existing understanding of the split-ticket voting phenomenon and turn to a closer examination of 66 news markets over 15 presidential elections (1932-1988) to test whether newspaper partisanship in those markets exercised a meaningful impact on split-ticket voting. We then present several caveats or cautions associated with our analysis, and conclude with thoughts regarding “new” partisan news.

## Partisan News in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Hamilton (2004) is widely and deservedly credited with highlighting the rise of independent newspapers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in the United States. His analysis shows that papers identifying themselves as independent or leaning-independent (independent, but supporting one of the parties) exploded from only around 13% of the papers in the top 50 markets in 1870 to around 47% in 1900.<sup>3</sup>

The rapid decline in partisanship (and the incentives to pursue economies of scale in each marketplace) identified by Hamilton during this time period would seem to imply

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<sup>3</sup> Hamilton relies on self-reported party affiliation, rather than impressions by outside observers. As with our own analysis below, this self-identification leaves open the possibility that the news outlets could choose to market themselves as one affiliation, but actually follow another in their coverage. Lawrence (1928) argues that such self-identifications undercount partisanship:

“Every time you send a questionnaire to newspapers listed in the newspaper directory, and ask them for their political affiliations, they invariably reply 'independent'; and there is no way to get away from that classification.... I mention this because, much as we might not like to admit it, the news content of the newspapers of today depends to no small extent on the editorial policies of those papers... and hence a very good thing is frequently relegated to some inside page or the waste-basket if it is favorable to the cause they are opposing, while the meritorious thing about the candidate they are supporting is usually put on the first page and given all the prominence necessary. That is a very important factor in political campaigns” (894).

that partisan papers would be at death's door at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, as we saw in the introduction, the *Los Angeles Times* survived and actually thrived for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as an unabashedly partisan paper. And as we shall see below, the *Times* was in good company.

Table 1 presents a tally of party self-identification by newspapers in *Editor and Publisher Annual Yearbook* surveys (note: "leaner" papers are included into the Republican and Democratic categories).<sup>4</sup> This table illustrates that, far from disappearing from the American scene at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a majority of American papers still explicitly identified themselves as favoring one of the two political parties a half century later. Only after 1950 did partisan papers slowly begin to fade away from the news scene.

[Table 1 around here]

The decline of partisan newspaper outlets coincided with the rise of a new and powerful news and entertainment medium: television. Like radio before it, television relied on the public airwaves for transmission, and as such was regulated by the FCC to ensure service of "the public interest, convenience or necessity." From the very beginning, television and radio were more regulated and less partisan than their rough-and-tumble peers in the press. In fact, for part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the FCC explicitly

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<sup>4</sup> In its annual yearbooks (titles vary), *Editor and Publisher* lists salient details of every English-language daily newspaper published in the United States, including location, circulation, publishing schedule, and (most importantly for our purposes), self-identified party affiliation.



banned editorializing over broadcast outlets, although that decision was later reversed to allow editorializing if broadcasters provided "a reasonable opportunity for the presentation of contrasting viewpoints on such issues" (FCC 1985).<sup>5</sup>

By 1963, television news had already surpassed newspapers as Americans' primary source of news. (Stanley and Niemi 1998, Table 4-5) Nonpartisan news outlets continued to expand their scope and influence throughout most of the 1970s and 1980s. The implication of such increasingly dominant non-partisan coverage of politics was to

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<sup>5</sup> The FCC's "Fairness Doctrine" (Section 315 of the Communication Act) evolved significantly in its content and interpretation over time. For example, in the famous Mayflower decision (1941), the FCC ruled that "A broadcaster cannot be an advocate," effectively ruling out any expression of editorial opinion by stations. The FCC argued in its decision that "as one licensed to operate in the public domain, the licensee has assumed the obligation of presenting all sides of important public questions, fairly, objectively and without bias" (Friendly 1976, 42). The decision was reversed seven years later, allowing editorial positions provided the broadcaster followed "the principles of balance and fairness in providing time for discussions of controversial issues." Two years later, the FCC issued the Seekout Opposition Rule, in which stations were viewed as having a "duty to seek out opposing points of views and encourage opposing views" if a station editorialized on controversial issues. This rule was rescinded in 1959, instead requiring that the station make an effort to provide a "reasonable" opportunity for the expression of opposing views whenever a station expressed its opinion. Finally, in 1987, the FCC repealed the Fairness Doctrine entirely.

severely curtail the opportunities for parties to promote themselves in the news, increasingly forcing them to rely instead on a consistent diet of cross-party attacks (Groeling ND). As we shall argue below, this shift is one potential explanation for why party ties increasingly seemed to diminish their influence over voting decisions in the post-war period. But before we proceed to that discussion, it first seems worth examining some of the reasons *why* partisan newspapers might have survived so long into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, only to meet such a precipitous decline as the century drew to a close.

## **The Decline of Partisan News**

A cursory glance at Table 1 suggests at least one convenient culprit for the decline: it seems like more than a coincidence that the period of greatest partisan decline follows the widespread introduction of commercial television and news in the 1950s. Was competition from this new, immensely powerful, and—perhaps most importantly—explicitly nonpartisan medium ultimately responsible for driving partisan papers out of the business? If so, why didn't the competition from radio, which previously had all of these characteristics, do the same thing thirty years earlier?

While a complete causal analysis of this market decline goes far beyond the scope of this paper, we have collected historical data on various media that might shed light on the causes and contours of this decline.

We begin by returning to the same source that we used in Table 1: *Editor and Publisher's Annual Yearbook* of daily newspapers. In contrast to Table 1, which accounts for every daily newspaper in the country, in the remainder of this analysis we focus on 66 representative cities that would later be the nucleus of a TV market area (so-called

Nielsen Designated Market Areas). To be included in our sample, the core city of the market area could not share media with or be considered a suburb of another nearby city or market.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in 1924, we gathered party affiliation, circulation, and publication information for each newspaper in these cities for each presidential election year until 2004.<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 charts the number of papers and their party affiliations in these 66 markets over time.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

A glance at Figure 1 reveals an echo of the story shown in Table 1: Until the late 40s, independent papers made up around half of all papers (54% or less), then increased by about a half point each year until 1960. After 1960, that rate of expansion more than doubled until 1976, at which time fewer than 18% of the remaining papers were partisan. By 2004 that number had shrunk to only 5%, and by 2008 the *Editor and Publisher Annual Yearbook* no longer included data on party affiliations.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that *Editor and Publisher's* directory of papers apparently did not include party affiliations in its 1921 edition, and prior editions were unavailable, so we began our analysis with the 1924 presidential election cycle. There were actually over 100 DMAs that met our criteria (about half of the DMAs), but due to limited labor, we selected a random subset of 66 for analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Note that if a newspaper put out multiple editions per day under the same name, we counted it as a single paper. If the same company owned more than one paper published under different names in the same city, we counted each paper name separately.

The x-axis of Figure 1 also reveals another important change: almost a 50% drop in the number of papers serving these 66 markets. After keeping relatively level at around 150 newspapers (an average of around 2.5 per market) through the 1940s, the number of papers shrank in the 1950s and continued shrinking until the average number of papers was only 1.3 in 2004.

Of course, one relatively straightforward explanation for the increased proportion of independent papers over time might be that those papers were more popular and adapted to the market better than their partisan competitors, who simply died off, leaving a constant number (but increasing share) of independent papers. Fortunately, because we have focused our analysis on a specific set of cities over time, we can trace the ultimate fate of each newspaper in those markets. In Table 2, we examine the 1924 party affiliation of the newspapers that survived (or merged with papers that survived) to 2004, versus 1924 papers that died (or merged with papers that died) somewhere along the way.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Table 2 shows that, in actuality, the partisan papers in 1924 were far more likely to survive to 2004 in some form than their independent peers: Nearly 4 out of 5 partisan papers were in surviving newspaper families in 2004, while less than half of independent papers from 1924 made the same transition. With only 33 of the 1924 independents making it into the heritage of the 85 papers surviving in 2004, this also implies that the bulk of surviving papers must have begun as partisan and changed their affiliation along the way. But what might have caused papers to change their affiliation?

As noted before, some of the explanation appears to be related to television's entry into the marketplace. Figure 2 takes a first crack at this analysis by charting the

proportion of our markets with at least one partisan paper against the proportion of our markets with at least one FCC-licensed commercial television station.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

The correlation shown in Figure 2, although certainly not proof of causation, is certainly striking. After a fairly sharp drop in the percentage of towns with partisan papers from 1924-1936 (coincidentally corresponding with the explosion of radio?), the percentage of such cities is relatively stable until 1956 (when TV explodes to cover nearly 90% of these markets), after which such partisan-served cities plummet rapidly.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 explores this dynamic further by charting the proportion of cities in our sample that had only a single daily newspaper (no competitors). Figure 3 shows that the number of newspapers in our sample with no local competitor bottomed out at around 22% in 1932. Over the next 48 years, that amount gradually increased to twice that amount (44%) in 1980, after which it shot up to nearly twice that level (85%) 24 years later. Figure 3 also shows one potential explanation for the drop, as radio and television consumed an increasing share of advertising revenue across the country, making it more difficult to support multiple newspapers in a given market.<sup>8</sup> And Figure 4 shows another

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<sup>8</sup> Data from 1948 were taken from the Television Bureau of Advertising's "Historical Cross-Media Advertising Expenditures" pages, found at

[http://www.tvb.org/rcentral/AdRevenueTrack/Trends\\_In\\_Advertising\\_Volume.asp](http://www.tvb.org/rcentral/AdRevenueTrack/Trends_In_Advertising_Volume.asp) .

Figures for 1929-1936 taken from Lazarsfeld (1940), Table 50. Note that the 1939 value was used for 1940.

side effect, as cities increasingly saw their evening papers die off in favor of morning papers, which could better withstand the competitive onslaught of timely local and national television news.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

## **Newspapers and Party-Oriented Voting**

The rest of this paper explores one potential impact of the emergence of an independent press. In particular, we explore the impact of partisan and independent newspapers on partisan voting among the electorate. First, we look at how the emergence of independent newspapers correlates with the divergence between presidential and congressional voting at the county level. Second, we examine how differing combinations of partisan papers (i.e., counties with only news from only one party versus counties with competing partisan papers) effected partisan voting. The results are preliminary, and should be approached with caution, but they are nevertheless suggestive of a correlation between the demise of party papers and the attenuation of partisan voting over the post-WW II era.

One of the most fascinating, and important, developments in American politics over the last one-hundred years has been the decreasing connection between electoral results for the presidency and Congress. Whether framed in the terms of split-ticket voting or presidential coattails, one can clearly discern a de-coupling of presidential and congressional results. At the national level, the evidence clearly suggests that presidential coattails have attenuated. From 1840 to 1900, the party that won the presidency almost won control of Congress in 13 of 15 elections (Engstrom and Kernell 2005). From 1940

to the 2000, on the other hand, the party that won the presidency captured control of Congress in only 5 out of 13 elections. At the district level a similar trend presents itself. Whether looking at individual split-ticket rates (Burden and Kimball 2002) or split presidential-congressional outcomes in districts (Brunell and Grofman 2009) there is clear evidence of attenuation between presidential and congressional voting in the post-World War II era (Jacobson 2001: 147).

While a number of explanations have been offered for this trend – from the weakening of party organizations to the rise of incumbency – here we want to explore the possible role of independent newspapers in contributing to this important development. Why might there be a connection? Where partisan papers dominated, information was either dominated by one side or was the product of an adversarial process. Newspapers made money by playing to the sentiments of fellow partisans. As a result, voters may have cast more straight-ticket ballots given their exposure to overtly partisan news. As voters were increasingly exposed to more independent news, voters should have become less partisan in their voting. Where voters received neutral, and broader, accounts of political and election related news, one would expect less consistent party voting.

To examine this possibility, we analyze presidential and congressional electoral results for the counties in our sample. The county-level electoral data comes from ICPSR Study #8611 (Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1987). This dataset reports the percentage of votes received by presidential and congressional candidates for every county in the

United States from 1840 to 1992. Because the newspaper data starts in 1932, we start there. Because the availability of county-level returns stops in 1992, we stop there.<sup>9</sup>

What counties are included in the analysis? For each DMA in the sample, we know the largest city in that DMA. Then for that city we take the county within which that city resides. For example, one of our DMA's has Detroit as the biggest city. Detroit is part of Wayne County. Therefore, the observation will be for Wayne County. For each of the largest cities in our DMA sample, therefore, we will analyze the county that contains that city.

The first dependent variable we consider is the gap, or divergence, between presidential and congressional voting. For each county we take the absolute value of the difference between the Democratic share of the presidential and congressional vote (i.e.,  $|\text{Democratic Presidential Vote}_{it} - \text{Democratic Congressional Vote}_{it}|$ ). The main independent variable is the 'Percentage of Independent Newspapers' within each county. This is measured as the total number of independent newspapers in a county divided by the total overall number of newspapers in that same county. The expectation is that as independent newspapers emerged one should expect to see a growing divergence between presidential and congressional voting.

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<sup>9</sup> We have found the county-level presidential returns up through 2004 and hope to eventually acquire the matching congressional results. This will allow us to examine more recent changes such as the introduction of Fox News, MSNBC, and other cable outlets that in some ways resemble the old partisan press.



To control for county-specific levels of split-outcomes the model includes DMA fixed effects. In addition, we will also run a model where we interact the DMA fixed effects with a dummy variable indicating whether the year is before or after 1966. The idea is to allow the county fixed effects to vary for the era before and after the Civil Rights Act. This will also help adjust for the electoral realignment brought on by the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, and the fact that Republican presidential nominees achieved a foothold in the South before their Congressional candidates.

To begin, Column 1 of Table 3 presents a bare-bones model with the percentage of independent newspapers as the key independent variable (along with DMA fixed effects). In this stripped down model, one finds a positive and significant coefficient for independent newspapers. The value of the coefficient is .063, which corresponds to a 6.3% increase in the divergence of presidential and congressional votes (when the independent variable goes from zero to one). The next column adds an interaction between the DMA fixed effects and a post 1966 dummy variable. Again the coefficient on the independent newspaper is significant, with a value of 4.7%. So, in these simple models one finds a significant correlation between the emergence of independent newspapers and split-ticket voting.

[Table 3 here]

Next the model adds a series of control variables. The first is a dummy variable indicating whether or not the congressional race was uncontested. Along with a measure for uncontested races, one ideally would also want to include an indicator of whether or not an incumbent is running for reelection. Unfortunately, matching data on incumbency status to county-level election results has proved exceedingly difficult. It is a problem

that in future versions of this paper will be resolved, but as of now it is still in process. As an alternative, however, we can use the prior Congressional vote for the Democrats within each county. Although not an ideal substitute for incumbency it should help pick up the ‘normal’ vote within each county. To control for possible differences across regions we have constructed four regional dummy variables: Midwest, South, Northeast, and West. To adjust for national political tides, we also include the Democratic share of the national presidential vote. This will help control for shifting national political breezes that may influence split-ticket voting. The final control variable we consider is the introduction of television into the county. Like the newspaper data, this variable is the proportion of the county population that has television. Much like the emergence of independent newspapers, one should expect that the rise of television may have increased the gap between presidential and congressional voting by reducing the partisan cast of elections.

Columns 2 through 6 present the results of adding each of these independent variables sequentially. In every column, the coefficient for independent newspapers is positive and significant. Finally, column 7 presents the results for the model with all of the controls included. According to these results, the full emergence of independent newspapers in a county increased split-ticket outcomes by 3.4%. The significance of this coefficient drops somewhat, but this is not too surprising given the inclusion of television in the model. The introduction of television is closely correlated with the emergence of independent papers, and thus one would expect an increase in the standard error. Nevertheless, the coefficient is still statistically significant. The value of the coefficient for television is 8.4%. Here we see a strong impact of television on split-ticket voting.

The next question we examine is what impact the varying combination of partisan papers had on split-ticket voting. While the ‘percent of independent news’ partially captures the presence of partisan papers (e.g., when independent news is close to zero), it masks the interesting variation among partisan papers. In particular, some counties were dominated by one party’s papers while others had competition between partisan papers. One should suspect that these varying combinations may have had an impact on straight-ticket voting. Where one party’s rhetoric dominated the information in a county, one should expect a closer alignment between presidential and Congressional news. Where there was more balance, or more competition, the consistency in partisan voting should have diminished.

To test this we use the same dependent variable as before (the absolute difference in the Democratic percent of presidential and congressional votes), but use a new set of independent variables. Instead of the percent of independent newspapers in a county, we include the percent of Democratic and Republican newspapers in a county. This is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Dem. \%} = (\# \text{ of Dem. Papers}) / (\# \text{ of Dem. Papers} + \# \text{ of Rep Papers} + \# \text{ of Ind. Papers})$$

The variable for Republican papers is calculated in a similar fashion. The expectation is that where one finds a greater percentage of Democratic newspapers, the dominance of Democratic rhetoric should more closely align presidential and congressional voting. In Table 4 we test for this. As before, we start with a very simple model and then proceed across the columns by including a series of control variables (these are the same controls that were used in Table 3).

[Table 4 here]

The results of the base model (Column 1) conform to our expectations. The coefficient on percent of Democratic newspapers is negative and significant. This indicates that as a county has more Democratic newspapers there is less split-ticket voting. Or to put it another way, there is a closer alignment of presidential and congressional voting. This result holds up as we move across the columns and add more control variables. The final column (Column 7) is the full model with all of our control variables. The coefficient on percent of Democratic papers is negative and significant. The size of the coefficient is -4.9%. Counties with higher proportions of Democratic papers demonstrated more consistency in voting for the Democrats.

Putting these results together with those in Table 3 provides tantalizing evidence of a correlation between the partisanship of newspapers and the consistency of partisan electoral outcomes. Where Democratic papers dominated, the outcomes of presidential and congressional results were closely aligned. Where independent newspapers dominated, electoral outcomes became less consistently partisan.

At this point in the project, however, these conclusions must remain merely suggestive. First, the results do not firmly establish a causal direction. It is possible that instead of causing split-outcomes, independent newspapers followed split-ticket voting. Where the fervent partisanship of voters had diminished, as a matter of financial survival, newspapers had to adjust by toning down their partisan leanings. Appealing to the median consumer by adopting an independent editorial position would be one way to ensure these papers' continued survival (Hamilton 2004). This demand-sided story is clearly part of the story and one to which we, in future work, intend to grapple with. Second, our

results are at the aggregate level. As a result, it is important not to fall into an ecological fallacy. It is worth noting, however, that one cannot arrive at aggregate split outcomes without at least some individual split-ticket voting taking place. Nevertheless, it is a caveat that one must attach to the results.

## **Conclusion**

Whatever the limitations of the present study, it seems clear that the influence of nonpartisan news had huge implications for party politics in the post-war era. However, beginning in the late 1980s, the market for political news began to shift again. Howard Fineman (2005) described the shift as follows: “The notion of a neutral ‘mainstream’ national media gained a dominant following only in World War II and in its aftermath, when what turned out to be a temporary moderate consensus came to govern the country....Still, the notion of a neutral, non-partisan mainstream press was, to me at least, worth holding onto. Now it's pretty much dead, at least as the public sees things.” While Fineman’s eulogy for his so-called “media party” might be premature, there is no question that recent years have seen a striking resurgence of news sources aligned with the parties. The increasing partisan activism across media (particularly in new media) makes it clear that the "old media's" hegemonic dominance of both the rules and content of American news has been cracked. While this should make it easier for parties to inform and motivate their own partisans, the decline of non-partisan news will also likely increase polarization in the electorate and in governing. Rather than representing a horrifying new reality on the American scene, however, it seems to foretell a return to a

prior equilibrium, with the post-war period notable chiefly as an exception to a central tendency in American news.

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

	<b>Democratic</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>1940</b>	25.9%	26.0%	1847
<b>1950</b>	25.5%	26.9%	1993
<b>1960</b>	21.3%	25.8%	1706
<b>1970</b>	16.7%	20.4%	1740
<b>1980</b>	9.1%	11.1%	1738
<b>1990</b>	4.9%	7.7%	1617
<b>2000</b>	3.1%	4.8%	1478

**Table 2:**  
1924 Papers that Survived or Didn't Survive to 2004, by Partisan Affiliation<sup>10</sup>

	<b>Survived</b>	<b>Failed</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Independent in 1924</b>	47.6%	52.4%	63
<b>Partisan in 1924</b>	78.7%	21.3%	89

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<sup>10</sup> Note that this counts papers that merged with a surviving paper as surviving, and papers that merged with a failed paper as not surviving.

**Table 3:**  
The Impact of Independent Newspapers on Split-Ticket Voting

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
% Ind. Newspapers	0.064**	0.047**	0.039**	0.023*	0.023*	0.022*	0.022*
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Uncontested Race			0.246**	0.250**	0.239**	0.241**	0.241**
			(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
TV In DMA				0.077**	0.077**	0.076**	0.076**
				(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Midterm Dem Vote					0.001*	0.001*	0.001*
					(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Nat. Pres. Vote						0.140*	0.140*
						(0.069)	(0.069)
Midwest							-0.017
							(0.062)
South							-0.070
							(0.059)
Northeast							-0.047
							(0.048)
Constant	0.026	0.050	0.055	0.023	0.002	-0.075	-0.075
	(0.035)	(0.043)	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.052)	(0.052)
DMA Fixed Effects?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Post 1966 Interaction?		X	X	X	X	X	X
Observations	987	987	987	987	952	952	952
R-squared	0.35	0.44	0.59	0.62	0.64	0.64	0.64

Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable= |Dem. Presidential Vote % - Dem. Congressional Vote %|

\* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%, One Tailed Test

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

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Pct. Dem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0.077**	0.088**	0.073**	0.049**	0.051**	0.049**	0.049**
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Pct. Rep.	-0.047*	0.006	0.004	0.014	0.015	0.017	0.017
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Uncontested Race			0.244**	0.249**	0.238**	0.239**	0.239**
			(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
TV In DMA				0.075**	0.075**	0.074**	0.074**
				(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Midterm Dem Vote					0.001*	0.001*	0.001*
					(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Nat. Pres. Vote						0.140*	0.140*
						(0.068)	(0.068)
Midwest							0.018
							(0.063)
South							-0.023
							(0.057)
Northeast							-0.041
							(0.048)
Constant	0.088**	0.085*	0.085*	0.038	0.016	-0.062	-0.062
	(0.034)	(0.042)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.052)	(0.052)
DMA Fixed Effects?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Post 1966 Interaction?		X	X	X	X	X	X
Observations	987	987	987	987	952	952	952
R-squared	0.35	0.44	0.60	0.63	0.64	0.65	0.65

Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable= |Dem. Presidential Vote % - Dem. Congressional Vote %|

\* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%,

Figure 1:  
Partisan Affiliation of Newspapers in 66 Sample Markets

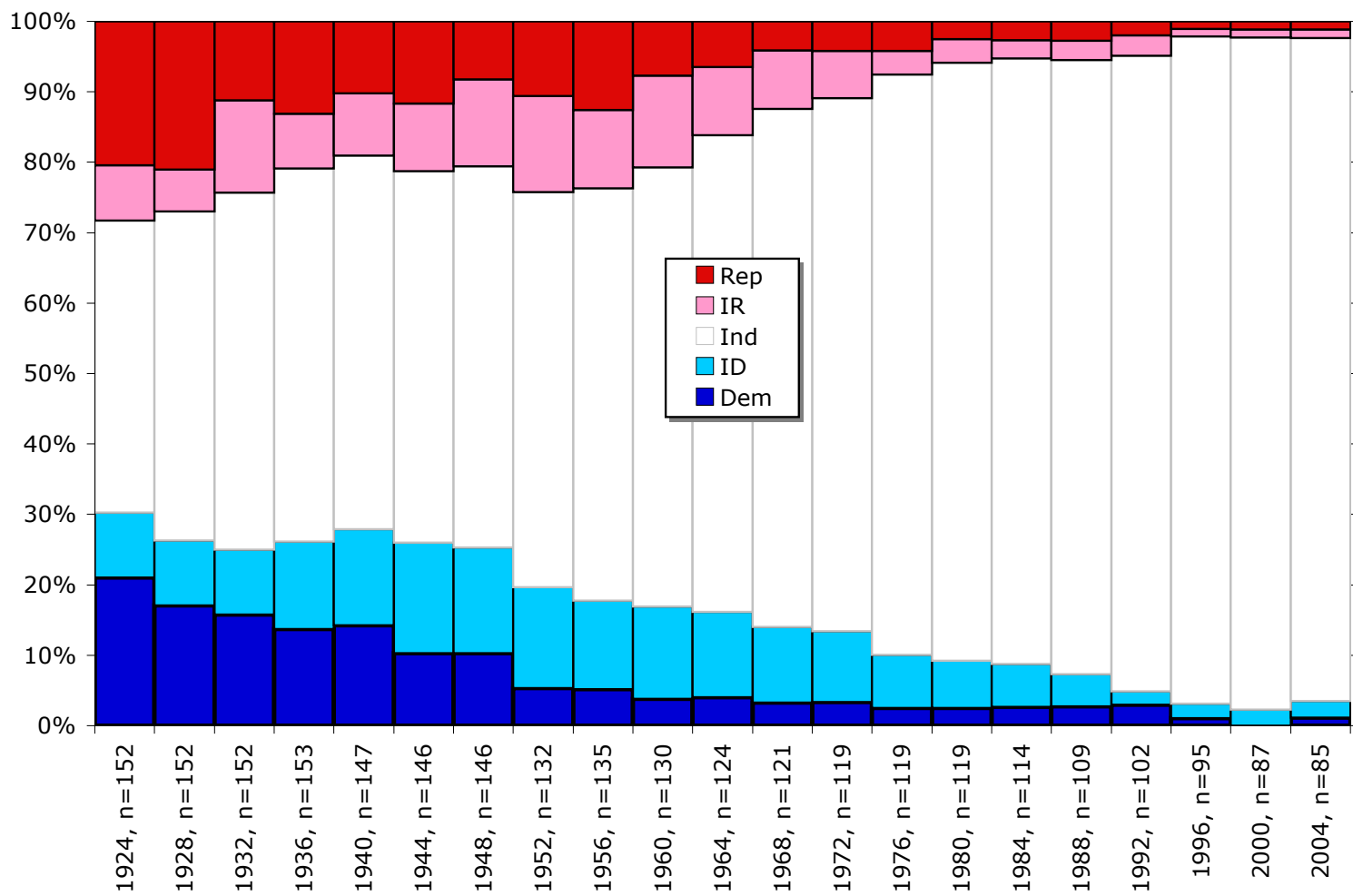


Figure 2: Sample Cities with TV Stations and with at Least One Partisan Paper (Including Leaners)

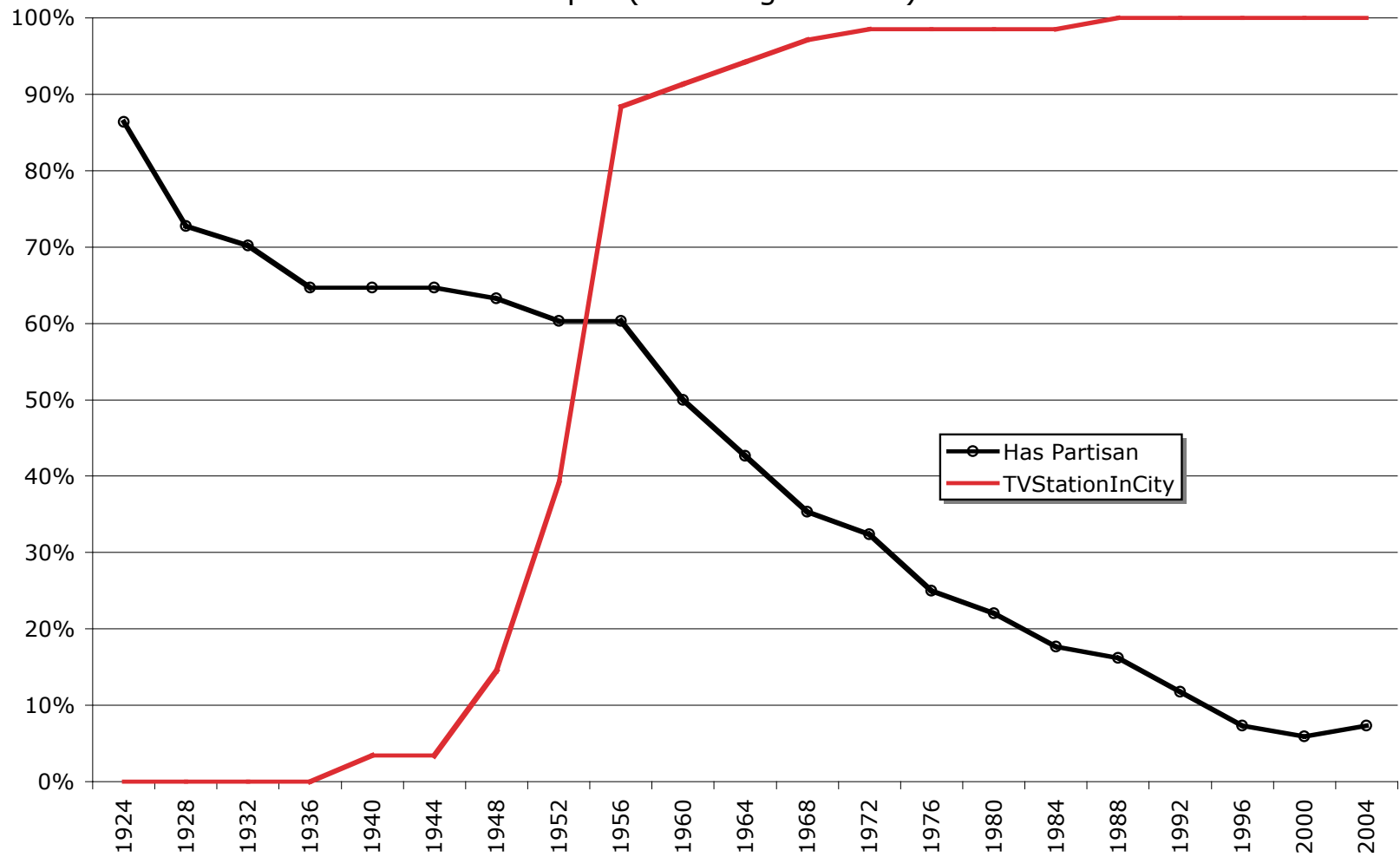


Figure 3: Sample Cities with Single Daily Newspaper  
Vs. Aggregate U.S. Newspaper Share of Radio/TV/Paper Ad Revenue

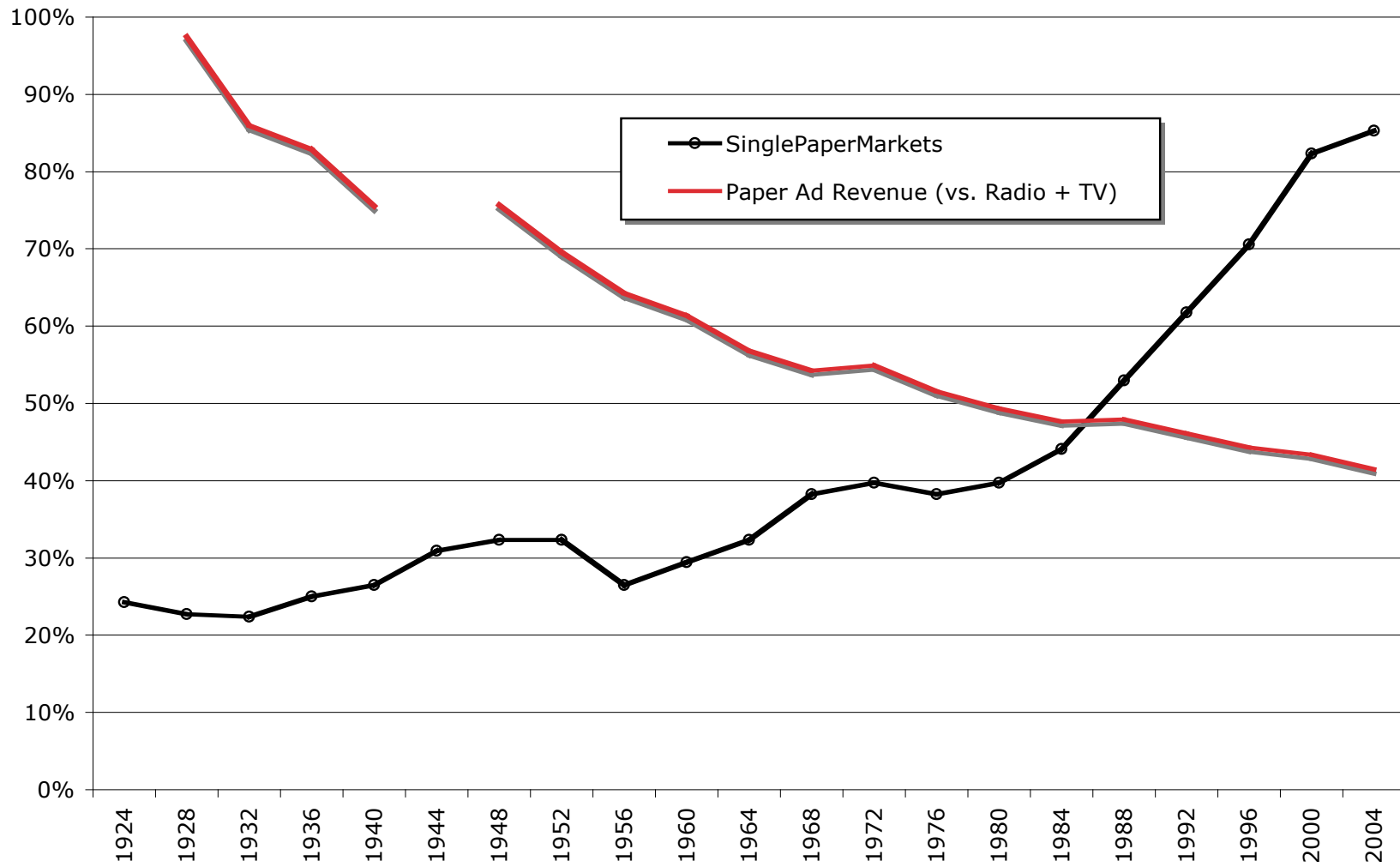
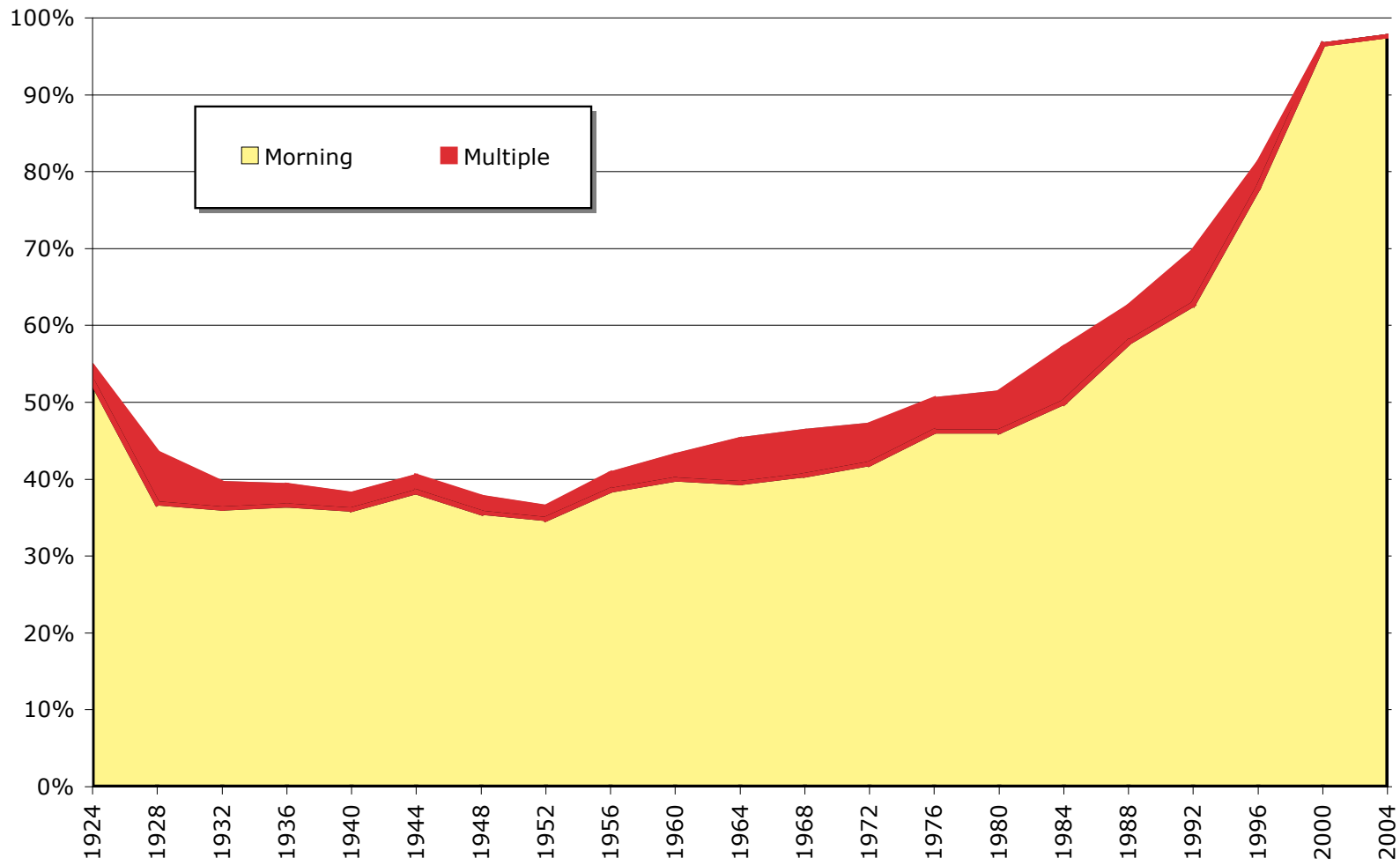


Figure 4: Morning and Multiple-Edition Newspapers as a Proportion of All Papers in Sample





### Appendix: Cities in the Sample

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