

FRAMING IN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS'
COVERAGE OF LOCAL ELECTIONS.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines framing in local election coverage, testing whether the same horse-race and strategy frames that dominate national political news are present in small community newspapers' coverage of local elections for city councils and town boards. The study involves a content analysis of 292 newspaper stories and 220 photographs across 23 small community newspaper websites in Missouri. The findings show that literacy frames, those that convey basic information about elections, and substantive issue frames, which report candidates' positions on issues, are prevalent. Issue stories, however, most often are shallow in their reporting. News briefs, one-shot candidate profiles and question-and-answer stories represent more than 50 percent of the sample. Although the framing analysis is encouraging, this research found that community newspapers have a different set of problems that might contribute to low voter participation. The study represents a first step in a potential thread of rich research on local election coverage and its influence on voter behavior and attitudes.