

# Media & the Politics of Implementation:

Explaining Geographic Variation in  
Local TV Coverage of the ACA

Erika Franklin Fowler & Laura Baum, Wesleyan

Colleen L. Barry, John Hopkins Bloomberg

Jeff Niederdeppe, Cornell

Pinar Karaca-Mandic, Andrew Wilcock & Sarah E. Gollust, UMN

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# News as Commodity, not a Mirror

- News is a highly selective version of reality (Lippmann 1922; Gans 1979; Hamilton 2004)
- Much of political science assumes information transmission (see Althaus et al. 2011)
- Even within communication, news production takes a backseat to effects

# Key Insight: Coverage Unlikely to be Uniform

- Audience characteristics
  - Ease of access to story material
  - Ownership characteristics
  - Geographic proximity to story
  - Congruence between media and political boundaries
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- In other words, production is variable and complex

# Competing Interests Shaping ACA Coverage

- News producers
- Politicians
- Organized interests

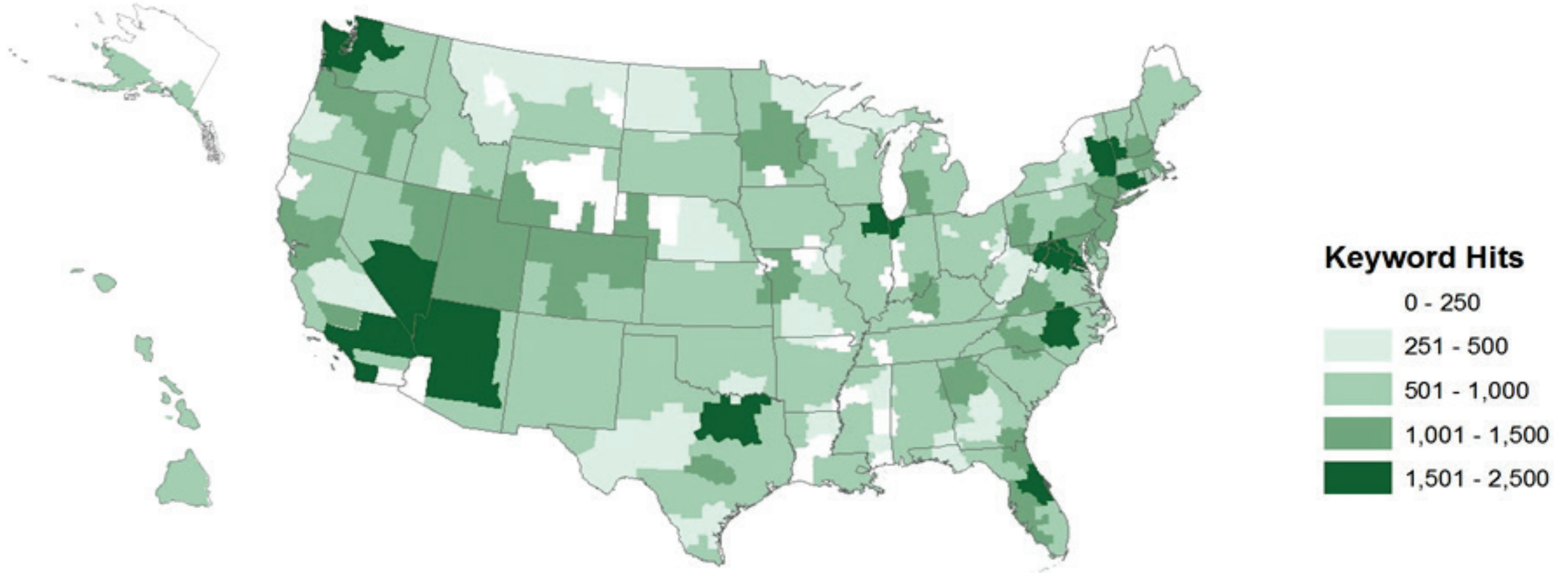
Interested here in predicting volume (content focus later)

# Data & Measures

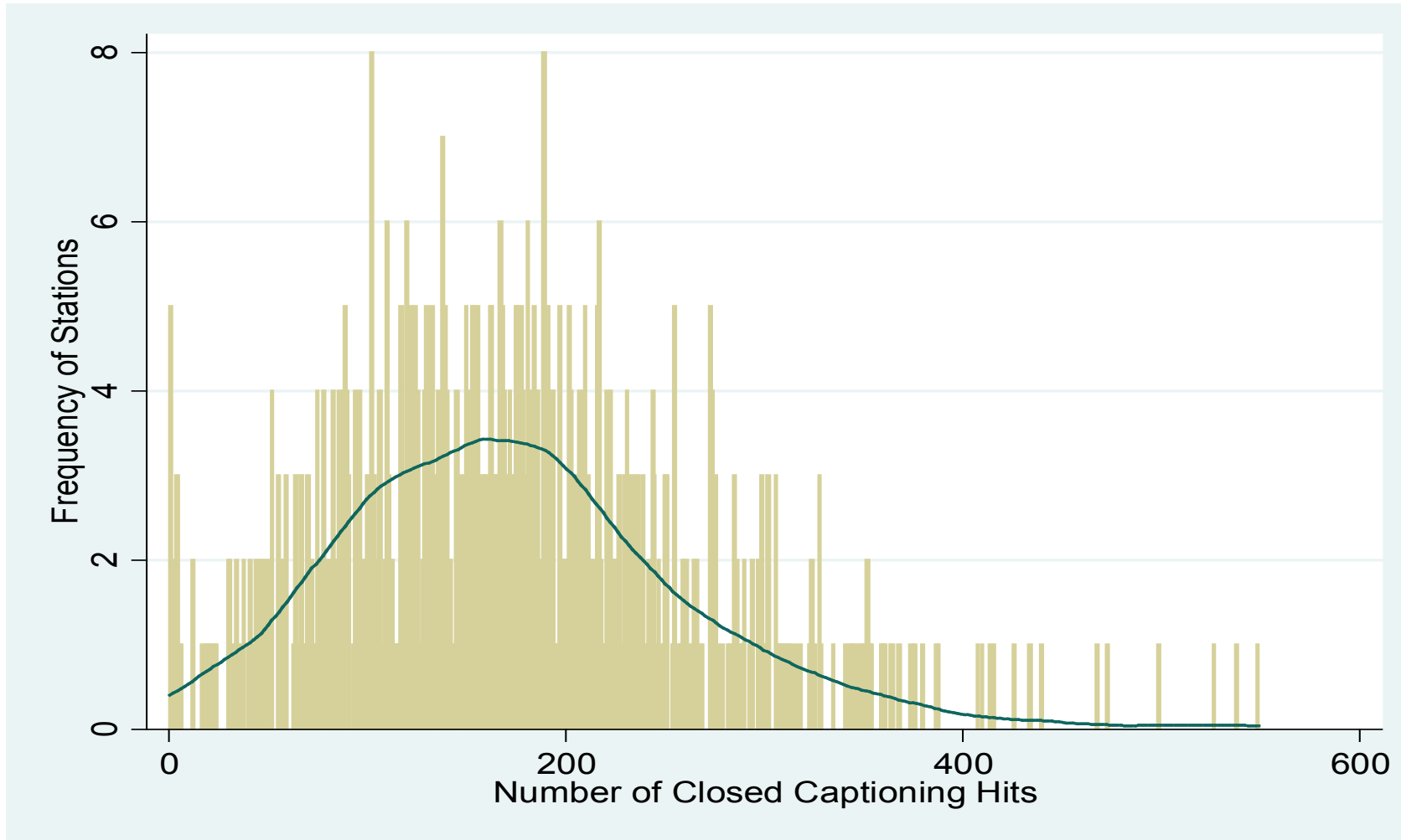
- Closed captioned searches of local TV news from 10/1/13-4/15/14
- Key words: “health care,” “healthcare,” “Obama care,” “Obamacare” and “Affordable Care Act”
- 685 stations in 208 media markets, all evening news (4:30-11:59pm)
  
- American Community Survey (ACS)
- Wesleyan Media Project political and insurance advertising data
- RWJF insurance market information
- BIA Kelsey Station Ownership Information

# Volume of Evening Local TV ACA Hits

Oct 1, 2013 – Apr 15, 2014



# Local TV News Hits by Station





# Analytic Approach

- Negative binomial count models
- Clustering by state, robust SEs (robust to hierarchical)
- All results from one model

# Factors Shaping News: Audience Interest

*Greater interest in the ACA in a market should drive coverage up*

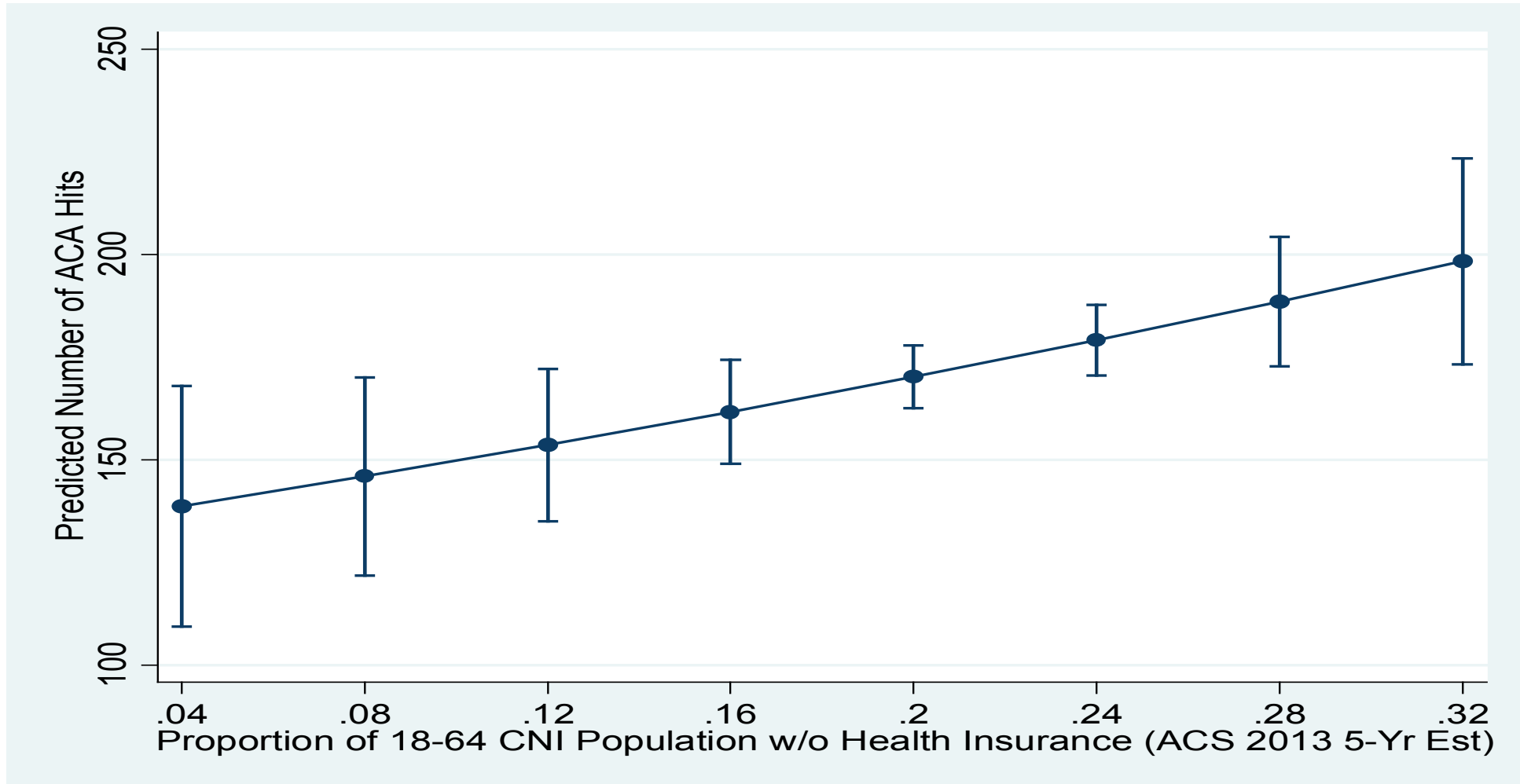
- Markets with more uninsured: more coverage
- Markets with more direct purchasers: more coverage
- Markets with high poverty: unclear
- Partisanship: unclear
- Political competition: more coverage
- Controls for news consumer demographics: age, sex, education, race

# Factors Shaping News: Audience Interest

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	Coeff.	(S.E.)
Uninsured (% 18-64 NCI population)	1.278**	(0.597)
Indiv. health ins. enrollees (% 18-64 NCI pop)	-0.206	(1.414)
Poverty (%)	-3.093**	(1.316)
White (%)	-0.227	(0.205)
College grad or more (%)	0.982	(0.734)
Male (%)	-17.73***	(3.353)
Ages 20-64 (%)	1.070	(1.684)
Ages 65+ (%)	-1.107	(1.032)
Obama vote in DMA (%)	0.175	(0.266)
Margin of victory (50 – abs(Obama vote))	0.214	(0.415)

# Predicted Count by Proportion Uninsured



# Ease of Access to Sources & Story Materials

*Availability of materials for ACA stories should increase coverage*

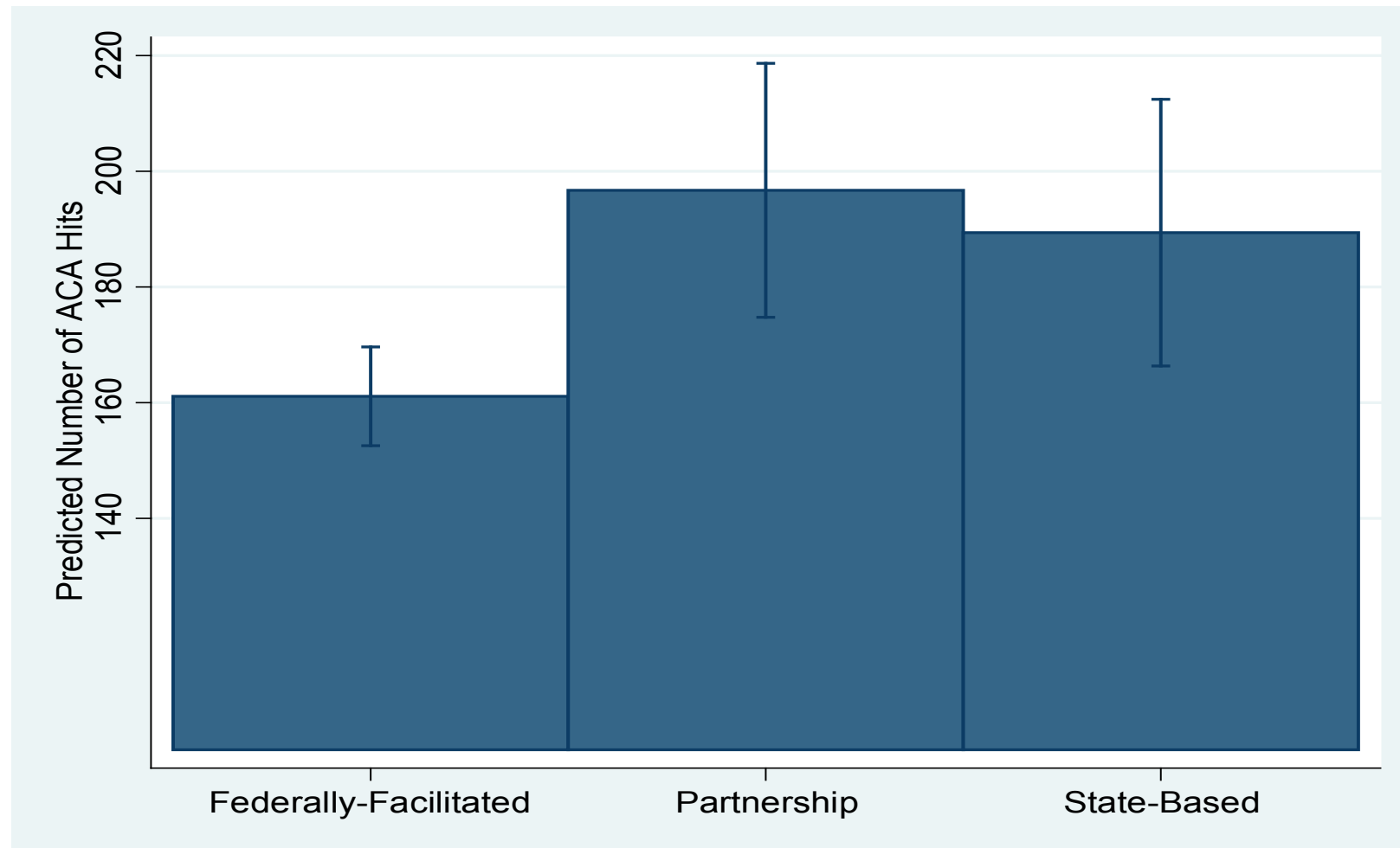
- Accessibility of spokespeople should increase coverage
- Volume of ACA insurance and political ads should increase coverage
- Type of insurance marketplace: state-based should have more stories

# Ease of Access to Sources & Story Materials

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	Coeff.	(S.E.)
Consumer assistance funds (per uninsured)	-0.00415	(0.00263)
Insurance ad volume (000s)	0.0195**	(0.00900)
Political ad volume (000s)	0.0642	(0.0417)
Partnership exchange	0.200***	(0.0665)
State-based exchange	0.162**	(0.0711)

# Predicted Count by Exchange Type



# Station & Ownership Characteristics

*Stations are enabled and constrained by their network affiliates and ownership groups choices and priorities for programming*

- Fox affiliates (more sports, fewer newscasts): less coverage
- Ownership profits: unclear



# Station & Ownership Characteristics

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	Coeff.	(S.E.)
CBS affiliate	0.0293	(0.0415)
Fox affiliate	-0.228***	(0.0473)
NBC affiliate	0.162***	(0.0417)
Second tier (revenue)	-0.114**	(0.0490)
Lowest tier (revenue)	-0.158***	(0.0483)

# Predicted Count by Owner Revenue Tier



# Structural Factors Affecting Production

*Structural set-up of media markets (population served and geographic congruence) matter*

- Number of states within DMA: decrease coverage
- Population of the media market: decrease coverage
- Insurer competition: increase coverage (expect negative sign)

# Structural Factors Affecting Production

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	Coeff.	(S.E.)
# of states within DMA	0.0316	(0.0203)
DMA total population (Ms)	-0.0321*	(0.0174)
HHI (insurance competition)	-2.02e-05	(1.28e-05)

# Contribution & Future Directions

- Variance in news coverage of the ACA is predictable
- Systematic analysis of *local TV* across the country
  
- Future work
  - Over time
  - Assessing content