Political Voyeurism

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Abstract

We introduce the concept of *political voyeurism*: individuals' tendency to fixate on distant local political events that do not directly affect them. Surveying voters in the United States, we show that approximately one-sixth prefer other people's local news over their own. We corroborate this finding with private web browsing data. We argue that an uptick in voyeurism is partially driving the nationalization of local politics and threatening accountability. Compared to peers who consume similar quantities of news, voyeurs are more likely to be polarized and political active. Consistent with this, analyses of city council transcripts show voters increasingly invoke distant events when calling for local action. Our findings suggest an overlooked *translocal* mechanism through which politics may have nationalized in recent years.

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> "'Japan is pretty good for disaster footage,' Alfonse said. 'India remains largely untapped. They have tremendous potential with their famines, monsoons, religious strife, train wrecks, boat sinkings, *et cetera.* But their disasters tend to go unrecorded. Three lines in the newspaper. No film footage, no satellite hookup. This is why California is so important. We not only enjoy seeing them punished for their relaxed life-style and progressive social ideas but we know we're not missing anything. The cameras are right there. They're standing by. Nothing terrible escapes their scrutiny."
>
> —Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

1 Introduction

One of the chief virtues of federalism is that it enables diverse local policy outcomes to reflect the heterogeneity in citizens' geographically concentrated preferences (Oates 1999). Voters in Tulsa, Oklahoma want different things than voters in Bangor, Maine, and the United States' model of decentralized governance theoretically accommodates this variation (Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova 2004, 2). Champions of federalism view this arrangement as having the additional benefit of enabling "policy experimentation," whereby voters in one community can learn from the successes and failures of others and decide on policies for their own communities through a process of interjurisdictional learning. Importantly, this model of so-called policy diffusion under federalism depends on the tendency for citizens in one jurisdiction to monitor the political goings-on in another (Shipan and Volden 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to probe the contours of a behavior—which we label *political voyeurism*—that we define as the tendency for individuals to focus on distant local politics to which they are not subject and by which they are not directly affected. We develop a conceptualization of political voyeurism by cleaving it from other forms of common political behavior. Conditional on being politically engaged, our schema first considers the *object* of citizens' attention as either proximate or distant; if it is proximate, it is simply an engagement with local politics. Next, our schema considers whether an individual is either directly affected by a given issue or policy (or indirectly via its externalities) or not; if they are indeed affected, and the object of attention is still distant, we label this a concern over spillovers. But if the object of attention is distant and they are neither directly nor indirectly affected, we label this political voyeurism. We elaborate on our classification in later sections, noting that voyeurs may train their attention on events to which they attach *either* a positive *or* negative valence.

We document some of the properties of political voyeurism by conducting three distinct measurement exercises. We design our measurement strategies to identify and characterize voyeurism across three venues of political behavior: self-reported preferences, public behavior, and private behavior. Together,

these strategies comprise a triangulation approach based on the recognition that none of our approaches are perfect. First, we surveyed 3,501 voting-age adults in California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Texas, using two measurement strategies to capture the incidence of political voyeurism. We develop a seven-item index in which, for each item, we find strong majorities of respondents across the ideological spectrum indicating an interest and willingness to engage in other peoples' politics. We correlate our measure with a suite of demographic variables, finding that better educated, more politically engaged, and ideologically polarized individuals are more likely to engage in political voyeurism than their peers. On the second count, we implement a forced-choice "decision-board experiment" in which we surreptitiously track respondents' inclination to consume other people's local news over their own. Specifically, the decision-board experiment enabled us to measure the amount of time participants spent engaging with different news articles, which builds on our previous self-reported evidence by offering a "revealed preference" for other peoples' politics over their own. The results of this exercise reveal that approximately one-eighth of respondents *express*—and one-quarter *reveal*—a preference to consume other people's local news over their own.

Our second measurement strategy leverages 103,808 local government meeting transcripts from 908 municipalities between 2006-2023 across the United States (Barari and Simko 2023). We find a tendency among those who speak during local government meetings to reference political developments from other jurisdictions—frequently invoking other cities, counties, or states as exemplars, warnings, or rhetorical foils when calling on their own representatives to act. Overall, at least since the early 2000s, citizens have mentioned other peoples' politics approximately half as frequently as they invoke their own locality. Our analysis indicates that the frequency with which speakers invoke other people's politics is increasing over time: to take one example, in 2012, fewer than 2% of city council meetings made reference to New York City; in 2023, nearly 6% of city council meetings involved a citizen invoking New York City.

Our third measurement strategy leverages the web browsing behavior of a sample of US residents over a period of six years, comprising 506,123 devices, documenting 2 trillion unique web visits. These data enable us to glimpse individuals' private browsing patterns, offering a unique behavioral measure, including the frequency with which they engage in political voyeurism.[1] Using these data, we conduct an analysis in which we estimate the relative frequency with which people consume other peoples' politics versus their own, finding that, on average, approximately 26.1% of local news articles consumed by participants in

1 For a discussion on the utility and pitfalls of digital trace data, see Munzert et al. (2024).

our sample concern other people's politics, defined as local news content originating from another state. This finding compares favorably to the estimates obtained in our first and second measurement strategies and suggests a more complicated portrait than one in which internet users ensconce themselves in "echo chambers" (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). Indeed, consistent with work on the consumption of out-partisan information (Bail et al. 2018; Barrie, Atalay and ElKattan 2025), people's online media diets may be more geographically diverse than previously anticipated (Green-Riley et al. 2022).

Our main contribution is to introduce a new metaphor for understanding an increasingly common form of political behavior and engagement. We believe that the concept of political voyeurism offers a vocabulary and framework for understanding behavior that has, until now, been collapsed into routine news consumption. It is important to underscore two caveats. First, we do not claim that this sort of behavior is new; in fact, two of the most famous media theorists of the twentieth century were preoccupied with behavior we might characterize as political voyeurism. Writing over fifty years ago, for example, Marshall McLuhan (1964) observed that the arrival of digital media meant that we live in a "global village" where "you have extreme concern with everybody else's business and much involvement with everyone else's lives." Meanwhile, focusing on the television in particular, Neil Postman (1985, 7) suggested that "we attend to fragments of events from all over the world because we have multiple media whose forms are well suited to fragmented conversation."

Second, we do not claim that political voyeurism is *necessarily* corrosive to democratic life. We nevertheless acknowledge that our choice of terminology—labeling the behavior we describe as "political voyeurism"—carries a deviant connotation that may predispose readers toward a negative interpretation.[2] We recognize this conceptual slippage but ultimately judge the alternative labels to be analytically weaker. Rather than sanitizing the term, our preference is to confront the term's normative ambiguity directly by emphasizing that political voyeurism may, under certain conditions, be healthy for democratic accountability. Think, for a moment, about the model of fleet-footed voters that underpins Charles Tiebout's model of decentralization, for example, and which depends on citizens having access to information about other jurisdictions such that they may migrate should they observe elsewhere a set of policies under which they would prefer to live (Oates 1981; Tiebout 1956). On this view, our interest is not in the incidental consumption of other people's politics (as the "civic gaze" would imply), nor is it in behavioral distraction (as

2 We considered a range of alternatives to voyeurism, such as "rubbernecking," the "civic gaze," "spectatorship," "exolocalism," "*badauderie*," "vicarism", and "gawking."

"rubbernecking" would imply), but instead in a form of comparative political awareness in which individuals may anchor their political attitudes and behaviors in reference to jurisdictions and events to which they are not party. Whether this behavior is to the benefit or detriment of democratic life is ambiguous.

More broadly, we contribute to the literature on the nationalization of American politics by identifying a previously overlooked mechanism through which voters' political attention escapes the bounds of local governance. Much of the existing scholarship emphasizes what might be characterized as supply-side explanations—elite messaging, the decline of local media, and partisan polarization (Hayes and Lawless 2021; Hopkins 2018; Iyengar et al. 2019; Moskowitz 2021; O'Brian 2024). Instead, we highlight a complementary, demand-side process through which citizens actively seek out and import political meaning from other jurisdictions into their local political life. In naming political voyeurism, we thus identify a translocal mechanism through which the nationalization of politics has occurred. In doing so, we also uncover evidence of an overlooked paradox latent in federalism: by sharpening policy divergence across subnational units, federalism may inadvertently encourage citizens to look outward—inviting comparison, fueling aspiration or alarm, and ultimately reinforcing a more nationalized political consciousness.

2 The Nationalization of Local Politics in the United States

The "nationalization" of politics in the United States has captured the attention of political scientists for over fifty years. In one of the first investigations into the phenomenon, Stokes (1967, 202) writes, "changes of party strength over many decades show that by the middle of this century the public decided whether and how to vote for Congress less than ever before on the basis of influences distinctive to the constituency." In one of the more systematic evaluations of this trend, Hopkins (2018) shows that Americans are now far more likely than in previous decades to evaluate local and state politics through a national partisan lens. For example, between 1980 and 2016, the correlation between presidential vote choice and gubernatorial vote choice nearly doubled, a clear indicator of the weakening boundary between national and subnational political spheres. Down-ballot races once dominated by local concerns have increasingly become referenda on national party brands (Rogers 2016; Sievert and McKee 2019). Today, most voters know more about national figures than their own state legislators or local government officials. This increasing reliance on a national interpretive political lens is occurring alongside a rise in affective polarization and its subsequent influence on issue positions (Druckman et al. 2021).

Scholars have identified a range of interlocking mechanisms to explain this transformation. For the

sake of brevity, we highlight just two explanations.[3] The first relates to the changing nature of electoral contestation. As the two major parties have grown more ideologically distinct, national party leaders have exerted stronger influence over local candidates, campaign finance, and issue framing (Masket 2009). The bundling of so-called culture war issues have also provided candidates with less latitude to strike out on their own (O'Brian 2024). The increasing influence of highly ideological out-of-district donors and organized interest groups has underpinned this shift (Henig, Jacobsen and Reckhow 2019; Canes-Wrone and Miller 2022; Yorgason 2025; Colao et al. 2025). Now, rather than running as pragmatists catering to local needs, down-ballot politicians are increasingly encouraged—or required—to align with national platforms, making it more difficult for voters to rely on local context to distinguish between candidates beyond their partisan affiliation.

Second, and more pertinent to our present study, is the hypothesis that the increasing nationalization of local politics derives from upheavals in the media landscape (Hayes and Lawless 2021; Moskowitz 2021). As local news outlets have closed or consolidated, and as Americans increasingly turn to national cable news and online aggregators for information, voters are exposed to a narrower and more nationally oriented set of political narratives (Martin and McCrain 2019; Prior 2007). Local news once played a crucial role in informing residents about school board decisions, infrastructure projects, and municipal budgets. But this source of information has been displaced by national stories that emphasize ideological conflict and partisanship (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007). Attesting to the importance of local media, scholars have shown that in media markets where voters are exposed to in-state (versus out-of-state) content, citizens are better informed and receive more accountable representation (Snyder Jr and Strömberg 2010).

We find this second argument particularly compelling. But we argue that there exists an important yet generally overlooked distinction lurking in the background of this literature: between the geographic *scale* of an audience versus the geographic *scope* of an object of coverage. In general, scholars studying the nationalization of media have trained their attention on the increasingly large geographic audiences being captured by media outlets. While outlets such as CNN, FOX News, and *The New York Times* have national audiences in the sense that their distribution penetrates all corners of the United States, *The Des Moines Register* has virtually no penetration into media markets beyond Iowa. Hopkins (2018, 197) puts the matter succinctly: "Those with shrinking audiences—most notably local newspapers but also local

3 In his original treatment, Stokes chiefly pointed to the changes in the structure of the ballot starting in 1888 with the uptake of the so-called Australian ballot. Prior, voters had delivered party-printed "tickets" rather than completed government-furnished "ballots."

television news—tend to have audiences that are much more clearly delineated in space."

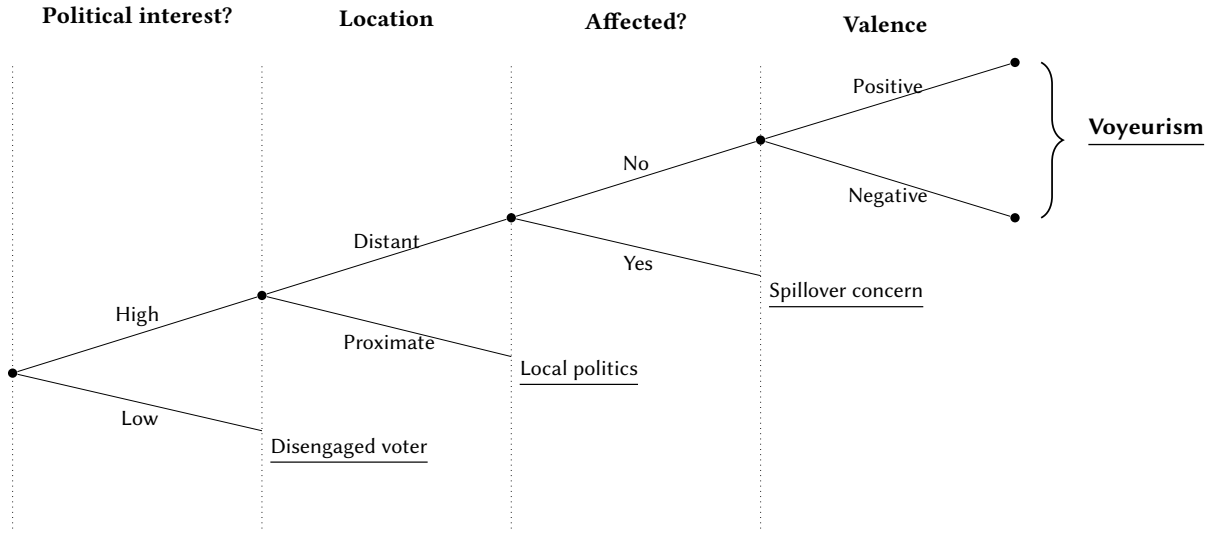
Our interest, however, is in the *objects* of media coverage, motivated by the observation that the growing *scale* of audiences to a national level often includes coverage of very localized events. Consider the intense scrutiny placed on Springfield, Ohio, during the 2024 Presidential Election in the wake of a comment at a city council meeting in which it was alleged that Haitian migrants were eating household pets (BBC News 2024). Or consider the breathless coverage by the national media of hyperlocalized episodes of shoplifting and vagrancy in cities like San Francisco or Seattle (Hubler and Weisman 2024). The fascination with these events stands apart from what we would label "national" objects of coverage: policy issues with genuinely expansive and material externalities that affect all Americans.

We label this behavior political voyeurism. It is worth briefly articulating that we find this behavior both puzzling and worthy of study because we believe it to be an ironic and unintended consequence of the model of federalism on which much of the governance in the United States is premised. If voters in San Francisco, California wish to enact soft-on-crime policies by electing a reformist District Attorney, as it did with, say, Chesa Boudin, the devolved nature of authority in the United States ought to permit them to do so (Simon 2020). And if, by the same token, local officials in Grants Pass, Oregon wish to criminalize vagrancy to deter homelessness, as they recently did, the logic of federalism empowers them to do so (*City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* 2024). But the centripetal forces of mass and social media mean that these actions are now being trumpeted on a national stage, drawing the attention, and inspiring anxiety, of faraway citizens who are not materially affected by the consequences of these actions.

3 The Concept of Political Voyeurism

This paper introduces and theorizes the concept of political voyeurism, which we define as the tendency for individuals to focus on distant local politics to which they are not subject and by which they are not directly affected. We develop our theory of political voyeurism by drawing on conceptual tools developed in democratic theory around the so-called "boundary problem," that is, the challenges associated with how to decide which individuals ought to be included in democratic decision-making processes. Solutions to the boundary problem typically depend on either the all-affected principle (i.e., those affected by a decision ought to be included in its making) or the all-subjected principle (i.e., those subject to a decision ought to be included in its making). Our schema, as we will discuss, situates political voyeurism as a concern with events that satisfy *neither* of these principles.

Figure 1—The Concept of Political Voyeurism



Note: The figure above illustrates our definition of political voyeurism—among politically interested people, voyeurism is the tendency to focus on distant (rather than proximate) political events that do not directly impact them.

We start by elaborating three core conceptual components: first, our conceptualization depends on a statement of individual interest in politics, recognizing that only highly engaged citizens follow politics, let alone participate in the consumption of other peoples' politics. Second, we articulate an understanding of what is local, i.e., what counts as "proximate" versus "distant." Later, we introduce a measurement strategy that relies on jurisdictional boundaries in the same manner that the all-subjected principle operates, meaning that proximate events are those that occur within an individuals' own jurisdiction. Finally, third, we consider the extent to which individuals are affected by the policy issue in question, on the view that monitoring events in a distant jurisdiction when that event has a material impact on an individual carries a distinct meaning than when no such impact is present. We outline our conceptualization of political voyeurism in Figure 1, which we expand inductively in greater detail below.

To start, we begin from the premise that political voyeurism demands some level of political interest and engagement. Our concept of voyeurism has similarities to what Eitan Hersh (2020) calls "political hobbyism," which he labels as the act of "consuming politics for personal enjoyment, with little regard for impact." Voyeurs may be a subset of hobbyists insofar as they engage in the activity for entertainment or identity affirmation. However, hobbyism encompasses a broader detachment from political outcomes

altogether, often rooted in national or partisan spectacle. Political voyeurism, as we will discuss, is spatially dislocated but may still aspire to local consequences, particularly when extra-local narratives are invoked to stir either protest or policy imitation.

Table 1: The Concept of Political Voyeurism, U.S. Local Government Transcript Examples

Label	Description	Example
Local Politics	Proximate issues	**Boston, MA Parks Committee: 2025-05-09**: "We annually go and review every tree we've planted for the last two years. So, we go and look at 3200-3600 trees a year to make sure they're alive and healthy, and if not we are able to replace them. You know, a lot of it is not just about water … sometimes there's something underground that might leach into the soil of the tree and causes the tree to die or you know, there's too much road salt put down."
Spillovers	Concern over externalities	**Granby, MA Board of Health 2025-04-07**: "The reason is, they've got that measles outbreak in Texas. Again, I don't know how large that's going to get but I'm guessing RFK Jr. is not promoting measles vaccines. So, the question is what percentage of students in the Granby system have their MMR vaccinations?"
Voyeurism (+)	Not affected, positive valence	[**Evanston, IL Reparations Committee: 2022-09-01**] "... I was inspired by a meeting — a Reparations Committee meeting — in San Francisco actually that opened with an ancestral acknowledgment. And I think that one thing that's great about being the first is there are many that will come after us and do more and differently and we can learn from and be informed from their work."
Voyeurism (-)	Not affected, negative valence	**Eastpointe, MI City Council: 2025-11-10**: You don't understand police work if you don't want ICE in this city… you need ICE here… there's been a big drug bust in Detroit with fentanyl and all that stuff. There's been a big drug bust in Chicago. There's been a big drug bust in Memphis. And in San Francisco… You think these guys, this hard working police department [in Eastpointe] can take care of it by themselves? I don't know what you're thinking. They need help.

Note: Above, we show four illustrative quotes from local government meeting transcripts as presented in *LocalView* (Barari and Simko 2023). While the first two rows illustrate politics "as usual" with discussions about locally proximate issues or concerns about potential spillovers, we argue the bottom two rows show examples of speakers engaging in political voyeurism.

We further distinguish political voyeurism from other forms of political engagement by emphasizing its focus on distant rather than proximate events. Highly engaged citizens who monitor proximate developments, such as the local environmental concerns raised at a recent Boston city council meeting described in the first row of Table 1, are best understood as participating in their own local politics. Two issues merit clarification, however. First, in systems of multilevel governance like the United States, individuals are

subject to overlapping jurisdictions, meaning that political voyeurism is inherently issue-specific: two residents of Washtenaw County, Michigan may be governed by different municipal land-use rules but the same county-level law enforcement policies. Second, our definition flattens physical distance by treating a resident of Ann Arbor monitoring school board meetings in nearby Whitmore Lake (≈ 15 mi.) as analytically equivalent to a resident of Mission Viejo following crime trends in San Francisco (≈ 450 mi.).[4] From the perspective of federal institutional design, however, these behaviors are alike insofar as they involve attention to jurisdictions whose rules do not apply to the observer.

Our third distinction is the most important: it stipulates that voyeurism identifies individuals who engage with events about which—absent their decision to engage—they would not have been affected. The intuition derives from democratic theory and the "boundary problem:" how should the so-called *demos* be constituted and who ought to be invited to participate in its self-governance? One of the more sensible solutions to this problem is the "all-affected principle" which holds that all who are affected by a decision ought to have a say in its direction (Dahl 1970, 67). The challenge with this principle is that individuals' understanding of whether or not they are affected by an event is inherently subjective and therefore expansive to the point that its pure application would be globally encompassing (Goodin 2007, 55). In an interconnected media environment, virtually every political event can be construed as affecting a distant observer. We therefore do not define political voyeurism with reference to whether individuals feel affected, but whether a given political system itself *treats them* as party to the decision-making community. Our solution is thus a second-order one that takes given jurisdictional boundaries seriously and defines "affectedness" by whether an individual holds political standing in a given decision-making authority.

We develop this intuition with examples. Consider, by way of contradistinction, how citizens in one jurisdiction may wish to monitor the capacity of fire departments in neighboring communities. Especially in, say, drought-stricken areas, the smoke generated from forest fires left untamed owing to incompetent governance may reasonably affect people in jurisdictions beyond the one in which the fire originated. The externalities associated with forest fire management naturally transcend jurisdictional lines, which reflects the typical decision to locate its governance at larger units of analysis (e.g., states or provinces). Citizens in neighboring communities may therefore reasonably monitor wildfire containment efforts because the risks are spatially diffuse. In such cases, attentiveness to "other people's politics" may reflect prudent self-

4 Our later analyses will often relax this definition by, for example, measuring voyeurism across state (rather than municipality) boundaries.

interest rather than voyeurism. The second row of Table 1 points to citizens of Granby, Massachusetts voicing concern over the potential spillovers associated with the outbreak of measles in Texas, nearly 2,000 miles away. But the nature of contagion means the negative externalities associated with Texas' weak vaccination policies are indeed material to the residents of Granby.

By contrast, consider now the case of rural residents who closely track crime rates in distant urban centers, despite little measurable spillover into their own communities. The fourth row of Table 1 describes a typical comment from a concerned citizen in Eastpointe, Michigan, invoking crime rates in Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, and Memphis. When these sorts of residents invoke urban crime trends to call for tougher local enforcement, as we will show they occasionally and increasingly do, the response often stems not from a material impact but from mediated fear. In these cases, the externalities associated with crime in faraway localities are largely *perceived* rather than material. This form of political engagement constitutes what we understand to be political voyeurism: an orientation toward remote developments that lack a plausible causal link to local conditions, but which nonetheless provoke political attention.

Our schema permits that the issue on which a political voyeur trains her attention may carry either a negative or a positive valence. The example above from Eastpointe, Michigan characterizes an issue to which the voyeur attaches a negative valence while the example from Evanston, Illinois captures a positive one. Many of the examples discussed up to this point concern issues to which citizens attach a negative valence. But recall, again, that the institutional design of federal and decentralized governance depends on some degree of "learning" that takes place across political units. This learning may take the form of cautionary tales to which the voyeur attaches a negative valence; they may also, however, take the form of mimesis in which the voyeur calls attention to events from elsewhere in a positive light (Grumbach 2022).

4 Data and Research Design

Below, we describe the several sources of data we use to examine the extent and correlates of political voyeurism in the United States.

4.1 Design #1: Verasight Survey in Four US States

In November 2025, we fielded a survey to probe the extent of political voyeurism with Verasight. The survey targeted approximately 1,650 respondents in California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Texas. Due to implementation issues associated with the initial omission of one of our measurement strategies (de-

cision board experiment, see below) we re-ran the survey again in November 2025. Thus, for some of our analyses, we have double the sample size ($N = 3,501$) across the four states. In addition to including modules gauging standard demographic questions, outgroup thermometers, and political participation, we included two distinct measurement strategies for measuring the extent of political voyeurism in complimentary self-reported and revealed ways.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics main items.

Question	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
When political controversies arise in other states, I closely follow the details, even if they don't affect me directly.	2.71	0.88	1	4	3501
I often read or watch news about political conflicts in other communities just to see how people there are behaving.	2.78	0.91	1	4	3499
I like to keep track of how other states or cities handle political issues, even when those choices have no impact on my own life.	2.79	0.92	1	4	3497
I feel compelled to know about political scandals in other regions, even if they don't affect my community.	2.70	0.94	1	4	3500
I monitor debates in distant school boards, legislatures, or city councils to see what decisions they are making.	2.20	0.94	1	4	3500
I spend time learning about political movements in other communities, even when their outcomes won't change anything for me.	2.50	0.94	1	4	3500
I pay attention to how other parts of the country handle controversial cultural issues, even if they have no direct connection to me.	2.89	0.89	1	4	3501

Notes: This table presents the descriptive statistics for our seven-item index of political voyeurism. All items oriented to point in the same direction.

The first strategy involved asking respondents seven questions designed to capture the extent to which they followed, and engaged with, political events in other jurisdictions. We crafted the questions to be ideologically neutral. The full text of the questions can be found in Table 2. Throughout the analysis, we construct an index of political voyeurism that is the averaged value of all seven items in this module, with higher values denoting greater voyeurism. The items have a high degree of internal consistency, with the Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$.

The second measurement strategy we adopted involved using a so-called "decision-board" experiment (Andersen, Redlawsk and Lau 2019). Our goal here is to overcome the social desirability bias inherent in directly asking respondents to answer sensitive survey items—about which they might obscure their true attitudes (Berinsky 1999). Here, we adapted a method developed by MouseLab: respondents were presented with six recent headlines concerning education, including two from their home state, two from another state, and two dealing with national policy. For each location, we provided respondents with

headlines that captured both liberal and conservative policies. To make matters comparable, we restricted the outgroup states to two dyads: respondents in Texas were shown a story about California, and vice versa, while respondents in Tennessee were shown a story about Massachusetts, and vice versa. The layout of the measurement strategy can be seen in the Online Appendix in Section B. When respondents moved their cursor over the headline, the full text of the news article was revealed. The full text of each article was revealed in a mutually exclusive manner, meaning a respondent could only read one article at a time. This enabled us to capture a behavioral indicator of political voyeurism by measuring respondents' interest and engagement with news stories outside of their own home state.

4.2 Design #2: LocalView Transcripts

One concern with our measurement strategy in Design #1 and its reliance on survey data is that its estimates derive from a contrived environment that may not reflect the sorts of real life settings in which people may engage in political voyeurism. To this end, for a more costly behavioral measure, we draw on 103,808 transcripts from city council meetings available in *LocalView* (Barari and Simko 2023). These transcripts capture local policy-making discussions from 908 local governments across the country between 2006-2023. The data were collected by scraping publicly-available videos of local government meetings uploaded to YouTube, where many local governments upload their meeting records to comply with transparency laws (Barari and Simko 2025). We present the descriptive statistics for these data in Table A3.

Here, we measure political voyeurism by measuring the extent to which participants in these city council meetings mention *other* places in their policy-making discussions. We measure four types of mentions: (1) other states, (2) capital cities of other states, (3) largest cities in other states, and (4) a set of high-salience cities (e.g., New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco).[5] An additional virtue of this data is that it enables us to measure the incidence of political voyeurism across time and space (2010-2024) whereas our survey-based measurement strategy only allows us to observe its incidence at a cross-section. Crucially, this period includes drastic expansion of social media usage, which we allege to be a key driver of the uptick in the incidence of political voyeurism. We also leverage a rich set of municipal- and county-level covariates to conduct a cross-sectional analysis in which we examine the correlates of political voyeurism as a function of community characteristics.

5 We intentionally avoid calculating references to all US cities (even above some population threshold) due to the large number of city names that also have an additional unrelated meaning, such as people's names (e.g. Tyler, Texas), common words (e.g. Normal, Illinois), or duplicate city names across states (e.g. Springfield in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Illinois, among others).

4.3 Design #3: ComScore Web Browsing Data

Design #2 suffers from two key shortcomings and leaves several issues unresolved. First, the LocalView data captures the behavior of extremely engaged citizens—i.e., those that show up to city council meetings and make their voices heard. These individuals are unrepresentative of the broader population, however, which may possibly be driving an overestimation of the extent to which individuals engage in political voyeurism (Brouwer and Trounstine 2024; Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019; Sahn 2025; Yoder 2020). Second, our measure in the analysis of LocalView data is behavioral in that it captures a citizen actively invoking someone else's politics in a public venue. But there are likely many political voyeurs who never speak on the topic while nonetheless having engaged in monitoring other people's politics.

To address these concerns, we draw on the ComScore market research sample, which captures the browsing behavior of an opt-in sample of adults in the United States across their internet-connected devices. Our covariate of interest is location, which is benchmarked to an individual's home at the baseline intake survey, and which hence does not vary within device (i.e., it seems likely that a desktop stays in a given location even if multiple users are using it). We describe the data in greater detail in SA Section A.3 and outline the descriptive statistics for our ComScore sample in SA Table A5.

We begin our analysis of the web browsing data from January 1, 2019. As of May 2020, there were 679,389 active persons in the US panel. We use these data to assemble a database of over 2 trillion unique site visits. Each URL is fully documented, meaning that we observe the domain name (e.g. "cnn.com"), as well as the ensuing path (e.g., "/politics/") and the URL slug or permalink (e.g., "/khashoggi-murder-trump-bin-saudi-crown-prince"). On the basis of the domain name, ComScore offers a pre-specified classification scheme for different types of websites (e.g., news, social media, or gaming). On the basis of these categories, ComScore further disaggregates URLs into subcategories, on which we rely for our analyses. Using the categorization scheme, we describe the overall breakdown of URLs in our dataset in Table A4.

After subsetting to news stories, we can examine the frequency with which individuals consume news about jurisdictions other than their own. We adopt an inductive method for classifying news stories as political voyeurism or not. Specifically, for each domain name (e.g., "foxnews.com" or "nj.com") we compute the most common region from which it is accessed. We only keep domain names that appear in our dataset at least 100 times. We take the most common region as the location about which the news site is concerned. Note that because we filter on "local news" specifically, we exclude nationally syndicated news

websites (e.g., "cnn.com" or "politico.com"). Then, using this dictionary of local news websites, we again use participants' regional location to construct an indicator variable that captures whether or not they are reading a news stories about someone else's politics.[6] We impose an additional arbitrary restriction that we only classify a given domain name as about a specific region if at least 25% of its visitors in our sample are from the same region. We also manually exclude domains that were erroneously classified as local news but which appear regularly in our data.

5 Main Results

We find consistent evidence that voyeurism is common in self-reported (survey data in Design #1), public (local government meeting transcripts in Design #2), and private (personal web browsing data in Design #3) political behavior. Across these analyses, we also find that voyeurism is: correlated with news consumption, education, and political activity, often targeted at large cities like New York and San Francisco, and particularly high among residents of neighboring states with high ideological divergence.

5.1 Analysis #1: Measuring Political Voyeurism Using Survey Data

We begin by probing the overall incidence of political voyeurism using our decision board measurement strategy in Table 3. We break down the incidence of political voyeurism according to respondents' residence, as well as the valence of the article towards which they directed their attention. We present state-level averages for a measure of stated preferences (i.e., which article did respondents say they would be most likely to read?) and a measure of revealed preferences (i.e., which article did they actually spend the most time reading?).

6 This method thus responds to the concerns of Canes-Wrone and Kistner (2023): "given the increasing displacement of print by the internet, future research would benefit from the development of a measure that incorporates district internet usage of local sources." See also Huber and Tucker (2023).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics by story and state.

	News article about:		
	Local	*Voyeurism*	*National*
	Stated // Revealed	Stated // Revealed	Stated // Revealed
California			
Liberal (%)	0.25 (0.44) // 0.21 (0.27)	0.07 (0.26) // 0.13 (0.21)	0.07 (0.25) // 0.09 (0.15)
Conservative (%)	0.12 (0.32) // 0.20 (0.26)	0.06 (0.23) // 0.15 (0.25)	0.44 (0.50) // 0.22 (0.29)
Texas			
Liberal (%)	0.29 (0.45) // 0.25 (0.30)	0.08 (0.28) // 0.13 (0.20)	0.07 (0.25) // 0.09 (0.17)
Conservative (%)	0.13 (0.34) // 0.19 (0.29)	0.04 (0.20) // 0.14 (0.20)	0.39 (0.49) // 0.20 (0.28)
Masschussetts			
Liberal (%)	0.27 (0.45) // 0.28 (0.34)	0.06 (0.23) // 0.10 (0.17)	0.09 (0.28) // 0.14 (0.23)
Conservative (%)	0.18 (0.39) // 0.18 (0.25)	0.03 (0.17) // 0.11 (0.15)	0.37 (0.49) // 0.19 (0.28)
Tennessee			
Liberal (%)	0.40 (0.49) // 0.27 (0.32)	0.11 (0.32) // 0.17 (0.27)	0.04 (0.20) // 0.10 (0.19)
Conservative (%)	0.13 (0.34) // 0.16 (0.22)	0.05 (0.22) // 0.11 (0.17)	0.26 (0.44) // 0.19 (0.29)
Overall			
Average (%)	0.41 (0.49) // 0.43 (0.35)	0.13 (0.33) // 0.27 (0.29)	0.46 (0.50) // 0.30 (0.31)

Notes: This table presents the descriptive statistics for the decision board experiment. Estimates are shown as proportions, and standard errors of the subgroup estimates are in parentheses. The "stated" variable captures respondents' stated preference for the article they would be most likely to read. The "revealed" variable represents the amount of time the respondent spent reading the text of the article as a share of all time spent reading articles. The "liberal" and "conservative" rows refer to the valence attached to the content of the selected article.

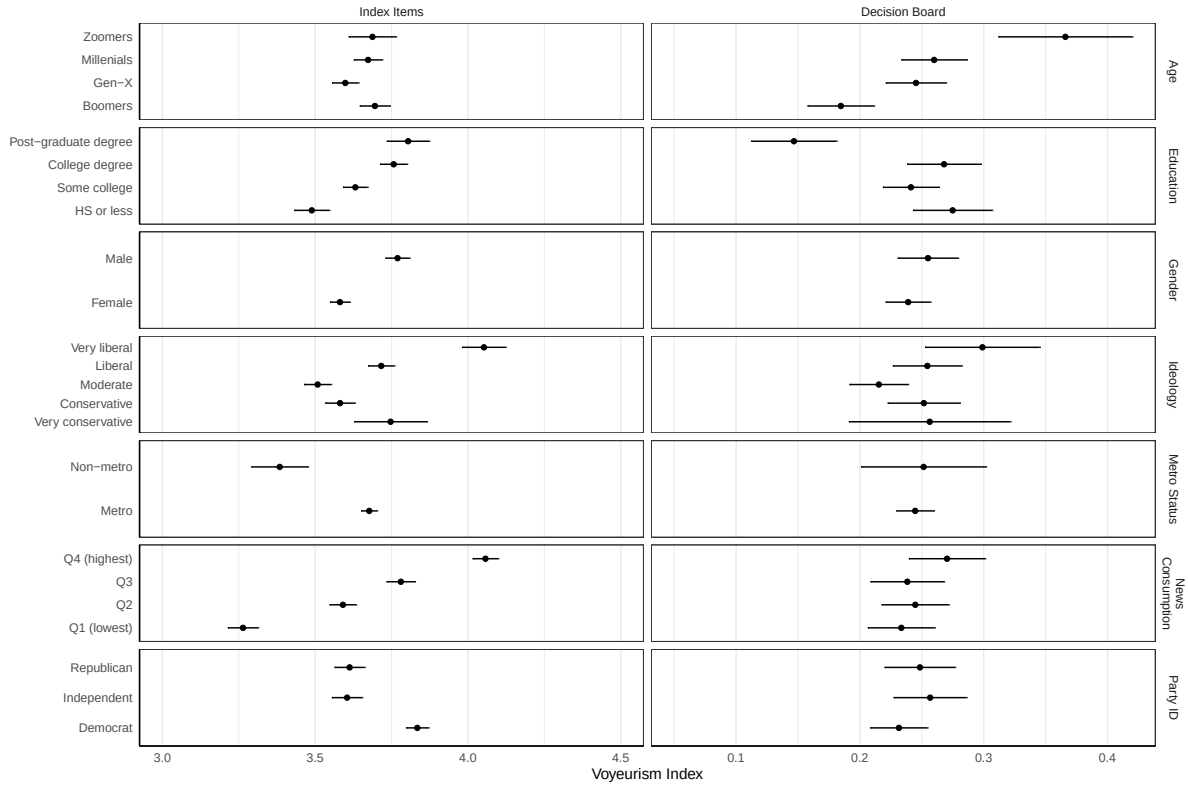
We focus our interpretation on the central column, which examines respondents' interest in news articles about other peoples' local politics. Several findings stand out. First, respondents' revealed preference in engaging in political voyeurism is—for all states and stories—nearly twice as high as their stated preference. We interpret this as evidence of a strong social desirability bias against openly admitting to engaging in political voyeurism. Second, descriptively, we find that the tendency to engage in political voyeurism is comparable and stable across contexts. In our sample, 12.7% and 27% of respondents overall either state or reveal a preference for political voyeurism, respectively. The tendency to understate one's true preference for voyeuristic content appears to come at the cost of an overstated interest in stories about national political issues that carry a conservative valence. Evidently, respondents' interest in consuming news about Donald Trump's policies, in this case, may be lower than their stated preference for it.

Next, we investigate the demographic correlates of political voyeurism. We look at our decision-board measurements, but our preferred measurement for this exercise is our 7-item index (items from Table 2).

We present the unadjusted sub-group average indices in the left-hand panel of Figure 2, which is scaled from 1-5, with higher values denoting a greater propensity to engage in political voyeurism.

Several trends stand out. First, we show that our news consumption index is a strong predictor of our political voyeurism index. Respondents in our top quartile score 24.5% higher on our voyeurism index than those who fall in our lowest quartile (4.06 v. 3.26). This finding provides face validity to our measurement strategy, given that political news is the main vector through which we theorize voyeurism to take place. In the online appendix, we also analyze how time spent on different social media platforms affects our index, showing an especially positive relationship between Instagram usage and political voyeurism, providing further support for the informational channel (see Figure A5). We find that both party-identification and ideological self-identification predict the incidence of political voyeurism. Democrats score 6.3% and 6.1% higher on our index than do Independents and Republicans, respectively; meanwhile, ideology presents a different portrait of a curvilinear relationship. Respondents identifying as "very liberal" or "very conservative" score 15.3% and 6.8% higher than those identifying as "moderate," who score the lowest on our index. We interpret this finding as evidence of political voyeurism being a partial function of polarization. Finally, we find that education is a strong predictor of political voyeurism. Higher educated respondents are more likely to report agreement with our measures capturing an inclination to political voyeurism.

Figure 2—Political Voyeurism Index, by Demographic Traits



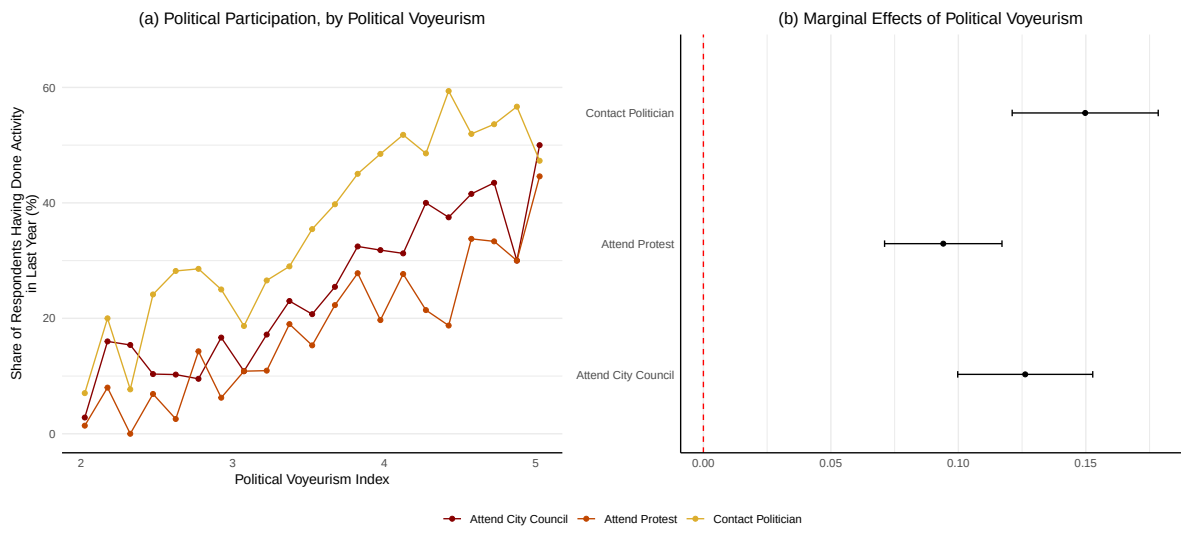
Note: Figure shows the extent of political voyeurism according to different demographic traits. The political voyeurism index is an averaged measure across seven item. The right hand panel shows the share of respondents in each category who indicated an interest in another states' news stories in the decision board experiment. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

The right-hand panel conducts the same exercise, leveraging our measure of "revealed preference" from the decision-board experiment. Several of the trends highlighted above continue to hold: most strikingly, the curvilinear relationship between ideology and political voyeurism appears with this measurement strategy, as well. Respondents identifying as "very liberal" and "very conservative" were 39.1% and 19.1% more likely, respectively, to have a revealed preference for political voyeurism than their self-identified moderate peers. We also find evidence that news consumption positively predicts political voyeurism here, as well. By contrast, we uncover evidence of a strong generational cohort effect: younger respondents are, in this measurement strategy, much more likely to reveal a surreptitious interest in political voyeurism that does not emerge in our direct measurement strategy. This may be a function of generational differences in internet usage. Gen-Zers and Millenials, so-called "digital natives," grew up entirely

in Marshall McCluhan's global village thus making the behavior more palatable, whereas Boomers and Gen-Xers may continue to attach some negative valence to nosy behavior (Munger 2022).

Next, we investigate how political voyeurism relates to political participation. Recall that our index, presented in the left-hand panel of Figure 2, revealed that political voyeurism is positively correlated with the consumption of political news. In addition, it might be the case that it is positively correlated with a propensity to engage in politics. (In SA Section C.1, we examine political voyeurism's relationship to partisan polarization.) To examine this possibility, we perform two analyses that look at how our index of political voyeurism correlates with three measures of political participation: whether a respondent in the last year (1) attended a city council meeting, (2) attended a protest, or (3) contacted a politician.

Figure 3—Self-Reported Political Voyeurism and Political Participation



Note: Figures show the relationship between political voyeurism and political participation. The political participation items ask respondents about whether they have participated in any of the activities in the last five years. The right-hand panel controls for age, gender, party ID, ideology, education, state. The coefficients for the regression model can be found in SA Table A7.

In the left-hand panel of Figure 3, we find all three measures of political participation increase as a monotonic function of our political voyeurism index. Take one example: for respondents who score in the lowest quintile of the political voyeurism index, 10.5% report having attended a public meeting in the past year. Among those in the highest quintile, this figure quadruples to 41.8%. Similar trends can be seen for the other measures of political participation: among the lowest quintile of political voyeurs, only

7.4% and 19.1% report having attended protest or contacted a politician in the past five years, respectively, compared to 30.9% and 52.5% among those in the highest quintile. This helps contrast voyeurism with political hobbyism introduced by Hersh (2020)—although similar demographic features predict voyeurism and political interest more generally, we find that voyeurs are much more likely to actively engage in politics, unlike hobbyists. While hobbyists may engage in voyeurism, we find many dedicated voyeurs are also actively engaged in local politics.

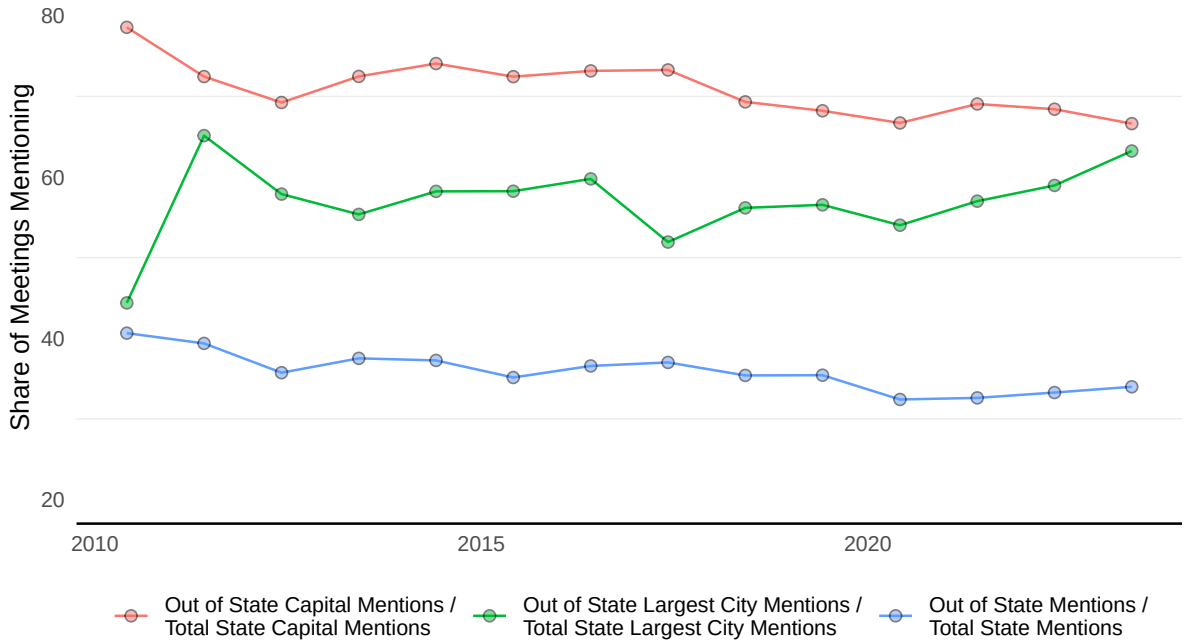
One concern is that these unadjusted trends are simply a function of confounding. As shown in Figure 2, political voyeurs are better educated, consume more news, and are more likely to be found in metropolitan rather than rural areas. As a function of these things—rather than political voyeurism *per se*—political voyeurs may be more likely to engage in political action. So, in the right-hand panel of Figure 3, we conduct a multivariate regression in which we regress our participation outcomes on the political voyeurism index, but also controlling for age, gender, education, partisanship, and an index capturing news consumption. The correlation we uncover is highly robust to the inclusion of these controls.

5.2 Analysis #2: Measuring Political Voyeurism in Local Government Meetings

We next turn to our measure of political voyeurism derived from local meeting transcripts. We find that references to other jurisdictions are extremely common in local policy-making discussions. We measure three kinds of references to other areas, where each is normalized by a ratio with measures of mentions of one's own area. For each meeting in our sample, we identify: references to (1) other states compared to one's own state, (2) capital cities in other states compared to the capital city in one's own state, and (3) largest cities in other states compared to the largest city in one's own state. Figure 4 visualizes these three voyeurism ratios across our sample. We find that the absolute share of meetings that make reference to other communities is high: the ratio of mentions of other states' capitals to one's own state capital is approximately 80% for all years in our sample, and slightly lower for references to the largest city in other states. Although lower in absolute terms, the share of mentions of other states vis-a-vis one's own state is also surprisingly high and stable around 35% for most years in our sample.

To explore this latter trend in greater detail we focus in on the frequency with which commentators at city council meetings reference what we label as "boogeyman" cities—large cities with a disproportionate share of liberals that have captured the public imagination as sites of disorder (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and San Francisco). We plot the share of meetings that mention each of these cities in

Figure 4—Combined Trends in Political Voyeurism

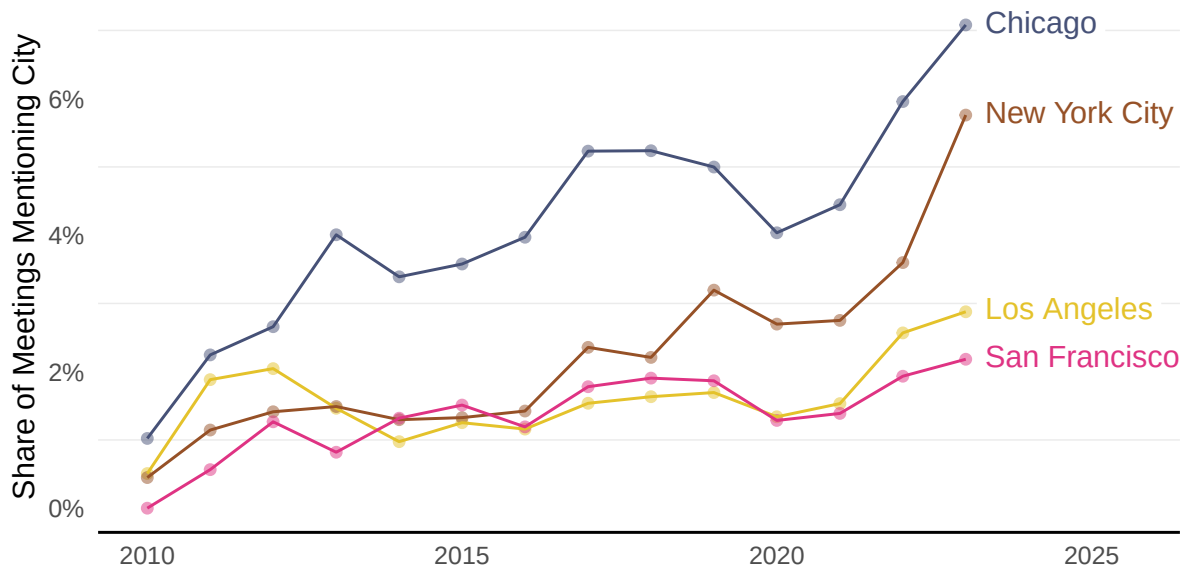


Note: For each meeting in our sample, we calculate: references to (1, top) other states compared to one's own state, (2, middle) capital cities in other states compared to the capital city in one's own state, and (3, bottom) largest cities in other states compared to the largest city in one's own state.

Figure 5. Note, importantly, as a means of ensuring that we are indeed capturing political voyeurism, that our measure excludes city council meetings that take place within the state of the city in question (e.g., we exclude all city council transcripts that originate from municipalities in California when calculating the share of meetings that mention San Francisco or Los Angeles). The most striking trend emerges for Chicago: in 2010, approximately 1.1% of city council meetings outside of the state of Illinois included a reference to Chicago; by 2024, over 7% of city council meetings made reference to Chicago. A similar magnitude increase can be observed for New York City, while smaller but detectable increases can be observed for San Francisco and Los Angeles.

We draw several conclusions from these trends. First, the steady increase in reference to large boogeyman cities, coupled with the analogous finding in the reference to out of state largest city mentions in Figure 4, suggest a growing tendency to engage in political voyeurism geared towards singular cases that capture an outsize share of the national attention. We interpret the time trends as consistent with broader

Figure 5—Political Voyeurism about Boogeyman Cities



Note: For each meeting in our sample, we calculate: out-of-state references to Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

trends in the nationalization of US politics over the same time period. Our preferred interpretation is that this is likely a function of the cheapening of the cost of information with the arrival of social media that has made it easier to engage in political voyeurism. In Appendix C.4, we provide additional descriptive evidence that patterns in voyeurism can be highly reactive to hyper-local events by tracking references to Minneapolis before and after the murder of George Floyd. The second observation we draw from our data concerns the downturn in political voyeurism in 2020, which we interpret as a function of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems plausible that public health concerns were localized, turning individuals' attentions to their communities and away from events unfolding elsewhere.

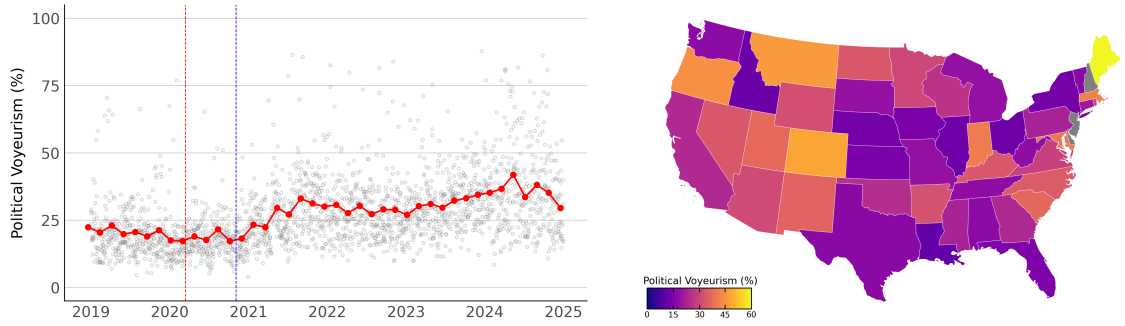
The trends presented in Figures 4 and 5 are purely descriptive with respect to time. But the *LocalView* data offer the opportunity to explore rich cross-sectional variation to identify which sorts of municipalities are most likely to have constituents engaging in political voyeurism. To this end, we conduct a multivariate regression analysis (in Table A9) with our various measures of political voyeurism as normalized outcome variables. We find consistent patterns across our first three measures of voyeurism: mentions of other states, the largest cities in other states, and the capitals of other states. Median household income and

racial/ethnic diversity are both inversely correlated with all three measures of voyeurism, though these estimates are not statistically significant for mentions of other state capitals. Similarly, Democratic vote share is positively correlated with all three measures, indicating that more Democratic places tend to discuss large cities more often. Similarly, being the largest city in a state is positively correlated with all four measures of voyeurism. Finally, we find that cities with larger populations are more likely to discuss the "Boogeyman Cities" like New York and San Francisco, perhaps due to similarities in the governing needs of larger cities.

5.3 Analysis #3: Measuring Political Voyeurism Using Web Browsing Data

The incidence of political voyeurism is likely considerably higher than its behavioral manifestation in discussions at local government meetings would suggest. For example, many people likely consume news about distant events about which they are not affected but do not speak or act on this knowledge. Thus, to capture the incidence of more private forms of political voyeurism, we draw on the ComScore dataset of web browsing behavior.

Figure 6—Measuring Political Voyeurism with Browsing Data



(a) Balanced Panel, Over Time

(b) Balanced Panel, by US States

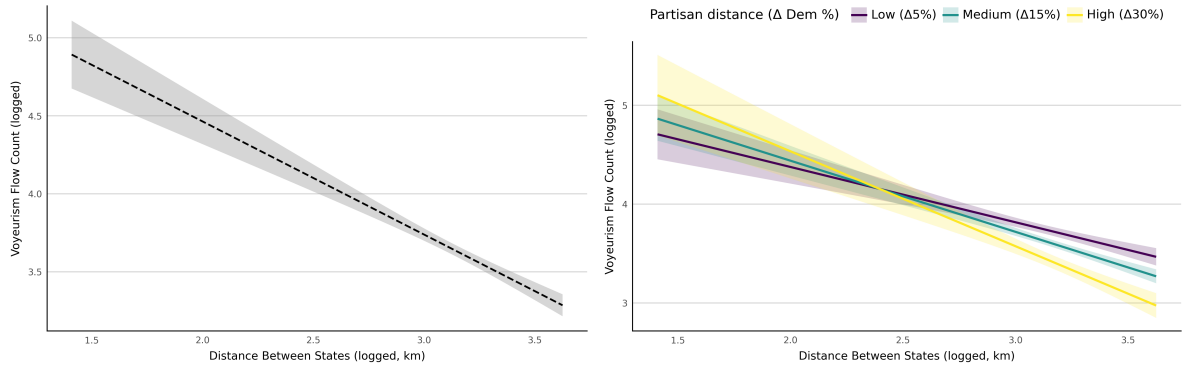
Note: The left-hand panel shows the frequency of political voyeurism over time. The red dots and line represents averages every two months. The red dotted vertical line indicates the first documented case of COVID-19 in the United States. The blue dotted vertical line indicates the 2020 United States Presidential Election. The right-hand panel shows the frequency of political voyeurism by state using the same data.

We begin by charting the incidence of political voyeurism in our data from 2019-2025 in Figure 6.[7] Re-

7 Note that the plot reflects challenges relating to compositional effects: new devices enter into the ComScore dataset periodically, but these are owned by individuals with varying tendencies to engage in political voyeurism. Any observed uptick or downturn in the incidence of political voyeurism may, in the unrestricted sample, simply reflect changes in the sorts of people whose behavior ComScore is tracking. Thus, the panel restricts the data to a "balanced panel," which we define as devices which we

call that our measure of political voyeurism here is necessarily expansive, as we cannot rely on a content-based approach. Instead, we categorize political voyeurism as when an individual navigates to a local news URL that originates from a news source outside their own state. Several features of the two panels of Figure 6 are worth highlighting. First, for the balanced panel, the average overall incidence of political voyeurism across our entire sample is approximately 26.1% of all local news consumed. This compares favorably to the estimates obtained from our more precise survey-based approach, although our ComScore methodology likely over-indicates the true incidence of political voyeurism given the properties of the measurement strategy. Second, we detect in our balanced panel an increase in political voyeurism following the November 2020 election in the United States. This uptick may be attributable to a suite of underlying time-variant factors: the increase in the perception of crime or the surge in travel post-COVID. Both of these trends are topics that, given their geographic scope, are likely to stoke political voyeurism.[8]

Figure 7—The Geography of Political Voyeurism, State Dyads



(a) Geographic Distance

(b) Geographic and Ideological Distance

Note: The figure shows the geographic variation in, and correlates of, political voyeurism. Both figures draw on the balanced panel of data defined as devices that appear in the data at least once a year. The left-hand panel shows the frequency of political voyeurism in the continental United States, with lighter colors indicating greater incidence. The right-hand panel examines state-level dyads and plots the frequency (in logged counts) of political voyeurism between the dyad and the distance between the state centroids. The tabular results for the models can be found in SA Table A8.

Another feature of our analysis that merits attention is the geographic variation in the intensity of po-

observe at least once in each year of the dataset (i.e., at least six times).

8 In the online appendix, we use the embedded word data from URLs to conduct a topic analysis, in which we specify several genres of news articles based on different common words with which they are associated (e.g. "school," "teachers," and "closures" for the education category). The full breakdown of keywords we used can be found in the appendix in Table A11. For the topical analysis, we restrict our data to the balanced panel of respondents and present the trends in Figure A4.

litical voyeurism. Recall that we can observe the state in which a given device is registered, and we track the frequency with which they consume information about political events in other states. So, to begin, we conduct a simple cross-sectional analysis that examines, by state, the average share of all news consumed that is about other people's politics in the right-hand panel of Figure 6. Several findings are worth highlighting. First, Maine scores highest in terms of political voyeurism; this is largely an artifact of our measurement strategy, as the bulk of Mainers live in the south of the state within the Boston metropolitan area. Following Boston's political events is thus classified as political voyeurism, driving up the overall incidence. The second thing to notice is that states in the Mountain West, on a whole, score the highest on our political voyeurism measure. This likely reflects the relative racial and ethnic homogeneity of communities in these states, and the relative absence of any major urban centers in these states on which citizens may otherwise train their attention.

We also use our browsing data to investigate the *target* of political voyeurs' interest—rather than simply voyeurs' location. To examine this, we construct dyadic pairs of all continental states and compute the "flows" of voyeuristic news consumption from one to the other. Then, in the left-hand panel of Figure 7, we look at the relative incidence of political voyeurism as a function of an individual's distance to the object of their interest. Specifically, we take the centroid of each state and calculate its distance to all other 49 states. Then, we take the logged raw count of stories for each dyad. We plot the relationship in the right-hand panel and model a line-of-best fit. The results reveal a negative relationship between distance the frequency of political voyeurism: at least in our ComScore sample, most participants are more likely to engage in political voyeurism towards their neighbors than they are to follow the politics of truly faraway places.

The right-hand panel adds an additional variable to the analysis which is the absolute difference in the dyadic pairs' vote share for Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election (e.g., for the Maryland and Wyoming dyad the value of this variable would be 62.6% - 25.8% = 36.8%). We then categorize values for dyads according to the degree of ideological distance as low (5%), medium (15%), or high (30%) and re-run our linear models. What emerges from the analysis is an inversion of the relationship: while political voyeurism decreases as a function of distance for all types of dyads, the slope of the aversion is higher for state dyads characterized by high ideological divergence. The implication is political voyeurism is actually highest for proximate states the exhibit high ideological divergence (e.g., Wyoming and Colorado,

Illinois and Indiana, Minnesota and North Dakota).[9] For example, only 2.4% of all local news in our sample consumed in Indiana concerns ideologically-aligned Kentucky. But 16.1% of local news consumed by Indiana originates from more ideologically-distinct Michigan. This underscores the potentially surprising fact that, while voyeurism can be found at higher rates among interdependent neighbors, voyeurism may be especially pronounced as an inverse function of ideological distance.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Our goal in this paper has been to introduce the concept of political voyeurism, which we define as the practice of engaging with distant local political events to which one has no direct connection. We believe this behavior is prevalent and thus intuitive in contemporary political discourse. Think, for example, about the awful and strange spectacle of Kyle Rittenhouse driving from his home in Antioch, Illinois to Kenosha, Wisconsin in response to protests that sprang up in June 2020 following the police shooting of Jacob Blake. Rittenhouse brought a firearm in order to attempt to protect the private property of a community to which he did not belong. Rittenhouse later shot three protesters—two of whom were also themselves not from Kenosha but who had also traveled from elsewhere to participate in protests against the behavior of a police department to which they were not subject. From all sides, this tragic episode depicts a potent microcosm of the behavior we describe in this paper: a concern over *other people's politics*.

Our motivation stems from the observation that, although prevalent, this behavior has neither been named nor systematically conceptualized or measured in the literatures on local politics, federalism, or political behavior (Hopkins 2018; Peterson 1981). Our primary aim was therefore descriptive: to define political voyeurism, identify its correlates, and estimate its prevalence. To do so, we have employed three distinct measurement strategies, each illuminating the phenomenon in a different empirical context. We acknowledge that each strategy has important limitations, but emphasize that our central goal is conceptual development rather than precise measurement or definitive causal estimation. In this sense, we seek to answer recent calls for "good descriptive" work in political science (de Kadt and Grzymala-Busse 2025; Gerring 2012). By combining multiple large-scale data sources to identify a novel political phenomenon, we also contribute to a growing literature in American local politics that leverages computational approaches to address longstanding data constraints (Trounstine 2009; Sumner, Farris and Holman 2020; Barari and

9 We further corroborate this finding with our LocalView data: municipalities within the same state as a "boogeyman" city but with high ideological distance are significantly more likely to have speakers who invoke boogeyman cities compared to peers in the same state but whose municipalities report narrower ideological separation. See Table A10.

Simko 2023; Holman, Johnson and Simko 2025).

It is worth stressing several caveats to our argument. First, conceptually, skeptical readers may wonder if voyeurism is genuinely distinct from either hobbyism or the broader phenomenon of nationalization. Our view is this: if political hobbyism captures a behavior, and nationalization reflects one of its consequences, then political voyeurism represents an overlooked mechanism.[10] Second, empirically, our findings do not suggest that political voyeurism characterizes the behavior of the majority of Americans. Most individuals continue to consume little political information of any kind, and when they do, their habits remain predominantly local or national in conventional way (Prior 2007). Recall that our decision-board experiment revealed that approximately five-sixths of our respondents revealed a preference for news about their own local politics or national events.

The finding that a sizable minority engages in political voyeurism matters for at least two reasons. First, at a theoretical level, the existence of political voyeurs challenges longstanding assumptions in the literatures on local governance and federalism that citizens are informationally siloed and primarily attentive to their own jurisdictions (Cutler 2004; Oates 1972). Our results suggest that this assumption no longer uniformly holds in the contemporary media environment. Second, because political voyeurs are more politically active than their peers, they may exert disproportionate influence over local political dynamics and policy, paralleling recent work on the policymaking power of small but engaged groups (Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019; Sahn 2025). Political voyeurs combine the distinctive news consumption patterns of political hobbyists (Hersh 2020) with the high levels of engagement characteristic of NIMBYs (Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019). More broadly, political voyeurism may accelerate the nationalization of American politics by exposing individuals to conflicts beyond their own jurisdictions and encouraging reliance on nationally inflected partisan heuristics (Hopkins 2018). As citizens increasingly form political beliefs in reference to other communities rather than their own, the informational and institutional foundations of federalism may erode.

One goal of this article has been to open new directions for political inquiry, and we conclude by outlining what we believe ought to be priorities for future research. Most pressing is the need to situate political voyeurism within a supply–demand framework: to what extent does its rise reflect genuine mass preferences versus elite strategies that mobilize outrage for political gain? Doing so requires bridging

10 Readers may also wonder if political voyeurism is distinct from policy learning; in some instances, they are observationally equivalent. But, here, we emphasize that voyeurs may train their sights on distant political events that harbor no policy implications. In other words, all policy learning is political voyeurism, but not all political voyeurism is policy learning.

elite-centered theories of political entrepreneurship and grievance mobilization (often emphasized in comparative politics) with structural accounts that attribute contemporary political behavior to institutional, media, and partisan dynamics (often emphasized in American politics). Relatedly, future work should disentangle the relative contributions of social media and nationalized news to any observed increase in the behavior. Our conjecture is that social media has played an outsized role by cheapening the cost of information, though our data cannot adjudicate this claim. Finally, we hope future work will grapple with the normative implications of political voyeurism by assessing the conditions under which the behavior is either corrosive or conducive to local self-governance.

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Supplementary Materials

A Descriptive Statistics

A.1 Verasight Data

Table A1: Summary statistics (Verasight survey).

Measure	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min.	Median	Max.
News Sources						
Political news via Facebook	3501	2.85	1.19	1	3	4
Political news via TikTok	3499	1.98	1.20	1	1	4
Political news via Instagram	3497	2.33	1.24	1	2	4
Political news via Fox News	3498	1.97	1.12	1	1	4
Political news via CNN	3499	2.02	1.08	1	2	4
Political news via national papers	3496	1.91	1.06	1	1	4
Ideology & Orientation						
Self-reported political ideology	3500	3.77	1.69	1	4	7
Voyeurism (Decision)						
Time spent reading voyeuristic story (ms)	1769	3397.87	11182.35	0	168	197417
Share of time spent reading voyeuristic story	1747	0.27	0.29	0	0.18	1
Voyeurism revealed preference (binary)	1769	0.25	0.43	0	0	1
Voyeurism stated preference (binary)	3500	0.13	0.33	0	0	1
Voyeurism (Int'l)						
Monitor Israel–Hamas war news	3501	2.33	0.90	1	2	4
Monitor persecution of Christians in China	3501	3.13	0.85	1	3	4
Follow online speech regulation debates	3500	2.85	0.94	1	3	4
Monitor LGBTQ+ persecution and censorship	3500	3.04	0.93	1	3	4
Civic Engagement (5y)						
Attended local meeting in last 5 years	3499	1.72	0.45	1	2	2
Protested in last five years	3500	1.80	0.40	1	2	2
Contacted elected official in 5 years	3499	1.61	0.49	1	2	2
Demographics						
Age	3374	48.94	14.72	18	49	88
Education	3376	3.74	1.40	1	3.50	6
Gender	3376	1.64	0.49	1	2	3
Household income	3372	4.07	2.05	1	4	9
Metropolitan status	3375	1.92	0.28	1	2	2
Race	3375	4.76	1.86	1	5	9
Party ID: base	3376	2.09	1.03	1	2	4
Party ID: lean	769	2.64	1.39	1	3	5

Table A2: Correlation matrix for political voyeurism items.

Item	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Q1	1.00	0.74	0.80	0.72	0.61	0.68	0.68
Q2	0.74	1.00	0.77	0.73	0.61	0.68	0.72
Q3	0.80	0.77	1.00	0.76	0.62	0.73	0.77
Q4	0.72	0.73	0.76	1.00	0.60	0.70	0.72
Q5	0.61	0.61	0.62	0.60	1.00	0.71	0.60
Q6	0.68	0.68	0.73	0.70	0.71	1.00	0.76
Q7	0.68	0.72	0.77	0.72	0.60	0.76	1.00

A.2 LocalView Data

Table A3: Summary statistics (LocalView).

Measure	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min.	Median	Max.
Video activity						
Number of legislative meetings	610	105.94	219.08	5	66	3703
Average video length (minutes)	610	70.74	39.70	0.16	66.69	354.13
City mentions						
Mentions of New York City	610	3.95	10.00	0	1	100
Mentions of San Francisco	610	11.04	98.61	0	0	2106
Mentions of Chicago	610	17.67	114.89	0	2	1875
Mentions of Los Angeles	610	13.50	137.59	0	0	3222
Mentions of Seattle	610	10.07	69.87	0	0	1163
Mentions outside state capitol	610	305.50	176.23	8.50	305.50	610
Mentions outside home state	610	305.50	176.24	3	305.50	610
Mentions outside largest city	610	305.50	176.23	9	305.50	610
Boogeyman state indicator	610	0.18	0.38	0	0	1
Boogeyman index score	610	305.50	175.78	53	305.50	610
Demographics						
Household income	573	77445.85	31815.88	22883	69535	250001
Household income margin of error	571	9182.95	7934.51	993	6541	55006
Total population	574	54019.73	126832.81	14	17250.50	1624832
White population	574	26852.36	57116.35	14	9874.50	671373
Black population	574	7633.27	24874.35	0	649.50	298920
Hispanic population	574	3272.19	9547.50	0	259.50	82115
Asian population	574	13225.32	47139.79	0	1453	678869
Other race population	574	3036.58	7505.55	0	784	92514
White share of population	574	0.66	0.24	0.02	0.73	1
Black share of population	574	0.10	0.16	0	0.03	0.94
Hispanic share of population	574	0.04	0.06	0	0.02	0.64
Asian share of population	574	0.15	0.17	0	0.08	0.97
Other race share of population	574	0.05	0.04	0	0.04	0.48
Simple diversity index	574	0.59	0.19	0.23	0.57	1
Log total population	574	9.71	1.57	2.64	9.76	14.30
Log household income	573	11.19	0.37	10.04	11.15	12.43
Elections						
Dem vote share 2020	548	0.48	0.19	0.03	0.47	0.97
Dem vote share 2018	377	0.48	0.18	0.04	0.46	0.97
Dem vote share 2016	547	0.46	0.20	0.03	0.44	0.99
Baseline Dem vote share	548	0.47	0.19	0.03	0.45	0.98
Squared Dem vote share	548	0.26	0.20	0.00	0.21	0.95

A.3 ComScore Data

Overview: ComScore recruits its panel members via online advertisements. When users join the panel, they are instructed to fill out a demographic form, although not all participants do so. If they do not complete the demographic survey, ComScore either assigns their data via Accudata merges or imputes their demographics. Although we observe in the individual-level demographic covariates, the unit of analysis here is the device, for which there may occasionally be multiple users (e.g., a family desktop). ComScore implements a methodology that assigns an individual household member's demographics to a unique browsing session, but this method is likely imperfect thus introducing some noise into our attempts to examine behavior according to demographic features.

Replicator access: As with many proprietary datasets, we are not able to freely share the underlying raw data on which our ComScore analyses are based. Access to these data was negotiated by [REDACTED] and, to protect the highly sensitive nature of the data, is governed by a series of restrictive data use agreements that prevent us from downloading even aggregated forms of the data off of the secured cloud server on which the ComScore data exists. To access the underlying raw data, replicators must contact ComScore directly to purchase access to the data (www.comscore.com). We are more than happy to work with any interested replicators in connecting them with the relevant parties to negotiate access to the data.

Table A4: ComScore Descriptive Statistics, by Classification

Category	URLs	Machines	Users
All	2,048,926,102,968	506,123	≈ 605,000
News/Information	18,122,520,724	326,264	≈ 605,000
Local News	384,693,926	180,893	≈ 605,000
Classification:			
Voyeuristic	80,951,979		
Non-Voyeuristic	82,400,022		
Unclassified	221,341,925		

Table A5: Sample characteristics for ComScore data.

Variable	Category	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	68844	38.02
	Male	46379	25.61
	Missing	65851	36.37
Age group	18-29	19188	10.60
	30-44	43458	24.00
	45-64	41111	22.70
	65+	11466	6.33
	Missing	65851	36.37
Household income	HHI USD:100,000 or more	11876	6.56
	HHI USD:75,000 - 99,999	17938	9.91
	HHI USD:60,000 - 74,999	7782	4.30
	HHI USD:40,000 - 59,999	18147	10.02
	HHI USD:25,000 - 39,999	18456	10.19
	HHI USD:Less than 25,000	41024	22.66
	Missing	65851	36.37
Race	Non-Hispanic	75593	41.75
	Hispanic	9641	5.32
	Race:Black	5943	3.28
	Race:Non-Black	23895	13.20
	Race:Unknown	86	0.05
	Not Reportable	65	0.04
	Missing	65851	36.37
Census region	West	21429	11.83
	Midwest	25396	14.03
	Northeast	17084	9.43
	South	49583	27.38
	Missing	67582	37.32

B Decision Board Experiment

B.1 Full Text

California

Conservative valence

- Source: Spectrum News 1
- Headline: Parental notification policy ruling at California School District requires parents be informed if student changes pronouns or preferred bathroom.
- Text: The Chino Valley Unified School District adopted a rule requiring schools to notify parents within days if students request changes to names, pronouns, or bathroom use. The policy quickly drew lawsuits and statewide criticism, becoming a flashpoint in California's education debates. A court ruling allowed parts of the policy to stand temporarily, while striking down others. Supporters insist it restores parental rights, while critics say it endangers vulnerable LGBTQ students. The case highlighted the tension between local school boards and state officials over education policy and student privacy.

Liberal valence

- Source: CalMatters
- Headline: California passed a new law that prevents schools from requiring staff to notify parents if a student identifies as LGBTQ.
- Text: California SAFETY Act (AB 1955), signed in July 2024 and effective January 2025, prohibits school districts from adopting , forced outing, policies that require educators to inform parents if students identify as LGBTQ. Supporters say the law protects student privacy and safety, especially for those who might face rejection at home. Opponents argue the measure sidelines parents in important decisions about their children. The law came after multiple districts passed parental notification rules, escalating conflict between local boards, parents, and state officials over LGBTQ rights in schools.

Massachusetts

Conservative valence

- Source: Boston Globe
- Headline: Brookline explores bringing back armed school police officers
- Text: Brookline officials debated reinstating armed school resource officers after several years without them. Supporters said having trained officers on campus could deter threats and speed emergency response, while opponents warned the presence of armed police may criminalize student behavior and affect students of color disproportionately. Discussions included limits on officers' roles, specialized training, and collaboration agreements with the police department. The proposal illustrates a wider Massachusetts conversation over school safety, discipline practices, and how to balance security with student support services and restorative approaches.

Liberal valence

- Source: Massachusetts school allowed to ban student's 'There Are Only Two Genders' shirt, court rules

- Headline: Associated Press
- Text: A federal appeals court upheld a Massachusetts middle school's decision to bar a student from wearing a shirt that read "There Are Only Two Genders." The court found the message could be seen as demeaning to transgender and nonbinary classmates and thus risked substantial disruption under school speech rules. Supporters say the ruling protects LGBTQ students and affirms administrators' authority to maintain a safe, inclusive environment. Opponents argue the ban suppresses viewpoint expression. The case reflects ongoing national disputes over student speech, gender identity, and the balance between rights and school climate.

Tennessee

Conservative valence

- Source: Tennessee governor signs new school voucher program that will exclude some immigrant families
- Headline: Tennessee governor signs new school voucher program that will exclude some immigrant families
- Text: Gov. Bill Lee signed a sweeping $447 million voucher law expanding private-school scholarships statewide, while excluding undocumented students. The program provides about $7,000 per student and prioritizes some lower-income and disabled students, with details on residency verification to be finalized. Supporters say vouchers expand school choice and spur competition. Critics warn public schools could lose funding and note limited accountability for participating private schools. The measure capped weeks of heated debate over admissions, testing, and protections for students with disabilities.

Liberal valence

- Source: Nashville Public Radio
- Headline: Thousands more Tennessee students would eat free in school under new bill
- Text: Legislation advancing in Tennessee would eliminate meal co-pays for students who qualify for the reduced-price lunch category, effectively making their breakfasts and lunches free. Districts would be reimbursed by the state for the foregone charges. Backers say removing the fees reduces stigma, improves nutrition, and helps families coping with food insecurity; early votes showed bipartisan support. Skeptics raise fiscal concerns and implementation questions. The proposal arrives as lawmakers debate broader funding priorities, offering a contrasting approach to equity and access alongside the state's expansion of private-school vouchers.

Texas

Conservative valence

- Source: The Texas Tribune
- Headline: UT-Austin announces round of firings in latest step to comply with Texas DEI ban.
- Text: A new Texas law (SB 17) bans diversity, equity and inclusion offices and related programs at state universities. To comply, the University of Texas at Austin announced layoffs of staff who worked in DEI initiatives, following earlier warnings from lawmakers who said schools had been too slow to change. Critics, including faculty and students, argue the moves diminish support for underrepresented groups and undermine academic freedom. University leaders say they are making necessary adjustments to follow state law while continuing to support campus diversity in other ways.

Liberal valence

- Source: Community Impact
- Headline: Eligible K-12 students in Texas to receive free school meals after Legislature approves funding.
- Text: Texas lawmakers approved nearly $20 million to cover the costs of reduced-price school meals, making them free to eligible students during the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years. Previously, families had to pay a small fee for breakfast or lunch if they did not qualify for fully free meals. Districts will now be reimbursed by the state for those charges, eliminating out-of-pocket costs. Supporters say the policy improves access to nutrition, reduces stigma, and eases financial strain, while school administrators work on implementing consistent reimbursement procedures.

National

Conservative valence

- Source: Reuters
- Headline: Trump signs order aimed at dismantling US Department of Education
- Text: President Donald Trump signed an executive order to begin dismantling or significantly reducing the powers of the U.S. Department of Education, shifting authority back to states and local school boards. Supporters argue this will restore local control, reduce federal overreach, and empower parents. Critics counter that weakening the federal agency risks increasing inequities and leaving vulnerable students without protections. The department has already faced budget and staffing cuts, and observers see the move as part of a larger conservative agenda to roll back federal involvement in K-12 education nationwide.

Liberal valence

- Source: Education Week
- Headline: Pre-K Programs Expand Nationwide
- Text: A new national report finds that while access to state-funded pre-kindergarten programs has expanded to record levels, quality standards and funding have not kept pace. Many programs operate with inadequate teacher pay, high student-to-staff ratios, and uneven curriculum guidelines. Advocates say expansion demonstrates a commitment to early childhood education and reducing inequities, but warn that without stronger quality controls, gains in access may not translate to improved outcomes. Researchers urge policymakers to increase investments, ensure rigorous standards, and prioritize equity so all children benefit from early learning opportunities.

B.2 Screenshots of Survey

Figure A1—Screenshot of Decision Board Experiment, California and Texas

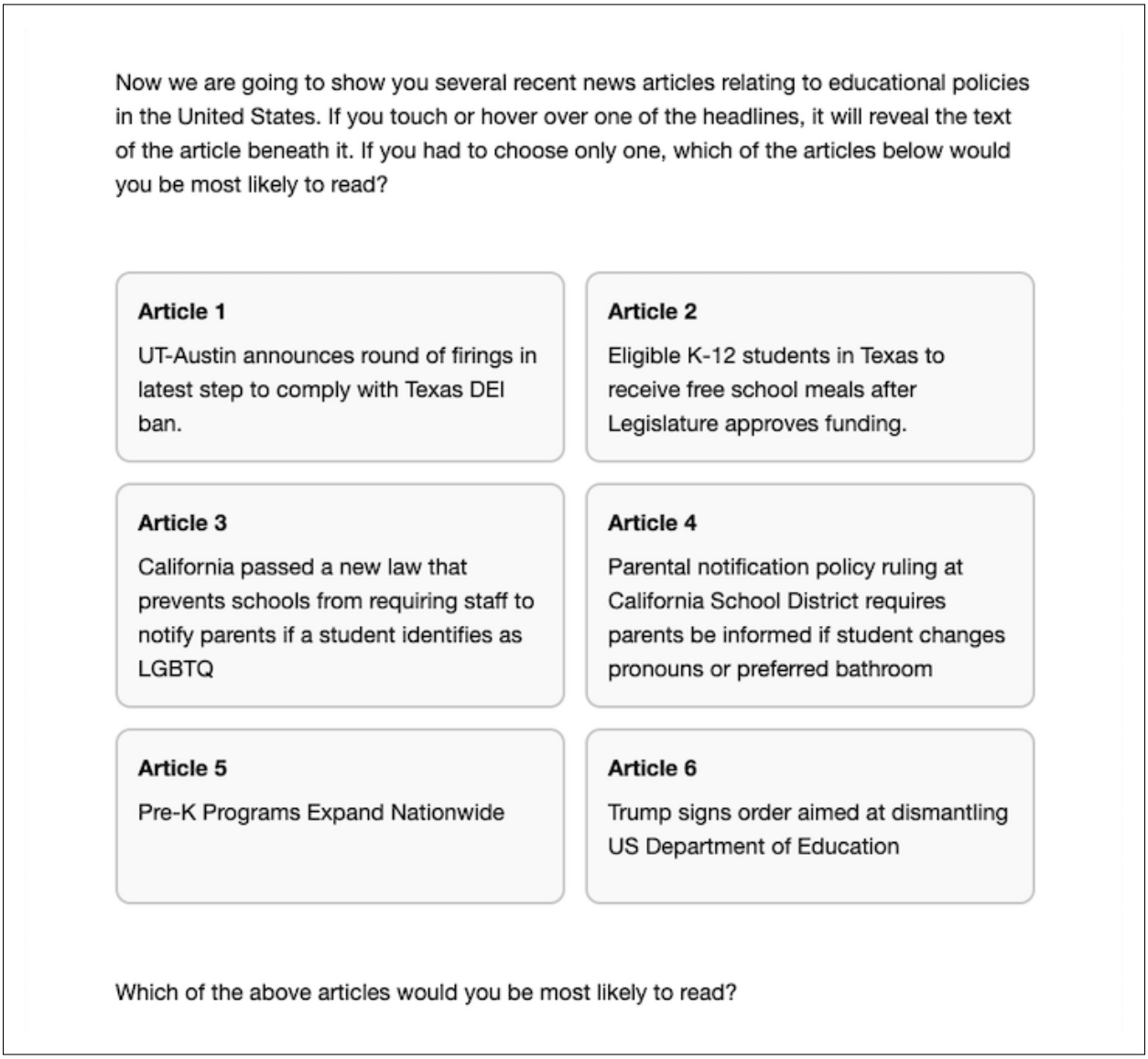
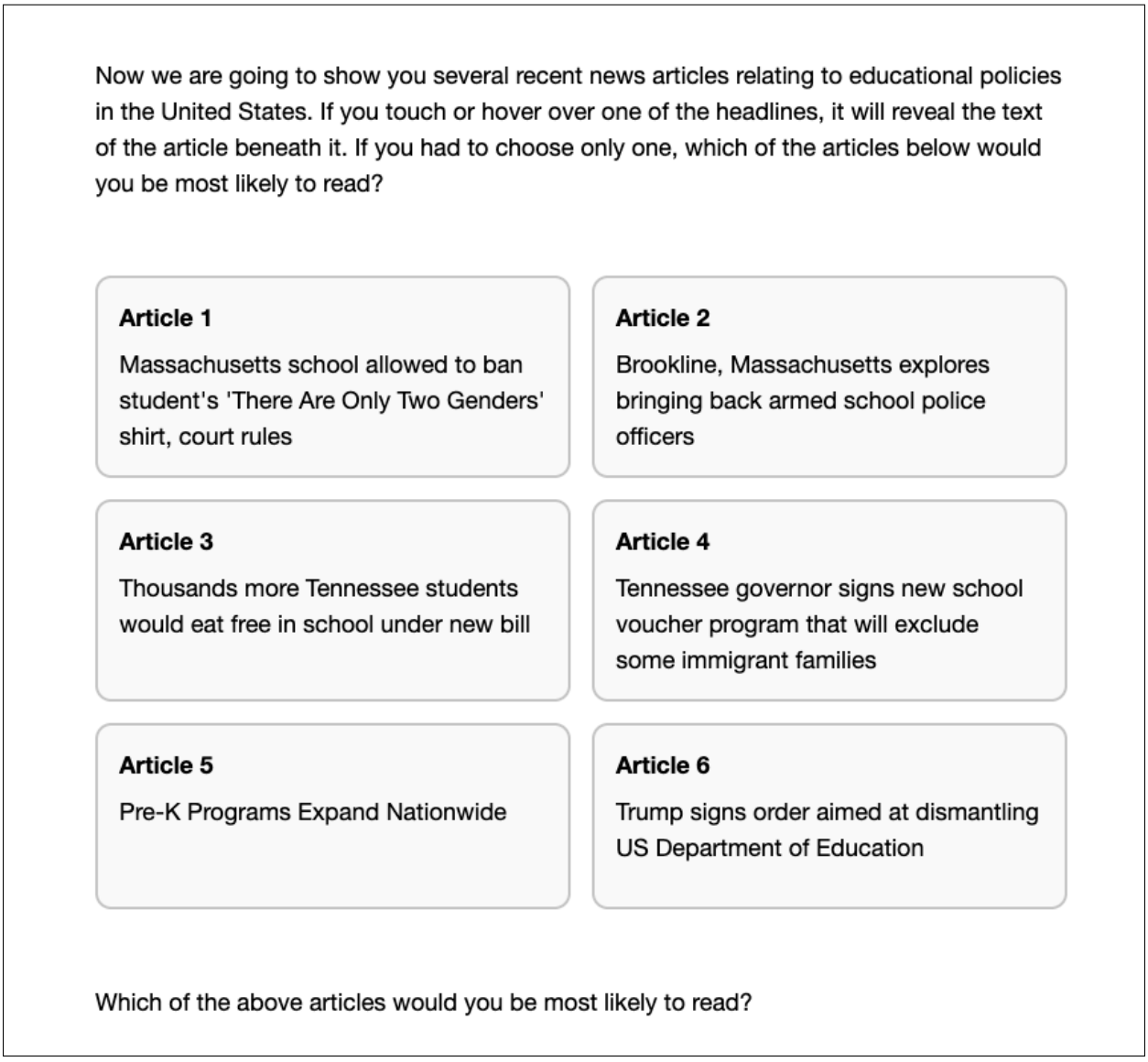


Figure A2—Screenshot of Decision Board Experiment, Massachusetts and Tennessee



C Additional Analyses

C.1 Polarization Analysis

Table A6: Political voyeurism and polarization.

	Partisan Polarization		Geographic Polarization	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Voyeurism Index	7.775***	5.936***	0.168	0.438
	(0.745)	(0.792)	(0.537)	(0.611)
Ideology: Very liberal		6.665***		-1.769
		(1.979)		(1.525)
Ideology: Liberal		-0.163		-4.270***
		(1.488)		(1.150)
Ideology: Moderate		-15.492***		-4.310***
		(1.431)		(1.104)
Ideology: Very conservative		11.998***		4.869**
		(2.579)		(1.995)
Age		0.573***		0.142***
		(0.037)		(0.029)
Educ: HS		-1.776		2.431**
		(1.599)		(1.234)
Educ: Post-grad		-2.009		0.281
		(1.846)		(1.427)
Educ: Some college		0.848		2.533**
		(1.360)		(1.050)
Gender: Male		-0.478		0.276
		(1.117)		(0.862)
Race: Black		3.044		-4.420*
		(3.287)		(2.548)
Race: Other		-0.056		-2.002
		(2.996)		(2.324)
Race: White		0.814		-3.934*
		(3.030)		(2.351)
News Index: Q2		0.818		-0.505
		(1.456)		(1.123)
News Index: Q3		1.899		-0.284
		(1.558)		(1.204)
News Index: Q4		-1.257		-0.720
		(1.646)		(1.270)
Constant	19.960***	1.871	29.956***	25.988***
	(2.780)	(4.414)	(2.003)	(3.417)
Num.Obs.	3425	3280	3466	3317
R2	0.031	0.174	0.000	0.025

Notes: This table presents the relationship between political voyeurism and polarization. The first two columns look at a measure of partisan polarization which is the absolute difference in 100-point feeling thermometers for Republicans and Democrats. The second two columsn look at a measure of geographic polarization which is the absolute difference in 100-point feeling thermometers for one's own state versus an average of the other three states in the sample. The control variables include ideology (5pt), age, gender, race, education, and an index of news consumption. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

C.2 Participation Analysis

Table A7: Political voyeurism and participation

	City council	Protest	Contact pol
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Voyeurism Index	0.148***	0.103***	0.155***
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Ideology: Very liberal	-0.018	0.304***	0.175***
	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.029)
Ideology: Liberal	-0.024	0.195***	0.062***
	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.022)
Ideology: Moderate	-0.018	0.048***	-0.036*
	(0.020)	(0.017)	(0.021)
Ideology: Very conservative	0.010	-0.013	-0.005
	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.038)
Age	0.000	-0.001***	0.004***
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Educ: HS	-0.138***	-0.120***	-0.221***
	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.024)
Educ: Post-grad	0.061**	-0.007	0.008
	(0.026)	(0.022)	(0.027)
Educ: Some college	-0.046**	-0.047***	-0.055***
	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.020)
Gender: Male	0.041**	0.021	0.007
	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.017)
Race: Black	0.176***	0.079**	0.136***
	(0.046)	(0.040)	(0.049)
Race: Other	0.227***	0.161***	0.241***
	(0.042)	(0.036)	(0.044)
Race: White	0.178***	0.150***	0.198***
	(0.043)	(0.037)	(0.045)
State: MA	0.114***	0.002	-0.021
	(0.032)	(0.027)	(0.033)
State: TN	-0.008	-0.054**	-0.007
	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.029)
State: TX	-0.026	-0.069***	-0.042**
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.017)
Constant	-0.402***	-0.274***	-0.510***
	(0.062)	(0.053)	(0.065)
Num.Obs.	3349	3350	3349
R2	0.107	0.174	0.166

Notes: This table presents the relationship between political voyeurism and participation along with a suite of control variables. The outcome is a binary indicator whether the respondent participated in the behavior in the last five years. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

C.3 Distance Analysis

Table A8: Political voyeurism and distance.

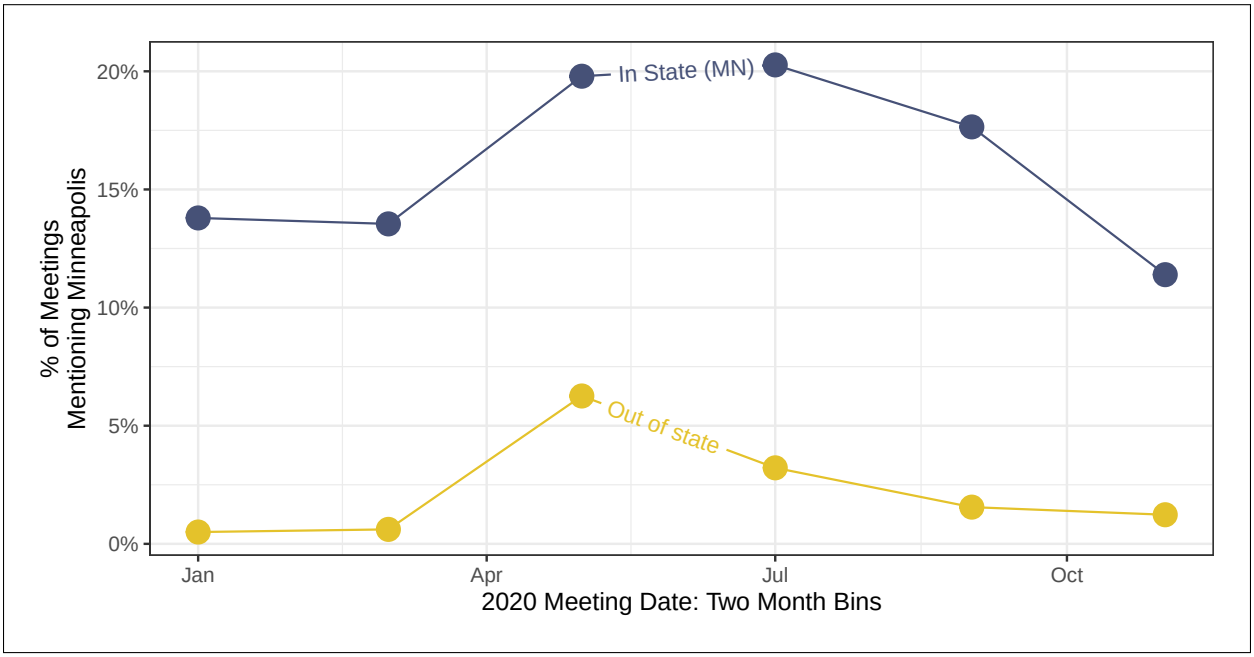
	Political Voyeurism Flow (logged)	
	(1)	(2)
Log distance	-0.75653***	-0.5273***
	(0.070782)	(0.104)
Abs. Dem. vote share diff.		2.8684
		(1.963)
Log distance × Abs. Dem. vote share diff.		-1.3992**
		(0.624)
Intercept	5.79433***	5.2740***
	(0.222)	(0.323)
Observations	2045	2045

Notes: This table presents the relationship between political voyeurism and geographic distance between dyadic state pairs. The outcome is a logged flow variable capturing the total count of voyeuristic news consumption across the state dyad. The second column interacts the dyadic geographic distance with an absolute vote share difference from the 2024 presidential election to capture ideological distance. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

C.4 LocalView Minneapolis Analysis

Below, Figure A3 provides descriptive evidence of voyeurism responding to highly local events. We track references to Minneapolis through 2020 among both other cities in Minnesota and also out of state cities. While out-of-state cities nearly never mention Minneapolis in early 2020, nearly 5% of city council meetings nationwide referenced Minneapolis following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. This trend gradually decreased throughout the remainder of 2020, until returning to baseline rates by the end of 2020. We see a similar pattern among other Minnesota cities, with a much higher base rate of mentions.

Figure A3—**References to Minneapolis spiked during mid-2020, indicating voyeurism**: Here, we show both in-state and out-of-state references to Minneapolis in our *LocalView* sample spiked in mid-2020, coinciding with the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests.



C.5 LocalView Regression Analysis

Below, Table A9 presents the results of a regression model that predicts the four measures of political voyeurism from the *LocalView* database using a series of city-level characteristics. We use the same four outcomes as in the main text—mentions of (1) other state capitals, (2) other states, (3) the largest city in other states, and a (4) "Boogeyman Index" of mentions of five commonly discussed urban centers: New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Seattle. We sum the total number of mentions across all meetings in each Census place, and normalize by the number of meetings in the *LocalView* dataset. Finally, we calculate the rank order for each city and measure in the data.

We then merge each city-level observation with a series of political, demographic, and economic covariates. First, we include the median household income according to the 2023 American Community Survey (5-year estimates). Second, we include the total population and calculate a racial/ethnic Herfindahl–Hirschman Index (HHI) using the population counts of five groups: White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, Asian non-Hispanic, Hispanic of any race, and Other. The HHI is bounded between 0 and 1, where 1 means a completely homogeneous place and lower values indicate more racial/ethnic diversity. Third, we calculate the average Democratic presidential two-party vote share from the 2020 and 2016 elec-

tions using McCartan et al. (2022). Fourth, we include two indicators that help predict discussions of other cities: whether the individual city is the largest city in the state, and whether the city is in the same state as one of the five cities in the Boogeyman Index (New York, California, Illinois, and Washington). Finally, we follow existing work on local meeting discussions by also controlling for the average length of local government meetings in each Census place, as longer meetings feature more discussions of all kinds (Holman, Johnson and Simko 2025).

Table A9: Predicting political voyeurism measures with city-level characteristics.

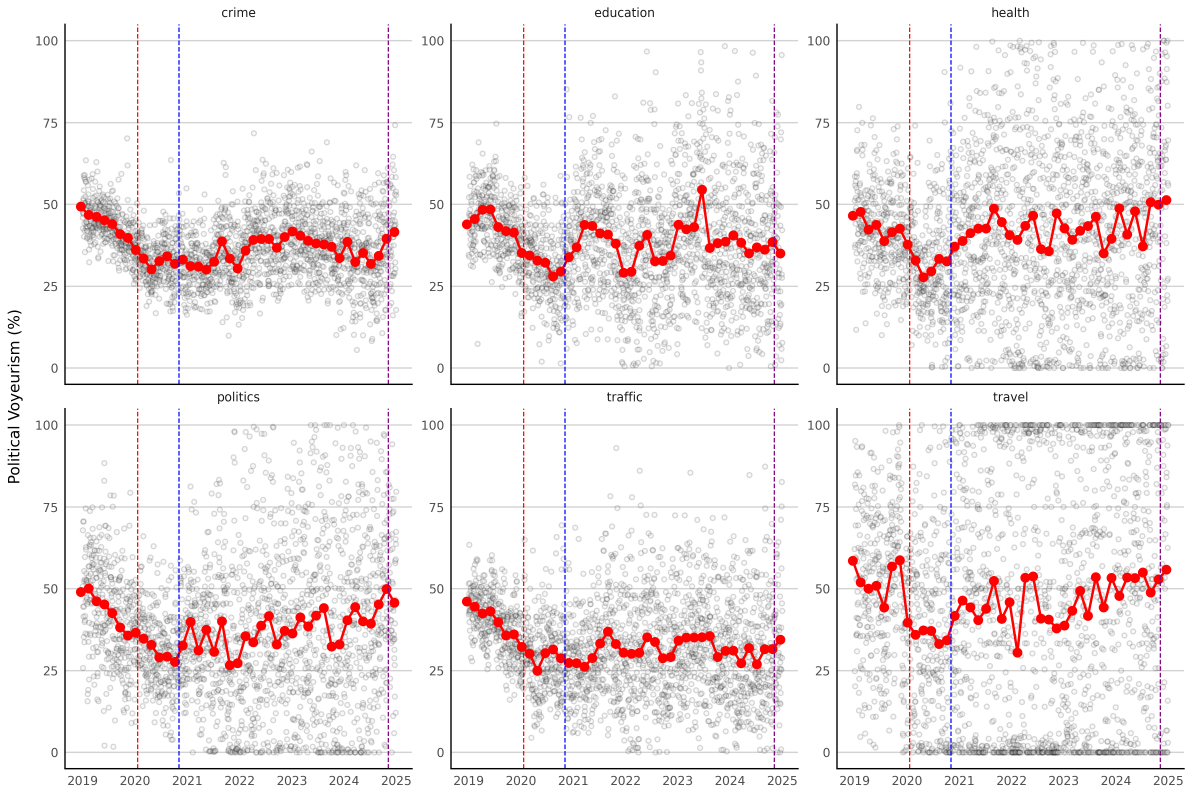
	Other State Capitals.	Other States	Other State Largest Cities	Boogeyman Index
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log(Median HH Inc.)	-49.055**	-61.178***	-55.009***	1.872
	(18.990)	(17.235)	(17.573)	(15.006)
Log(Total Population)	12.026**	11.765**	9.600*	11.188**
	(5.701)	(5.174)	(5.276)	(4.505)
Racial/Ethnic Diversity	-73.841	-72.904*	-143.661***	-63.419*
	(46.090)	(41.832)	(42.652)	(36.422)
Democratic Vote Share (16+20)	28.241	-9.688	40.197	82.313**
	(41.536)	(37.699)	(38.438)	(32.824)
Largest City in State	49.049	24.592	69.514	80.690**
	(46.251)	(41.978)	(42.801)	(36.549)
In Boogeyman State	-69.130***	-55.092***	-53.433***	163.018***
	(19.651)	(17.835)	(18.185)	(15.529)
Meeting Length (min.)	1.999***	2.670***	2.378***	2.060***
	(0.178)	(0.162)	(0.165)	(0.141)
Constant	633.276***	740.188***	731.012***	-3.747
	(217.455)	(197.366)	(201.235)	(171.842)
Num.Obs.	547	547	547	547
R2	0.260	0.390	0.366	0.513

Table A10: Predicting political voyeurism by geographic and ideological distance.

	Other State Capitals.	Other States	Other State Largest Cities	Boogeyman Index
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Democratic Vote Share (16+20)	5.977	-3.777	45.014	104.906***
	(44.262)	(40.244)	(41.035)	(34.933)
In Boogeyman State	-157.268**	-31.691	-34.361	252.461***
	(64.067)	(58.251)	(59.396)	(50.564)
Dem Share × Boogey State	152.733	-40.552	-33.051	-154.996*
	(105.680)	(96.087)	(97.977)	(83.407)
Constant	654.266***	734.615***	726.470***	-25.049
	(217.721)	(197.957)	(201.850)	(171.835)
Num.Obs.	547	547	547	547
R2	0.263	0.390	0.366	0.516

C.6 ComScore Topic Analysis

Figure A4—Web Browsing and Political Voyeurism, Over Time, by Topic



Note: Each panel shows the frequency of political voyeurism by different topics. Red dashed line is first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States (January 19, 2020). Blue dashed line is the 2020 US Presidential Election (November 3, 2020). Purple line is the 2024 Presidential Election (November 5, 2024). Solid red dots and lines are binned estimates of the incidence of political voyeurism by topic area, by 2-month intervals. Topic key words searched over the headline of the articles. Grey dots indicate daily averages.

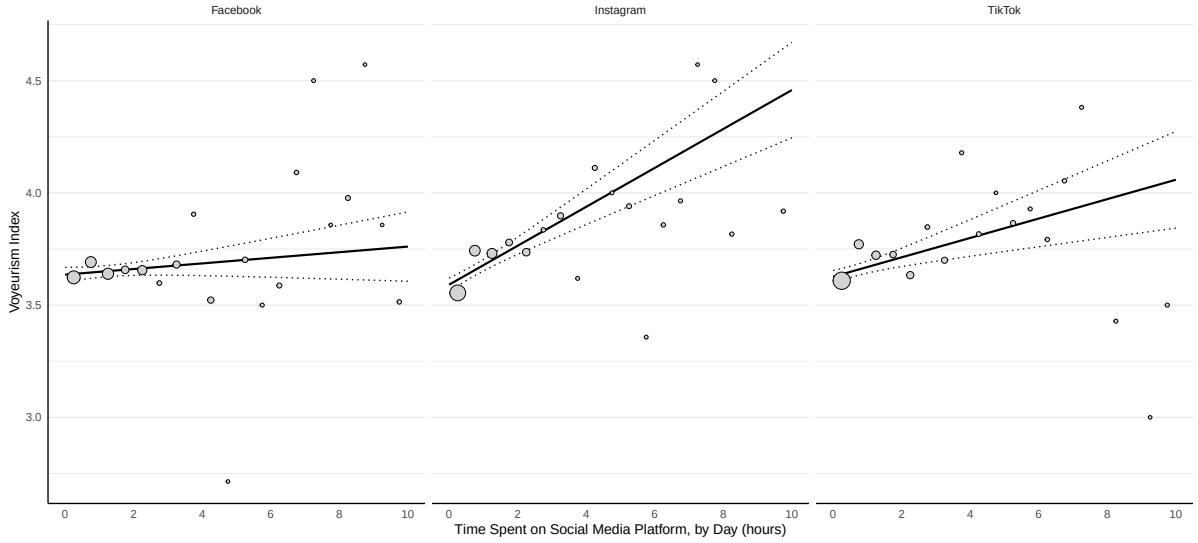
Table A11: Keywords used for topic model classification.

Topic	Keywords
crime	crime arrest police theft murder shooting robbery assault burglary homicide
covid	covid coronavirus pandemic vaccine omicron delta quarantine lockdown mask
education	school education teacher student university college class curriculum district
politics	election vote senate congress governor mayor politics campaign legislation
weather	weather storm rain snow hurricane tornado flood forecast temperature
sports	sports game team score player coach tournament match league season
business	business economy market stock company finance job employment industry
health	health hospital doctor nurse medical disease illness treatment mental
fire	fire wildfire blaze burn evacuate smoke
traffic	traffic accident crash road highway closure congestion

entertainment	entertainment movie music concert festival celebrity show theater
environment	environment climate pollution recycle conservation wildlife nature
technology	technology tech app software hardware internet cyber data ai robot
real estate	real estate housing property home apartment mortgage rent
travel	travel flight airport tourism hotel vacation trip
food	food restaurant dining recipe cooking grocery meal
community	community event festival parade volunteer charity

C.7 Social Media Analysis

Figure A5—Political Voyeurism Index, by Social Media Platform Usage



Note: The figure shows the relationship between self-reported daily hours spent on different social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) and our political voyeurism index. We include a naive line of best of fit with 95% confidence intervals. The dots represent binned averages, with the sizes scaled to the number of observations within each bin.