Supplementary Information: Measurement of Control Variables

Case Based Factors

A number of other case features beyond those that are the focus of our theory are likely to shape negativity in media coverage. Our modeling strategy accounts for these factors, which we discuss further here. We control for decisions that declare legislation unconstitutional or alter precedent since these may generate controversy in the legal community. Because of this, they are apt to be covered more negatively. Using the SCDB's "declarationUnconstitutional" indicator, we create a dummy variable to measure whether a case *Declared law unconstitutional*. It may be also the case that rulings that formally alter precedent generate more negative coverage, so we include a dummy variable for *Precedent alteration* using the relevant indicator from the SCDB. We also include a control for whether a case is a civil rights or liberties dispute, as opposed to economics and federalism cases, since these disputes are often more contentious, which should affect the manner in which they are covered. Our measure of *Civil rights/liberties case* is a dummy variable that codes all broad issue areas in the Supreme Court database from 1-6 as a "1", and 7-13 as "0."

A dispute's history may also impact the way in which it is covered by the press. Specifically, reversals of a lower court opinion might be interpreted as more controversial and, thus, more likely to garner negative coverage. We include a dummy variable, drawn from the SCDB, to evaluate whether a *Petitioner won* on appeal to the Supreme Court, indicating reversal of a lower court decision. Finally, we consider the possibility that the Court's landmark same sex marriage ruling, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, was covered uniquely (about 14% of the stories published concerning cases from the 2014 term focused on *Obergefell*). We include an *Obergefell* dummy variable to take this possibility into account.[1]

Media Factors

We anticipate that there will be a difference in the way in which "sensationalized" outlets and "sober" ones cover the Court (e.g., Johnston and Bartels 2010). More specifically, we see it as likely that sensational outlets will feature more negativity in their coverage. To account for this possibility, we take two steps. First, adapting the definition provided by Johnston and Bartels (2010), we create a *Sensational outlet* dummy variable that takes on a value of 1 for sensational news outlets and 0 for sober news outlets. For example, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, The Daily Beast,

[1] The other very "high profile" decision that term was the second decision involving the controversial Affordable Care Act, *King v. Burwell* (2015), which comprised 9% of our stories. When we controlled for this case as potentially producing a set of outlier observations, it had no discernable impact, possibly because the issue in question had come before the Court previously during the 2011 term (*National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* 2012).

NewsMax, and the Huffington Post are included as sensational outlets, while major newspapers, broadcast television networks, and public radio are rated as organizations that offer sober reporting.[2] Additionally, we considered the possibility that outlets that are known to be visual mediums (e.g., cable or network television news) will feature more negative coverage than their print counterparts, and we include a dummy variable to measure whether a news source is a *Television outlet* (0=no, 1=yes).

We also anticipate coverage negativity to be a product of ideological considerations. For instance, ideologically extreme (or polarized) outlets may be more inclined to use negative language in their coverage. This insight calls for a measure of news outlet ideology. We rely on ratings compiled by Mondo Times (mondotimes.com) for this purpose. Mondo Times is a company dedicated to the evaluation of media. It regularly publishes scores on the content, credibility, and political bias of news organizations that are aggregated from the ratings of registered users and have appeared in prior work on news slant (e.g., Ho and Quinn 2008).

We focus here on the political bias score, which rates each news outlet on a five-category measure ranging from conservative to liberal, with no bias as the middle category. Using this measure, we generate two variables. First, we generate an *Ideologically extreme outlet* variable. This takes on a value of 0 for outlets rated as unbiased, a value of 1 if an outlet is rated to "lean left" or "lean right," and a value of 2 if an outlet is seen as "liberal" or "conservative." Finally, we create dummy variables for whether outlets are *Liberal outlets* (0=no, 1=yes), which includes leaners, or *Unbiased outlets* (0=no, 1=yes), while outlets with a conservative (or leans conservative) bias serve as the referent category in our models.

[2] The Johnston and Bartels (2010) conceptualization of "sensational" media effects is based on survey respondents' preferences toward cable news and talk radio sources for political information. Since we focus exclusively on news, as opposed to opinion, online-only outlets are used in lieu of talk radio in the analysis. We posit that these online-only sources, much like cable news, exhibit disparate journalistic standards from their more "traditional" media counterparts.