

Political Accountability, Policy Responsiveness, and Capitol Coverage in the U.S.

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Abstract

News organizations across the country are downsizing and closing news bureaus assigned to cover national government and state capitols. What are the implications of declining attention to governments for political accountability and representation? How important are news bureaus? Two competing perspectives suggest different importance for mass media in general and capitol coverage in particular. Some theorists of democratic elitism assign little importance to news media and reporters, emphasizing political competition as a principal mechanism to ensure the proper functioning of democracy. Others, especially journalists and students of political communication, think of reporters and mass media indispensable. This paper investigates the role capitol bureaus play in public opinion-policy linkages and in helping the public hold officials accountable. I compare political outcomes in states with large press corps and large bureaus to those in states with smaller press corps and smaller bureau staffs. A robust community of well-staffed capitol bureaus facilitates and improves responsiveness and accountability.

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Most news about national and state politics flows through bureaus and reporters assigned to cover governments in Washington, D.C., and state capitols. However, a substantial number of newspapers and television stations are downsizing and eliminating these bureaus. Most onlookers, particularly in the Fourth Estate, see this as a problem. Is it? A competing understanding of politics in a complex democratic republic suggests that this is not particularly worrisome: The elitist conception of democracy suggests that the demise of news bureaus could have little effect on representation and the process of holding elected officials accountable. If journalists and their sympathizers are right, the downward spiral news media seem to be experiencing will have dire consequences for American democracy if it continues, while if political scientists and theorists who ascribe to the elitist model are correct, bureau closure and even newspaper failure, will not be terribly harmful to the republic.

I investigate the implications of the size and staffing of news bureaus for democratic functioning, beginning with an assessment of trends in the downsizing and closure of government news bureaus in Washington, D.C., and in state capitols. During the last seven years, newspaper bureaus in Washington and the state capitols have lost approximately 30 percent of the reporters who covered government activities in the early years of the decade. As with many other aspects of politics, cross-sectional analysis of the American states may teach us something about the implications of these downsizing trends. I draw on in-depth interviews with capitol bureau reporters and data on political outcomes in the states. Complementing previous research in this area (Cooper and Johnson 2005a, 2006, 2007), I find that the staffing of news bureaus has implications for government monitoring, policy responsiveness, and holding officials accountable. These findings suggest that basic democratic processes are possible in the absence

of well-staffed news bureaus and active communities of capitol correspondents but that they are improved with a more robust press corps.

Downsizing News Bureaus for State, National Government

News organizations have been trimming their staffs in Washington D.C. for more than a decade (e.g., Kimball 1994). According to data from the *News Media Yellow Book*, between 2004 and 2009, the number of newspaper-specific bureaus covering the federal government decreased 28 percent. In 2004, at least 93 newspapers maintained Washington bureaus, staffed by 496 reporters. In 2009, the *Yellow Book* identifies 67 newspaper with bureaus, staffed by 364 reporters. This represents a loss of 132 reporters covering the federal government for local newspapers, a 27 percent drop in the last five years. The number of reporters took a similar turn, down 27 percent.

Similar trends affect newswire services, with dramatic and high-profile bureau closures. For example, two years after winning the 2006 Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting for its coverage of the bribery scandal involving former U.S. Rep. Randy “Duke” Cunningham (R-CA), *The San Diego Union-Tribune/Copley News Service* closed its bureau in Washington, D.C., as part of a wave of bureau closures in 2008 (McQuaid 2008).

In addition, many of the newspapers that did not close its bureau reduced its staff. Figure 1 shows the change in the staff size of Washington, D.C., bureaus between 2004 and 2009. The horizontal axis is the number of reporters in the bureau in 2004. The vertical axis plots the difference in staff size reported by the *Yellow Book* in 2009. The majority of bureaus lost reporters. Across all bureaus in both years, even ones that closed and thus had zero reporters in 2009, the average Washington, D.C., bureau in 2004 was staffed by 5.0 reporters and had 3.7 reporters in 2009 ($t=4.63$, $p<.001$).

[Figure 1 about here]

This process is also underway in state capitols, starting from a relatively small investment in attention from news organizations (Layton and Walton 199, Lynch 2003, Simon 1973). The overall number of reporters, bureaus, and their average size is on the wane in state capitol press corps too. For example, in July 2007, Sacramento, California's *Capitol Weekly* reported on the departure of "at least nine Capitol journalists" bought out or laid off, "a direct consequence of business reversals that already have hit the home offices where staffs are being savaged" (Howard 2007). Many observers, including A.G. Block, director of the Public Affairs Journalism Program at University of California Center Sacramento, focuses on the total number of reporters in the capitol and their responsibilities as they watch their numbers decline: "There are still folks around, but there are fewer of them and they are stretched further. There are fewer eyes on the ball" (Howard 2007).

Periodically, the *American Journalism Review* conducts a census of state capitol press corps. Comparing across the 2003 (Layton and Dorroh 2003) and 2009 (Dorroh 2009), we see big losses in the statehouse press corps. Their study focused on bureaus for daily newspapers and newspaper chains. They do not include wire services (e.g., Associated Press), specialty publications targeted to insiders (e.g., *Capitol Weekly*), or bureaus for broadcast news outlets. In 2003, 524 reporters in 304 newspaper bureaus covered statehouses across the U.S. In 2009, the number of documented reporters shrank to 355 in 296 bureaus – a loss of 169 reporters and 8 bureaus across the state capitols. In 2003, the average number of reporters in each state capitol was 10.5 reporters. This reduced to 7.1 for the 2009 census ($t=5.94$, $p<.001$). The average state press corps contained 6.1 bureaus in 2003, down slightly to 5.9 in 2009 ($t=1.59$, $p<.1$, one-tailed)

However, perhaps the most important number is the average bureau size. While statehouse reporters can meaningfully constitute a collective capitol press corps (see Rosten,

1937, and Cater, 1959, for a discussion of this in Washington, D.C., and Shields and Dunwoody, 1986, for a state-level example), they work for institutionally distinct bureaus, with responsibilities to readers in communities and thus may not only be grouped as a single unit. Consequently, the problem of shrinking state capitol press corps, has at least three dimensions: the collective size of the press corps previously discussed, the loss of entire bureaus, and the reduction in the staff size of each particular bureau. Figure 2 shows the change in the staff size of average bureau in each statehouse between 2003 and 2009. The horizontal axis is the average number of reporters per bureau in a given state in 2003. The vertical axis plots the average change in staff size reported by Dorroh (2009). The vast majority of states are seeing their statehouse bureaus shrink: The average bureau at the state level shrank from 1.7 reporters in 2003 to 1.2 in 2009 ($t=7.27$, $p<.001$).

[Figure 2 about here]

In sum, news organizations are shedding reporters from the bureaus that cover state and national governments. Does this matter for the monitoring of government officials and the health of U.S. democracy? Reporters certainly think it does. In the next section, I revisit the question from the perspective of journalists, drawing on rich, in-depth interviews with state capitol reporters (Cooper and Johnson 2006).

State capitol bureau staffing: Reporter perspectives

How do the size of the press corps and the size of a reporter's bureau affect how she does her job? Media coverage of government entails both monitoring the actions of government officials and publishing stories about them. In order to learn more about how statehouse reporters do their job and how this might be influenced by the size of the press corps, I draw on interviews

from 43 reporters in six states conducted in 2006 and 2007: nine from Ohio, nine from Michigan, 11 from Illinois, seven from Indiana, three in Wyoming, and four in Maine (for a more detailed discussion of the selection of these states and participants, see Cooper and Johnson 2006). Three of these states have a relatively small number of daily newspaper bureaus (Michigan with five capitol bureaus, Maine with four, and Wyoming with two). Three have a larger number of bureaus (Indiana with eight; Ohio and Illinois each have 10).

The reporters interviewed expressed grave concerns about the total number of bureaus covering politics. However, size of each of those bureaus was more worrisome to the reporters (Cooper and Johnson 2006). A bureau is limited in the number of stories it can cover by its staff size. Having very small bureaus also reduces the likelihood that reporters will be able to develop investigative or enterprise stories, which tend to take more time, research, and expertise than daily spot news stories.

Small staffs, big concerns

The problem of one-person bureaus is straightforward: each news organization generally covers the major story or stories of the day. Even in a state with many bureaus, if each bureau has just one reporter, that reporter will cover the Governor's Press conference, for example. The variety of coverage depends on each news bureau having multiple reporters. A larger bureau can send one reporter to a major news conference, while the second and third reporters are free to work on other stories—thus providing for a wider variety of stories and a richer news environment. This is particularly dramatic in Indiana, which at the time had 11 bureaus, all but two of which had only one full-time person. Reporters in Indiana are concerned about missing stories. Reporter Y explains:

I think all of the one-person bureaus have to choose: “cover this” or “cover that.” “Cover this” or “cover that.” And I know I have to make those choices, and I

know the stuff I don't cover sometimes is at least as important. Or, there's decisions being made there that people aren't going to be held accountable for. And I would be happy that I knew someone was there, and I know sometimes there isn't.

However, this concern is not restricted to Indiana. Reporters in other states, including Reporter P from Illinois, expressed similar worries that the size of news bureaus affects the range of stories in the capitol that generate any attention:

There are a lot of one person bureaus where [Daily A] is doing the same things as [Daily B] is doing the same thing as [Daily C] and the bigger news organizations that theoretically could have more people specializing don't really invest the time and money in that. The [largest newspaper in the state] has two people here full-time, which, to me seems like an awfully small number for that size of a news organization. [Another large newspaper] has one. So I don't think there's enough people dividing up government so that the different pieces of government get proper attention.

Enterprise journalism

Small staff sizes also affect the energy and tenacity of reporters in pursuing investigative projects. In this vein, West (1994) finds that reporters from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, which maintained the largest state capitol bureau in Ohio at the time of her study, were more able to develop more specialized knowledge than reporters from other smaller bureaus. In many ways, it comes down to the amount of time reporters have to invest in their work.

Interviewer: What do you see as the principle obstacle constraining you guys investigating state government? What gets in the way of that?

Reporter W: Time—especially in a one person bureau—not so much money...It just takes so much effort sometimes to get the smallest detail or document that you just sort of lose your gusto sometimes. You start out and after two months of banging your head against the wall you're suddenly like "do I care about this issue anymore?" So frustration, but mostly time, and I think that's normal.

Interviewer: So if you had a bigger bureau, would that make some difference?

Reporter W: Oh sure. During the session there are a couple weeks that I have a second person come down to help. And that's invaluable...that really helps because we're following so many different bills at the same time and they sort of all crush together.

Conversations with state capitol reporters suggest that bureaus staffed by one reporter or fewer are producing a qualitatively different sort of coverage of state government than bureaus staffed by more than one full time reporter. Reporters staffing a one-person bureau are missing stories and not covering the ones they manage to write about in the depth they would like to; and the addition of even a part-time stringer would make a major difference in their view.

What role does capitol coverage play in a democracy?

While reporters certainly think that the size of bureaus and press corps matter, their thoughts on this question might be dominated by self-interest. It is plausible that the staffing of press corps matter little because in this period of decline, or in the absence of a well-developed mainstream media or press corps, alternative information venues emerge via the Internet and other new media. That said, these sources have not yet matured to the point of filling the news void experienced by readers and viewers (e.g., Wattenberg 2007). Press corps may also matter little for reasons informed by democratic theory. Many contemporary political scientists are influenced in their understanding of American politics by the so-called *elitist theory of democracy* (Walker 1966, Dahl 1966), often associated with Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942). While Schumpeter's goals are open to debate (e.g., Medearis 1997), ideas attributed to him have proven a powerful influence on contemporary political scientists.

Specifically, political and other social scientists learned many years ago that many, if not most, people living in democracies do not conform to the informational requirements of a

“classical” theory of democracy (Berelson, Lazasfeld, and McPhee 1954; Walker 1966). People lack factual knowledge of politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and make decisions about electoral choices on the basis of little information (Popkin 1991). Schumpeter suggests that methodological democracy forces elites to compete and churns the personnel of collective decision making and thus ensures proper democratic function. Fundamentally, democratic systems may not depend on decision-making of citizen, rather the competition of ambitious politicians, political parties, and other elite forces.

How does this relate to news bureaus? If elite competition really drives democratic practice, and people do not need to be well-informed in order to contribute to satisfactory democratic outcomes, the demise of capitol reporting may not have deleterious effects on democratic function, contra Kovach and other concerned onlookers. For example, political scientist Gary Jacobson (quoted by Dorroh 2008/2009) applies the lessons of the elitist theory of democracy in his reaction to the bureau closures, referring primarily to voters:

They’ll be missing details of who is on what committee. What are they doing? What is their status in Washington? Those are things they can’t get locally. But in this day and age that kind of detail isn’t important. What really matters is whether they have a “D” or an “R” after their names...because most of the information they use to make their decision is information from coverage of the campaign and from campaigns themselves. Their rivals make the news, and their arguments make the news. People are reasonably sophisticated.

In sum, Jacobson asserts the position that bureau closure matters little because the information these bureaus provide is not relevant to electoral decision making and that primarily partisan, elite competition will produce campaign information that is germane to voting.

Others assert a role for press attention even within an elitist model of democracy. For example, Baker reviews multiple theories of democracy, including the elitist model. He asserts a role for the press in exposing corruption or incompetence, which “can make important structural

contributions that are as great or greater than the constitutional and administrative devices” (2002: 324). Even here, Baker recognizes that, per the elitist conception of democracy, the press plays a secondary role to political and market competition.

Even among political scientists, there is strong push-back to the elitist conception of democracy (Walker 1966, Bachrach 1980). In addition, many contemporary media critics argue for the fundamental indispensability of a free press (Meyer 2004, Jones 2009). Drawing on well-established arguments (see Trenchard 1995[1721]), many still argue that in a democracy, people select the government and hold officials accountable. Without the independent information provided by the press a functioning, authentic democracy is impossible (Entman 2005). For example, Bill Kovach, chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists executive board, calls the current trend “a process tailor-made for an oligarchy and not a democracy... people in power are the only ones informed about what is happening and how to control it” (Dorroh 2008/2009: 22).

Further, the importance of news reporting extends beyond the publication of news stories and their potential impact on the public to include the mere presence of a monitoring press. In this vein, Molotch, Protes, and Gordon (1987) develop their “Muckraking Model” for understanding the influence of the news media in political and policy processes. Their main model charts five potential steps to connect the behavior of reporters and changes in public policies:

...muckrakers (*investigative journalists*) unearth evidence of a problem. The exposure (*publication*) leads to the mobilization of changed *public opinion*, which in turn is reflected in *policy initiatives* by legislators and administrators, followed by some sort of *policy consequence*. (p.29)

They provide a schematic for this model:



To affect politics and policy, reporters do not necessarily need to move through each of these five steps. A number of variations on their model involve “leaping impacts” (Molotch et al., 1987: 34). Policy makers may react to journalistic investigation itself, without reporters even writing a news story. The threat of publication can be enough to effect the behavior of public officials. Similarly, in developing his theory of lawmakers as controlled agents, Arnold (1993) emphasizes that the threat of exposure may be enough to make lawmakers anticipate public reactions to their behavior and actions.

In sum, the competing perspectives on the role of media – press corps in particular -- sets up a compelling set of empirical questions: Does the presence of a press corps promote proper democratic functioning? Does the reduction of press attention in Washington, D.C., and state capitols promise deleterious effects for American democracy? Would U.S. governments function better with stronger press corps?

Assessing the democratic correlates of a robust press corps

In order to assess these research questions, I turn to the variation provided by the American states. It may be several years before we can adequately assess the effects of contemporary trends in Washington, D.C., on the functioning of U.S. democracy. Similarly, it could be several years before the implications of trends at the state level manifest implications for the functioning of state political systems. However, cross-sectionally, the 50 states vary widely in the extent and size of their state capitol press corps. This cross-sectional variation allows me to begin to assess how press corps affect democratic politics. Figure 3 characterizes

some of this variation, showing the size of press corps in terms of the number of bureaus, on the vertical axis, as well as the average bureau size on the horizontal axis. We see a tremendous of heterogeneity with states having many small bureaus, as in Virginia and Connecticut; a small number of large bureaus as in Michigan and Georgia; as well as a small number of small bureaus (Kansas, Mississippi) and a relatively large number of well-staffed bureaus (California, Alabama).

[Figure 3 about here]

In terms of democratic process, I focus on two desirable characteristics of democratic systems: First, I examine the extent to which they feature a correspondence between what people want and what government provides, what I refer to as representation. In general, there is a correlation between public opinion and state public policy (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). Here, I investigate how state press corps characteristics modify this relationship. Specifically, I test the hypothesis that a robust state press corps strengthens relationship between public opinion and public policy. Second, I assess the extent to which press corps affect the accountability of elected officials – in the correspondence between judgments about the job performance of public officials and conditions in the state. Here, I focus on judgments about the job performance of governors and economic conditions, investigating the extent to which press corps affect the relationship between these two things.

I discuss the dependent variables for these analyses in greater detail below. However, because these analyses rely on a common set of independent variables – mediating variables – I focus on them first. I am primarily interested in the extent of the press corps at the state level. Importantly, I focus on staffing and size of press corps here, rather than patterns of publication – story counts or some other form of content analysis -- my rationale for this lies in the fact that, as

discussed above, the mere presence of a monitorial press and the threat of publication can influence the behavior of officials. I divide states into categories based on the size of their press corps and the average size of bureaus within these press corps. Table 1 presents similar information as Figure 3, distinguishing states with reference to each of these.

[Table 1 about here]

I characterize states with six or more state capitol bureaus as having large press corps and states with average bureau sizes greater than 1.5 reporters as having many reporters in each bureau, relatively speaking. I identify each state with both a big press corps and large average bureau size with a dichotomous indicator. I also tag each state with small press corps and small average bureaus with a dichotomous indicator. Across the analyses reported below, I use these two dichotomous variables to explore the role press corps size and extent moderate representation and accountability processes.

Representation

To investigate how press corps moderate the representation process, I begin with indicators of state-level public policy and public opinion and assume that in more representative political systems, there is a closer correspondence between what the public wants and what government does. In their seminal study of representation in the state, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) measure the general content of public policy in the states, using an index assessing the general liberal-conservative orientation of state public policy. Gray (2008:4) presents a similar measure using contemporary public policy outcomes, from 2005, summarizing state gun control laws, access to abortion, the scope of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, tax progressivity, and labor union regulation (i.e., right-to-work laws). She ranks each state on policy liberalism, with California and Hawaii as the states with the top two most liberal policy

outcomes and South Dakota and Wyoming as states with the most conservative public policies. Low numbers indicate states with more liberal policies, while high numbers (capped at 50) indicate states with more conservative policies.

I use two measures of public opinion in the American states. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) aggregate respondents from multiple administrations of the CBS/*New York Times* news surveys at the state level in order to create a measure of state ideological orientations. The original data for their study covered a period of survey response from the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, they frequently update the aggregate data and provide it via the Internet.¹ I aggregate their public opinion liberalism scores 1999-2003 (also following Gray 2008) as my first measure of public opinion in the states. Measuring state-level public opinion has proven controversial (Norrander 2007). So in order to cover additional bases with a multiple indicator approach, I also use a state policy mood indicator for 2003, provided by Berry, Ringquist, Fording and Hanson.² Berry, et al. (1998) construct their indicator by weighting interest group assessments of state officials as a function of partisan representation in states and the electoral success of partisan state lawmakers. Both of these indicators are scaled so that larger numbers indicate more liberal state electorates.

I model the policy indicator as a function of these indicators for public opinion in separate regressions shown on Table 2. Importantly, these models are designed to test for moderating effects associated with press corps attributes. The models include the dichotomous indicators for *Few, small bureaus* and *Many, large bureaus*, as well as interactions between each of these and the public opinion indicators. The relationship between opinion and policy should

¹ <http://php.indiana.edu/~wright1/>

² This data is also available for download: <http://www.uky.edu/~rford/stateideology.html>

be negative, because of the scaling of the data, with the opinion indicators array conservative on the left and liberal on the right and the ranking of policy outcomes in the opposite direction.

The models also include controls for the size of state populations and political competition. Include population to ensure that the bureau size and staffing indicators are not simply capturing the size of audiences or media markets.³ My control for competition is more complicated. Specifically, elite theorists may anticipate that competition performs the functions which democratizing media advocates assign to the press corps: Improving representation. Consequently, I include a control for the Ranney competition index computed using data from the early 2000s (Holbrook and La Raja 2008), as well as its interaction with public opinion in models reported in Tables 2 and 3.

[Table 2 about here]

The models in Table 2 suggest something more nuanced than my initial expectations. The table includes a model for competition alone and the potential role it plays in moderating the relationship between opinion and policy outputs, a model with just the press corps indicators and their interactions with public opinion, and a third model with both clusters of variables. I was motivated by the concern that small bureaus in small press corps might reduce representation. The models in columns 2 and three do not support that concern. The slope for regression line for opinion and policy considering the few, small bureau data points is not significantly different from the regression line for the rest of the states in the off-diagonal cells of Table 1. Instead, it appears that large bureaus and large press corps work together to improve patterns of representation. The regression line for these states in this cell is significantly different from the

³ The inferences informed by these models are substantively similar with and without this control.

other states'. Table 3 reports similar models to those in Table 2, but using the Berry et al. measure of policy mood as an indicator of public opinion.

[Table 3 about here]

Figures 4a, b, and c graph the estimated relationship between opinion and policy using the coefficients from the regression reported in the third column of Table 2. This model used the Erikson, Wright, and McIver measure of public opinion and controlled for potential moderating effects of political competition. The first figure graphs the relationship between opinion and policy rank in states with *Many, large bureaus*, as well as confidence intervals for each expected value calculated using Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg, and Kine 2001). The most conservative states are predicted to rank much lower on policy liberalism (around 50th) than the most liberal states, predicted to rank higher (around 1st), as we should expect. In places with *Few, small bureaus*, the model predicts that the most conservative state would rank around 40th on policy liberalism and the most liberal state population would rank about 10th on policy liberalism, suggesting that the representational linkage is attenuated in these states. The other states, with many, small bureaus or few, large bureaus, are associated with policy liberalism ranking at the ideological extremes that are similar to states with a few, small press bureaus. This data and these predicted values suggest that the potential effects of press corps staffing and size are of degree rather than kind. Even in states with a small number of relatively small bureaus, we see a correspondence between public opinion and public policy. However, this relationship is stronger in states with large press corps (six or more bureaus) and larger bureaus (more than 1.5 reporters on average).

[Figures 4a–c about here]

Accountability

To assess accountability, I begin with somewhat herculean assumptions about what accountability looks like. Specifically, I anticipate a relationship between the state of the economy and approval of the job performance of officials (Kelleher and Wolak 2007), the governor in particular. I assume that in states where voters hold the governor accountable for the performance of the economy we should see a relationship between gubernatorial approval and indicators of economic conditions. While it may not be entirely fair for voters to hold governors accountable for the performance of state economies (Hansen 1999), I assume that voters are likely to judge their performance worse when the economy is bad and better when the economy is good (but see Stein 1990), provided these voters are well informed about state government.

I use an indicator of gubernatorial job approval from 2004, collected by Lindquist (2007). She has data for 43 governors. It is a five-point scale with one indicating less than 30 percent positive job approval; two indicating 30-39 percent approval; three, 40-49 percent approval; four, 50-59 percent; and 5 more than 60 percent positive job approval. I use the percentage of a state's families living in poverty in 2003 as my economic conditions indicator, anticipating a lag in the effects of economic conditions on assessments of the governor. In Table 4, column 1, I use an ordered probit specification to model gubernatorial approval as a function of percentage of families in poverty, as well as interactions between poverty and the press corps size indicators, and a control for state population size. Here, I expect a negative relationship between the percentage of families in poverty and gubernatorial approval, and expect press corps attributes – the size and number of bureaus – to modify that relationship.

[Table 4 about here]

The effects here are admittedly more modest than the robust findings in Tables 2 and 3. Large, well-staffed bureaus strengthen the relationship between economic conditions and gubernatorial approval ($p < .10$). In the second column of Table 4, I include additional control variables. Three of the states for whom Lindquist has approval data elected new governors in 2003 who then took office in 2004 (California, Kentucky, and Louisiana). I would not expect these new governors to necessarily experience negative evaluations for economic conditions experienced under a previous governor. Also in 2004, New Jersey Gov. Jim McGreevey resigned in scandal over an extra-marital affair. Consequently, I add a dichotomous indicator for states with new governors and for New Jersey.

With these additional controls included in the model in column 2, we see a stronger relationship between economic conditions and gubernatorial ratings in states large, well-staffed bureaus. Still, the presence of a robust press corps strengthens this relationship between economic conditions and job approval. In column 3, I estimate the same relationships, entirely dropping California, Kentucky, Louisiana, and New Jersey. Using coefficients from this third model, I estimate the predicted gubernatorial ratings for states with large, well staffed bureaus, states with smaller, poorly staffed bureaus, and all other states. In Figure 5 I graph the predicted probability of each of these kinds of states being in the highest category of gubernatorial approval (greater than 60%) conditioned on the status of the economy: relatively low family poverty (5%) and high poverty (17%). This illustrates that we see that the presence of large, well-staffed press corps at the state level seems to make it much more likely that the governor will have high approval in states with low poverty ($p = 0.8$), compared to governors in states with poorly developed press corps ($p = .3$) or other states, i.e., those with a mix of attributes – many reporters but few bureaus or many small bureaus ($p = .5$). In all three conditions, very high

family poverty makes it very unlikely that a governor will enjoy a high approval rating, suggesting that visibility via the press corps might make it easier for voters to reward officials in good times, while all are able to punish officials in bad economic times.

[Figure 5 about here]

Discussion

This paper draws the broad outlines of a theoretical and empirical argument: First, we have seen a dramatic decrease in the coverage of government in the U.S. during the last seven years, and coverage of a particular kind – local in-person, bureau-based newspaper reporting on the activities of state and national government has decreased. The overall press corps, the number of bureaus, and the average size of those bureaus have shrunk as newspapers have retreated, closed, or consolidated. Second, smart observers have good reasons both to think that this will have small and large effects on the functioning of governments and the quality of democratic processes in the U.S. Third, we can use cross-sectional variation observed in the American states to begin to assess the implications of shrinking press corps by comparing political outcomes in states with large, well-staffed bureaus; those with small, poorly staffed bureaus, and the rest of the states.

I find that press corps size and extent do matter, but rather than find that press corps with a small number of small bureaus inhibit representation and accountability, I find that larger press corps with more reporters promote representation and accountability. Further, these findings suggest that the kinds of linkages we tend to want from democracies are possible without developed press corps, but stronger with more media presence in the statehouse. This may suggest that, as press corps whither, the quality of representation and holding officials

accountable will suffer, but perhaps not spiral out of control as the U.S. transitions from its old mainstream media forms to the new media products and institutions replacing them.

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Table 1. Average state capitol bureau size and bureau counts, 2003

	Small bureaus (1.5 reporters or fewer on average)	Large bureaus (more than 1.5 reporters on average)
Small press corps (5 or fewer bureaus)	Alaska, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming	Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington
Large press corps (6 or more bureaus)	Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Vermont	Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin

Source: Layton and Dorroh (2003)

Table 2. Public opinion-policy linkage moderated by bureau number and size, EWM measure

	β (robust s.e.)	β (robust s.e.)	β (robust s.e.)
State opinion liberalism, EWM measure	-1.62 (1.30)	-1.20*** (0.21)	-0.99 (1.57)
Political competition	-7.03 (23.17)		-5.91 (23.02)
Competition \times Opinion liberalism	0.35 (1.51)		-0.19 (1.75)
Few bureaus, small		0.71 (4.73)	1.07 (4.81)
Many bureaus, large		14.20** (5.04)	14.43** (5.20)
Few, small bureaus \times Opinion liberalism		-0.05 (0.35)	-0.10 (0.42)
Many, large bureaus \times Opinion liberalism		-0.88** (0.30)	-0.95** (0.34)
State population	-0.24 (0.24)	-0.33 (0.21)	-0.30 (0.23)
Constant	48.52* (19.98)	41.16*** (3.63)	45.80* (20.13)
	N = 48	N = 48	N = 48
	$F_{4, 43} = 22.87^{***}$	$F_{6, 41} = 27.67^{***}$	$F_{8, 39} = 18.08^{***}$
	$R^2 = 0.55$	$R^2 = 0.59$	$R^2 = 0.59$

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, †p<.10.

Table 3. Public opinion-policy linkage moderated by bureau number/size, Berry et al. measure

	β (robust s.e.)	β (robust s.e.)	β (robust s.e.)
State policy mood, Berry et al. measure	-0.24 (1.19)	-0.53*** (0.13)	0.85 (1.29)
Political competition	-21.04 (73.58)		19.79 (75.08)
Competition \times Policy mood	-0.40 (1.44)		-1.55 (1.56)
Few bureaus, small		-1.79 (12.99)	4.80 (13.50)
Many bureaus, large		30.35* (12.76)	40.54** (10.91)
Few, small bureaus \times Policy mood		0.08 (0.25)	-0.09 (0.26)
Many, large bureaus \times Policy mood		-0.54* (0.25)	-0.84** (0.23)
State population	-0.17 (0.28)	-0.29 (0.28)	-0.06 (0.27)
Constant	72.82 (61.19)	51.56*** (7.10)	32.62 (60.62)
	N = 50	N = 50	N = 50
	$F_{4,45} = 8.75***$	$F_{6,43} = 8.5***$	$F_{8,41} = 10.07***$
	$R^2 = 0.47$	$R^2 = 0.46$	$R^2 = 0.54$

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, †p<.10.

Table 4. Economic basis of 2004 gubernatorial evaluations moderated by bureau number, size

	Excludes 4 states		
	β (robust s.e.)	β (robust s.e.)	β (robust s.e.)
Percentage of families in poverty, 2003	0.00 (0.08)	-0.17* (0.08)	-0.18* (0.09)
Few bureaus, small	1.77 (1.32)	0.53 (1.41)	0.32 (1.41)
Many bureaus, large	2.24 (1.60)	2.58† (1.46)	2.30 (1.43)
Few bureaus, small × Poverty	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.04 (0.14)	-0.01 (0.14)
Many bureaus, large × Poverty	-0.31† (0.17)	-0.30† (0.16)	-0.27† (0.15)
State population, thousands	0.05 (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)
New governors, 2004	–	2.22** (0.78)	–
New Jersey	–	-2.66*** (0.58)	–
	N = 43 $\chi^2_{6 \text{ d.f.}} = 8.97$ pseudo $R^2 = 0.06$	N = 43 $\chi^2_{8 \text{ d.f.}} = 44.03***$ pseudo $R^2 = 0.13$	N = 39 $\chi^2_{6 \text{ d.f.}} = 18.05**$ pseudo $R^2 = 0.10$

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, †p<.10. Cut points not shown

Figure 1. Change in Washington D.C. bureau staffing, 2004-2009

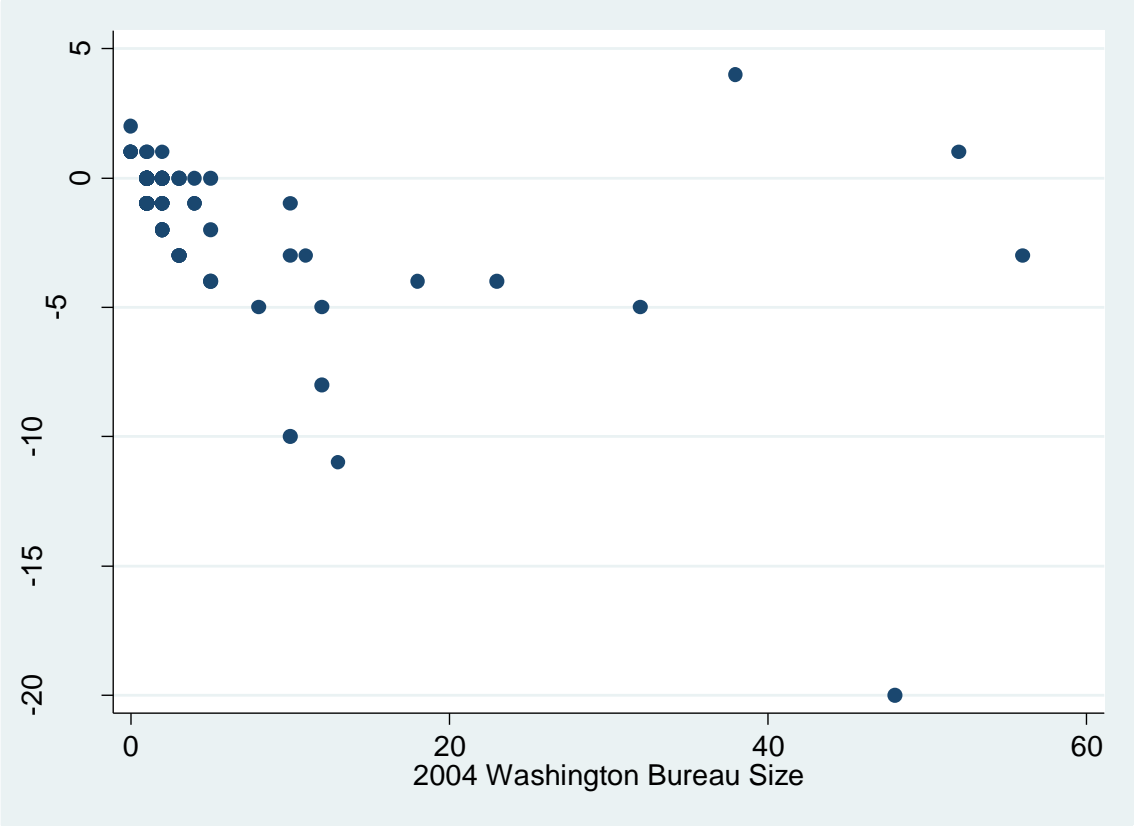


Figure 2. Change in state capitol bureau staffing, 2003-2009

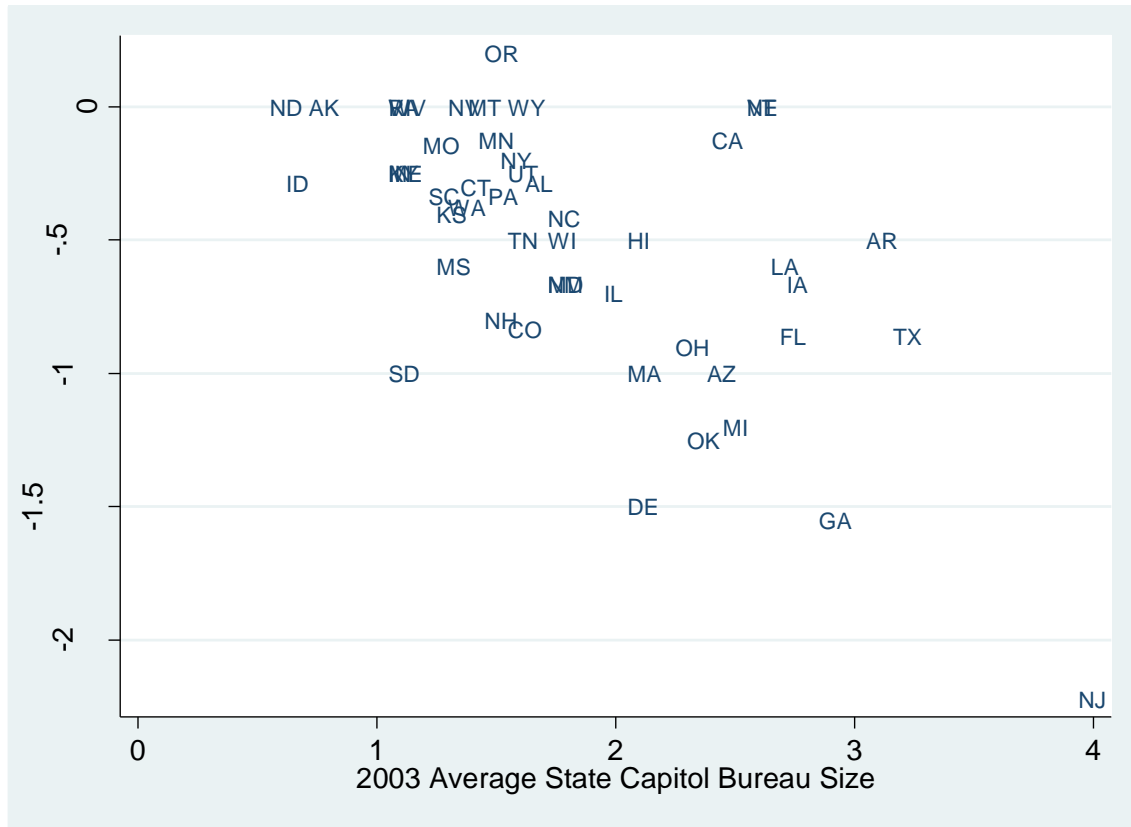


Figure 3. Average state capitol bureau size and bureau counts, 2003

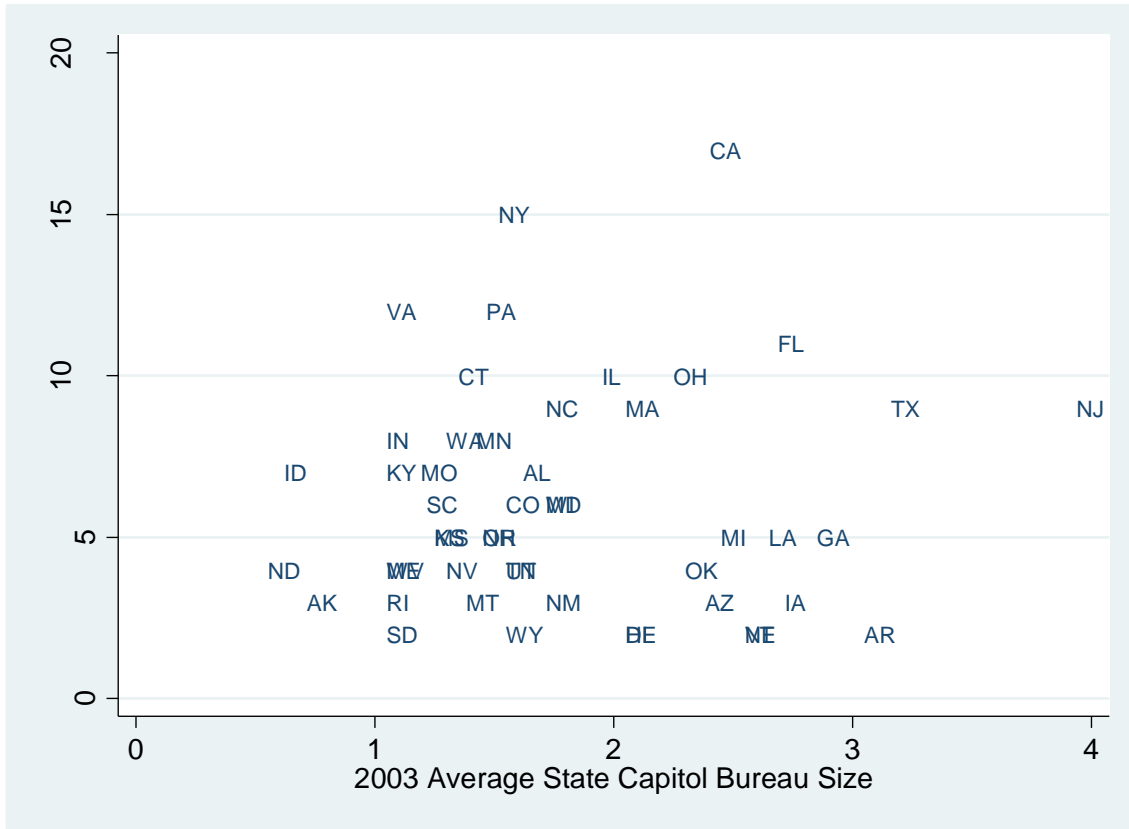
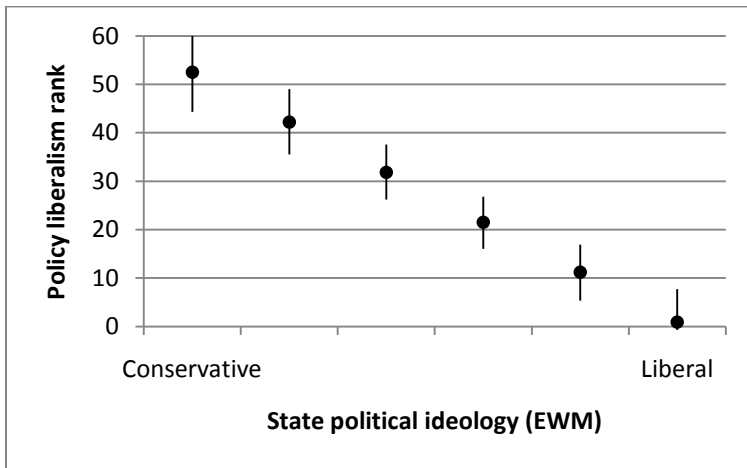
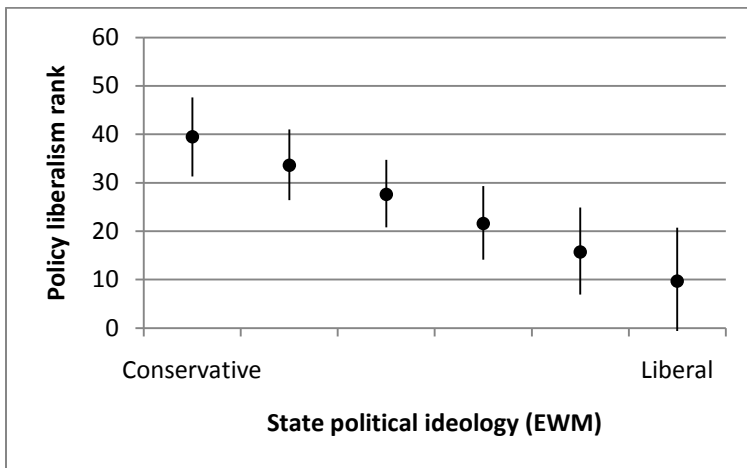


Figure 4. Public opinion-policy linkage moderated by bureau number and size, EWM measure

a. States with many, large bureaus



b. States with few, small bureaus



c. All other states

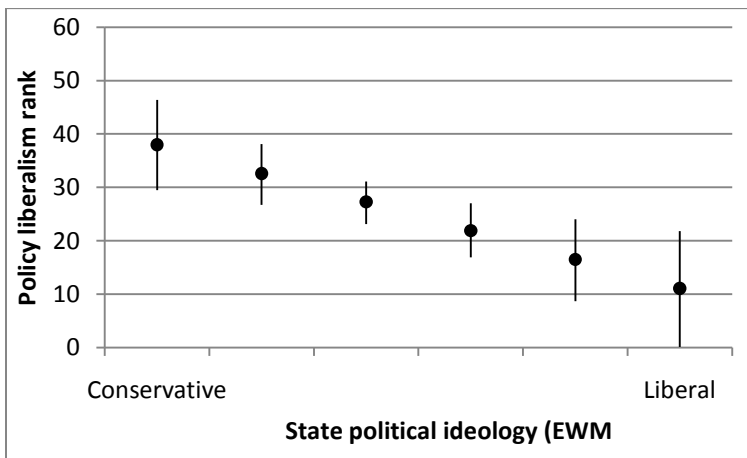


Figure 5. Probability of strongest gubernatorial approval level, by poverty level, bureau number and size

