Politics and the Press Corps: Reporters, State Legislative Institutions, and Context

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Abstract

How do differences in institutional and social contexts affect press-government relations and political journalism in the U.S.? Despite a widespread recognition that journalists and the stories they write affect the public agenda, policy options, and the frames through which people understand public policy, we know precious little about how political reporters do their jobs or patterns of press/government relations. Even with recent interest in press relations in Congress, little research has compared political reporters' behavior across institutional and social contexts. In this paper, we examine the practice of American statehouse journalism. We focus on the presence or absence of term limits for lawmakers, the level of professionalization of state legislative bodies, and the overall size of the press corps. Using the comparative method, we carefully selected four state capitals: Columbus, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Lansing, Michigan; and Springfield, Illinois. We find that the attributes of legislative and press corps organization influence how journalists cover the story of government.

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> State government coverage is about as important as any other level of government coverage. I understand that the federal government does a lot of stuff. They spend a lot of our tax money and I know that local governments are the ones that pave the roads and plow the streets and all that. I just feel like things go on at the state level that are just vitally important and I just don't understand why more editors don't care, and that's a problem.
>
> – An Indiana capitol reporter

1. Introduction

Just like newspaper editors, scholars of media politics in the U.S. have focused almost exclusively on the national politics. Reporters are frequently treated as not part of the political system but separate from it. We think that this is a mistake. Reporters are just like any other political actor—we anticipate that their behavior is predictably and systematically by the institutional contexts in which they serve.

A more productive approach to studying media politics would consciously place reporters in their political contexts and considers how the organization of politics and government affects newsgathering. As Squire and Hamm (2004) point out, studies of national politics are inherently limited because the institutional context does not vary at any given cross-section. The institutional and cultural variation in American states, however, provides analytical leverage to help determine influences on the politics of newsgathering. This project focuses on political journalism and the relationships between reporters and officials, using U.S. statehouses as the primary research setting.

Journalists wield tremendous power in American politics. They set the agenda for the issues that citizens believe are important and frame the tone of media coverage. Capitol bureau reporters are a primary link between citizens and their government. Despite their importance, we know little about how reporters view their role in the political system, how they collect information, or what factors cause these practices and priorities to vary. Indeed, the dynamics of

the press-government relationship in the states is virtually unknown (Clucas 2003; Lynch 2003). We are interested in two questions about the practice of political journalism in the American states. First, we are interested in how reporters do their jobs. What is the routine? What are the goals of reporters? Second, we ask how reporters and sources interact and develop a sufficient level of trust in each other to facilitate linkages between audiences and policy makers, concentrating on the question of whether institutions affect their behavior.

2. Reporters and sources

A chain of classics stretching back at least to Leo C. Rosten's (1939) *The Washington Correspondents* inform what we know about the politics of American governmental reporting. This research generally concludes that reporters and sources engage in a complicated dance where each needs something from the other. Reporters need political officials because they are inherently newsworthy and they must be covered. As Tim Cook explains, "To standardize an inherently unpredictable process, reporters routinely turn to people in positions of authority within an institution, thus not only ensuring a steady flow of copy, but also helping guard against charges of bias or incompleteness by covering politicians who peers, superiors, and audience generally agree upon as newsworthy." (1989, 8). Government officials, on the other hand, need the news media because making news has become a constructive part of the policymaking process at the national (Cook 1998; Kedrowski 1996) and state (Cooper 2003) levels. Kaniss (1991) warns us that local officials differ greatly in their ability to use the media, but this does not stop many from trying to affect policy through the media. The lesson is clear: politicians of all stripes at all levels of government use the media to address issues, further policy agendas, and enhance career ambitions.

Were the interaction between reporters and their sources a single-shot game, the incentive would be obvious—both would attempt to extract the maximum benefit from the other, regardless of the effect on their relationship. Reporter-source relationships, however, are better understood as an iterated game where each side has repeated opportunities to deal with each other. Reporters, then, must treat sources well, not burn their sources, and work to cultivate relationships. Likewise, sources are not well-served by lying to reporters or holding back too much information. What is left is a "negotiation of newsworthiness" where reporters and politicians constantly negotiate and renegotiate the process by which news is made (Cook 1989).

Existing research on reporter-source interactions has established that individual reporter routine and source relations may vary depending on beat structures (Sigal 1973), characteristics of both reporter (Hess 1981) and politicians (Kedrowski 1997), but virtually no research has examined the effects of institutional structures on reporter-source interaction. It would be easy to blame this on the hyper-focus on national politics, but even when state media have been studied, they have either been the focus of single-state case studies (Dunn 1969) or aggregated and treated as if there is a single "national" state press corps (Beyle, Lynch, and Ostdiek 1993), rather than 50 state press corps. In sum, because there is no institutional variation in national politics and other researchers have largely ignored institutional differences across states, social scientists do not know much about how the organization of American politics affects reporters and their newsgathering activities.

We are interested in the coverage of politics in the mainstream news media as well as the routines, practices, and contacts that inform political news. We anticipate that some elements of newsgathering will be consistent across contexts. For example, much research suggests a set of underlying news values (e.g., a commitment to objectivity) are shared by reporters (Tuchman

1972, Weaver and Wilhoit 1996). However, we also expect to see previously uncharted variation across individual characteristics, such as what kinds of people reporters identify as important sources, as well as collective properties of press corps, such as their range of interests. These should vary with institutional context as the costs and benefits of gathering different types of information change and the underlying story of state government varies.

3. Considering state-level variation

We rely on the institutional and social variation in American states to provide analytical leverage for the study of the politics of newsgathering. We anticipate that three state-level institutional and contextual factors will have effects on reporter-source interactions: legislative professionalism, term limits, and statehouse press corps size. We consider each of these below.

Legislative Professionalization

One of the most important changes in state politics has been the increasing professionalization of state legislatures. Professional legislatures are those with greater capacity to operate—ones with larger salaries, longer session length and more staff members (King 2000). Because of this greater capacity, legislators in professional legislatures are likely to do more things—they perform more casework (Freeman and Richardson 1996; Jewell 1982), listen to their constituents more (Maestas 2003), are more effective in the budget process (Kousser 2005), and use the media more often (Cooper 2002). We expect professionalism to affect not only legislators, but also reporters.

When the legislature is in session, we expect that journalists will have less time for enterprise stories, and other investigative journalism, because their time and resources will be spent covering the daily grind—the day to day happenings of the legislature—bill signings, bill

introduction, committee meetings, etc. It is only when the legislature is not in session that reporters will have the time to pursue stories that take more time, energy and resources. As a result, professional legislatures will receive less investigative coverage than non-professional legislatures.

Term limits

The one iron-clad assumption in legislative research has been that legislators are motivated by re-election (Mayhew 1974). Although this assumption holds for members of Congress, and in many state legislatures, 15 states have term limits, allowing political scientists to explore what happens when the re-election motive is altered or removed (Farmer, Rausch and Green 2003; Kousser 2005; Sarbaugh-Thompson, Thompson, and Elder 2005). Early work suggests that term limits—a movement designed to bring legislators closer to the people—may actually do the opposite. Carey, Niemi, Powell, and Moncreif (2006) argue that term limits have led to a Burkean shift where legislators actually can ignore constituents more easily. Other scholars suggest that term limits reduce expertise in the legislature and increase power of un-elected political actors, such as lobbyists and staffers (Moncrief and Thompson 2001). In sum, term limits have radically changed the way legislators perform their jobs. Unfortunately there is comparatively less work examining the effects of term limits on the other political actors who surround the Capital.

Reporters reacted to the passage and implementation of term limits as major political events in states (Farmer and Bigelow 2003). In addition to providing a set of interesting news stories, term limits should also have changed the way legislators interact with reporters. Specifically, we expect that in term limited states, legislators will be less valuable sources as they are not as known to their constituents and thus less newsworthy. In addition, legislators in

term limited states will not have the expertise on many issues, and thus will have less of an informational advantage in the negotiation of newsworthiness.

Statehouse press corps size

In addition to institutional variables focused on the legislature, we expect at least one reporter-centered institutional variable should matter—the number and distribution of reporters in the state. As Layton and Walton (1998, 7) suggest, “Coverage of state government is in steep decline. In capital press rooms around the country, there are more and more empty desks and silent phones. Bureaus are shrinking, reporters are younger and less experienced, stories get less space and poorer play, and all too frequently editors just don’t care.” By 2003, there was “a modest increase in state Capitol staffing at a few papers this year over last year. But, overall, the resources newspapers devote to statehouse news remain low by recent historical standards” (Layton and Dorroh 2003, 45).

Variation in the number of monitoring agents varies by capital. It stands to reason that as the numbers of journalists vary, the relationship between journalists and politicians should vary. Just as species evolve when challenged, and interest group behavior is highly dependent on the number of interest groups in a particular state (Gray and Lowery 2000), the density of journalists should change the competitive environment of the negotiation of newsworthiness. We anticipate that press corps size introduces different incentives and disincentives of coverage and alters the behavior of both reporters and legislators. In previous work, we argue that the population density of reporters affects how they interact with lobbyists (Cooper, Nownes, and Johnson N.d.), as well as how adversarial they are towards the legislature (Cooper and Johnson 2005). We also expect that the size of the statehouse press corps should be important in determining other aspects of reporter-legislative relations. West hints at this when she suggests that reporters

from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (the largest bureau) in Ohio are more able to specialize than reporters from other smaller bureaus (1994, 182).

4. Methods and Procedures

We use the comparative method to study relationships between reporters and officials in U.S. state capitols. Following Beamer (2002), we rely on in-depth elite interviewing across four states to explore the influence of state legislative professionalization, legislative term limits, and the number of bureaus in the state capitol on newsgathering activities and reporter-official relations. We conducted interviews with 36 statehouse reporters and 22 press information officers across the four states. Although we focus here on interviews with reporters, in the future we hope to analyze these discussions as well to learn more about political communication at the state level and perceptions of these PIOs about their relationships with reporters.

We developed a typology characterizing states. We use professionalization indicators provided by the National Council of State Legislatures (2004), which describes legislatures as full-time, part-time or somewhere in between.[1] We also drew our list of term-limited and non-term limited states from the National Council of State Legislatures (2005). Finally, the *American Journalism Review* published a census of statehouse bureaus in 2003. We divide the states at the median number of bureaus, 5, and consider states with 5 or fewer bureaus to have "few bureaus" and those with 6 or more to have "many bureaus." This yields a 12-cell typology of states, shown in Table 1. From this, we chose four states (Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan) that would

[1] The National Council of State Legislatures divides states into five categories, ranging from full-time to part-time. We simplify this into three groups, counting the middle group as "hybrid" states, with the two more extreme categories on each side of the hybrid group to represent full-time or part-time legislatures, respectively.

provide us variation across each of these three dimensions, while holding region constant. Those states are shown in bold.

[Table 1 about here]

To develop our sample within each state, we started with the census of statehouse newspaper reporters and bureaus developed by Layton and Dorroh. We do not include television or radio journalism because they are generally considered less important in state politics and less attentive to state capitols (Lynch 2003; West 1994). We used the Internet to locate names of all active reporters within each bureau, searching newspaper websites and Lexis-Nexis for current by-lines and, in some cases, the membership rolls of legislative press associations (e.g. the Ohio Legislative Correspondents Association). With this population of print reporters, we assigned ourselves at random to interviewees, drew up call sheets with contact information, and began scheduling interviews between one week and two days before we arrived in that state capital.[2]

We conducted the field work July 25-August 5, 2005. We spent at least two days conducting interviews in each state capital.[3] Each day we scheduled between one and seven interviews per investigator. We explained to each participant that we were studying the relationship between reporters in state capitols and their sources of information about state government. Participants were promised confidentiality and all provided their informed consent. We allowed the reporters to meet wherever they were comfortable. We met with the majority of our informants in their offices, although some preferred to meet in other places in the capital, some in coffee shops and others in restaurants in the capital complex. We digitally recorded the

[2] We developed a similar procedure for executive, legislative and agency public information officers, concentrating on PIOs for Governors, Secretaries of State, Lieutenant Governors, legislative leaders and state agencies responsible for education, health, and transportation policy.

[3] In a few state capitals, we scheduled a few morning interviews on a third day, depending on our travel schedule.

vast majority of interviews.[4] Following the completion of the field work, we had the interviews professionally transcribed and work from these transcripts here.

Research settings

The Ohio state legislature is dominated by the Republican Party, where the Republicans hold a 2:1 advantage in the Senate. A term limited state, Ohio is considered the 7th most professional legislature in the country—about 32% as professional as the U.S. Congress. Ohio state legislators make $53,707 per year and have the 20th most staff of any state in the country (Squire and Hamm 2005). According to Layton and Dorroh (2003), the Ohio press corps has 22 reporters, spread across 10 bureaus, with the largest being the *Columbus Dispatch*.

The umbrella organization that credentials reporters is the Ohio Legislative Correspondents Association (OCLA). Although the OCLA has an office in the state capitol that is open to all members, reporters generally have their primary offices outside of the state capitol building, as do many members of the House of Representatives. The *Columbus Dispatch*, for example, has its main offices across the street from the capitol, making for relatively easy access to the capitol, but other bureaus are dispersed around the capitol complex, some with easier access to the statehouse than others. The OLCA office is a two-room suite – an entry way for staff, documents, and references, and a large room with about a dozen cubicles for news outlets. A regular lunch crowd meets everyday around a table in the OLCA office. Outside of the traditional news outlets, Ohio also houses two influential daily news journals (Gongwer News Service *Ohio Report* and *The Hannah Report*), which perform a similar function to what *the Hill* or *Roll Call* do for the political community in Washington, D.C.

[4] Two of 36 reporters we spoke with asked that we not record their interview.

We met with 9 reporters and 6 PIOs in Ohio. The major story dominating the headlines in July 2005 was Coingate: A gubernatorial campaign contributor invested money from the Bureau of Worker's Compensation in rare coins, many of which went missing. This ultimately resulted in several misdemeanor convictions for Governor Taft. Many of our informants were working on Coingate stories and often discussed the topic with us.

Michigan is also considered a highly professional state legislature, the second most professional—about 52% as professional as Congress (Squire and Hamm 2004). Michigan legislators make $77,400 per year and have more staff resources than their counterparts in Ohio. Both houses of the legislature are controlled by the Republicans—although by a much closer margin than in Ohio. The major differences between Michigan and Ohio are in the number of bureaus and the presence of term-limits. According to the Layton and Dorroh census, Michigan has 12 reporters spread across five bureaus and enacted term-limits in 1992. We met with 9 reporters and 5 PIOs. Michigan was the second state we visited on our trip and the major story of the day involved Governor Granholm's visit to Japan.

The Michigan press corps has virtually no permanent presence in the capitol building itself. The building is a three-story, high-ceilinged capitol. In an earlier layout, the building was divided into six stories. At that time, the building contained a large press room and ample space for lawmakers and state officials. Today, a historically appropriate renovation has returned the building to its three-story layout. There is no office space for state House members, let alone reporters. There is a small room for the distribution of press releases in the basement of the North Capitol Annex. Similar to Ohio, the Michigan Press Corps also includes Gongwer News Service *Michigan Report* and the Michigan Information and Research Service (MIRS), read by reporters, legislators, aides, and others in the capital city.

Both houses of the Illinois State Legislature are controlled by the Democratic Party. The Illinois legislature is a professional legislature (the 11th most professional, according to Squire and Hamm) and does not have term limits. Illinois legislators make $55,788 per year and have more staff than Ohio but fewer than Michigan.

According to Layton and Dorroh, there are 19 reporters and 10 bureaus in Illinois. They have offices in the Illinois Press Room, located within the state capitol. The name, Press Room, is misleading, because this is actually a suite of 15-20 fairly large offices housing statehouse bureaus. Two-thirds to three-quarters of the press corps earned an M.A. in Public Affairs Reporting at the University of Illinois at Springfield and entered the press corps via internships during that program. The networking within this program, along with the small size of Springfield produces a fairly intimate environment where reporters view themselves as part of the same time.

During our trip to Illinois, reporters were extremely concerned about what they perceived as Governor Blagojevich attempts to by-pass the state legislative press corps. In what many perceived as bringing Washington politics to Springfield, Blagojevich had been recently moving many offices to Chicago and had consolidated the PIOs into an office of information management. We met with 11 reporters and 4 PIOs during our time in Springfield.

The final state we visited was Indiana—a non-term limited, citizen legislature. Indiana legislators have far fewer staff than their counterparts in Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan. Their compensation is also considerably lower ($11,600/year). Both houses of the Indiana legislature are controlled by Republicans, where they hold a small (52-48) advantage in the House, and a slightly larger (32-26) majority in the Senate.

The Indiana press corps has 8 bureaus and 8 full-time reporters. The press corps is housed in the "shacks" a basement block of large cubicles. Virtually every news organization's "shack" has no ceiling, making for little privacy. The "shacks" are located close to a partisan legislative staff office, making for a more relaxed relationship between legislative staff and reporters. The major stories during our visit were the new governor's recent transition and on-going negotiations over the implementation of Daylight Savings Time in the state. We met with 7 reporters and 7 PIOs while we were in Indianapolis.

5. Findings

In analyzing these conversations, we start with our assessment of several similarities we observed among reporters across the states we visited. These similarities primarily revolve around their goals and aspirations, as well as fundamental elements of their work like how they build relationships and choose sources. Then, we shift our attention to the differences across contexts that we observe, examining the influence of legislative session length on the attention of reporters, how term limits appears to disrupt reporter-source relations, and the role press corps density plays in limiting the scope of capitol news.

Informing our assumptions about the goals of reporters

Reporters are sincere and strategic actors. We find them to be single-minded information gatherers who want to learn as much as they can about politics, the behavior, and thinking of the people they cover, given their constraints. These constraints include access and the sheer, but variable, volume of communication they must sift through on a daily basis. They consume great amounts of information about policy and palace intrigue while working in the halls of power, then strategically release a portion of what they learn to the public. They are motivated by the

day-to-day need to write stories for editors and readers, but are also genuinely interested in politics. For example, Reporter A from Michigan described how his colleagues seek more information than they need in the short-term: "You'll see an awful lot of people at press conferences and stuff, and you may not see the story. But people are following things."

Our qualification to this insight is that reporters also engage in satisficing behavior: They want to learn enough to write a news story for the short-term. However, they are also gossipers who want to know much about capitol politics out of sheer interest. Seeking some of this information is motivated by wanting to be in the know, but a great deal could inform future stories. As Reporter B from Ohio commented:

> I do compulsively track just about every other issue because otherwise, I wouldn't be up to speed on them. An example of that was I was following every development of the coin scandal and on Taft. Not necessarily writing about it, but reading everything I could so when I did do that story, I think it was more thoughtful maybe.

Reporters are generally interested in informing, entertaining and protecting the interests of their readers.[5] As Reporter C from Indiana said, "the whole reason I'm here is to make sure I write about things that are going to directly affect my local constituents." Reporter D who covers state politics for a capital city newspaper explained the dynamic between informing and entertaining local readers:

> We are also a community paper. Our bread and butter is getting people [here] to feel connected to what we write about and so it's kind of an every person thing. But basically, I'm writing for [our city's] readers. I'm not writing for politicians…We used to talk about writing for readers and leaders, now we mostly talk about writing for readers.

Reporter E from Illinois referenced "the water cooler effect," rhetorically asking about a potential story, "Is this going to get people talking?" Cultivating the interests of readers is by no

[5] Elsewhere we show that reporters are largely representative of their readers (Cooper and Johnson 2006).

means just to serve them with relevant information. Reporter F from Illinois added, "Unless I can find a reader-friendly way to tell it, no one is going to read it, because no one understands what it's about. I'd rather do the stories that people will find interesting, because first and foremost we have to sell newspapers."

In addition to informing and entertaining, a numbers of reporters mentioned their potential role in protecting the public from political misdeed and policy mistakes. Consider this comment from Reporter G about his news story selection criteria:

> It's just a complicated matrix, but the main thing is that it has an impact on people's lives and sometimes that impact is political…sometimes we'll just do a story because somebody's been wronged and we want to bring it to light, or something's not working well and it's hurting people, and we need to bring that to light.

Reporters' general political curiosity, story-specific satisficing, and interest in serving the public we observe are complimented by their strategic disclosure of information. They release to editors and readers enough information to produce interesting news stories, but not enough to frighten away current and potential sources of information. Many reporters told us stories about the need to build trust with officials and others in the state capitols, through repeated interaction and a willingness to listen, but not write about everything they know. A particularly good example comes from Reporter H from llinois:

> So when you're first dealing with them they're guarded maybe a little bit, kind of treating everybody the same. But how you kind of, it seems to me how you kind of get in there, repeatedly talk to them, show them that you're not looking to burn them you're just looking to get as much information as you can. You're willing, if they give you something, you don't necessarily need to use it but that may turn into something later and you're willing to say, "Okay, this isn't super private information, here's what I know. You trade back and forth and that's how things start to build so when it comes time you really need them you can get a hold of them and it pays off.

It was important to a number of reporters that their sources feel as though they had been treated fairly. Reporter I from Indiana told us, “99% of the time it’s more important to me that someone not feel screwed than to get something in the paper. There aren’t that many things that are so important that you have to get them in the paper even if it costs you some relationship.” This strategic release of information may be even more important in state capitols than it is in Washington, D.C. In state capitals, the number of actors is limited, and personal relationships take on heightened importance. Whereas a reporter covering national politics may alienate a source with little effect, a reporter covering state politics operates in a much smaller world – a world where trust is more important and lapses in trustworthiness have greater consequences. Reporters J and K in Indiana told us[6]:

> Reporter J: If you’re a Washington bureau reporter with all the members of Congress, all the members of Senate, all the members of the administration, those are largely anonymous. You may interview some of those people once and never again. It’s easy to burn somebody there. We have to deal with these people time after time after time. The same people. So I think there’s much more a, I think we try harder to be fair probably.
>
> Reporter K: We are much more, to some extent I think we are much more accountable. We have to look these people in the eye every day and we have to continue to work with them.
>
> Reporter J: It doesn’t mean being easy on them, but it does mean making sure you got it right, that you’re fair, that you tell both sides.
>
> Reporter K: And it’s a very small world. You get a bad reputation, you write an unfair story and word travels fast. And they have long memories, these people.

[6] This is the only time we interviewed two reporters simultaneously.

Getting to know people as sources

Reporters do not necessarily enter their jobs already possessing relationships with potential sources. Relationships with sources, just like any other relationship, must be cultivated over time. Reporter L from Indiana explained the importance of contact and familiarity in building sources:

> I spend a lot of time on the floor of both chambers, even though we have sound piped into our shack…But I've got a laptop and I just find that it's important to be visible a lot on the floor because it actually makes lawmakers, I think, trust you more, like you more, be more open with you because they see your face. And they see that you think what they're doing is important.

Indeed, time is a necessary (but probably not sufficient) condition of cultivating relationships, as Reporter M from Illinois suggests:

> It's been a matter of being here. You know it takes, some people have a personality where they can pretty much walk up and start being friends with people and I'm more reserved so I think with me it's more of, "Hey, we've seen each other around a long time, we might as well acknowledge each other's existence and maybe get to know each other a little."

A reporter in Indiana explained that while time is important, the process of cultivating sources is not always easy. Indeed, legislators and other sources may put reporters through a hazing process where they constantly test reporters before they will trust them enough to release information. The payoff for sticking with the relationship for reporters may be huge.

> Reporter N: There used to be a guy that was at the [omitted] committee for 30 years. And he was so smart. I mean he was brilliant. They called him "The Silver Fox" because he was a silver-haired guy and he was always three steps ahead of everybody. He was incredibly powerful, incredibly insightful. And after he got to like you, and that took some working with him, but if he did get to like you, and I got this guy to really like me, he would tell you what he was going to do before hand, a couple days before hand. He would tell you what he was thinking. He would tell you he was doing something just to jack around with a couple of lobbyists he didn't like. I mean he would make them go through hoops that they

would go through without them knowing that he had no plans whatsoever to give them what they wanted. And he would tell me he was doing that and wouldn't tell them…

Interviewer: *Can you tell me more about how you built that relationship over time?*

Reporter N: What he would do with every young reporter is he would—he would [test] you—upon one of your initial interviews with him. He would say something rude to you or mislead you. And it was a very strange thing. And he did it—I can't remember how he did it to me. He misled me on something and I didn't call him on it and I didn't say anything to him about it. But, people told me it was extremely important to know the guy. So, I went to all his committee meetings. And he had a big ego. And I would go up to him and ask him questions afterwards and I just spent an incredible amount of time. I would talk to him almost every day whether I was going to write anything about it or not. And I don't think I ever set him on the record or off the record, but there were clearly times when he knew that it wasn't on the record. And when it just got more comfortable that way.

Oftentimes, it is interest in the same issue that can help reporters and sources develop a good relationship. Reporter M in Illinois reporter said, "Usually it gets spurred by some issue…The way I get to know people is mostly through dealing with them on issues that we're both interested in."

Reporters share many similar characteristics across the states we visited. As the previous sections suggests, we were impressed with their similar backgrounds, routines, and the continuity in much of the practice of state house journalism. However, reporters are political actors whose behavior is shaped by institutions across contexts. Below, we explore how reporter behavior is affected by legislative professionalization, term limits and the size of statehouse press corps. We elaborate on the variation we saw across these aspects of state institutions and contexts.

How does legislative professionalism affect reporters?

Statehouse reporters are affected by the presence of the legislature. The demands and availability of legislative news are almost completely preoccupying for most of the reporters we interviewed. This preoccupation with legislative activity amounts to a distraction, albeit an important one, from other topics—statewide elected officials, agencies, policy implementation, and other key issues, unless they deal directly with the legislature. Things that might be worth scrutiny outside of the legislative session are usually not investigated while lawmakers are in town. However, as we discovered, this preoccupation with the legislature is not felt uniformly across states. We first establish the effect of the presence of the legislature on news bureau priorities, and then elaborate the effect of differences between professional and citizen lawmakers—differences we think are primarily due to session length.

Reporter N in Illinois reporter explains the long hours and obsession with legislative process while the legislature is in session.

> I don't take lunch or I eat lunch at my desk. I don't get to go out of the building for lunch. If they work until eight o'clock, we are here until 10:00 because that is sort of the way it goes…I have two different lives, one where I don't see my wife or my family very much and work long hours and the other where I am relatively normal…Sure as in any state capital, it's feast or famine. When it's a feast, there is so much to do you can't possibly do it all.

Similarly, Reporter A from Michigan told us that covering a legislative session strains the capacities of reporters and their bureaus. Indeed, it seems that political actors other than legislators are virtually ignored during the legislative session.

> A fair amount of—probably 75 to 80% of the day's activities is governed by what the legislature is going to be doing during that time. So, it requires that at least two of the people in our staff focus, and usually three, focus on what the legislature's doing in session, what the legislature's doing in committee…When the legislature's in session, we are pretty well dominated by covering the legislature.

When the legislature adjourns or recesses, the pace of life in the capitol—even news bureaus—slows considerably, priorities change, as does the focus of news reporting. According to Reporter O from Michigan, "It's a lot busier when the legislature is in. It seems like the town sort of takes on a collective sigh and ratchets down a little bit when they're gone." This change of pace and priorities, often during summer months, allows statehouse bureaus to invest more resources and attention to stories outside of legislative politics. Reporter P from Illinois recounts: "we're doing more enterprise, we're getting out of the area and doing some feature reporting, that kind of thing." Indeed, reporters covering professional and non-professional legislatures seem to be similarly preoccupied with the legislature when they are in session. Reporter C in (relatively unprofessional) Indiana tells us:

> Legislative sessions are crazy. I do two or three stories a day, sometimes four. There is no time for eating. There is not time for anything. You come in at eight, you leave whenever you get done: seven, eight, nine, whatever. Summers provide us a much better opportunity, off time in general, a much better opportunity to do some enterprise projects, some research projects.

We think he main relevant difference between professionalized and citizen legislatures is the length of the session. Given the distraction of covering the legislature while it is in session, professionalized legislatures are generally more preoccupying than citizen legislatures because they meet for longer periods of time. While the legislature is in session, reporters tend to focus on the daily grind of committee meetings, floor actions, and negotiations, while out of session, they are able to investigate issues outside of the legislature and focus on broader stories, which reporters call "projects" or "enterprise" pieces. According to Reporter Q from Michigan: "Our focus is much more on breaking stories when the legislature is in session. When it isn't in session, we tend to look at more investigative, big picture pieces." The implications of this are clear: reporters are more easily able to exercise their oversight function on the executive and

judicial branches in less professional legislatures than in professional legislatures where the legislative session dominates news for the vast majority of the year. Alternatively, in states with full-time legislative sessions, there will be a greater reliance on "burglar alarm" coverage (Zaller 2003) than "police patrols" (Bennett 2003) for coverage of state agencies and other officials.

How are reporters affected by legislative term limits?

The effects of term limits on legislatures are well-documented. The effects on the media, however, are less understood. Indeed, a recent essay on the future of term limit research makes no mention of the media (Sarbaugh-Thompson and Thompson 2004). Theory would suggest, however, that term limits should affect reporters as well as legislators. Term limits provide discontinuity in the work of reporters. We find that these effects are seen in three ways: the social arrangements and "capital culture," professional relationships between reporters and officials, and the distribution of political and policy expertise.

Good old days

The state capital culture has changed across the country (Rosenthal 1998) and these changes have had important changes for newsgathering. West (1994, 1985) quotes a reporter who speaks of the "old days": "The rules of the game were different. You hung around your source, you drank with your source, you kibitzed with your source, and you would get stories that way." Although this way of life has faded in almost all states, we find it is most evident in term-limited states, where the constantly changing cast of characters has reduced what was formerly an active social scene into a much more independent, less cliquish culture. Consider, for example, this story from Reporter R in Ohio.

> There used to be two places downtown where politicians and reporters hung out and neither one of them are around. There was an old hotel—that was even

> before I was here—across the street from the statehouse and it was a hangout for decades of politicos and reporters in the bar. Then there was one next to us and that was torn down, The Galleria, and it was also a bar with a hangout where all the politicians and the reporters went, but there really isn't anyplace like that.

Reporter S from Michigan connects this directly to term limits,

> …partly because of term limits, there's less long lasting, there are fewer long-lasting relationships between the media and the elected officials and so there's a little more distrust, a little more wariness, so naturally in that kind of a situation, there'd be less camaraderie at a bar, between the two sides, after work

Finding sources: Relationship building

As we suggested earlier, reporters build source relationships over time. With term limits, however, long-lasting relationships with legislators are rendered unlikely. Consequently, relationship building is quite difficult in term-limited states. As Reporter R in Ohio said,

> If you don't go to the legislature for a while and you have to show up, you go "Who are these people?" I mean literally, I've gone in—there have been times I've gone in for maybe a year to cover a full house session or a full senate session and I go "I don't know half of these people." …I think it limits your ability to develop any really long-term relationships with a lot of people. The former Speaker of the House was speaker for I don't know how many years, but he was in office for 25 years and everyone of us knew him and we knew how to go to him and how to talk to him and he'd either tell us or he wouldn't, but we knew who it was. Now it's a new speaker that's only been in for a couple of years and he'll be term limited out in another couple of years and then—it just makes it harder in a lot of ways to get any continuity.

Reporter D from Michigan agreed, "It makes relationships significantly harder." Reporter T from Ohio added, "you don't have the familiarity with people that you might have once had."

The consequences of less stable professional relationships and less rapport can be easily seen in how reporters do their jobs. Consider this example from Reporter R in Ohio:

> Sometimes I think you'd be more inclined to not make that extra call if it means calling up a legislator you've never dealt with. "Well I've talked to them once or twice but I don't really know him that well." And are they going to tell me anything? They barely know who I am, let alone tell me did they take a campaign contribution from somebody they shouldn't have…Again, I understand the need

> for term limits, but I think it does hamper our ability to an extent to know people and feel comfortable with them and for them to feel comfortable with us, because it works both ways.

Finding sources: Identifying expertise

Clearly term limits change the capital culture and reduce the length of relationships. They also change the way reporters identify and cultivate expertise, as well as the particular actors they seek for information. After all, reporters consider expertise a key component in what makes a good source. Reporter M from Illinois told us, "One of the main things is knowledge of the process and knowledge of the issue because sometimes issues stick around for years before anything really develops and so it helps to have somebody who knows a bit of the history." Reporter S from Michigan expands on the importance of knowing who to contact for expertise:

> There used to be folks that no matter what the issue is, I knew I could get them on the phone and I knew who knew what about what…I knew that if there were an issue that came up I knew exactly who to call, who would know. It wasn't always necessarily the committee chair for that issue. Now, it's a little harder to tell. You don't have the same long-lasting relationships with people.

Whereas, in non-term limited states, legislators are often the most reliable, knowledgeable sources; expertise shifts to staff members and lobbyists when term-limits are enacted. The result is a shift over the power of information from elected to unelected officials in term limited states, as Reporter I from Michigan told us:

> It used to be in the olden days you knew there were certain people—if you had a mental health question, you knew that was the guy you went and talked to, because he just knew everything about it. He knew the budget. This guy was corrections. You had these experts and they'd been there for 20-25 years, you don't have that today. You don't have the same level of expertise. So the staff often outlives the lawmakers and the lobbyists for certain do. And I think some of the lobbyists are good information sources. They hear a lot of things. So yeah, definitely staff and lobbyists. You'd prefer to talk to a lawmaker. But oftentimes that's just not the case. They may not have the expertise that other people have.

Reporter W from Ohio tells a similar story:

> A couple of people whom I've known for a long time are sort of the unofficial government: the trade groups and the lobbyists, and the people who were tax commissioners before. So they're still here, that's sort of a good group of people to have to call on, because given term limits, they have a lot more history than many of the legislators, but you have to realize that each of them has a point of view. But if you want to find out what happened in 1984, or 1994 even, lot of the legislators won't know. And some of them; I think one of the functions, one of the results of term limits, is just anecdotally, is that there's a lack of historical perspective on some of the legislators.

This is not to suggest that reporters in term-limited states never talk to legislators. Instead, they tend go to lobbyists and staffers to investigate the substance of the story, but turn to legislators for quotes to fill in the story. As Reporter U from Michigan says, "I don't go to lawmakers for background hardly at all. It would be more like their staff. Or, I hate to use the word, lobbyists…I just generally get opinions from lawmakers. I don't go to them for background at all." Being "on background" allows a source to speak to the history of an issue, event, or personality, without requiring the information be attributed to her. Not relying on legislators as sources for background is primarily due to their lack of expertise. This leads to increased dependence on lobbyists and staff for information in term-limited states such as Michigan, where we spoke to Reporter Q:

> Reporter Q: When you have state lawmakers who have been around three years, who are in charge of the budget, I mean they need a lot of input…
>
> Interviewer: D*o you guys go to lobbyists more for sources now that the politicians themselves might not know as much about a certain issue?*
>
> Reporter Q: "Not necessarily because ultimately you need a source in the legislature. You need to quote someone from the legislature. So lobbyists might—I think they mostly educate the lawmkers and direct and send out signals to the press."

Interviewer: *So they're working through the lawmakers who they try to work through you?*

Reporter Q: "Right."

The situation in term-limited states contrasts dramatically with how things work in states without term limits, where lawmakers retain their cachet as information sources as well as quotable newsmakers. Reporter W from Indiana, a non-term limited state, tells us:

> Lawmakers are good sources. A lot of PIOs. Not lobbyists very often. Lobbyists during session are helpful to understand specific issues, give statistics, things like that. But they're not main sources in any manner. A lot of just basic staff members that you see every day down here and just chat with. But I depend on my lawmakers a lot.

Indeed, lawmakers in states without term limits are often the most knowledgeable sources a reporter can find. They are often known to cultivate specific expertise and build issue-oriented reputations, as Reporter F from Illinois (a non-term limited state) explains:

> There was a lawmaker that's not in our area. She's a state senator from the suburbs just a little bit south of our area and she barely, she won her race by like a hundred votes in one of the most expensive races here. She gets here and she spent her first term focusing on tax increment finance reform and she was the only person—no one really cared—that's not a sexy issue at all. But now I know she was very serious about it. She built a lot of respect among her colleagues for taking on something very boring and mundane and controversial at the same time and really working with everybody. And so I know that there is a good budget question and I need somebody that's not going to hit themselves in the knee and give me a reaction, somebody who's going to think a little bit. I can go to her because she usually thinks, you know, delves into her issues a lot more. And so that's you know, you kind of pick up on things like that as they go through their careers and you've been here years.

Lawmakers in non-term limited states also may have more interest in cultivating media attention in addition to their greater perceived knowledge. A reporter from Indiana echoes the importance of legislators as sources:

Reporter I: Legislators make excellent sources."

Interviewer: Why is that?

Reporter I: Because they like to have their name in the paper, and they like to point out things the opposite parties do. So they love it. They just absolutely love it. They tend to be gossipy people. So they love to call you and share their knowledge and because usually they're in the know. Their information is almost always good and then they almost always know some constituent or someone who's affected by whatever's going on. So they're great."

How does press corps size affect reporters?

Conventional wisdom about state press corps suggests that decrease size of bureaus and the number of bureaus has dramatic effects on the amount and depth of coverage of state politics. These concerns are echoed by many of the reporters we spoke with, for example Reporter V from Michigan said, "We used to have a lot of reporters and now we don't have a lot of reporters…We're shrunk dramatically [the bureau staff was cut in half]…When this last recession hit, it was bad and every person who left was not replaced…I just don't see our bureau ever being staffed like it was." Reporters are more concerned about missing important stories and lapses in political accountability than they are about the depth of coverage on any individual issue. According to Reporter I from Indiana:

> It would be almost impossible for all of the one person bureaus to really cover the Department of Environmental Management. The Department of Environmental Management is huge. They do really important stuff. And the utility Regulatory Commission, I mean I do cover the Utility Regulatory Commission, but you could have—I could do that full-time and never run out of stories. I just can't imagine, I can't even think about the number of things that are not getting covered because it just makes me upset. It's just overwhelming. I just can't think about it. It's just too bad.

The Reporter I emphasized the importance of overall size for the press corps:

> Anytime you have fewer people covering, you're going to have just what we were talking about before—you're going to have fewer people breaking away doing their own thing.

That said, one of the most important and unanticipated insights we had in visiting these news bureaus is that the overall number of bureaus and the overall number of reporters in the press corps seems to matter less for the coverage of state capitol news than the number of reporters staffing each bureau. The reason is simple: each news organization generally covers the major 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. The problem is particularly dramatic in Indiana, which has a relatively high of bureaus (11) and all but two have only one full-time person per bureau. 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.

This problem is not at all restricted to Indiana. Reporters in other states, including Reporter P from Illinois, expressed similar concerns that the size of news bureaus staffs 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.

While the staff-size problem suggests fewer things are covered at the state level, in the extreme, it also produces pack journalism, as each small bureau employs a similar set of criteria to select stories to cover:

Reporter I: We're really a pack this year.

Interviewer: *Here in Indiana generally, is that?*

Reporter I: Yeah, it is because almost everybody in Indiana has just one reporter. And so everybody tends to cover the big stuff…we have a problem here in that we all cover the same stuff, because we all want to cover the big stuff. And my newspaper wants me to cover the big stuff. They want me to cover the budget and the big tax proposal, but it also means that we're all covering the same stuff."

We observe a similar situation in Ohio, where the bureaus are larger, but average just over two reporters in each:

Reporter Z: You've got an organization [in the Ohio press corps that has a large number of reporters], so I mean, they're able to spread out a lot more. Then you've got an organization like ours that only has two people most of the time and then you've got a lot of organizations that are just one man bureaus…

Interviewer: *How does that affect coverage do you think?*

Reporter Z: We wouldn't have to make the choices that we have to make all of the time. There are times we do just have to look at what's going on. Like you'd be surprised how many times things are happening at exactly the same time down here, and that would be things that are just scheduled, not stories that you want to develop during the course of the day, but you've got to look at how many hours you've got available, when things are taking place. You've got to make choices to what you're covering and why. Then, you get back down to what we were talking about before, you pick the one that people are more likely to read.

In addition to affecting the breadth of press corps coverage and pack journalism, small staff sizes also affects the energy and tenacity of reporters in pursuing investigative projects.

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, I don't think it's money. I think it's time and effort. 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.

While staff size is a problem for a number of the state press corps we visited, some of the bureaus had experimented with very large staffs, and found over-staffing could be a problem as well. An Illinois Reporter N said, "There was a point when—shoot—I think we had seven or eight people in here at one point and that's kind of nice to have that luxury. But even from just a physical space thing, it was difficult. So I really don't have any problems with the size we're at now." A bureau in Michigan had a similar experience with a very large staff, and even the expanded staff of temporary bureau one Ohio newspaper created to cover the Coingate story often experienced inefficiencies in researching and writing stories.

Our sense is that bureaus larger than one reporter but smaller than four tend to be more efficient. Under this arrangement, reporters make fewer complaints about feeling spread too thin and being forced to make difficult choices, while simultaneously avoiding the alternative difficulties of overcrowding. In Indiana, most reporters in on-person bureaus said they thought the addition of one person in the bureau would help. Indiana-based Reporter I explains, "We wouldn't have this problem of not covering these places if this bureau was two people…Just

adding one person to every bureau—and maybe a few more newspapers having a bureau—would just change things incredibly."

6. Discussion

In Arnold's assessment, the "entire informational system" (2004: 253) does not provide sufficient information for democratic accountability: the average newspaper does not publish enough information on representative positions for the average reader to notice, read, or comprehend much information. The average challenger is not sufficiently funded to communicate with voters directly. The average citizen does not learn much about a representative's performance.

This problem is even worse at the state level where the increasingly hectic pace of legislation, institutions like term limits, and under-staffed news bureaus exacerbate these problems. We find that three institutional changes: reduced size of statehouse bureaus, increasingly lengthy sessions, and the advent of term-limits all have important influences on the way news is gathered and reported in America's statehouses. Two of the three reduce enterprise stories and increase pack journalism. The third (term limits) decreases expertise and increases the power of unelected officials over the information environment in the states. Reporter-source interactions are built on a foundation of trust built over time. Term limits eliminate lengthy stays for legislators, and thus shift the power of information away from legislators and towards lobbyists, staff members, and long-serving journalists.

Our findings have important implications for those interested in the future of media politics. While there are shelves of books on how political officials use the media, there is much less work on the routines, habits, and news-gathering behavior of journalists, and even less

which treats reporters as political actors. We find this puzzling. After all, interest groups, think tanks, and other non-elected officials are commonly understood as political actors whose behaviors vary with institutional context. Even citizen behavior varies with institutional context. Why would reporters be any different? We think they are not. Reporters, like other political actors, have similar goals everywhere, but different contexts and institutions structure the costs of gathering information and the potential penalties for disclosure. In other words, institutional arrangements affect reporter behavior. Consequently, we think a focus on statehouse reporters is important, not only because the states are increasingly important arenas for government action, but because the institutional variation in the states allows us to move closer towards a coherent theory of reporter-source interaction. This research agenda will eventually allow us to answer questions about media content—and ultimately determine how political institutions alter the political information environment.

Table 1. Typology of states by legislative professionalization, term limits, press corps size

		Professional legislature	Hybrid legislature, semi-professional	Citizen legislature
Term limits	*Many bureaus (6 or more)*	California (18), Florida (14), **Ohio (10)**	Colorado (6), Louisiana (6), Missouri (8)	
	Few bureaus (5 or less)	**Michigan (5)**	Arizona (4), Arkansas (3), Nebraska (2), Oklahoma (4)	Maine (4), Nevada (4), Montana (3), S. Dakota (2)
No term limits	*Many bureaus (6 or more)*	**Ilinois (10)** , Massachusetts (10), New Jersey (10), New York (15), Pennsylvania (14), Wisconsin (6)	Alabama (9), Connecticut (12), Kentucky (8), Maryland (6), Minnesota (8), North Carolina (10), Oregon (7), South Carolina (6), Texas (15), Virginia (12), Washington (10)	Idaho (6), **Indiana (11)**
	Few bureaus (5 or less)	Alaska (3)	Delaware (2), Hawaii (2) Iowa (5), Tennessee (4)	Georgia (5), Kansas (5), Mississippi (5), New Hampshire (5), New Mexico (3), North Dakota (4), Rhode Island (3), Utah (4), Vermont (3), West Virginia (4), Wyoming (2)

Appendix: Interview protocol for statehouse journalists, Johnson version.[7]

Thanks for participating in this study – I really appreciate it. As I explained when we spoke earlier this month, this study concerns the relationship between reporters in state capitols and their sources of information about state government and politics. Some of the questions are specific, asking for examples of your experiences. But most are fairly general: Not much is known about the politics of journalism and state government.

This interview has three parts and I'll give you a sense of where we're at as we move through these three categories: your background, your relationships with other people in the news media, and your relationships with officials and policy makers. If there is a question you don't want to answer for any reason, just let me know and we can skip past it.

All of your answers to these questions will be kept entirely confidential. In other words, your name and answers will never be linked, and your name never revealed. The only people who will have access to any potentially identifying information are me and my co-investigator, Dr. Christopher Cooper at Western Carolina University [Dr. Martin Johnson at University of California, Riverside].

Before we begin, would you be willing to sign this statement of informed consent, recognizing that I have informed you about the nature of my questions and indicating your willingness to participate.

It will be too difficult for me to write down everything you say, and I want to make sure I get your exact remarks recorded. So is it all right if I record our discussion?

A. Questions about Background

1. I'd like to start with some basic background information about your career as a reporter. How did you get into Journalism? Perhaps you could start by telling me where you are from and where you went to school.

2. How long have you been working in the state capital?

3. How is your routine affected by the legislative session? When the legislature is meeting, what differences do you see in your day?

4. Are there any other times of the year your day-to-day routine varies?
[probe: What about election campaigns? How do they affect your routine?

I'm also interested in how you view your job.

[7] Cooper's version was similar to this, but identified Johnson as a collaborator and provided Cooper's contact information.

5. What makes a story newsworthy? Why would you choose to cover one topic instead of another?

6. What are your responsibilities as a journalist? To whom do you feel accountable?

B. Questions about Relationships with Other Reporters

Now I would like to change the subject and talk a bit about your relationships with other people, starting with your colleagues in the press corps. I'm not going to ask you assess anyone else's work or identify anyone by name, but just ask general questions about the way things work here.

1. Generally speaking, would you say that political news is accurately reported by the state capitol press corps?

2. How satisfied are you with the way political news is reported here?

3. Do you view other reporters from your newspaper as competitors or colleagues?
[probe: Can you give me an example of how you compete or collaborate?

4. What about reporters in other news organizations? Are they competitors or colleagues?
[probe: Can you give me an example of how you compete or collaborate?

5. Do you regularly socialize outside of the office with other members of the press corps?
[probe: Is there a press club or other state press organization to which you belong?
[probe: If so, does this social life affect your professional life?

C. Questions about Relationships with Sources

Our last group of questions involves the people who provide information for your reports – sources. One perspective among communication scholars is that "sources make the news," so we are particularly interested in your interaction with sources.

1. Do you think, in general, journalists are given enough access to information about state government?

2. Do you think, in general, journalists are given enough access to policy makers in state government?

3. What kinds of people are your principal sources of information? Do you primarily get information directly from policy makers and elected officials or do you find that most of your information is mediated by press contacts and other staff?

4. What qualities make for a good source of information?

5. Generally speaking, how do officials court the press in the capitol? What do legislators, state officials, staff, and bureaucrats do to get your interest and attention?

6. Are there variations in ease of access to information depending on the office, department or agency concerned?

[probe: Do some agencies or officials make your job easier while others make it more difficult?

7. In some state capitals it is perfectly natural for journalists and politicians and staff members to be friendly and socialize. Elsewhere this isn't viewed favorably. What has your experience been? Is it common for you to socialize outside of the office with the people you cover and other sources of information or is this something you are not likely to do?

8. What about other reporters? Do they regularly socialize with officials, staff, and bureaucrats?

9. Have you seen many situations where it seemed that reporters were too close, too friendly, with officials, policy makers, and staff?

10. I'm interested in your thoughts on whether the press corps affects public policy. How large a role would you say the press and news media play in state politics?

11. Do people in state government use the news media to try out ideas – or float trial balloons – to gauge the reactions of the public and other people in the capitol? How often does this happen?

12. What kind of interactions do you have with lobbyists? Do they seek you out for information mostly or come in to try to give you information?

13. Finally, what would you see as the principal obstacles constraining journalistic investigation of state government?

Thanks for participating in this interview. If you have any questions about the project, please let me know. I am leaving a business card with you – my telephone number (951-827-4612) and email address (martin.johnson@ucr.edu) – are printed on it, so you can get back in contact with me.

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