

## **Newsgathering and Role Orientations among American Statehouse Reporters**

Christopher A. Cooper  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Political Science and Public Affairs  
Western Carolina University  
Belk 279  
Cullowhee, NC 28723  
ccooper@email.wcu.edu  
Fax: 828-227-7647  
Phone: 828-227-3861

Martin Johnson  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of California, Riverside  
2222 Watkins Hall  
Riverside, CA 92521  
Martin.johnson@ucr.edu  
Fax: 951-827-3933  
Phone: 951-827-4612

Prepared for presentation at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on State Politics and Policy. East Lansing, MI. May 13-15, 2005.

\* Thanks to Garrick Percival, Lynn Kaufman, and Crystal Simmerman for assistance with data collection on this project.

Journalists wield tremendous power in American state politics. They set the agenda for the issues that citizens believe are important and frame the tone of media coverage. Indeed, reporters are a primary link between citizens and government. Despite increasing scholarly attention to the national press corps on the one hand and increased attention to state politics and policy on the other, we know precious little about how U.S. statehouse reporters contribute to the policy process, how they view their role in the political system, how they collect information, or what factors cause these roles and habits to vary. These issues are theoretically and substantively important. Although journalists are political actors whose actions are influenced by both institutions and preferences, they are rarely treated as such.

In this paper, we examine the roles and values of statehouse reporters to discover not only what values they hold, but to gain some insight into what factors affect these values. Because so little is known about statehouse reporters, we also describe their basic characteristics. To this end, we first discuss why values are important, then we discuss what we know and what we would expect about goals and newsgathering among reporters. After reviewing this literature, we describe the data we use, describe the basic characteristics of statehouse reporters, describe the distribution of journalists by role, and then discuss the predictors of one particular role (being an adversary toward government). We conclude with some thoughts on where this investigation will lead us in the future.

### **GOALS, ROLES, AND NORMS**

How do journalists view their jobs? Do they seek to break the “big story” as *All the President’s Men* would have us believe, or do they merely seek to keep their jobs? Do they serve as watchdogs—keeping constant watch over the government—barking at any small disturbance in hope of keeping away the big ones, or are they lapdogs—choosing to keep a good relationship with a politician rather than exposing them and losing a potential source? Some have even argued that journalists instead seek to give the public what they want. This market-based explanation may explain the rise of so-called soft news and entertainment media at the expense of “hard news.”

The early work on journalistic roles asked whether reporters felt it was appropriate to let their own opinions and attitudes bleed into their coverage of the news. Johnstone et al. (1976) discussed two major journalistic role archetypes—the neutral role and the participant role, but cautioned that few journalists were entirely one or the other. Instead, journalists, like legislators, lobbyists, or any other political actor, sometimes display one role and other times are motivated by another. Gans (1979) found that although their actions were not always consistent, unlike journalists in other countries<sup>1</sup>, journalists in the United States adopted an explicit stance of neutrality.

Realizing that most journalists do not fall entirely within one camp or another, recent work relies on survey data and asks journalists how strongly they agree with a particular role. This approach inevitably leads to a more nuanced view of journalistic roles and values than can be reached by placing an individual squarely in one category or the other. Recent work by Weaver and Wilhoit moves past considerations of two roles, and instead argues that there are four roles: disseminator,

---

<sup>1</sup> For a good review of the roles of journalists in different countries, see Patterson (1998)

interpretive, populist mobilizer, and adversarial (1996). To determine which roles are the most prevalent, they rely on a large-scale telephone survey of journalists of many types from around the country.

Borrowing from rational choice theory, John Zaller has recently posited a simpler, unidimensional goal for journalists, arguing that:

Journalists aspire, individually and collectively, to maximize their independent and distinctive “voice” in the news. By “voice” I mean any sort of distinctively journalistic contribution, whether it be hidden information, analytical perspective or simply personality. . . . The drive for journalistic voice is far from innocuous. . . . it leads journalists to adopt an adversarial stance toward others, most notably politicians, who venture onto their turf.

Although this literature is admittedly mixed, what evidence has been proffered seems to suggest that there is no one answer: journalists are neither lapdogs nor watchdogs. They do not only want to tell the politicians’ story, nor do they solely respond to the whims of the market. Journalists then, are much like other political actors—or any other person. They have a series of multiple goals and the way these goals interact with one another leads them to behave differently in different situations. The question remains, however: what are these conditions? What sorts of journalists are likely to be adversaries of government—barking at problems and which journalists are tamer lapdogs? We now approach this last question, not because other roles are not prominent, but because the notion of an adversarial press corps seems to be at the center of much of the debate about the mass media. As such, we believe it provides a prime opportunity to consider what leads journalists to adopt different roles.

So, what does lead some journalists to exercise their voice by being more adversarial and others to exercise their voice in other ways? At the risk of oversimplifying matters, we believe it can best be summarized using Plott’s Fundamental Principle that Preferences x Institutions = Outcomes (Plott 1979).

## **Preferences**

The literature and political debate about journalists’ preferences has focused almost exclusively on ideology and partisanship. Specifically, many scholars and commentators ask whether the media display a noticeable “bias.” This bias is generally understood as a tendency to favor members of one’s party or ideological orientation. Although scholars generally found that reporters are more likely to be liberal and Democratic than conservative and Republican (Lichter, Rothman and Lichter 1986; Weaver and Wilhoit 1996), they have been much less successful determining whether these preferences translate into action (Niven 1999; 2001; 2002; but see Groseclose and Miylo 2003).

Regardless of how journalists’ partisanship and ideology are distributed across states (we address this question in Cooper and Johnson 2005), we expect that journalist party affiliation influences how journalists perform their jobs. Specifically, given that Republicans are generally less supportive of government and display lower levels of trust in government than Democrats, we expect that Republican reporters will be more adversarial toward government than their Democratic counterparts.

Zaller's assumptions about journalistic norms requires that journalists have a mechanism to receive these norms of how journalists do business. Although we call a number of people "journalists," the reality is that just like any other profession, some journalists are more likely to be part of their professional establishment than others. Just like some political scientists may have little connection to the norms of the discipline, it is likely that some journalists are more connected to their profession than others. We expect that journalists who are more connected to their discipline to fall closer to Zaller's postulate that journalists should be adversarial toward government. Specifically, we expect that journalists who are members of journalistic organizations are more likely to adhere to journalistic norms and therefore more likely to be adversarial toward government than those who are unaffiliated with the major organizations of their profession. Likewise, we expect that journalists who are about to retire are less likely to adhere to journalistic norms and are therefore less likely to be adversarial toward government officials.

## **Institutions**

Studies of journalistic norms in national politics are necessarily limited. They are unable to determine if, much less how, variation in institutions affects outcomes. The states, however, provide rich variation in institutions where we can test the effects of institutions on outcomes. One institutional variation that should affect how journalists watch government is the performance of that government. If members of the press exercise their oversight function responsibly, we expect that government performance has an influence on how much reporters watch government. Specifically, we expect that journalists are more likely to be adversaries of government in states where government does not perform as well. A rational journalist will be less adversarial, however, in a state where government performs comparatively well.

Politicians and journalists need one another (Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999; Zaller 1999). Journalists need politicians to give them information. Politicians need journalists to "get their story out" (Zaller 1999: 14). 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. In an environment where politicians have many journalists to choose from, it stands to reason that they would be likely to go to those who are least adversarial, and thus most likely to tell their story as they want it told. A rational journalist, therefore will become less adversarial toward government to try to maintain competitive advantage and continue access to his/her governmental source.

One of the most important occurrences 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. 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), and may even use the media more often (Cooper 2002). Because professional legislators are more likely to have aggressive media organizations, providing information from a variety of perspectives, we expect that reporters will be advantaged in the "negotiation of newsworthiness" (Cook 1989). Journalists then will have to work harder to gain an upper hand in the battle over media politics. Consequently, they will have an incentive to be more adversarial.

In sum, we expect that journalists from more professional states, those from states with a government that does not perform well, Republicans and those who are members of journalistic organizations will be more likely to be adversarial toward government.

## THE SURVEY

To investigate the question of media bias and test the hypotheses discussed above, we designed and conducted an original survey of the statehouse journalists in all 50 states. We fielded this beginning August 4, 2003 and finishing on October 28. The survey's design and implementation was conducted in accordance with Dillman's Tailored Design Method (2000), in slightly modified form intended to take advantage of the fact that the investigators work at different universities.

After acquiring a list of statehouse reporters across the country, four undergraduate research assistants at the University of California, Riverside, checked the list for accuracy using the Internet and telephone calls to news bureaus. After the list was cleaned, Cooper at Western Carolina University assigned each respondent an identification number and sent surveys to 489 individuals. Reporters who had not responded to the survey were sent a reminder postcard approximately three weeks later. Three weeks after this reminder postcard, non-respondents were sent a final reminder and a new copy of the instrument.

Respondents returned their surveys to Johnson at University of California, Riverside. Due to this two-site design we are able to merge individual survey responses with contextual information about the state, news organization where individuals work, and communities these respondents serve, without any threat of identifying our respondents or violating the anonymity agreement we have with them. The survey included a variety of questions about newsgathering practices, patterns of source use, questions relevant to media agenda setting, reporter ideological leanings (Cooper and Johnson 2005), and the role of interest groups in state politics (Cooper and Nownes 2003).

In the end, 35 surveys were returned for bad addresses and 19 were returned with notes indicating that the reporter did not cover state politics, in spite of our efforts to clean the mailing list. We received 133 completed surveys, for a 31% response rate, higher than many recent surveys of political elites (Abbe and Herrnson 2002; Cooper and Nownes 2003; Kedrowski 1997). Recent research also suggests that low response rates are not as problematic as previously believed. Research in marketing suggests that response rates above 15% for surveys sent to business executives are acceptable (Tomaskovic-Devey, Leiter, and Thompson 1994; Baldauf, Reisinger, and Moncrief 1999; cited in Abbe and Herrnson 2003) and research in psychology indicates that response rates are less important than the representativeness of the sample (Krosnick 1999). Although it is impossible to compare our sample with numbers about the population, below we discuss the major characteristics of our sample.

## RESULTS I: THE BASICS

While we know a good bit about what the national press looks like (Hess 1981), there is no source to find descriptors of the state press. Consequently, before continuing with our analysis, we briefly review the basic demographic characteristics of statehouse reporters, first discussing demographics, then discussing indicators of journalistic professionalism<sup>2</sup>. These data are presented in Table 1. To gain a better sense of how journalists compare to other political actors in the states, we also compare these data to data on legislators whenever possible<sup>3</sup>.

[Table 1 About Here]

The first cluster of rows presents the data about journalist education. Although there are no formal education requirements for being a reporter, statehouse journalists, like other political actors, appear to be well educated. Almost all (95%) have a college degree or higher. Almost ¼ have a graduate degree. This level of educational attainment is higher than that found by Weaver and Wilhoit in their 1992 study and Hess in his study of Washington journalists (1981), but is consistent with trends toward an increasingly educated press corps. By comparing this to Carey, Neimi and Powell's data on state legislators, we see that journalists are slightly more educated than the legislators they cover (80% of legislators in Carey, Neimi and Powell's sample had a college degree or higher education).

Unlike most elected offices, there is no minimum age to be a reporter. Nonetheless, the next row indicates that the average age of a statehouse reporter is 45—similar (although slightly younger than) to that of legislators, lobbyists, and other political actors. Further examination of these data suggests that age ranges from 23 to 71 and the distribution of age approaches normality—age is not skewed heavily in either direction. Statehouse reporters are neither young, nor old—they are generally in the middle of their careers. Average legislator age falls slightly higher (mean=53), although once again, the demographic profile of the two groups are surprisingly similar.

The next few rows indicate that statehouse reporters are overwhelmingly white (94%) and middle class. Very few make less than \$35,000 a year, but only about a third make more than \$60,000 a year<sup>4</sup>.

The average reporter has worked for the newspapers' state capital bureau for 9 years and has lived in the state in which they work for about a fifth of their life, indicating reasonable stability both in state of residence and time in the job.

There has recently been considerable debate over the rise in corporate media. Although the empirical evidence to buttress these debates has been sparse, Underwood (1993) finds some evidence to suggest that journalists who work for corporate owned media have different values and goals than journalists who work for family or locally owned newspapers. Our data indicate that about 1/3 of statehouse reporters work for locally owned papers and the mean number of people who work for their organization is about 150.

---

<sup>2</sup> For information about ideology and partisanship, see Cooper and Johnson (2005).

<sup>3</sup> In future iterations of this research, we plan to compare this to data on state lobbyists.

Journalism, like any other occupation, has professional norms and standards. Our data indicate that roughly two-thirds of statehouse reporters were journalism majors and about half are members of journalist organizations.

Finally, our descriptive data suggests that although most reporters believe that the press/government relations in their state has remained about the same, a sizeable proportion (about 30%) believe that press/government relations has become less collegial in their state since they became a reporter.

Altogether, these data paint a picture of a fairly professional, middle class occupation. While reporters are certainly not getting rich, few are earning less than \$35,000 per year<sup>5</sup>. Further, a sizeable proportion has been exposed to professional norms either through majoring in journalism or being a member of a journalism organization. Finally, there is some evidence (although it is certainly not overwhelming) to suggest that the relationship between press and politicians is becoming more strained.

## RESULTS II: DESCRIBING ROLES

Now that we know a little bit about what reporters look like, we next describe how they view their jobs. In Table 2 we present our findings about roles. The first column presents each of the different values that we asked our respondents about. These values are grouped by the role that Weaver and Wilhoit assign to each: interpretive/investigate, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer. We also include one value that does not fall into any of the above categories. The first column of data presents the percentage of people in our survey who believe that a particular value is “extremely important.” The next two columns present data from the last two iterations of the Weaver and Wilhoit studies (found in Weaver and Wilhoit 1996: 136).

[Table 2 About Here]

Table 2 shows important difference between our data and the Weaver and Wilhoit studies. First, two of the three components of the interpretive function are more prominent among current statehouse reporters than among journalists in the past. Clearly journalists today are putting more weight on interpreting current events than their counterparts in previous studies. It is also interesting to note that the one value in the interpretive role that does not see much change is investigating claims and statements made by the government. Although Weaver and Wilhoit include it as an interpretive function, one could easily argue that it fits just as easily into the adversarial function.

Next, we find that the disseminator function—getting information to the public—is much less prominent in our study than in previous work. Despite critiques of market-based journalism, it does not appear that this critique holds for our sample of statehouse journalists. Clearly statehouse reporters believe it is more important to focus on the complexity of state news, than to merely disseminate the information quickly. Likewise, far fewer journalists in our sample claim that they

---

<sup>5</sup> Although we do not present the results here, ordinal logistic regression analysis indicates that reporters in states with more professional state legislatures earn more money than reporters who cover less professional legislatures.

believe it is extremely important to “give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs.”

Together, this investigation suggests that there are important differences between our study and previous work on the topic. These differences could arrive for one of two reasons. First, it could be that the simple passage of time has shifted journalistic attitudes. More likely, however, is that the focus on state reporters has given us different results. Because statehouse reporters are all at a specific point in their career, and cover similar beats, it stands to reason that they have different attitudes, and roles than journalists who cover other levels of government.

For ease of comparison, we grouped the values above by the functions that Weaver and Wilhoit assign to each. Further investigation, however, suggests that (at least among statehouse reporters) the roles do not seem to be capturing the same concept. For instance, the Cronbach’s alpha for the interpretive function is only .50 and the alpha for the populist mobilizer function is a mere .21. Although the alpha is slightly better for the adversarial function, we nonetheless believe that the two components of this scale are very different from one another. One can easily imagine that the predictors of being an adversary of public officials are very different than the predictors of being an adversary of business. For instance, we would expect Republicans to be more likely to be skeptical of government, while Democrats and liberals are more likely to be skeptical of business. In all, we urge future scholars to carefully consider the data before grouping them in ways that (while they were useful in previous studies) may obscure interesting variation.

### **RESULTS III: EXPLAINING ADVERSARIAL MEDIA**

Recall from earlier that we are particularly interested in what explains why some journalists are more adversarial toward government than others. We focus on this question for a few reasons. First, Zaller (1999) argues that this is the preeminent goal of journalists. Second, it is methodologically appealing. While some other roles are more uniformly agreed upon in our sample, the adversary of government value produces substantial variation and thus allows us to test whether journalistic behavior can be adequately predicted. Finally, the rise in adversarial journalism has been blamed for many ills of society. Unfortunately this has been considered in the aggregate, national political scene where institutions remain fairly constant. The states provide institutional and cultural variation which can do a better job of explaining outcomes.

To test hypotheses about the adversarial governmental function, we cast an ordinal logistic regression model where the dependent variable represents how important the respondent believes it is to “be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions” with higher numbers indicating that the respondent believes it is more important. Recall that we expect professionalism and Republican party identification to be positively related to this variable. Further, we expect the number of news bureaus in the state, whether a journalist is a member of a journalism organization, whether s/he is about to retire, and the quality of government to be negatively related to an adversary stance toward government. We also include control variables for age, income and whether the reporter works for a locally owned newspaper. Details on these (or any other) variables used in this paper can be found in the Appendix.

Table 3 presents the results of this analysis and reveals that four of our five variables of interest are significant in the expected direction: professionalism, the number of news bureaus in the state, the quality of government, and party identification.



The professionalism variable is positively related to the dependent variable, indicating that when a reporter covers a more professional legislator, s/he is more likely to have an adversarial attitude toward the government. Because legislators from professional legislatures like California have more power and resources at their disposal, it stands to reason that journalists would be more wary of the information coming from them and thus would adopt a more adversarial stance toward them than legislators in a less professional state, like New Hampshire.

[Table 3 About Here]

As expected, we also find that the number of news bureaus in a state is negatively associated with the belief that it is important to be an adversary of government. In an environment with a high density of journalists, politicians have many people to tell their story to. Given a choice, they will, of course, choose a journalist who is less likely to cast their story in a poor light—a less adversarial journalist. A rational journalist will respond to this pressure and will take a less adversarial stance, so s/he will still “get the story.”

Next, Table 3 indicates that the quality of government is negatively associated with journalists believing that it is important to be adversarial toward government, suggesting that when government performs better, journalists are less likely to be skeptical of their performance. To borrow from McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) and Zaller (2003; see also Bennett 2003; Graber 2003), when government is performing well, journalists exercise fire-alarm oversight. When government performs poorly, however, journalists are constantly skeptical of their actions and exercise police patrol oversight of government.

To learn more about this relationship, we used CLARIFY (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2003; Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2003) to compute the predicted probability that a journalist believes that it is extremely important to be an adversary of public officials by all potential levels of government performance, holding all other variables at their sample means. We then graphed these predicted probabilities and presented them in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 About Here]

The top line traces the predicted probability of a journalist believing that it is extremely important to be an adversary of public officials by all possible levels of government performance. The results are fairly dramatic. The probability of believing that being an adversary of government is extremely important for a journalist who covers a poorly performing government (a government that scores an F) is more than 60%. For a journalist who covers a government that scores an “A+” on performance, the probability of believing it is extremely important to be an adversary of government drops to less than 10%.

Table 3 also indicates that Republican partisan identification is positively related to being an adversary of government. Because ordinal logits are so difficult to interpret, once again, we computed a series of predicted probabilities and graphed them in Figure 2. These data are also dramatic. While a strong Democrat has about a 10% probability of believing that it is extremely important to be an adversary of public officials, a strong Republican has a probability of over 50%. Clearly party is important in predicting how journalists view their jobs.

[Figure 2 About Here]

Together, these results suggest that journalists are rational actors whose values are fairly predictable. When challenged by others competing for the same market (sources), they will respond to increase their competitive advantage by being less adversarial toward the officials who they cover and depend on for tips, quotes, and access. When they cover a body that performs well, they will conserve resources and take a less adversarial position toward that body. When they cover a poorly performing body, however, they tend to respond by acting in a more adversarial fashion.

These results also suggest that partisanship may have an influence on journalistic norms and values, although perhaps in a different way than is traditionally considered.

## CONCLUSION

Journalists provide a key, if rarely acknowledged, link between citizens and their government. Unfortunately the state politics literature generally ignores the experiences of the mass media (Clucas 2003; Lynch 2003). Indeed, most state politics textbooks make only passing mention of the mass media and do not spend any significant time discussing who journalists are, what their motivations are, or what they do.

This paper is a smaller part of a larger research agenda (Cooper 2002; Cooper and Johnson 2004; Cooper and Nownes 2003; Johnson 2003), which attempts to shed light on these understudied and poorly understood actors. In this paper, we first discuss basic demographic characteristics of journalists, followed by a brief discussion of their roles. We then focus on the factors that make some journalists more likely to be adversarial toward government than others. This investigation leads to a number of important conclusions.

First, we find that the typical statehouse journalist is well-educated, middle-class, white and to be professionally active. Journalists look similar to other political actors in the states, but have slightly lower incomes.

Second, we find that the roles that Weaver and Wilhoit found prevalent in previous studies have shifted some over time and space. Specifically, the statehouse journalists in our sample are more likely to advocate various parts of the “interpretive function” and somewhat less likely to support the disseminator function than their counterparts in previous studies. While these general roles are instructive, we believe that there has been too much focus on the roles taken together, rather than on their individual components. Indeed, our analysis demonstrates that many of the roles do not measure the same concept. Further, the various roles have different predictors and lumping them together produces misleading results about the causes and consequences of role orientations.

We then focus on one role in particular—whether a reporter believes it is important to “be an adversary of public officials by being skeptical of their action.” Through this investigation, we find that journalists are political actors, just like any other. They are subject to institutional constraints and incentives, and they have identifiable goals which govern their behavior. Republicans are (not surprisingly) more likely to be critical of government officials. Next, borrowing from the literature on population ecology, we find that reporters in states with more news bureaus are less likely to be adversarial toward government officials than reporters in states with fewer news bureaus. We also

find that reporters exercise their adversarial function in a rational manner—they are more likely to be adversarial toward government officials in states where government does not perform as well.

Obviously this is only a small step in a larger project. In future work, we would like to examine the predictors of more roles. Further, we would like to consider how professed roles influence newsgathering activity. Do journalists who wish to get information to the public quickly use different sources than those who wish to provide analysis and interpretation of complex events? Through this investigation, we hope to learn much more about not only the production of state news, but also how institutions affect journalist behavior.

## Appendix: Details on the Variables

---

Variable	Source
Professionalism	King (2000)
Quality of Government	Barrett, and Greene (2001)
Number of News Bureaus in the State	Layton and Dorrah (2002)
Locally Owned Newspaper	Coded by authors after survey was completed
Party ID	Authors' survey. Question Wording: "What is your political affiliation?" Responses ranged from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican
Member of Journalism Organization	Authors' survey. Question wording: "Are you a member of a state professional journalism organization, association, or press club?" Response options: yes or no.
Age	Authors' survey. Question wording: "In what year were you born?" (Recoded for age)
Income	Authors' survey. Question wording: "Finally, we'd like to ask you some financial information. Once again, all of your information you provide will be treated in strict confidence, and neither you nor your organization will ever be reported by name. What was your total personal income, before taxes, from your work in the communication field in 2002?" Response options: Less than \$35,000, between \$35,000 and \$60,000, more than \$60,000."
Race	Authors' Survey. Question wording: "What Racial or ethnic group best describes you?" Response options: White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino/Mexican-American, African-American/Black, American Indian/Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander. Recoded into white/non-white.
About to retire	Authors' Survey. Question wording: "Where would you most like to be working in five years—in the news media or somewhere else?" Response options: In the news media, somewhere else, I don't know. Recoded into: Somewhere else or other.
Roles	Authors' Survey. Question wording: "Next, we'd like to ask you how important you think a number of things are that the news media try to do today. Please indicate the importance you apply to each by circling the number next to the response." Response options: Not really important, somewhat important, quite important, extremely important.

---

## WORKS CITED

- Abbe, Owen G., and Paul S. Herrnson. 2003. "Campaign Professionalism in State Legislative Elections." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 3: 223-45.
- Baldauf, Arthur, Herbert Reisinger, and William C. Moncrief. 1999. "Examining Motivations to Refuse in Industrial Mail Surveys." *Journal of Market Research Society* 41: 345-53.
- Barrett, Katherine, and Richard Greene with Michele Mariani. 2001. *Governing's Government Performance Project*. 2001. Available at: <http://governing.com/gpp/2001/gp1intro.htm>
- Bennett, W. Lance. 2003. "The Burglar Alarm that Just Keeps Ringing: A Response to Zaller." *Political Communication* 131-38.
- Clucas, Richard A. 2003. "Improving the Harvest of State Legislative Research." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 3: 387-419.
- Carey, John M., Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell. STATE LEGISLATIVE SURVEY AND CONTEXTUAL DATA, 1995: [UNTIED STATES] [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Columbus, OH: Kathleen Carr, Ohio State University, Polimetrics Lab [producer], 1995. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2000
- Cook, Timothy E. 1989. *Making Laws, Making News*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Cook, Timothy E. 1998. *Governing with the News: the News Media as a Political Institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cooper, Christopher A. 2003. "Media Tactics in the State Legislature." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 2: 353-371.
- Cooper, Christopher A., and Anthony J. Nownes. 2004. "Negotiating Newsworthiness: Interest Groups and Journalists in the States." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association. New Orleans, LA. January.
- Cooper, Christopher A., and Martin Johnson. 2005. "Media Bias and American Statehouse Reporting: Toward a Theory of a Representative Press Corps." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association. New Orleans, LA. January.
- Dillman, Don A. 2000. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Freeman, Patricia K., and Lilliard E. Richardson, Jr. 1996. "Explaining Casework Among State Legislators." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 21: 41-56.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Random House.

- Graber, Doris A. 2003. "The Rocky Road to New Paradigms: Modernizing News and Citizenship Standards." *Political Communication* 20: 145-48.
- Gray, Virginia, and David Lowery. 2000. *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation: Lobbying Communities in the American States*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Groseclose, Tim, and Jeff Miylo. 2003. "A Measure of Media Bias." Unpublished manuscript: UCLA.
- Hess, Stephen. 1981. *The Washington Reporters*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Jewell, Malcolm E. 1982. *Representation in State Legislatures*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
- Johnson, Martin. 2003. "Rationalizing Betrayal: Journalistic Ethics, Reputations, and Institutional Incentives." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA.
- Johnstone, John W. C., Edward J. Slawski, and William W. Bowman. 1976. *The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Kedrowski, Karen. 1996. *Media Entrepreneurs and the Media Enterprise in the U.S. Congress*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- King, Gary, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg 2000. "Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation." *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 347-61.
- King, James D. 2000. "Changes in Professionalism in U.S. State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25(2): 327-343.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1999. "Survey Research." *Annual Review of Psychology* 50: 537-67.
- Layton, Charles, and Jennifer Dorroh. 2002. "Sad State: News paper Budget-Cutting Has Triggered a Sharp Drop in the Number of Reporters Assigned to Cover the Nation's Increasingly Important Statehouses." *American Journalism Review* 24:19-
- Lichter, Robert, Stanley Rothman, and Linda S. Lichter. 1986. *The Media Elite*. Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler.
- Lynch, G. Patrick. "The Media in State and Local Politics." In Mark J. Rozell, ed. *Media Power, Media Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Maestas, Cherie. 2003. "The Incentive to Listen: Progressive Ambition, Resources, and Opinion Monitoring Among State Legislators." *Journal of Politics* 65: 439-56.
- Niven, David. 1999. "Partisan Bias in the Media? A New Test." *Social Science Quarterly* 80: 847-58.

- Niven, David. 2001. "Revolutionary Headlines: Media Coverage of Legislative Term Limits." *American Review of Politics* 22:491-504.
- Niven, David. 2002. "Objective Evidence on Media Bias: Newspaper Coverage of Congressional Party Switchers." *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly* 89(2): 311-26.
- Patterson, Thomas E. 1998. "Political Roles of the Journalist." In Doris Graber, Denis McQuail, and Pippa Norris, eds. *The Politics of News, the News of Politics*. Washington DC: CQ Press.
- Sparrow, Bartholomew H. 1999. *Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald, Jeffrey Leiter, and Shealy Thompson. 1994. "Organizational Survey Non-Responses." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39: 439-57.
- Tomz, Michael, Jason Wittenberg, and Gary King. 2003. CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results. Version 2.1. Stanford University, University of Wisconsin, and Harvard University. January 5. Available at <http://gking.harvard.edu/>
- Underwood, Doug. 1993. *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom: How the Marketers and Managers are Reshaping Today's Media*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Weaver, David H., and G. Cleveland Wilhoit. 1986. *The American Journalist*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Weaver, David H., and G. Cleveland Wilhoit. 1996. *The American Journalist in the 1990s*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA
- Zaller, John. 1999. *A Theory of Media Politics*. Unpublished Manuscript UCLA. Available at: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/media%20politics%20book%20.pdf>.
- Zaller, John. 2003. "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication* 20: 109-30.

---

**Table 1. Summary Data About Respondents to 2003 State Capitol Journalists Survey**

---

*Demographics*

% with Graduate Degree	24%
% with Some Graduate School	14%
% with College Education	57%
% with Some College	5%
Mean respondent age	45
% White	94%
% earning less than \$35,000/Year	5%
% earning between \$35,000 and \$60,000/Year	61%
% earning over \$60K/Year	34%
Average time working for newspapers' state capital bureau	9 years
Mean % of life lived in the state in which they work	21%

*Organizational Data*

% who work for locally owned newspapers	34%
Mean number of news people who work for their organization	150

*Indicators of Professionalism*

% who are members of journalist organizations	49%
% who were college journalism majors	67%

*General Descriptors on Job Satisfaction and Press/Government Relations*

% believing the relationship between press and politicians has become much more collegial	0%
% believing the relationship between press and politicians has become more collegial	11%
% believing the relationship between press and politicians has become neither more nor less collegial	60%
% believing the relationship between press and politicians has become less collegial	23%
% believing the relationship between press and politicians has become much less collegial	6%
% who want to be working in the news in five years	80%
% who want to work somewhere else within five years	8%
% who do not know	13%

---

Note: Data are rounded to the nearest whole number

Source: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters



---

**Table 2: How important do you think the following are to the news media?**

---

	Cooper and Johnson <sup>a</sup> 2003	Weaver and Wilhoit 1992	Weaver and Wilhoit 1982-1983
<b>Interpretive Function</b>			
Provide analysis and interpretation of complex events	67	48	49
Investigate claims and statements made by the government	63	67	66
Discuss state policy while it is still being developed	52	39	38
<b>Disseminator Function</b>			
Get information to the public quickly	48	69	60
<b>Adversarial Function</b>			
Be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions	21	21	20
Be an adversary of business by being constantly skeptical of their actions	10	14	15
<b>Populist Mobilizer Function</b>			
Concentrate on news which is of interest to the widest possible audience	13	20	36
Develop intellectual and cultural interests of the public	10	18	24
Entertain readers	4	14	20
<b>Misc.</b>			
Give ordinary people a change to express their views on public affairs	22	48	--

---

<sup>a</sup> The sample size varies from 125 to 131, depending on the question.

Table 3: Ordered Logistic Regression Model Predicting Government Watchdog Role

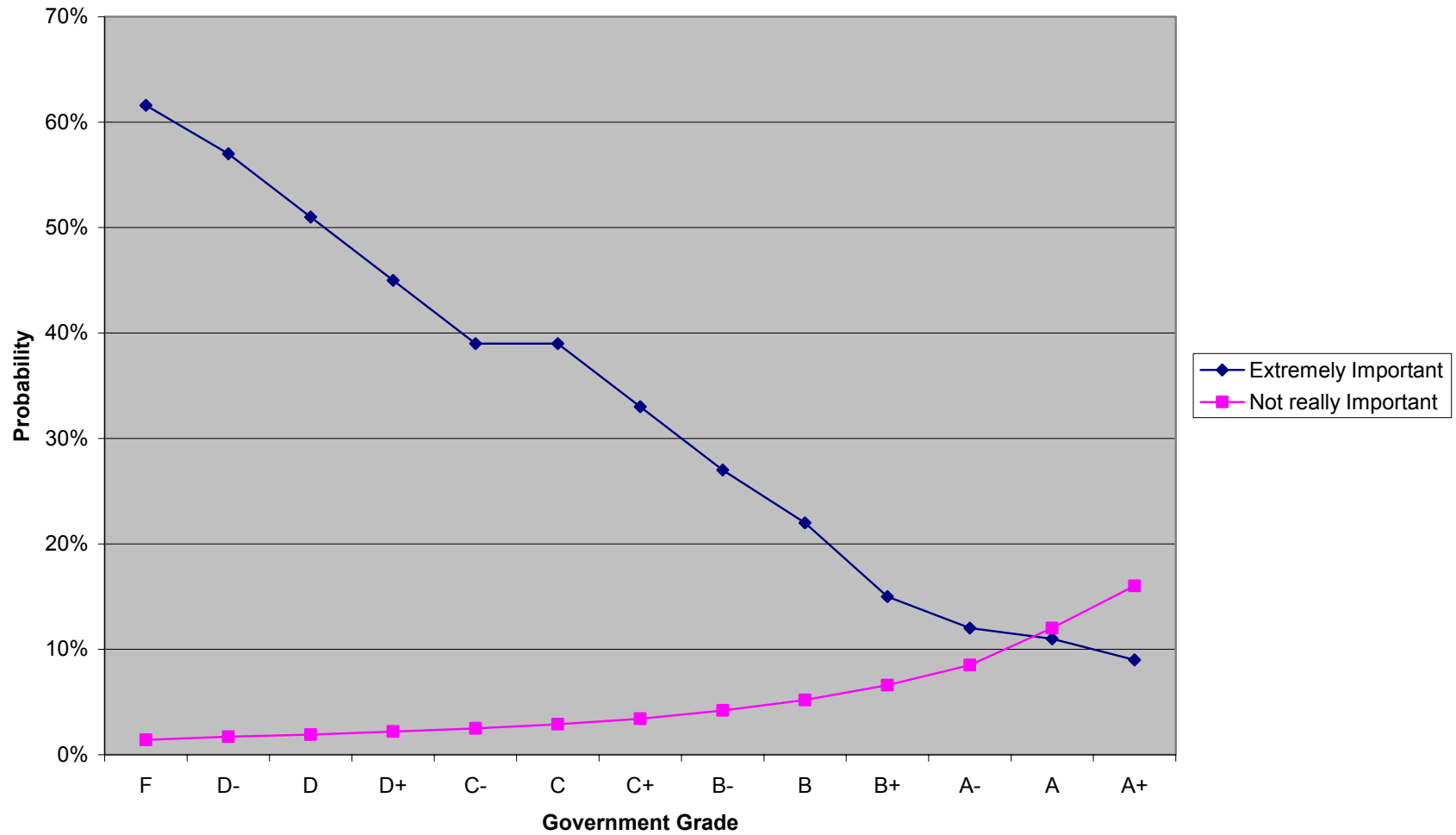
	Coefficient (Robust SE with clustering on state)
Professionalism	3.75** (1.55)
Number of News Bureaus in the State	-.127** (.052)
Quality of Government	-.271* (.152)
Party ID (Higher numbers=more Republican)	.405** (.192)
Member of Journalism Organization	.032 (.411)
Locally Owned Newspaper	.294 (.452)
Age	-.037 (.030)
Income	.218 (.325)
About to Retire?	.081 (.585)
N	79
Wald Chi Square	19.74**

\*  $p < .1$ ; two-tailed test

\*\*  $p < .05$ ; two-tailed test

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ ; two-tailed test

**Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Being an Adversary of Public Officials by Government Performance**



**Figure 2: Predicted Probability of being an adversary of public officials by Party ID**

