Public Abstract

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With traditional media encountering financial struggles, many newspapers have shrunken or eliminated their state government news bureau. This downsizing has culled several watchdogs from the state capitol press corps and in turn has created a statehouse coverage void. This raises concern as state government issues regularly impact the everyday citizen, and some argue that these issues are more important than federal legislation.

However, several online non-profit news sites have formed in response to this phenomenon, taking to statehouses across the nation in an attempt to fill the void. In some cases, their work has been published in the mainstream. Meanwhile, some scholars and mainstream news leaders are questioning the ideological neutrality of the content provided by these sites.

This study investigated that ideology by analyzing the state government news content provided by these sites, and placing this content in a context familiar to the everyday citizen by comparing the results of that analysis to an ideological exploration of the Associated Press, one of the most ubiquitous mainstream media organizations. The results suggest that the content produced by online non-profit news sites are more informal and tend more often to emphasize viewpoint over evidence compared to the Associated Press. Furthermore, their content often is left or right of center on the political spectrum. That said, there may be some cases in which these sites are perhaps less ideological on the whole than their mainstream counterparts.