

Paper Cuts: How Reporting Resources Affect Political News Coverage | American Journal of Political Science

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October 23, 2020

Media outlets provide crucial inputs into the democratic process, yet they face increasingly severe economic challenges. I study how a newly salient manifestation of this pressure, reduced reporting capacity, influences political coverage. Focusing on newspapers in the United States, where industry-wide employment fell over 40% between 2007 and 2015, I use panel data to assess the relationship between reporting capacity and political coverage. Staff cuts substantially decrease the amount of political coverage newspapers provide. Across different samples and measurement approaches, a typical cutback to a newspaper's reporting staff reduces its annual political coverage by between 300 and 500 stories. These political news declines happen against the backdrop of similar reductions in nonpolitical coverage, meaning the share of newspaper articles focused on politics remains stable over this period. This demonstrates that economic pressure affects the political information environment by shaping the media's capacity to cover politics.

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