

Representative Reporters? Examining Journalists' Ideology in Context*

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Objective. We investigate the ideological orientations of U.S. statehouse journalists, asking whether reporters hold similar political ideologies to their audiences, and under what conditions reporter ideology diverges from audience ideology. *Methods.* We use an original survey of statehouse journalists, and employ both traditional OLS regressions and a heteroskedastic regression. *Results.* We find that reporters tend to reflect the political leanings of their audiences. Considering reporters in the context of the states they serve, we find that journalists who are racially and economically dissimilar from their constituents have less representative political predispositions than journalists who have characteristics similar to their readers. *Conclusions.* In the case of statehouse reporters, descriptive representation leads to substantive representation.

News media are the primary sources citizens use to gather information about politics. Media messages affect how people think about politics and order their political priorities. Whether their effect lays with the issues they prime, the way they frame issues, or the agendas they help set, the news media are of great concern to social scientists and other political observers. Consequently, the ideological orientation of the people who write and present the news has become a contentious subject. Allegations of media bias and charges that reporters lean to one side of the political spectrum or another also have currency because political elites have an interest in portraying news actors as biased in order to gain political coverage more favorable to their own interests (Alterman, 2003).

To many observers, the main evidence that the media are “biased” lies in the fact that news organizations are staffed with more liberal reporters than conservative reporters (Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter, 1986). Although this

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evidence is compelling, we offer an important refinement. Reporters, like all political actors, are embedded in their contexts. Consequently, we place reporters in context and investigate the representativeness of reporters relative to their audiences. First, we compare the ideological self-descriptions of reporters to the political orientations of the readers they serve to determine to what extent liberal news audiences are served by liberal reporters and conservative news audiences are served by conservative reporters. After establishing this contextual approach to reporter political orientations, we investigate the correlates of ideological deviation. Although many pundits and scholars are interested primarily in *whether* news media are liberal or conservative, we focus on understanding the conditions under which reporters express political orientations at variance from those of their audiences. Given the political orientations of their readers, what are the characteristics of reporters who deviate from the ideological central tendency of their audience?

Unlike most research that focuses on the national media, we concentrate on newspaper correspondents who work in state capitals across the country. By examining political orientations of reporters across a wider array of social and political contexts, we are able to consider the attributes of audiences and journalists. Our results indicate that reporters are more representative of their readers than many political professionals and scholars currently believe, calling into question conventional wisdom about the representativeness of the U.S. press corps. We also find that journalists who are racially and economically similar to their constituents hew closer to their constituents' political ideology.

Media Bias and Representativeness in U.S. Politics

Books alleging bias in news media line the shelves of the "Politics & Government" or "Current Affairs" sections at most retail bookstores. Due to the contested nature of media messages and their potential effects on the mass public, journalists, pundits, and social scientists have taken a particular interest in trying to detect the ideological and partisan leanings of reporters, the items they file, and their underlying political predispositions. Frequently, this discussion of media bias turns on the ideological and partisan orientations of reporters themselves rather than dealing with the actual news content. The main piece of evidence used to support the allegation is that there are more self-identified liberals and Democrats in the Washington press corps than self-identified conservatives and Republicans. For example, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press recently stated: "Journalists at national and local news organizations are notably different from the general public in their ideology and attitudes toward political and social issues" (2004:24). It found that 34 percent of 247 national journalists surveyed in March and April 2004 identified themselves as liberal. Only 7

percent self-identified as conservative, with the modal category (54 percent) representing themselves as political moderates. Of course, much of this work assumes that reporter ideology affects news content (Groseclose and Mlylo, 2005).

Other scholars show that taken together, reporters lean left (Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter, 1986; Patterson and Donsbach, 1996; Rosten, 1937; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Although most of this research centers on reporters who cover national politics, Beyle, Ostdiek, and Lynch (1996) aggregate reporter attitudes across the states and conclude that reporters tend to be liberal and Democratic and Rozell (1994) finds that Virginia journalists were more likely to hold liberal views on a variety of policy issues.

There may be more liberal reporters than there are conservative reporters, but these findings have significant limitations as evidence of an unrepresentative press. Most of this work examines the national press corps with little attention to variations in readership or social and institutional contexts (Lynch, 2003). In cases where scholars examine reporters across the nation or simply outside Washington, journalists are generally aggregated and treated as a collective disassociated from their specific locations (Beyle, Ostdiek, and Lynch, 1996; Pew, 2004; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Alternately, extant scholarship often focuses on only one location outside Washington (Dunn, 1969; Morgan, 1978; Purvis and Gentry, 1976; Rozell, 1994). These studies do not make use of the potential benefits of comparative research or contextual analysis (Morehouse and Jewell, 2004).

A potentially more productive approach would consider whether the apparent liberal tilt of journalists is distributed evenly across the U.S. political landscape. There is some evidence to suggest that it is not. Hamilton (2004) argues that newspaper partisanship is influenced by the characteristics of the community in which it resides. For instance, where there are high concentrations of African Americans, Democratic newspapers have historically generated larger market shares and are thus more likely to survive in the long term. Hamilton also discusses media bias in terms of representativeness. People are more likely to see a program or newspaper as biased when there is a greater absolute distance between individual ideology and the ideology of the program. Others suggest media outlets skew stories to the worldview of their audiences (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006) and that economic attributes of readers affect the amount of coverage incumbent members of Congress receive (Arnold, 2004).

Clearly, context matters in discussions of media bias and representativeness. Building on the work of Hamilton and others, we investigate self-reported political orientations among members of state capital press corps. We argue that to maximize the analytical leverage of the U.S. states, scholars should employ a comparative method to determine whether there is a monolithic "state press corps" or whether journalist ideology varies systematically across the states.

Placing Reporters in Political Context

Conventional wisdom suggests that reporters are not representative of their audiences: observers cast journalists as collectively too liberal (Goldberg, 2002) or even collectively too conservative and invested in the status quo (Alterman, 2003). These inferences might be driven by the existing research's exclusive focus on national politics and policy. Using data from the states, we are able to ask under what conditions reporters are more or less representative of their audience. Our aim is to understand more about why a reporter might be unrepresentative, and who tends to be unrepresentative, rather than just whether or not they are unrepresentative. Consistent with Cook (1998) and Zaller (2003), we treat journalists as endogenous actors in political systems and processes. Placing reporters in context, we can assess representation among journalists when we know whether a liberal reporter's audience leans to the left, right, or center.

We understand the association between reporters and audiences as a principal-agent relationship. Audiences made up of news consumers represent a collective principal, who, because of lack of time, capacity, or interest, is unable to observe the actions of a set of policy-making agents constantly. Consequently, this collective principal requires the services of a second agent, or set of agents—the media, a capitol press corps—to monitor policymakers. For example, Zaller characterizes effective press coverage of government in terms of sounding “burglar alarms” that alert audiences to official misconduct or controversy (2003). The principal, an audience, trusts the press to be an effective monitoring agent.

Our expectation from this understanding of the relationship between reporters and the public is that, assuming reporters are equally competent, the public would prefer a reporter who shares its collective political predispositions. Given the opportunity for the audience to select news outlets to attend to, news organizations act strategically to maximize sales and will therefore hire reporters who best match the audience's ideology. Thus, we anticipate the press corps of any given state should be at least loosely representative of public opinion in the state it serves. In terms of a spatial model, we would expect reporters in a given state to be ideologically closer to the median reader, rather than diverge much from the ideological central tendency of readers. If a state primarily has conservative residents, we would not expect to see a set of politically liberal or even moderate political reporters but, rather, relatively conservative reporters in the capital press corps, in step with their conservative public and the conservative officials it elects. Similarly, a liberal state should be more likely to employ liberal reporters than moderate or conservative reporters. Similar to how politicians attempt to align themselves with the median voter to be as spatially proximate to as many voters as possible, we believe that reporters and newspapers wishing to maximize their market share will appeal to the median reader in their

community.¹ This highly stylized model suggests a primary hypothesis for this article: the political orientations of statehouse reporters should be associated with the political orientations of the audience.

On average, reporters should be reflective of the ideological orientations of the readers they serve, but individual reporters may deviate from this. When is a reporter's ideological perspective unrepresentative of the central tendency of his or her state's readership? Here, we focus on patterns of descriptive and substantive representation. We investigate the relationship between a reporter's deviation from his or her state's political orientations and the reporter's race and income. However, our contextual understanding of reporters' political orientations suggests that we consider not just characteristics of reporters, but also audience characteristics. Consequently, we examine the effects of reporter and audience racial and economic characteristics on the reporter's deviation from the audience's political orientations. In this, we emphasize the *interaction* of reporter and state characteristics and their effect on the ideological match between reporters and audiences.

The concept of descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967) informs our expectations for the representativeness (or lack thereof) on the part of journalists. Descriptive representation primarily involves whether people are served by representatives who "look" like them, or match them with regard to characteristics like race. Scholars have demonstrated the importance of descriptive representation to the services governments provide (Bratton and Ray, 2002), as well as citizen relationships with their elected representatives (Gay, 2002). Newsrooms tend not to reflect the ethnic diversity of readerships (Dedman and Doig, 2005; Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1985). We believe that this lack of descriptive representation will have substantive impacts. Specifically, we hypothesize that journalists who share racial characteristics with their readers, satisfying the criterion of descriptive representativeness, will also enjoy a closer ideological correspondence: the reporters will be substantively more representative as well. For example, we anticipate that in states with larger concentrations of minority residents, reporters who are themselves members of minority racial and ethnic groups will more closely match the ideological perspectives of their readers, while white reporters will be less representative. Similarly, in states with larger white populations, minority journalists will be less ideologically representative than white reporters.

We have a similar set of expectations about income. Where journalists earn salaries that are much larger than the average incomes of members of their audience, they are less likely to share similar opinions with their readers and will therefore be less ideologically representative of readers than lower-income journalists. Similarly, reporters earning lower salaries in social

¹Given the importance of obtaining mass appeal for newspapers, appealing to the median reader makes more theoretical sense than appealing to the extremes of the distribution.

contexts composed of wealthier people should be less ideologically representative than better-paid reporters.

Journalist Survey Procedures

To investigate the conditions under which journalists' political orientations match their audiences, testing the hypotheses discussed above, we conducted an original mail survey of statehouse journalists from August 4–October 28, 2003. The population of interest was reporters in all 50 states. We designed and conducted the survey following Dillman's tailored design method (2000), but modified to take advantage of the fact that the principal investigators work at different universities. To begin, we acquired a list of statehouse reporters across the country from the National Conference on State Legislatures. Four undergraduate research assistants at the University of California, Riverside, then checked the list for accuracy using the Internet and telephone calls to news bureaus. After the list was cleaned, the research team at Western Carolina University assigned each respondent an identification number and sent surveys to 489 individuals (the population of statehouse reporters identified). We sent a reminder postcard to reporters who had not responded to the survey approximately three weeks later. Three weeks after the reminder postcard, Western Carolina University sent non-respondents a final reminder and a new copy of the instrument.

Respondents returned their surveys to the University of California, Riverside, which was responsible for coding the data. There, researchers can associate respondent identification numbers with their responses, and at Western Carolina University, researchers can link respondent identification numbers with respondent names. However, no data file directly associates respondent names with their responses. Due to this two-site design, we are able to merge individual survey responses with contextual information about the state where these respondents work, without any threat of identifying our respondents or violating the anonymity agreement we have with them.

Because of this unique design, we are able to ask, in a way that has thus far eluded most social researchers, under what conditions reporters express their particular ideological leanings. The survey includes questions about news-gathering practices, source use, questions relevant to media agenda setting, and the role of interest groups in state politics, as well as a number of relevant demographic questions. The survey also includes several questions about the political orientations of reporters and their news organizations. Table 1 presents several social and economic characteristics of the journalists in 42 states who responded to the survey.

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 percent response rate, higher than many recent surveys of

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Respondents to 2003 State Capitol Journalists Survey

Percent earning over \$60,000/year	34.1%
Percent identifying themselves as white	93.9%
Percent college journalism majors	66.9%
Median respondent age	45
<i>Geographic Distribution</i>	
Northeast (9 states)	10.5%
Midwest (12 states)	30.8%
South (16 states)	36.8%
West (13 states)	21.8%

NOTE: The geographic distribution uses Census regions. Northeast includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Midwest includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The West includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

SOURCE: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters.

political elites (Abbe and Herrnson, 2003; Kedrowski, 1996). Recent research suggests that response rates in this range, or even lower, are adequate to make inferences about larger populations (Baldauf, Reisinger, and Moncrief, 1999, cited in Abbe and Herrnson, 2003).

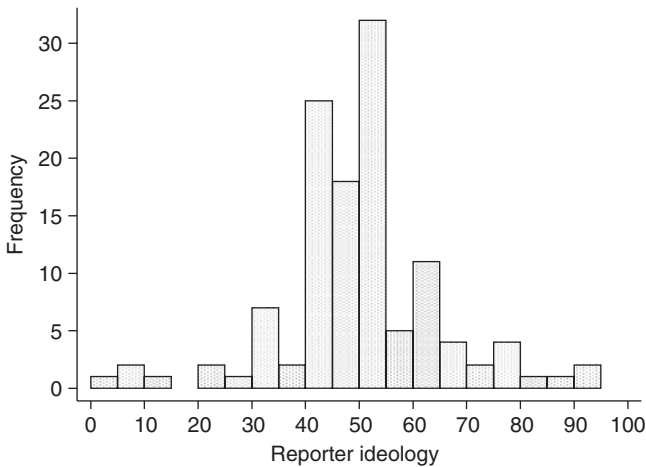
Findings

Aggregate Political Orientations of Statehouse Reporters

Before modeling reporters' ideology, we consider their ideological orientations in the aggregate. We asked the statehouse journalists to place themselves on a scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 means extreme left and 100 means extreme right² (for question wording, please see the Appendix). Figure 1 shows a histogram of responses to this political ideology question. The mean self-placement is 47.7, which is statistically different from the centrist self-placement at 50 ($t = 1.71$, $p < 0.1$, two-tailed test), but just two points on a 100-point scale to the left of center. Although statehouse reporters lean slightly left as an aggregate, they also demonstrate considerable variation, with a standard deviation of 14.9: some reporters think of

²In addition to asking reporters to rate their own political orientations, we asked them to rate the political predisposition of their news organization using the same 0 to 100 scale. The self-identifications and perceptions of news organizations were correlated ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$). More than half our respondents (52 percent) placed themselves within 10 points of their news organization. Given the relationship between these measures and our interest in reporter ideology, we focus on the personal ratings.

FIGURE 1
Reporter Political Ideology



SOURCE: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters. High numbers indicate that reporters perceive themselves as leaning to the right of the political spectrum.

themselves as very conservative and others consider themselves strong liberals.³ This distribution is more normal than what is often found in studies of the national media, but consistent with Rozell's (1994) finding that statehouse reporters tend to self-report ideologies that are more conservative than their national counterparts.

Reporter Ideology in Context

We model reporter political ideology across the states. The first model presented in the left column of Table 2 includes state ideology as measured by Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993:16) as the only independent variable.⁴ Erikson, Wright, and McIver aggregate national surveys conducted by CBS/New York Times, 1976–1988, to the state level. They measure state-level political ideology using self-reported ideological placement and a question similar to the question we asked of journalists in the

³We also conducted a similar analysis of reporter partisanship and found similar results. These findings will be made available on our websites in a technical appendix.

⁴While 133 journalists returned surveys, only 121 were willing to characterize their political ideology. Three additional responses are removed from the analysis because Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) do not report an ideology score for Alaska or Hawaii.

TABLE 2
Reporter Political Ideology, Individual and State Correlates

	β (Robust s.e.)	β (Robust s.e.)
State ideology (Erikson, Wright, McIver)	-0.230* (0.113)	-0.287** (0.116)
Reporter race (white)	—	-2.455 (7.713)
Reporter age (in years)	—	0.250 [†] (0.154)
Reporter income	—	-0.107 (2.220)
Constant	44.158*** (2.167) $N = 118$ $F_{1,37} = 4.17^*$ $R^2 = 0.01$	34.079*** (7.709) $N = 111$ $F_{4,36} = 2.59^{\dagger}$ $R^2 = 0.05$

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; [†] $p < 0.1$ (one-tailed test). The dependent variable is self-reported journalist ideology measured on a 0–100 scale, with 100 representing conservative reporters. The robust standard errors relax the assumption that respondents from the same state are observed independently from each other.

SOURCE: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters.

states.⁵ Although these data do not coincide with the year of our survey data, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) argue that state ideology exhibits tremendous stability and rarely varies over time, suggesting that the difference in cross-sections should not systematically affect our conclusions.⁶ Recall that we expect that reporter ideological self-placement will roughly correspond to state ideology. Our measure of ideology runs from left to right, with low numbers representing a more liberal reporter and high numbers representing a more conservative reporter (bound by 0 and 100), while Erikson, Wright, and McIver code liberal states as positive and conservative states as negative.⁷ Thus, if reporter ideology follows state ideology, we would expect a negative coefficient.

⁵Erikson, Wright, and McIver operationalize ideology using the CBS/New York Times survey item: "How would you describe your views on most political matters? Generally, do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?" They code liberals as 100, conservatives -100, and moderates 0, and then compute state means from these individual responses (Erikson, Wright, and McIver, 1993:17).

⁶Berry et al (2007a, 2007b) argue that state ideology is much less stable than Erikson, Wright, and McIver suggest; however, their conclusions only apply when using their data (which they claim captures policy mood). Erikson, Wright, and McIver (2007) and Brace et al. (2007) argue that self-reported ideology pooled to the state level is more stable than variable across time. However, using Berry et al.'s ideology indicator for 2002, we obtain findings substantively identical to the findings presented here.

⁷As noted, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) measure state ideology using self-reported political ideology rather than issue-specific position taking. Consequently, we measure reporter ideology with self-placements rather than issue positions.

In the bivariate model, state ideology is associated with reporter ideology: reporters who are more liberal serve states that are more liberal ($p < 0.05$) and reporters who are more conservative serve conservative states.⁸ For instance, in this bivariate context, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Indiana fall almost exactly as would be predicted from the model. The second model, presented in the right-hand column of Table 2, includes individual characteristics as well as state ideology. We might expect that white reporters, older reporters, and reporters with higher incomes would tend to lean conservative, mirroring findings among the general population.⁹ Surprisingly, our results indicate that individual characteristics have little effect on reporter ideology. Once again, however, state political ideology is significant ($p < 0.01$), and robust to the inclusion of these individual characteristics as control variables.

This is consistent with our hypothesis that journalists and audiences will have ideological orientations that converge. We have not seen this demonstrated elsewhere. Others have shown correspondence between content and coverage patterns and reader attributes (e.g., Hamilton, 2004), but not a relationship between reader and audience ideological orientations. In the aggregate, the press corps in state capitals appears to lean slightly left, but when state context is taken into account, reporters appear fairly representative of the states in which they work.¹⁰

Modeling Reporter Deviations from Audience Contexts

The models in Table 2 suggest that reporters tend to be representative of the states in which they serve, but there is still a great deal of unexplained variation in statehouse journalist orientations. Some reporters are more conservative than we might expect given their state's political orientations (e.g., some reporters in Florida), while others are more liberal than we might expect (e.g., some reporters in Georgia). Why are some reporters farther than others from the regression line—and thus less representative of the states in which they serve? We now turn our attention to the deviation of a reporter's political orientations from those of his or her readers and neighbors: Given what we know about a reporter's state, how far does the reporter fall from the ideological position we expect the reporter to occupy?

As discussed above, if a reporter shares racial and economic characteristics with the average resident of his or her state, we anticipate that reporter will be more ideologically representative of that state. For example, a white

⁸Each of the models reported in this article relax the assumption that the reporters observed in each state press corps are wholly independent from their colleagues: we cluster reporter respondents by state of residence and compute robust standard errors.

⁹The number of cases included in the analysis is smaller due to higher rates of nonresponse on the age, income, and race questions.

¹⁰Although we do not present the models here, we find similar results for reporter/state partisanship. These results will be made available in a technical appendix on our websites.

reporter in a white homogenous state (or a wealthy reporter in a state with higher per-capita income) should be more “representative” than a reporter who does not match on these descriptive characteristics (e.g., a white reporter in a racially diverse state, or a wealthy reporter in a state with lower per-capita income).

We do not anticipate that reporter characteristics alone will be associated with their difference from their readers. In other words, we do not expect white reporters to be more or less representative of their readers than reporters of color. Similarly, we do not expect rich reporters to be more or less representative of their readers than poor reporters. Rather, we expect that when reporters resemble residents of their state, they will more likely be politically representative of their state.

In analyzing the ideological convergence of reporters and their audiences, we are not interested solely in the absolute ideological position reporters take. Instead, we are interested in how reporters’ ideological positions are distributed around the ideological self-placement of an hypothetical reporter whose political preferences match those of his or her readers. We have a reliable surrogate for reader ideology in the Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) state ideology measure. Although we might prefer measures centering on issue positions or the content of news articles, this self-reported ideology taken from surveys optimizes the comparability of our measures of political orientations. We do not know exactly what function links the readership indicator to our survey data on reporter ideology. Our best guess of the ideological self-placement for a journalist who is *representative* of his or her readership in a given state is the expected value for a reporter in that state computed from the regression in the first column of Table 2.

To model each reporter’s deviation from this ideal of representativeness in a given state, we estimate the dispersion of journalists’ self-reported ideology around a regression line like the one computed in the first column of Table 2, using heteroskedastic regression.¹¹ This allows us to examine both the relationship between reporter and reader political orientations, as well as the correlates of the dispersion of reporters’ political orientations around that regression line. We simultaneously model the mean of reporter ideology and the variance of the disturbances around the regression line (Braumoeller, 2005). Harvey (1976) develops a model to account for multiplicative heteroskedasticity. The choice model examines correlates of the dependent variable. This is linked to a variance model used to test hypotheses about its disturbance term:

$$y_i = x_i\beta + u_i \quad (i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, n), \quad (1)$$

$$\sigma_i^2 = e^{z_i\alpha} \quad (i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, n), \quad (2)$$

¹¹An earlier version of this article modeled the absolute value of the standardized residuals from the regression in the first column of Table 2. This analysis is attached as a memorandum not intended for publication.

where y_i is a vector of observations on the dependent variable, x_i is a vector of observations on independent variables, β is a vector of parameters, u_i is the disturbance term of the choice model, σ_i^2 is the variance of the disturbance term, z_i is a vector of observations of independent variables, and α is a vector of parameters.

In OLS regression, we assume the disturbance term is distributed normal with a mean of 0 and a fixed variance ($u_i \sim N[0, \sigma^2]$). Here, we anticipate systematic variance in the disturbance term. In fact, given the amount of attention to the issue of reporter political orientations and our approach, we are arguably more interested in modeling the variance of reporters' ideological predispositions in a given context than the mean of reporter ideological predispositions in each context (see Braumoeller, 2005). We model these deviations as a function of characteristics that could separate the interests or predispositions of a reporter from those of his or her readers, focusing on racial and economic characteristics of each reporter and his or her state.

Our expectations simultaneously involve the racial and economic characteristic of reporters and the people of states they serve. Reporters of color should be more ideologically in tune with readerships made up of higher percentages of minorities in the population and white reporters should be more representative of states with higher percentages of white residents. The attributes of the population a reporter serves should also affect the relationship between a reporter's income and his or her representativeness. We capture the extent to which reporters match the racial and economic characteristics of their audiences using interactions terms computed using reporter and reader characteristics.

We measure self-identified racial identity with an indicator of whether a reporter is white or nonwhite. Racial context is measured using the percentage of people in each state who are white (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2003). We measure reporter income using a three-step self-reported measure described in an appendix, with the highest step representing journalists earning more than \$60,000 in 2002. State economic conditions are measured using per-capita income in 2002 (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2003).

Table 3 presents a regression model of reporter bias, similar to those shown in Table 2, but also modeling the disturbance term of the regression line. In the choice model, state political ideology is correlated with reporter ideology as before ($p < 0.01$, one-tailed test). The choice model of reporter ideology here is of less interest to us than the variance model. As expected, the income and race of a reporter, conditioned by the average per-capita income in the state and the balance of white and nonwhite residents in a state, respectively, are significant predictors of the variance of the choice model's disturbance term. Variables with positive coefficients are those associated with greater ideological deviations between a reporter and his or her audience, while those with negative coefficients decrease ideological disper-

TABLE 3
Modeling Reporter Political Ideology: Heteroskedastic Regression

	β (Robust s.e.)
<i>Choice Model</i>	
State ideology (Erikson, Wright, McIver)	-0.180** (0.059)
Constant	44.686*** (0.813)
<i>Variance Model</i>	
Reporter income	8.899*** (2.671)
State per-capita income, 2002 (in 1,000 s)	0.766*** (0.236)
Reporter income \times State per-capita income	-0.344*** (0.094)
Reporter race (white)	12.121 ^t (7.416)
State percent white, 2000	0.179* (0.100)
Reporter race \times State percent white	-0.170* (0.096)
Constant	-27.325** (10.261)
	$N = 116$ $\chi^2_{2, \tau} = 19.66^{**}$ pseudo- $R^2 = 0.02$

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ^t $p < 0.1$ (one-tailed test). The dependent variable is each journalist's self-reported ideology. The robust standard errors relax the assumption that respondents from the same state are observed independently from each other.

SOURCES: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters; U.S. Department of the Treasury (2002, 2003).

sion, suggesting that a reporter holds an ideological predisposition similar to that of the reporter's readers. For example, in hypothetical states where per-capita income approaches zero, increased reporter salaries would be associated with reporters being out of step with the population. The model's estimates predict that a white reporter's ideological self-placement in a state with no white residents would lie far away from the regression line that maps the relationship between state ideology and reporter preferences. A white reporter in a state with only white residents, however, would lie much closer to the line.¹²

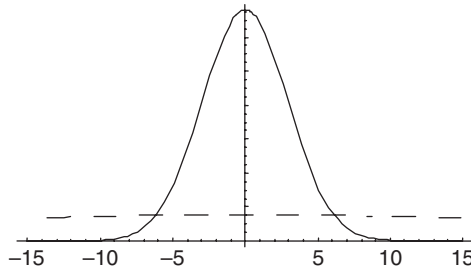
We estimate predicted distributions of the error term for types of reporters in different contexts, using coefficients from the heteroskedastic regression model. The graphs in Figure 2 show how the interaction between

¹²Although we do not present the models here, we find similar results for reporter/state partisanship. These results will be made available in a technical appendix on our websites.

FIGURE 2

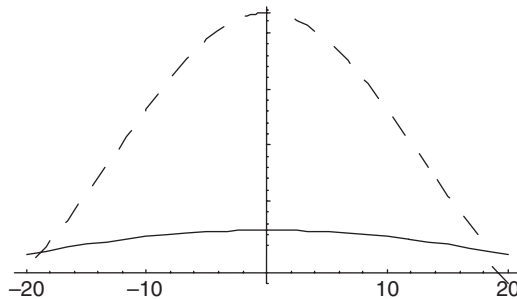
Reporter Income, State Per-Capita Income, and Ideological Bias

a *Reporters in states with higher per-capita incomes (\$38,450)*



The solid line represents the estimated distribution of the disturbance term for reporters who earn more than \$60,000 per year, $u_i \sim N[0, 8.6]$, compared to the dashed line representing the distribution of the disturbance term for reporters earning between \$35,000 and \$60,000 per year, $u_i \sim N[0, 647.7]$. For these reporters with lower income, the distribution of the disturbance term appears almost parallel to the axis line, suggesting they are far less representative than wealthier reporters.

b *Reporters in states with lower per-capita incomes (\$20,412)*



The solid line represents the estimated distribution of the disturbance term for reporters who earn more than \$60,000 per year, $u_i \sim N[0, 1034.5]$, compared to the dashed line representing the distribution of the disturbance term for reporters earning between \$35,000 and \$60,000 per year, $u_i \sim N[0, 158.0]$.

SOURCE: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters.

reporter economic interests and state economic characteristics affect the variance of the disturbance terms around the regression line associating reporter ideological identifications with those of their readers. A tall, narrow distribution would suggest that reporter ideology converges on, or is similar to, reader ideology. However, a squat, broad distribution would suggest

more ideological deviance, or dispersion, for reporters relative to their audiences. In Figure 2a, we hold annual per-capita income constant at \$38,450, the top of the range of observed per-capita income at the state level. We plot two distributions in Figure 2a, varying reporter incomes.¹³ The distribution plotted using the solid line is for reporters who are themselves well off, with incomes greater than \$60,000. The distribution plotted using the dashed line is for reporters earning less, between \$35,000 and \$60,000 per year.¹⁴ Given a more affluent readership, we see that well-off reporters are more representative of state ideological orientations than are more middle-class journalists. The distribution of political orientations is much flatter—almost parallel to the axis—for less affluent journalists, suggesting they diverge more dramatically from their reader orientations than do the richer reporters. Figure 2b shows the opposite situation in states where annual per-capita income is lower, held at \$20,412. Reporters earning over \$60,000 per year (the solid line) have more dispersed ideological placements than those earning between \$35,000 and \$60,000 (the dashed line). Reporters are more likely ideologically out of touch with readers, dispersed farther from the regression line, when their incomes diverge more dramatically from those of the population they serve.

Figures 3a and 3b present the interaction between reporter race and the percentage of white residents in a state. We are cautious about these findings, given the small number of minority reporters who responded to our survey; only seven minority respondents are included in the analysis. However, we see that reporters are clustered closer to the regression line when they are more demographically representative of their state's residents. In Figure 3a, we hold the percentage of state residents who are white constant at 97 percent.¹⁵ As with the income figures, we see that racial representativeness matters for ideological representativeness. The distribution of the disturbance term for white reporters, plotted as a dashed line, is taller and narrower than the disturbances for minority reporters, plotted with a solid line. Again, this solid line representing the distribution of the disturbance terms for minority reporters is almost parallel to the axis, suggesting they are far less representative of the ideology of their readers. As the white population decreases relative to the minority population of a state, the representativeness of minority reporters increases. Even with 60 percent white residents in a state, minority reporters (solid line) are more representative of readers than white reporters (dashed line).

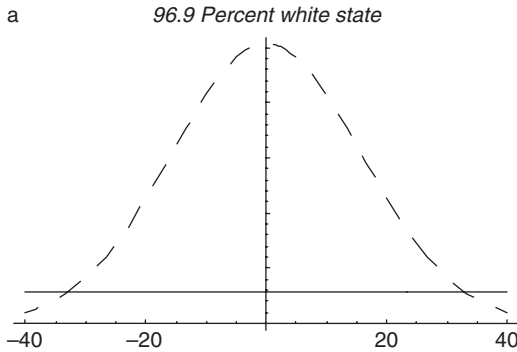
¹³The range of annual per-capita income in states where our respondents work is \$20,412–\$38,450 in 1996 dollars.

¹⁴Only 6 of our 133 respondents reported earning less than \$35,000 annually. We compare the richest respondents to those in the middle category, more accurately reflecting the variations we observe in reporter incomes. Using this poorer group of reporters for the counterfactuals plotted in Figures 2a and 2b provides similar results.

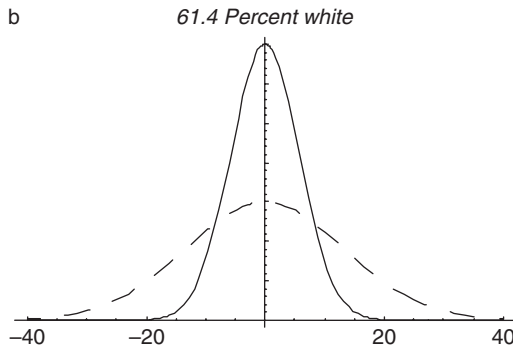
¹⁵The range of the percentage of white state residents is 60–97 percent.

FIGURE 3

Reporter Race, State Diversity, and Ideological Bias



The solid line, which appears almost parallel to the axis, represents the estimated distribution of the disturbance term for minority reporters, $u_i \sim N[0, 18804.1]$, compared to the dashed line representing the distribution of the disturbance term for white reporters, $u_i \sim N[0, 247.6]$, suggesting that Anglo reporters are more representative of readers in states with nearly homogenous white populations.



The solid line represents the estimated distribution of the disturbance term for minority reporters, $u_i \sim N[0, 32.4]$, compared to the dashed line representing the distribution of the disturbance term for white reporters, $u_i \sim N[0, 177.0]$.

SOURCE: Authors' survey of statehouse reporters.

Discussion

The dominant approach to understanding political communication assumes that there is one national press corps (usually the Washington, DC, press corps) and that journalists act similarly in all circumstances. This approach suggests that reporters lean to the left, regardless of context. Given recent work demonstrating the importance of context to media behavior, we believe that this monolithic approach to understanding political commu-

nication as a national phenomenon is limiting. Rather than aggregating reporter political preferences into one overall measure of ideology, we use the analytical leverage of the states to determine whether reporters are representative of the states they serve.

Our findings suggest that while reporter ideology leans to the left, it is conditioned by the context in which the reporter works. Liberal reporters serve in liberal states and reporters who are more conservative serve in conservative states. Given the nature of our data, we cannot conclusively determine the causal direction, but our data are consistent with our claim that media hiring decisions may be influenced by context and that there is not a monolithic press corps but, instead, a series of independent press corps, influenced by context.

We also develop insights into why reporters may differ politically from the states they serve, focusing on how well reporters match their states racially and economically. We find a linkage between the descriptive representation offered by reporters and their substantive, ideological representativeness. Reporters are more likely to reflect the ideological orientations of their readers when their salaries and racial characteristics are similar to those of their readers. When minority reporters represent homogeneous states, and poorer reporters serve in wealthier states, however, they appear to be less ideologically representative of their principal.

Future studies should determine whether cases with inadequate descriptive representation have different news content than similar situations where the reporter is a closer descriptive fit to his or her state. Whatever the results, the conclusions could help move toward a more satisfying understanding of journalistic independence, media bias, and public opinion.

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Appendix: Items from 2003 State Capitol Journalists Survey

Political Ideology

- The media are often classified politically in terms of left, right, and center. On a scale from 0, indicating the extreme left, to 100, which means the extreme right, where would you place the editorial policy of your organization?
- Where on this scale would you place yourself, keeping in mind that 0 means extreme left and 100 means extreme right?

Reporter's Race

- Which racial or ethnic group best describes you? White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino/Mexican-American, Black/African-American, American Indian/Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Other.

Reporter's Annual Income

- Finally, we'd like to ask you some financial information. Once again, all of the 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? Was it: Less than \$35,000; Between \$35,000 and \$60,000; More than \$60,000.

Reporter's Age

- In what year were you born? (responses were subtracted from 2003).

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