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# America's Shifting Statehouse Press

*Can New Players Compensate for  
Lost Legacy Reporters?*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
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## About This Report

This report is a census of reporters covering the 50 statehouses in the United States. The report tracks statehouse reporters working in all media sectors, including newspapers, television, radio, wire services and non-traditional news organizations. It details how the number of statehouse reporters breaks down by state and media sector and which factors relate to the size of a statehouse press corps.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Find related reports online at [pewresearch.org/journalism](http://pewresearch.org/journalism)

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## Overview

Within America's 50 state capitol buildings, 1,592 journalists inform the public about the actions and issues of state government, according to new data from the Pew Research Center.

Of those statehouse reporters, nearly half (741) are assigned there full time. While that averages out to 15 full-time reporters per state, the actual number varies widely—from a high of 53 in Texas to just two in South Dakota. The remaining 851 statehouse reporters cover the beat less than full time.

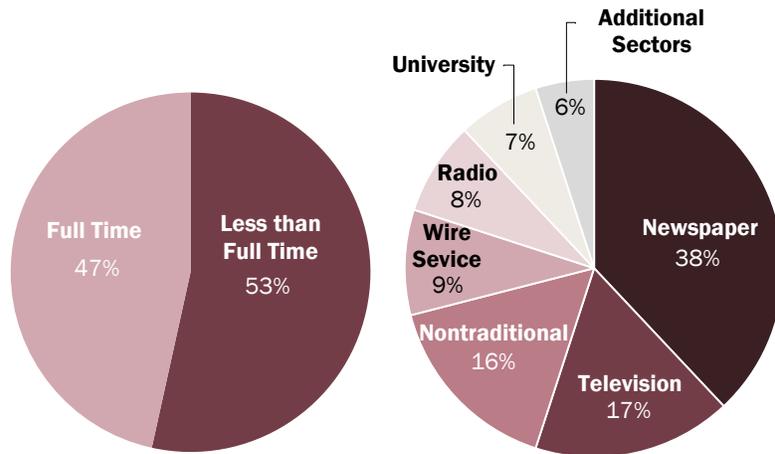
In this study, statehouse reporters are defined as those physically assigned to the capitol building to cover the news there, from legislative activity to the governor's office to individual state agencies.

Newspaper reporters constitute the largest segment of both the total statehouse news corps (38%) and the full-time group (43%). But the data indicate that their full-time numbers have fallen considerably in recent years, raising concerns about the depth and quality of news coverage about state government.

Between 1998 and 2009, American Journalism Review conducted five tallies of newspaper reporters assigned to the statehouse full time. Each tally since 1998 showed decline. The most precipitous drop occurred [between 2003 and 2009](#), coinciding with large reductions in overall newspaper staffing prompted by the recession and major changes in the news industry. To gauge the loss of reporters through 2014, Pew Research went back to the 2003 AJR list and examined statehouse staffing levels at newspapers that were accounted for in the last two AJR tallies—2003

### Who Reports from U.S. Statehouses?

*% of all statehouse reporters*



Note: The "less than full time" category includes part-time, students (temp.), reporters working during session only and other staff such as interns and videographers. Additional sectors represent the following: professional publications, multi-platform media companies and "other," which includes freelancers, magazines and alternative weeklies. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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and 2009 and in our 2014 accounting.<sup>1</sup> Those papers lost a total of 164 full-time statehouse reporters—a decline of 35%—between 2003 and 2014. That percentage is slightly higher than the decline in newspaper newsroom staffing overall. According to the American Society of News Editors, full-time newspaper [newsroom staffing shrunk by 30% from 2003 through 2012](#) (the latest year for which data are available).

As newspapers have withdrawn reporters from statehouses, others have attempted to fill the gap. For-profit and nonprofit digital news organizations, ideological outlets and high-priced publications aimed at insiders have popped up all over the country, often staffed by veteran reporters with experience covering state government. These nontraditional outlets employ 126 full-time statehouse reporters (17% of all full-time reporters). But that does not make up for the 164 newspaper statehouse jobs lost since 2003.

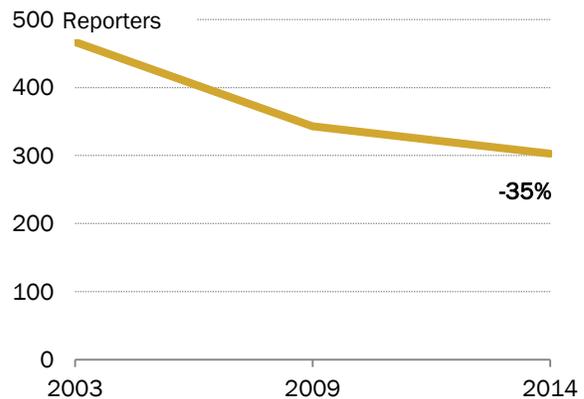
The cutbacks have led to other changes as well. State officials themselves have attempted to fill what they say is a reduction in coverage by [producing their own news feeds](#) for public television, broadcast outlets or the Internet. Newspapers and other media have tried to compensate for the changes by hiring students and increasing collaboration among outlets. It is not uncommon these days for former competitors to share reporters or stories, a trend that would have been unheard of in years past.

To gather as complete of an accounting as possible of the nation's statehouse reporting pool, Pew Research spent months reaching out to editors and reporters, legislative and gubernatorial press secretaries and other experts on state government. This report puts a first-ever number on statehouse reporters not just from newspapers, but from all media sectors. It details how they break down by state and media sector and looks at how those numbers relate to state

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## Newspaper Statehouse Reporters Decline

*# of full-time newspaper statehouse reporters*



Note: Figures are based on a subset of newspapers, identified in the AJR studies and the current Pew study.

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014 and American Journalism Review.

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<sup>1</sup> Because AJR's list of papers varied some each year, it was not feasible to create a consistent list going all the way back to 1998.

demographics and legislative activity. For this report, the key requirement was that a statehouse reporter physically work in the state capitol building—whether full-time or less than full time.

Major findings of this study include:

- **Less than a third of U.S. newspapers assign any kind of reporter—full time or part time—to the statehouse.** According to the Alliance for Audited Media, only 30% of the 801 daily papers it monitor send a staffer to the statehouse for any period of time. In Massachusetts, whose capital is the largest city (Boston), just 6% of the state’s newspapers have any reporting presence at the statehouse—the lowest percentage of newspaper representation of any state.
- **Fully 86% of local TV news stations do not assign even one reporter—full time or part time—to the statehouse.** Of the 918 local television stations identified by BIA/Kelsey and Nielsen, just 130 assign a reporter to cover the statehouse. Overall, television reporters account for 17% of the total statehouse reporting pool and considerably less (12%) of the full-time mix.
- **About one-in-six (16%) of all the reporters in statehouses work for nontraditional outlets, such as digital-only sites and nonprofit organizations.** They also account for 17% of the 741 reporters who work at the state capitols full time. The largest statehouse bureau in the country, with 15 full-time staffers, is operated by the five-year-old Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, digital-only outlet. And in New York, the third most populated state, the largest bureau (with five full-time reporters) belongs to Capital New York, a commercial digital outlet founded in 2010.
- **Students account for 14% (223 in all) of the overall statehouse reporting corps.** Most students work at the statehouse part time and for short tenures. Many of these students (97) work for legacy outlets—newspapers, TV or radio stations, or wire services—while the other 126 work for outlets ranging from school newspapers to nonprofit news organizations.
- **Wire services assign a total of 139 staffers to statehouses, representing 9% of all the reporters at the capitol buildings.** The vast majority of full-time wire service reporters (69 of 91) work for the Associated Press. Although the wire service reduced statehouse staffing during the recession, the AP is now increasing the size of some of its capitol bureaus.
- **Two indicators of the size of a statehouse press corps are the population of the state and the length of its legislative sessions.** Of the 10 most populous states, all but two (Georgia and North Carolina) are among those with the 10 largest full-time statehouse press corps. And, eight of the 10 states with the longest legislative sessions also rank in the top 10 in the number of full-time statehouse reporters. Other potential factors—including demographic breakdowns, and the number of legislators per state—have no apparent

association with the number of reporters assigned to cover a statehouse. (To access state-by-state data, [click on this database](#))

While full historical comparisons on the number of statehouse reporters do not exist, the newspaper data reveal substantial decline over the past decade. And in numerous conversations with journalists, legislative leaders and industry observers, one sentiment was expressed again and again: concern about the impact of what they see as a broad decline in mainstream media coverage.

“I do think there’s been a loss in general across the country, and that’s very concerning to me,” said Patrick Marley, who covers the Wisconsin statehouse for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. “We have scads of reporters in Washington covering every bit of news that Congress makes. State legislators have more effect on people’s daily lives. We need to have eyes on them, lots of eyes.”

“I think you’re seeing fewer stories,” said Gene Rose, the longtime former communications director for the National Conference of State Legislatures. “The public is not being kept aware of important policy decisions that are being made that will affect their daily lives.”

The reality—at least for the foreseeable future—is that news budgets will remain tight and that statehouses are not the only beat to have suffered. Simply increasing staff, then, is often not an easy option. Some news outlets have taken steps to try to produce more with less through new kinds of collaborations. The [Miami Herald](#) and the [Tampa Bay Times](#), for example, now share a statehouse bureau in which reporters who formerly competed with each other now coordinate coverage. In Illinois, the State Journal-Register, based in Springfield, covers the statehouse for all Illinois newspapers owned by its parent company, GateHouse Media. And in other cases, reporters work for more than one outlet. In addition, more and more state legislative offices are putting out information themselves, giving residents direct access to it—if they know where to look.

How these new collaborations and information sources impact the public is hard to assess. The changes may help fill some of the gaps created when news organizations trimmed or eliminated statehouse bureaus and may expose more people to state government issues. But they also raise questions about the level of diversity in reporting. As we found in our recent research on [local television consolidation](#), fewer reporters following events and asking questions may well mean less diverse coverage and fewer opportunities to dig below the surface of events. As Jeff Zent, communications director for North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple, remarked, “The more perspectives you can get in covering a story by professional journalists, the better off the public is in being informed.”

## Statehouse Staffing: A Mix of Full-Time, Part-Time and Session-Only Reporters

Altogether, the Pew Research Center identified 1,592 journalists who cover state government around the country. Of those reporters, 741 (47%) cover state government full time. For these journalists, the statehouse is their beat. They cover it every day and have the greatest opportunity to develop sources and produce stories that go beyond the basic contours of daily news. Most of them have desks in pressrooms within their state's capitols or in buildings nearby. They usually cover many aspects of government, particularly the legislature, the governor, state agencies and departments and, sometimes, state courts.

The data find slightly more reporters who work at the statehouse on less than a full-time basis—851 in all (53%).

Of those, 163 reporters—10% of the total—cover statehouses solely during legislative sessions. These session-only journalists report during the periods when statehouse news is most plentiful, when lawmakers are debating and voting on bills. Pew Research found that only 11 legislatures meet for an average of six months or more per session (and four meet only every other year), meaning that most of these session-only journalists spend less than half the year at the statehouse.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the time, these reporters usually cover other assignments for their news organizations.

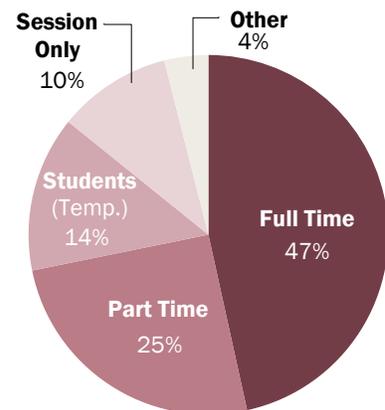
In addition, 402 journalists (one-quarter of the total) cover the statehouse part time. Often, they cover other assignments on a regular basis and are dispatched to the capitol when there is a big story or news on a particular topic they are covering.

There also are 223 college students—14% of the total statehouse press corps—who generally cover the statehouse for short periods of time, such as a semester. In all, 97 of these student reporters work for legacy organizations, such as newspaper or broadcast outlets or wire services. The

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### Roughly Half of Statehouse Reporters Are Full Time

*% of all statehouse reporters*



Note: Other category includes interns, videographers or other supporting staff.

N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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<sup>2</sup> The Pew Research data for the length of a state's legislative session were based on the average of its 2012 and 2013 sessions.

remaining 126 cover the statehouse for university-based publications, nonprofits and even some specialty publications.

Several journalism schools have built statehouse reporting assignments into the curriculum. At the University of Maryland, broadcast bureau director Sue Kopen Katcef sees the journalism school's Capital News Service as a "training ground" for aspiring journalists. Seniors and master's degree students work several days a week to produce stories for outlets that subscribe to the news service. This spring, Katcef had five students covering the Annapolis statehouse.

Other universities have more informal arrangements to give students statehouse reporting experience. The University of Montana, for instance, provides a scholarship and college credit for one student to spend a legislative session in Helena. The student's articles are syndicated to nearly 40 newspapers—mostly weeklies and small dailies that cannot afford to have their own full-time reporters at the capitol. In addition, two broadcast students are assigned to another news service, which provides coverage to commercial radio and television stations throughout the state.

Finally, Pew identified 63 statehouse journalists who don't fit into any of those categories or whose delineation in the data collection was unclear. Some are interns, although not student interns. Others are videographers or camera operators who work for broadcast outlets.

Across this mix, it is the journalists stationed at capitols year round who often bear the most responsibility for informing the public about the thousands of new state laws that are enacted each year. Because the federal government is divided and Congress today is often gridlocked, many people view state governments as the prime sources of legislative diligence in the United States.

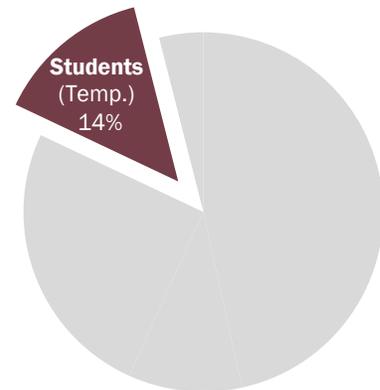
"With gridlock in Washington, a lot of the action has shifted to statehouses," said Darrel Rowland, public affairs editor of the Columbus Dispatch in Ohio's capital city.

Numbers bear that out. The 112th Congress, which was in session during 2011 and 2012, passed 283 bills that were signed into law, according to records of the [Library of Congress](#). During 2012 alone, California's legislature passed 1,013 bills that became law, Michigan's passed 948 and

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## One-in-Seven Statehouse Reporters Are Students

*% of all statehouse reporters*



N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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Louisiana’s legislature—which was in session for just 60 days—passed 870. In fact, 24 state legislatures—more than half of those that met in 2012—enacted more laws in that one year than Congress did in 2011 and 2012. Four state legislatures meet only in odd-numbered years.

Given this amount of legislative activity, several journalists expressed a need to be grounded in statehouse business full time, to maintain a constant presence in order to develop sources and keep tabs on officials.

“Anytime there are less people watching what’s going on, things are going to be slipping through the cracks,” said Garry Rayno, a statehouse reporter for the Manchester (N.H.) Union Leader. “Things that people should know are not getting reported.”

## Who Covers the Statehouse

These 1,592 reporters come from a wide range of outlets and sectors. Even with the declines of the last decade, newspapers still employ the greatest portion of all statehouse reporters—38% of the total.

The next largest employer, television stations, account for less than half as many (17%). They are followed by reporters working for a range of nontraditional outlets such as commercial digital sites, nonprofits, specialty outlets and ideological news sites that together make up 16% of the overall reporter pool.

Wire services account for 9% of the total pool and radio 8%.

But it's perhaps more instructive to look at the organizations supporting the 741 full-time reporters, which represents a greater commitment to ongoing reporting of statehouse issues and events.

### The Full-Time Reporter Pool

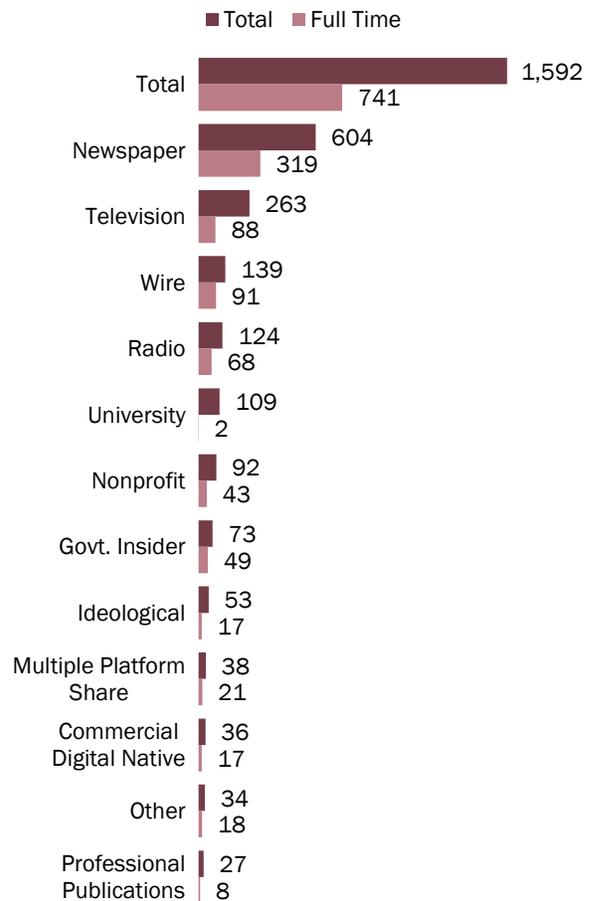
Of the 741 journalists who cover the statehouse full time, 319 (43% of the full-time workforce) report for newspapers.

The second largest group of full-time statehouse reporters works for wire services, primarily for the Associated Press but also others such as Reuters and Bloomberg News.

About two-thirds of wire service statehouse reporters (91 in all) are full time. And although they represent a modest 12% of all full-time statehouse reporters, their impact is likely greater as their stories often run in many media outlets that are wire service clients.

## Newspapers Employ the Biggest Statehouse Press Corps

# of all statehouse reporters



Note: The "other" sector category includes alternative weeklies, magazines and freelancers.

N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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Television stations employ a smaller portion of all full-time reporters than they do of the total reporter pool: just 12%, or 88 full-time reporters in all, and 17% of total statehouse reporters. An additional 68 full-time statehouse reporters were assigned there by radio outlets, and 21 other full-time reporters file stories for multi-platform companies that ask them to produce stories across television, radio and print.

In addition to the legacy news organizations listed above, a number of nontraditional outlets cover statehouse news. Many of them were launched in the past six years in response to the sharp reduction of statehouse coverage by more established outlets. Taken together, the nontraditional organizations identified by Pew Research employ 126 full-time statehouse reporters, or 17% of the full-time total.

That figure includes 49 full-time reporters who work for government insider publications. These publications are aimed at those whose business interests are closely tied to state legislative activities, and they can sometimes come with a steep subscription price. [Nonprofit news organizations](#), a growing part of the journalism ecosystem, employ 43 full-time statehouse reporters. A group of ideological news organizations, with clearly stated editorial philosophies, employ 17 full-time statehouse reporters. And another 17 full-time reporters work for a group of commercial, for profit digital native news outlets.

In addition, eight full-time journalists work for professional publications, such as local business journals or others that target a specific industry. Two full-time statehouse reporters work for outlets owned by universities—one each at the University of Illinois and the University of Missouri.

Finally, 18 full-time statehouse journalists work for outlets that we included in an “other category.” Some of them are freelancers whose work appears in a variety of outlets, while others work for outlets such as monthly magazines and alternative weeklies.

Below is a deeper look at the reporters coming from each sector of media.

## Newspapers: The Primary but Declining Pool of Reporters

Newspapers account for the greatest portion of statehouse reporters, but to get a sense of how those numbers have declined over time, Pew Research turned to earlier studies conducted by American Journalism Review. The magazine [conducted five studies of newspapers'](#) statehouse staffing levels between 1998 and 2009. Each time, it reported that staffing was down, with the sharpest decline occurring from 2003 to 2009.

Pew Research data show that the decline has continued in the past five years, albeit at a somewhat slower pace.

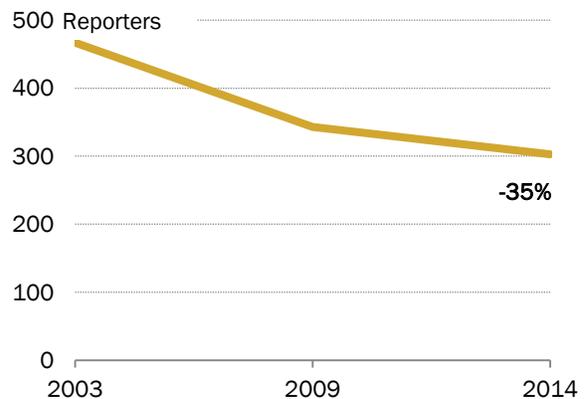
In order to provide a direct comparison with today, Pew researchers examined staffing at the papers included in both 2003 and 2009 AJR studies as well as in the current 2014 data. Those 220 papers had 467 full-time statehouse reporters in 2003, which dropped to 343 in 2009 and then to 303 in 2014. That amounts to a 27% decline from 2003 to 2009, a 12% loss from 2009 to 2014, and an overall decline of 35%.<sup>3</sup>

These cutbacks are not uniform across the board, however. Newspapers' statehouse staffing among this cohort of papers dwindled in 23 states between 2009 and 2014. The sharpest cuts occurred in Illinois, which lost seven full-time newspaper slots—from 12 to five—during that period. And, two of the three most populous states—California and New York—reported losses of five full-time jobs each.

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### Newspaper Statehouse Reporters Decline

*# of full-time newspaper statehouse reporters*



Note: Figures are based on a subset of newspapers, identified in the AJR studies and the current Pew study.

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014 and American Journalism Review.

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<sup>3</sup> The AJR report cites a loss of 32% among the papers they studied. But some papers identified by Pew Research in 2014 were not accounted for one way or another in the original AJR lists. To make this comparison with AJR as accurate as possible, researchers examined a subset of papers that were in both the AJR lists and our current 2014 list: a total of 220. There were two cases where AJR outlets existed in our 2014 count but not within the newspaper sector. Morris Communication and Dayton Daily News told Pew Research that their statehouse reporters work for the company that has outlets across multiple platforms, including but not limited to newspapers. Thus in the current data set they are counted within the “multiple platform” category.

At the same time, 15 states did not show any change in the number of full-time newspaper reporters covering the statehouse between 2009 and this year, though one—South Dakota—did not have any to begin with. And 12 states posted increases—most of them small. The most significant growth occurred in New Mexico and New Jersey, each of which added three reporters. (In the case of New Mexico, that doubled the staffing from three to six.) Georgia, Idaho and Massachusetts gained two reporters each. Again, this comparison was of a subset of the papers that were a part of the 2009 AJR study.

In addition to the AJR cohort, however, our current research identified 15 papers that employed 19 full-time reporters, bringing the total number of newspaper reporters currently dedicated to the statehouse full time to 319.<sup>4</sup>

To bolster the coverage provided by full-time statehouse journalists, newspapers send 285 other reporters to their capitols at various times. Of those, 55 cover state government during legislative sessions only and 144 are part time. An additional 66 reporters are students and 20 are non-student interns and others that papers did not categorize.

Still, a large majority of newspapers do not send anyone to the statehouse. Of the 801 newspapers nationwide that submit to regular circulation audits by the Alliance for Audited Media, almost three-quarters (71%) have no full- or part-time reporters at the statehouse. Only 229 have at least one statehouse reporter.

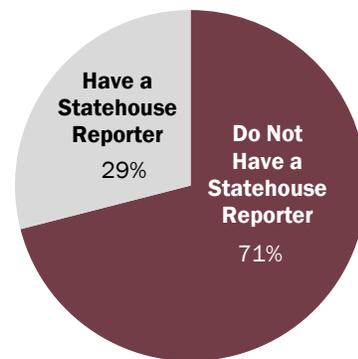
With the exception of USA Today—a national newspaper not anchored to any one state—each of the country’s 25 largest newspapers has at least one full-time or part-time statehouse reporter.

At one point, observers say, smaller papers had a larger presence in the nation’s statehouses.

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### More than Two-Thirds of the U.S. Newspapers Do Not Have a Statehouse Reporter

*% of audited U.S. newspapers*



N=801

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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<sup>4</sup> In compiling its count of newspaper reporters, Pew Research included journalists who worked for companies such as Lee Enterprises and Gannett, and produced stories for a number of papers in those chains.

“Way back in the day, 35 years ago, a lot of the small papers had reporters in the statehouse,” said Susan Moeller, news editor of the Cape Cod Times in Massachusetts. Her paper had a two-person statehouse bureau, which was cut to one and then zero during the recession, she said.

“You can lay off your statehouse reporter or you can lay off somebody covering your town that is nearer and dearer to people’s hearts,” Moeller said. “You will lay off the statehouse reporter because you can get that from another source.” Last year, Moeller said, editors hired a reporter to cover the statehouse part time—but he is based on Cape Cod and also responsible for covering the town of Hyannis.

## Wire Services

Wire services devote a greater proportion of their statehouse staffs to the beat on a full-time year-round basis than do newspapers or broadcast outlets. Fully two-thirds of their statehouse reporters, 91 out of 139, are assigned to capitols full-time.

In addition, wire services send 26 reporters to statehouses only during legislative sessions and 16 on a part-time basis. They complete their staffs with three students and three other journalists.

In all, wire service reporters represent 9% of all statehouse reporters and 12% of all full-time statehouse reporters, but their impact is greater as their work is widely distributed by other outlets that carry those stories. In interviews, several editors say that now that they have cut their own staff, they rely on wire services more than in the past.

“We receive several wire service reports, but no longer have a reporter in Springfield,” said Philip Angelo, senior editor of the Small Newspaper Group, which has a handful of papers in Illinois. “We’ve had several rounds of layoffs.”

About three-fourths (76%) of the full-time wire service reporters (69) work for the Associated Press. Other wire services with state government reporters include two national organizations, Bloomberg News, which has 12 full- and part-time reporters in 11 state capitols, and Reuters, which has one reporter in California alone. There also are several smaller wire services that distribute stories to clients within an individual state. One of those wires, the News Service of Florida, has six full-time, year-round statehouse reporters, more than any other bureau in Tallahassee.

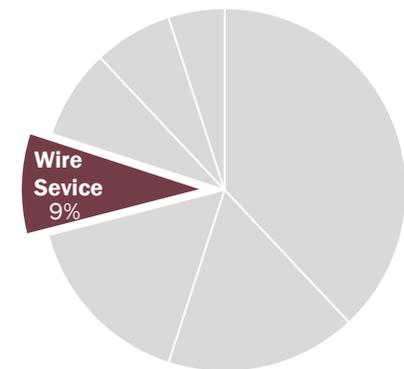
“At the very core of the AP’s core business is state coverage, and at the very core of that is statehouse coverage,” said Brian Carovillano, AP’s managing editor for U.S. news.

Nonetheless, reporters for the AP and other outlets in a number of statehouses said the wire service cut staff during the recession. “As each person left, they never replaced them,” said Amy

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### Wire Services Account for about One in Ten Statehouse Reporters

*% of all statehouse reporters*



N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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Worden, the Philadelphia Inquirer's Harrisburg bureau chief and president of the Pennsylvania Legislative Correspondents' Association. The AP's bureau in Pennsylvania's capitol has dropped from five reporters to three.

The AP declined to enumerate its current or past statehouse reporting staffs. However, Carovillano said: "The AP, like so many news organizations, got a little bit smaller after 2008. There was never a conscious pullback."

With the improvement of the economy and under the guidance of Gary Pruitt, who became AP's president and CEO in July 2012, the AP Board of Directors identified state news, in general, and statehouse coverage, in particular, as "a major priority" for 2014, Carovillano said. As a result, he added, "we are hiring a number of political and state government reporters this year."

The Associated Press also relies more heavily upon temporary reinforcements than organizations in other sectors. While roughly two-thirds (66%) of the AP's statehouse reporters cover the government full time, their work is supplemented by temporary reporters hired specifically to work full time or part time only during legislative sessions. This is different from the practice of newspapers, which often dispatch reporters to cover statehouses during legislative sessions, but assign them to do other things the rest of the year.

## Television

Of the 918 local television stations identified by BIA/Kelsey and Nielsen, only 130 assigned at least one reporter to cover the statehouse—meaning that 86% of the local stations do not have a state government reporter.

Altogether, 263 television journalists play a role in statehouse coverage, which amounts to 17% of all statehouse reporters.

A total of 88 television reporters cover state capitols full time. An additional 28 television reporters cover statehouses only when their legislatures are in session.

The largest group of television reporters—102—cover state government part time. These often are general assignment reporters who are dispatched to the capitol to cover breaking news. In addition, television stations use 21 student reporters and 24 people who don't fall into the other categories, but who tend to be videographers.

Nationwide, 32 states have at least one full-time television reporter covering the statehouse. Idaho, one of the smallest states with roughly 1.5 million residents, has the greatest per capita representation of television outlets in its statehouse—six stations cover the capitol in Boise. Television reporters are entirely absent from statehouses in Connecticut, Maine, Oklahoma and Oregon. Yet [previous Pew studies](#) show that local television is the primary place Americans go for news.

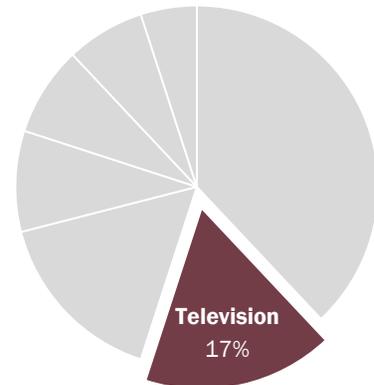
“A lot of people still get their news from TV and they're not here,” said Stephen Miskin, spokesman for the Pennsylvania House Republican Caucus and for the speaker and majority leader.

Public television affiliates staff their statehouse bureaus at a somewhat higher rate than commercial broadcast stations. Ten of the 130 stations that cover state government are public TV affiliates. They employ a total of 11 full-time statehouse reporters. These outlets rarely have nightly newscasts, but produce long-form programming that tackles state issues in depth. Washington state's PBS affiliates produce a trio of programs: “Inside Olympia,” a year-round broadcast featuring interviews with lawmakers; “The Impact,” a newsmagazine show on the statehouse; and “Legislative Review,” a daily recap of lawmaking highlights when the body is in session. In some

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### Television's Place among Statehouse Reporters

*% of all statehouse reporters*



N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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cases, officials said these broadcasts were created in response to a reduction in reporting by other legacy outlets.

Some state-owned TV stations, such as those in California, Rhode Island and Washington—also broadcast legislative proceedings (similar to what C-SPAN does for Congress). And Pew Research identified seven states that have cable channels or local access channels dedicated to live coverage of the legislature. In some cases, these broadcasts also extend to committee hearings. Some of these channels are independent, while others are extensions of state government. Several journalists interviewed by Pew Research said that these broadcasts enable them to cover the capitol remotely.

## Radio

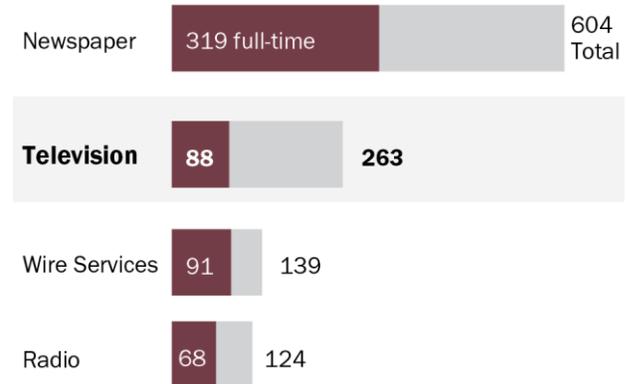
Radio reporters constitute a smaller segment of the statehouse press corps than their television counterparts, about 8% of all statehouse reporters and 9% of those who cover the statehouse full time.

In all, radio stations assign 124 reporters to the statehouse beat: 68 who are full-time, 15 who cover it only during legislative sessions, 31 part time, 7 students and 3 who fall into none of those categories.

Reporters for public radio stations make up a just under half of both the full-time radio contingent working in the nation's statehouses—31 of the 67. (In addition, 36 report for commercial radio outlets.) They also account for just under half of less than full-time reporters—26 of the 56.

## TV Has a Smaller Share of Full-Time Statehouse Reporters than Other Sectors

# of all statehouse reporters



N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014.

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## Nontraditional Players in the Statehouse Press Corps

As legacy news organizations have reduced the size of their statehouse reporting staffs in recent years, nontraditional outlets have sprung up to try to fill the gaps in coverage.

These organizations, which are mostly digital-only, fall into four main categories: nonprofit, government insider or those aimed at government insiders, ideological and for-profit (or commercial digital native). Some news outlets fall into more than one category, particularly those that are nonprofits and also have a stated ideological bent. In those cases, we categorized them as ideological and removed them from the remaining category so as not to count any organization twice.

Altogether, nontraditional organizations assign 254 journalists to statehouses, accounting for 16% of all statehouse reporters. That figure comprise 126 full-timers, 28 reporters who cover state government only during legislative sessions, 73 who are on the beat part time, 21 students and 6 who fall into the “other” category.

In seven states—Connecticut, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas and Vermont—the outlet with the largest number of full-time statehouse reporters is one of these upstarts.

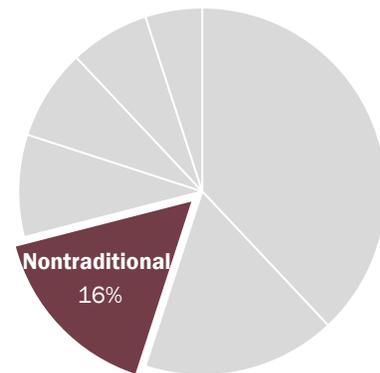
“We saw the need. There’s been a decline in state coverage here as elsewhere. We felt that there was an underserved market for it,” said Joe Copeland, political editor for Crosscut, a Washington state website that launched in 2007 and started covering the statehouse full time last year.

According to the AJR census, the largest reduction in newspaper statehouse reporters coincided with historic decreases in total staffing during the recession, though it was underway in the three preceding years. As reporters were laid off or bought out, some of these journalists—who had covered state government for legacy outlets—decided to start their own news organizations or to buy and transform existing ones.

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### About One-Sixth of Statehouse Reporters Work for Nontraditional Outlets

*% of all statehouse reporters*



N=1,592

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014

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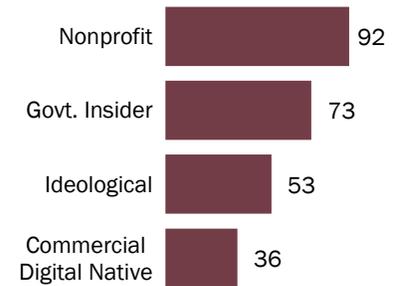
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“When we started, everybody was abandoning their state capitol desk at the time. There was this mass exodus,” said Christine Stuart, editor in chief of CTNewsJunkie.com. Stuart bought the for-profit Connecticut website in 2006, the year after it was founded. “We were really filling a gap that existed. The mainstream media had abandoned statehouse reporting.”

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### Nontraditional Outlets Aim to Fill Gaps in Statehouse Coverage

*# of all statehouse reporters*



N=254

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014

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## Commercial Digital Native

Eleven for-profit websites cover state government with 36 reporters, 17 of whom are on the beat full time. Nine of the outlets were founded in the past decade, including seven during or after 2008.

The for-profit site that has the greatest number of full-time, year-round statehouse reporters is the four-year-old Capital New York, which has the largest bureau in Albany. With five full-time journalists and one student intern covering the statehouse, Capital New York eclipses the New York Times and the Albany Times Union, each of which has three full-time reporters and none in any other category. None of the 24 other outlets that cover state government in the third most populous state has more than two full-time, year-round reporters in the capitol.

In fact, only 10 other news organizations in the country—of any type—have more than five full-time journalists in their statehouse bureaus year-round. And many of the for-profit outlets are not as large as Capital New York.

Erik Smith, news editor of the Washington State Wire, is the lone journalist for a site that provides a combination of original reporting and aggregation. A former statehouse reporter for two newspapers, Smith founded his outlet in 2003, just as other state government reporters were losing their jobs. Now, he said, he is struggling to find a way to sustain the site financially, and might seek nonprofit status.

Not all the outlets were created recently. Brian Howey, publisher of Howey Politics Indiana, formed his organization in 1994 as the Howey Political Report and put most of it online in 2001. A former newspaper reporter, Howey oversees a website, with some free and some subscription-only content, and a weekly print publication, which he mails to subscribers. He also writes a column that he syndicates to 30 newspapers in the state. His publication, which is edited by his journalist parents, has one full-time, year-round statehouse reporter and two part-timers.

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## Staffing Levels for Commercial Digital Outlets

*# of statehouse reporters*

Digital News Organization	Total	Full-Time
Capital New York	6	5
Civil Beat	6	0
CTNewsJunkie.com	5	2
Howey Politics Indiana	3	1
Politickernj.com/State Street Wire	4	2
NJSpotlight.com	4	3
Concord Patch(New Hampshire)	3	0
Roxbury News	2	2
Alaska Dispatch	1	1
Washington State Wire	1	1
GoLocalProv	1	0

Source: Pew Research Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014

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“As a third-generation journalist, I’m alarmed at what’s going on in statehouses around the country,” Howey said. “We’ll pay a price if coverage keeps receding...My fear is that as journalism recedes down [and] fewer people are there on a full-time basis, that’s just going to set the stage for scandal if nobody’s watching. I think we’re heading into a very dangerous territory in state government.”

## Nonprofits

Like for-profit digital news organizations, nonprofit outlets have mushroomed since the recession pummeled the legacy news industry. Last year, [Pew Research identified 172 nonprofit news outlets](#) across the country. Our new study found that 23 of the nonprofits that were not also ideological cover state government.

The nonprofits have a relatively small number of reporters in capitols, just 43 full time and 92 in total—6% of all statehouse reporters. In addition, five reporters cover the statehouse during legislative sessions and 26 do so part time. Fifteen of the nonprofit reporters are college students, and three fall into the “other” category.

The Texas Observer has been covering the statehouse in Austin for 60 years, but that is an outlier in terms of age. Sixteen of the nonprofits that report on statehouses were founded in the past six years. In addition to the Texas Observer, only one—the Center for Investigative Reporting, which dates back to 1977—existed before 2000. St. Louis Public Radio, an affiliate of National Public Radio, also has existed for some time, but it merged with the newer, digital-only St. Louis Beacon in December 2013 to create a new entity.

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# THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

TUESDAY, MAY 27, 2014



## Video: AG Candidates Battle on the Airwaves

by [Justin Dehn](#) and [Alana Rocha](#) | May 27, 2014

In the Republican primary runoff for Texas attorney general, state Rep. [Dan Branch](#), R-Dallas, and state Sen. [Ken Paxton](#), R-McKinney, traded sharp on-air jabs, spending more than \$2 million combined to advertise in the state's largest TV markets. Take a look back at the ads they aired. [➔ FULL STORY](#)

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Most nonprofits employ few reporters, but some have bigger staffs. The Texas Tribune has the largest statehouse bureau of any news organization in the country, with 15 full-time, year-round reporters and 10 students. The Connecticut Mirror is next with four full-time reporters.

The Texas Observer has three full-time, year-round statehouse reporters and three students. VTDigger.com also has three full-time statehouse reporters—representing nearly one-quarter of all full-time reporters in Vermont’s capitol. Four other nonprofits have two full-time statehouse reporters.

### **Ideological Organizations**

Among the nontraditional statehouse outlets are those that have a stated ideological point of view. Most of them define themselves as conservative or as in favor of a “free market,” a basic tenet of economic conservatism. Only one outlet, NC Policy Watch, calls itself progressive.

The ideological outlets assign 53 reporters to the statehouse. Those outlets assign 17 reporters to state government full time, just 2% of all full-time reporters. They dispatch 15 reporters to the statehouse only during legislative sessions and 19 are part time. In addition, they have two student reporters. Most of these publications are digital only and many also are nonprofits. But because they describe themselves in ideological terms, we created a category to distinguish them.

About half of the ideological sites (14 out of 33) are owned by the Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity, a nonprofit that was founded in 2009 “to address the falloff in statehouse reporting as well as the steep decline in investigative reporting in the country,” said spokesman Michael Moroney. The center, based just outside Washington, D.C., in Alexandria, Va., supports a free market, he said.

In a [2011 study of news nonprofits](#), Pew Research found that the Franklin Center’s Watchdog.org sites were about four times as likely to present stories with a conservative theme than with a liberal one, though about half (49%) of their stories either had no ideological theme or had a combination of them. Its president, Jason Stverak, is a former executive director of the North Dakota Republican Party.

The Franklin Center places reporters in state capitols full time when legislatures are in session and assigns them to work on investigative projects the rest of the year, Moroney said. He said there is one reporter in each of 14 state capitols and two in Nebraska and Virginia. In addition to posting the stories on Franklin Center websites, the organization syndicates them. That is a nod to the enduring dominance of more established news outlets, particularly newspapers.

“We know that the best way to get those stories out there is through the legacy media,” Moroney said.

Representatives of some of the conservative outlets say they are acting as an antidote to what they see as liberal bias in the mainstream media.

“Our feeling was in Tallahassee and many other statehouses, there really wasn’t anybody who was looking at the other side of the story,” said Nancy Smith, executive editor of Sunshine State News, which she described as “right of center.” “They look at a more liberal side of the news—almost everybody up there does.”

Sunshine State News was founded in 2010 with investments by “three people who want to see the other side of the news covered,” Smith added. The organization does not divulge their identities, she said. Smith, like a number of other journalists at outlets with known ideologies, hails from the legacy media. She was an editor at The Stuart News/Port St. Lucie News for 28 years and is former president of the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors.

NC Policy Watch identifies itself on its website as a “progressive, nonprofit and non-partisan public policy organization and news outlet.” It is an independent project of the NC Justice Center, a nonprofit anti-poverty organization.

The fact that ideological organizations have begun to put reporters in statehouses has not gone unnoticed by legacy journalists.

“Some of the vacuum has been filled by advocacy groups,” said Rob Christensen, longtime statehouse reporter for the News & Observer in North Carolina. “Of course, they all have axes to grind, but they do provide information.”

## Government Insider Outlets

A total of 73 reporters cover state government for specialty publications aimed at government insiders, and 49 of them are full time—accounting for 7% of the total full-time statehouse reporting corps. Five reporters cover the statehouse only during legislative sessions, and 15 do so part time. Two of the journalists are students and two are in the category of “other.”

These outlets often charge hefty subscription fees, placing the content outside the reach of a general audience. They target lawmakers, lobbyists, activists and even journalists who are willing to pay for highly specialized information about the inner workings of government. Indeed, some of these outlets are owned by lobbyists or interest groups.

Prices for these outlets vary widely. The Alaska Budget Report charges \$2,397 a year, the Austin Monitor \$1,099 a year and the Tennessee Journal, \$247 a year, to name a few. Conversely, StatehouseReport.com/CharlestonCurrents.com is free.

Most of these organizations track legislative bills and cover many of the small-bore daily developments of government—such as the incremental progression of a bill or a committee hearing—that general-interest outlets tend to ignore.

The Florida Current, which says on its website that it “is written for stakeholders in Florida’s legislative process,” is one of the rare insider outlets that does not charge a fee to readers. It is owned by Lobby Tools, an online subscription service that provides legislative research and analysis, bill tracking and customized daily reports. The Current’s managing editor and three reporters formerly worked at legacy outlets, according to the organizations’ website.

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The rise of niche outlets that have stepped in to cover statehouses as the legacy press corps shrunk follows a pattern found in coverage of the U.S. federal government. In an earlier report on the composition of the [Washington press corps](#), Pew Research identified a dramatic rise in specialty publications at the same time that mainstream media coverage of Washington was declining.

## Bigger States & Longer Sessions Mean More Statehouse Reporters

The number of journalists covering the statehouse varies dramatically from state to state, with some capitols filled with dozens of full-time reporters and others playing host to only two or three.

What accounts for these differences in staffing? We looked at several factors that could conceivably be connected to the number of reporters assigned to a statehouse. These included the length of legislative sessions, the number of legislators serving in a statehouse and a series of demographic factors including population size, income and education levels, age, race and ethnicity, percentage of residents living below the poverty line and the urban-rural breakdown.

Some variables that might have correlated to the size of a statehouse reporting corps were difficult to compare across states, since each state has a different way of doing and categorizing legislative work. For example, researchers examined numbers of bills passed per state, but the accounting varies too much from one state to the next to make a fair comparison across states possible.

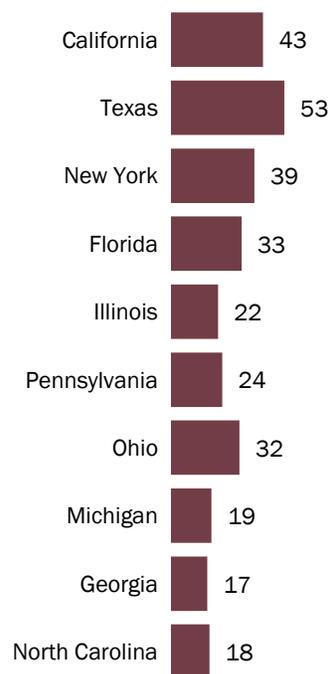
Of the factors examined by Pew Research, a state's population and the length of its legislative session both have a strong association with the size of a statehouse press corps. In general, states with more residents and states that have longer legislative sessions tend to have relatively large numbers of full-time reporters.<sup>5</sup>

Of the 10 most populous states—California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Georgia and North Carolina—all but the last two are among those with the 10 largest full-time statehouse press corps.

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### Statehouse Reporters in 10 Biggest States

*# of full-time statehouse reporters, ranked by each state's population*



N=741

Source: Pew Research Statehouse Data Aug. 2013 to March 2014 & U.S. Census Bureau 2012 population estimates

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<sup>5</sup> The Pearson's r correlation coefficient is statistically significant for the associations between the number of statehouse reporters in each state (full-time and total) and both state population and length of session.

The pattern is somewhat less consistent among smaller states. Of the 10 least populous states—Wyoming, Vermont, North Dakota, Alaska, South Dakota, Delaware, Montana, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine—half rank in the bottom 10 for the size of their press corps.

State	Full-Time	Session Only	Part-Time	Students (Temp.)	Other	Total	Avg. Legls. Session (months) ▲	Population (2012)
Wyoming	6	4	8	0	0	18	1.2	563,626
Vermont	13	2	3	0	0	18	4.1	625,741
North Dakota	5	1	1	0	0	7	3.9	672,591
Alaska	8	9	2	1	1	21	3.0	710,231
South Dakota	2	7	3	2	0	14	2.4	814,180
Delaware	3	4	2	0	0	9	5.8	897,934
Montana	8	3	5	4	0	20	3.6	989,415
Rhode Island	8	0	2	0	0	10	5.8	1,052,567
New Hampshire	5	0	9	0	0	14	5.8	1,316,470
Maine	8	2	3	0	0	13	6.1	1,328,361

It is true that South Dakota, which is the fifth least populous state, has the smallest full-time statehouse press corps in the country, with just two full-time reporters: one writes for six newspapers and the other for the Associated Press. But Vermont, the second-smallest state in population, has 13 full-time statehouse reporters—more than 25 other states.

There are also substantial differences in the number of statehouse reporters among states that are similar in population. Illinois, Pennsylvania and Ohio are roughly comparable, with 12.8 million, 12.7 million and 11.5 million residents, respectively. But Ohio, the least populous of the three, has considerably more full-time statehouse reporters—32—than Illinois (22) or Pennsylvania (24).

Likewise, Missouri, Maryland, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Colorado have between 5 million and 6 million residents apiece. Yet Minnesota has three times as many full-time statehouse reporters as Colorado—21 vs. seven. The others range between 12 (Maryland) and 19 (Wisconsin).

The number of full-time reporters covering a statehouse is one way to measure how the public gets state government news. Yet another way to think about coverage is to consider how many

statehouse reporters there are per capita. The average among all states is one reporter for every 373,777 people.

Although California has more full-time statehouse reporters than any state save one, it is so populous that it actually has the fewest number of reporters per resident. In California, there are 866,371 people per statehouse reporter.

Mississippi, a much smaller state, is second to California when it comes to the highest number of residents for each statehouse reporter. With only four full-time reporters, the ratio there is one reporter for every 741,824 people. Next is Colorado, with 718,457 people for each of its seven full-time reporters.

On the other end of the spectrum is tiny Vermont, which has 13 full-time reporters in the statehouse year-round—one for every 48,134 residents. Alaska has one reporter for every 88,779 people and Wyoming, the least populous state, has one reporter for every 93,938 people.

When the states are grouped by regions, there is one thing that stands out: Generally speaking, Western states have fewer reporters than states in the Northeast, South and Midwest. Of the 13 states in the West, nine have fewer than 10 full-time, year-round statehouse reporters. Three Western states (Arizona, Washington and Idaho) have 10-14 reporters and only one—California—has more than that.

By contrast, among the 13 states in the Midwest, just three have fewer than 10 full-time, year-round statehouse reporters. Two Midwestern states have 10-14 reporters, five have 15-19 reporters and three—Ohio, Illinois and Minnesota—have more than 20.

In addition to population, the amount of time a state legislature spends in session correlates to the number of reporters. Of the 10 states with the longest legislative sessions—based on the average length of the past two sessions (in 2012 and 2013)—eight of them also ranked in the top 10 in the number of full-time statehouse reporters.

State	Full-Time	Session Only	Part-Time	Students (Temp.)	Other	Total ▼	Avg. Legis. Session (months)	Population (2012)
Wisconsin	19	2	16	1	1	39	12.0	5,686,986
New Jersey	37	0	4	0	0	41	12.0	8,791,894
Massachusetts	15	0	7	9	1	32	12.0	6,547,629
California	43	1	26	11	0	81	12.0	37,253,956
New York	39	1	9	7	1	57	12.0	19,378,102
Ohio	32	0	13	16	1	62	11.8	11,536,504
Michigan	19	0	26	16	2	63	11.6	9,883,640
Pennsylvania	24	1	6	0	10	41	11.5	12,702,379
Illinois	22	3	6	11	3	45	8.4	12,830,632
Maine	8	2	3	0	0	13	6.1	1,328,361

For example, California, where the session lasts an average of 12 months, has the second-largest full-time press corps, at 43 reporters. Wisconsin, which also has a 12-month session, ties for 10<sup>th</sup> in the number of full-time reporters (19), while New Jersey and New York, also at 12 months each, have 37 and 39 reporters, respectively.

Viewed another way, eight of the 11 states with the largest full-time press corps also ranked in the top 10 for the length of their legislative sessions.<sup>6</sup> The outliers are Texas, which ranks first for the size of its press corps (53) but 18<sup>th</sup> for average session length (less than five months in biennial sessions); Florida, which ranks fifth in its press corps size (33) and 46<sup>th</sup> for average session length (two months); and Minnesota, which is ninth for its press corps size (21) and 24<sup>th</sup>, along with three other states, for session length (four months).

None of the other factors that Pew Research examined has a correlation with the number of statehouse reporters.

<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin is tied with Michigan for 10<sup>th</sup> place in full-time statehouse reporters, with 19.

## Coping with Fewer Reporting Resources

### Media Collaborations at the Statehouse

With fewer resources, legacy organizations have had to figure out new and creative ways to cover news out of the statehouse. A number of them have adopted an approach that in the past would have been unusual, if not unheard of—collaborating with the competition. Other outlets are combining resources with sister papers, broadcasters or digital-only outlets.

Perhaps the most notable example of collaboration has taken place in Florida. The Miami Herald and the Tampa Bay Times (formerly the St. Petersburg Times) used to compete to break stories in the Tallahassee statehouse. Faced with layoffs in late 2008, the papers merged their bureaus. Now, like other former competitors in state capitols across the country, these two one-time rivals share stories, blogs, assignments and resources.

The two papers each staff the capitol bureau with three reporters, who divvy up beats and daily assignments so as not to overlap. Every story and blog post the reporters produce can be used by both papers, whose editors decide what to run, said Mary Ellen Klas, the Herald's Tallahassee bureau chief. While the combined bureau still competes for scoops with other Florida news outlets, Klas said the reporters from the Herald and the Times don't feel the heat the way they did when they were rivals. "I think the absence of competition affects what our editors demand of us," she said. "Stories that in the past they would want us to be all over, it's a little bit harder for us to make that sell now."

In another unusual arrangement, the eight largest papers in Ohio share state government and other stories through the new Ohio News Organization. The arrangement began in 2008, when the top editors met to try to figure out how to get around what they considered high fees charged by the Associated Press.

Other regional competitors have made similar arrangements. In North Carolina, the Charlotte Observer uses stories written by reporters from the (Raleigh) News & Observer. In Maine, the Bangor Daily News and the Lewiston Sun Journal share stories. Four news organizations on different platforms share content. In Missouri, for instance, the St. Louis Beacon, a digital nonprofit, has merged its newsroom with that of KWMU-FM, a National Public Radio affiliate.

There are other sharing arrangements, too.

Pew Research identified 12 papers that syndicate coverage on behalf of a larger parent company. In Illinois, for example, the State Journal-Register covers the statehouse for all newspapers owned by GateHouse Media. Four newspaper chains—Lee Enterprises, Gannett, Media General and Community Newspaper Holdings Inc.—have statehouse bureaus in which reporters produce stories for all the papers in the chain. This saves money because they don't need to have individual bureaus with separate staffs. And more than 20 small-circulation papers share reporters with one or more sister publications owned by the same company. .

Some outlets are engaged in more than one type of collaboration. In Vermont, the Times Argus and the Rutland Herald, which are owned by the same local family, share two reporters who cover the statehouse year round. Steven Pappas, editor of the Times Argus, said his paper also links to coverage by Vermont Public Radio. Moreover, he said, the paper's website carries gavel-to-gavel legislative coverage provided by Orca Media, a local, nonprofit production facility that provides programming to central Vermont.

"We try not to duplicate efforts so we can give readers a more scattershot view of what's going on in the statehouse," Pappas said. "As the editor of this daily newspaper, it's critical for me to have state government stories on the front page every day, as well as stories from my core cities."

## **Newsmakers Becoming News Producers**

Another consequence of the reduction in statehouse reporters is a growing stream of legislative information that is going to the public directly and circumventing media scrutiny and vetting, according to numerous reporters and press secretaries.

The internet, as well as other new media technology, has made it easy for public officials to go straight to the people. While that makes government information more available to those who seek it out, it also reduces the news media's historic role as watchdogs. And a [Pew Research report](#) released last year included a public endorsement of that watchdog role, with 68% of respondents saying that press criticism of political leaders keeps them from doing things that should not be done. That represented a jump of 10 percentage points from two years earlier.

"We have to rely more on getting out press releases, and we've expanded some of our coverage on Capitol Television, our cable TV network," said Larry Berman, communications director for Rhode Island House Speaker Nicholas Mattiello, a Democrat. "We post online all of our hearings and press conferences. If reporters want to write about it, they watch online."

In Pennsylvania, lawmakers try to make up for the dearth of television reporters by offering to do interviews remotely—and by providing their own news feeds, said Stephen Miskin, spokesman for the House Republican Caucus and for the speaker and majority leader. Television stations can pick up videos of individual legislators from the caucus’s website, he said. While that process allows lawmakers to speak to the public without a filter, Miskin said the audience is smaller than it was when the press corps was more vibrant.

*“We have to rely more on getting out press releases, and we’ve expanded some of our coverage on...our cable TV network,” said Larry Berman, communications director for the Rhode Island House Speaker. “We post online all of our hearings and press conferences.”*

In Illinois, the House and Senate provide live audio and video streams of floor sessions and committee hearings, said Steve Brown, press secretary to Speaker of the House Michael J. Madigan, a Democrat. “In some ways, you may be able to get more information because there are more things available to average citizens through state government itself,” said Brown, who has worked in the capitol for more than 30 years, initially as a newspaper reporter. But, he added, “It’s not the same as when your news was dropped at your door.”

Gene Rose, a communications consultant who specializes in state government, said that when he worked for the National Conference of State Legislatures, an annual convention for public information officers focused on media relations. Starting in about 2005, he said, the group “turned to putting together your own newsrooms because we saw the departure of legacy media.”

The government-provided feeds have another, unintended effect: They have made it easier for journalists to cover state government remotely, without actually going to the capitol.

“I’ve watched a number of hearings on TV,” said Jim Panyard, communications manager for the conservative watchdog Media Trackers Pennsylvania. “Thank God for the Pennsylvania Cable Network.”

While these direct ways of communicating with the public may help compensate for some reporting gaps, some statehouse reporters and press secretaries alike expressed concern that the increased availability of information through state websites and cable channels has not led to greater public awareness of government actions.

“People are not informed,” said Miskin, a 23-year statehouse veteran. “Legislators do newsletters, they use technologies—whether it’s a telephone town hall meeting or YouTube or their own

website [and] they use e-mail, Facebook and Twitter. But all that is really just scratching the surface of the breadth of what your state government does.”

Furthermore, several reporters said, information distributed by state officials may be one-sided and lacking context.

“I think in a way because of the internet, there’s more information being put out, but the information a lot of times is partisan,” said Bobby Harrison, capitol bureau chief for the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal. “As far as analysis and in-depth reporting, I think there’s definitely less than there was 10 years ago.”

## Methodology

This study, “America’s Shifting Statehouse Press” employed several methods to obtain a census that is as complete as possible of reporters covering the 50 statehouses in the United States. The main methods consisted of an intake questionnaire, outreach to press secretaries, legislative staff or state government employees and direct contact via email or phone calls to remaining news outlets with missing or conflicting data.

### The Intake Questionnaire

A 13-question intake questionnaire was designed by Pew Research Center as the first step in identifying statehouse reporters and then having those reporters help identify others. The questionnaire asked individuals to identify the number of full-time and part-time statehouse reporters their organization employed and to name other individuals or organizations covering the same statehouse.

From August 28 and September 1 and November 12, 2013, the questionnaire was sent via email to 1,928 reporters and editors at 839 news organizations nationwide.

The initial contact list was pulled from several different industry sources: Local television news directors (source: BIA/Kelsey; 673 members), radio program directors (source: BIA/Kelsey; 42 members from news stations), database of digital nonprofit news outlets (source: Pew Research Center; 252 outlets), AP bureau chiefs (source: [AP website](#); 16 different individuals), AP reporters (source: Cision; 38 members), statehouse legislative correspondents associations (source: California, 89 members; Illinois, 20 members; North Carolina, 30 members; Ohio, 39 members; Virginia, 24 members; Wisconsin, 45 members; Texas, 96 members), Twitter list of statehouse reporters (source: [Public Twitter list](#) by Dan Vock, former Stateline reporter at the Pew Charitable Trust; 115 members), database of newspaper news reporters and editors (source: Cision; 456 members) and database of state and local reporters (source: Cision; 256 members). As the lists were not mutually exclusive, duplicates were removed.

The questionnaire was administered by [Rational Survey](#). All respondents were granted anonymity in their responses to survey questions, unless they agreed to an interview. Three rounds of email reminders were sent to ensure maximum participation. In total, 360 reporters and editors completed the questionnaire. The numbers for their organizations were inputted into a main database. The additional organizations and names were put into a second database for follow-up confirmation.

In addition, respondents provided the names of 171 colleagues covering the statehouse. Researchers collected these names and contact information and sent them the questionnaire for confirmation (in cases where contact information was not provided, researchers used Cision, Leadership Directories and/or the Web to acquire the contact information of these individuals).

Additionally, Pew Research contacted individuals at 404 organizations derived from the American Journalism Review study conducted in 2009.

## **Additional Steps**

To complement and confirm the questionnaire data, researchers employed two additional steps.

**Step 1:** Between November 12 and December 2, 2013, researchers contacted, by phone or email, officials in all 50 statehouses to identify any news organization with a statehouse reporting presence that did not respond to the Web-based survey. These officials were legislative and gubernatorial press secretaries and other employees who credential and interact with journalists. In these conversations, sources also were asked to confirm that our lists of current statehouse reporters were accurate. At the end of this process, Pew Research compiled an exhaustive list of all the news organizations covering each statehouse.

**Step 2:** After this process was completed, researchers analyzed the data and determined where staffing information was missing for specific outlets. In this last step, between December 2013 and March 2014, researchers contacted hundreds of reporters and editors at individual outlets to confirm their staffing information. Because the Associated Press, which has bureaus in every state, declined to provide staffing information, we called individual AP bureaus. We also contacted newspaper chains, which often have joint bureaus, to make sure we had correct staffing information.

During this step of the process, researchers conducted interviews to gather further insights on statehouse coverage. Thus, throughout the report, the reader will come across a number of quotes and information provided by reporters and editors about their experiences and their take on statehouse coverage.

## **Definitions**

For the purposes of the study, a statehouse reporter was defined as a journalist who is assigned to cover state government on a full- or part-time basis and who does so from the state capitol. More specifically, the following definitions were employed:

**Full-time and year-round statehouse reporter:** The journalist covers the statehouse when the legislature is in session AND when it is not in session. In other words, the statehouse is the journalist's full-time beat.

**Session-only reporter:** The journalist covers the statehouse ONLY when the legislature is in session.

**Part-time statehouse reporter:** The journalist covers the statehouse fairly often, but has other assigned areas of coverage.

## Discrepancies

Throughout this multilayered process, Pew Research maintained a detailed database for every organization. In the multiple follow-up stages, discrepancies sometimes occurred. In all, researchers identified 142 such cases. These discrepancies were classified as: a) respondents working for the same organization providing different staffing information; b) respondents that misunderstood some of the questions; and c) news organizations providing information only for one state, while employing reporters in other states, too. Researchers contacted these individuals directly and clarified all the conflicting cases.

With staffing sometimes in flux, a number of respondents provided a range for the number of reporters covering the statehouse. This occurred most in the category of “students.” Respondents told us that the number of students covering the statehouse changes from session to session. In these cases, researchers entered in the final dataset the lower number of the range provided. This was consistent in all responses where ranges were provided.

## Comparisons to American Journalism Review

This study contains several references to earlier [studies](#) of statehouse staffing conducted by [American Journalism Review](#). That report contained two tallies of statehouse coverage – full-time newspaper reporters and “session help” (journalists who contribute only when legislatures are in session). The AJR statistics referenced in the Pew Research Center's study refer only to full-time statehouse reporters.

To keep our comparisons consistent, Pew Research Pew Research went back to the 2003 AJR list and examined statehouse staffing levels at newspapers that were accounted for in the last two AJR

tallies—2003 and 2009—and in our 2014 accounting.<sup>7</sup> We removed any newspapers from the original AJR cohort that had ceased publication or joined a chain/content partnership with shared employees since 2003. As a result, 220 newspapers were identified by Pew Research and are included in the comparison count.

In addition, there were two cases in which outlets included in AJR’s tally existed in our 2013/2014 count, but not within the newspaper sector. Morris Communication and the Dayton Daily News told Pew Research that their statehouse reporters work for a company that has outlets across more than one platform, including but not limited to newspapers. Thus in the current Pew Research dataset they are counted within the “multiple platform” category.

## Correlations

Pew Research Center looked at the association between the number of statehouse reporters and state demographics and legislative activity. For the test of these associations, researchers computed the Pearson’s *r* coefficient for each pair of variables. Correlations were considered to be statistically significant if they had a p-value of less than .05. The Pearson’s *r* correlation coefficient is statistically significant for the associations between the number of statehouse reporters in each state (full-time and total) and both state population (full-time:  $r=.88$ ; total:  $r=.80$ ) and length of session (full-time:  $r=.55$ ; total:  $r=.43$ ).

**Note:** This census began in August 2013 and continued until March 2014. In this timeframe, staffing may have shifted due to the commencement of legislative sessions, industry layoffs and restructurings and additional hiring. While this count was extensively exhaustive and used multiple methods to derive our final counts, these numbers may have shifted between data collection and the release of this report. As a result, we may have missed organizations that have journalists dedicated to the statehouse beat. To this end, we encourage submissions of any updates to this data by contacting us at [journalism@pewresearch.org](mailto:journalism@pewresearch.org).

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<sup>7</sup> Because AJR’s list of papers varied some each year, it was not feasible to create a consistent list going all the back to 1998.