



# Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability

*R. Douglas Arnold*

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## **Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability** R. Douglas Arnold

*Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability* is the first large-scale examination of how local media outlets cover members of the United States Congress. Douglas Arnold asks: do local newspapers provide the information citizens need in order to hold representatives accountable for their actions in office? In contrast with previous studies, which largely focused on the campaign period, he tests various hypotheses about the causes and consequences of media coverage by exploring coverage during an entire congressional session.

Using three samples of local newspapers from across the country, Arnold analyzes all coverage over a two-year period--every news story, editorial, opinion column, letter, and list. First he investigates how twenty-five newspapers covered twenty-five local representatives; and next, how competing newspapers in six cities covered their corresponding legislators. Examination of an even larger sample, sixty-seven newspapers and 187 representatives, shows why some newspapers cover legislators more thoroughly than do other papers. Arnold then links the coverage data with a large public opinion survey to show that the volume of coverage affects citizens' awareness of representatives and challengers.

The results show enormous variation in coverage. Some newspapers cover legislators frequently, thoroughly, and accessibly. Others--some of them famous for their national coverage--largely ignore local representatives. The analysis also confirms that only those incumbents or challengers in the most competitive races, and those who command huge sums of money, receive extensive coverage.

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