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West Virginia state legislators' opinions of local mass media

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West Virginia State Legislators' Opinions of Local Mass Media

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Thesis submitted to the
School of Journalism
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Science in Journalism

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ABSTRACT

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This survey of members of the West Virginia House of Delegates and Senate regarding their opinions of local mass media found that the majority of lawmakers felt local mass media had little influence on their decision making process. The legislators did not, however, view the media as neutral sources of political information. Self-described “conservative” lawmakers rated media sources described as “liberal” as being less accurate in their coverage of the legislature than did self-described “liberal” or “middle-of-the-road” lawmakers.

The thesis used discriminate analysis to develop a statistically significant function able to classify, with high confidence, the political orientation of lawmakers, based on their responses to survey questions regarding the quantity and accuracy of local media coverage of themselves, and other state legislators with similar political views.

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INTRODUCTION

Media influence in the political process is a rich research subject. Dozens of papers are published each year examining the relationships between politicians, voters and the press. The scope of most of this research, however, concentrates either on the electoral process in general or the legislative process at the national level. For this thesis I chose to concentrate on the media influence on the legislative process. To a lone graduate researcher seeking to accumulate survey data on legislators' opinions, the U.S. Congress seems inaccessible. A small state legislature is not only a manageable population, but also one neglected by most current research.

Charleston, WV is fortunate in being one of a few U.S. state capital cities (or U.S. cities of any size) with two daily newspapers (Bagdikian, 1997). The *Charleston Gazette* is published mornings and is considered the Democratic paper. The *Charleston Daily Mail* is published afternoons and is considered the Republican paper. They publish a joint Sunday edition.

Both papers devote considerable coverage to the West Virginia Legislature, which meets in Charleston from mid-January to mid-March every year (plus interim and special sessions). This provides an unusual opportunity for research. The lawmakers live in all parts of West Virginia, but they must come to the Charleston media market to participate in the legislative session. The Charleston-Huntington Metro area is crucial to legislators from every part of the state. Whereas a politician working in Sacramento, CA for a district in San Diego might not be concerned by an article in the *Sacramento Bee*, a West Virginia legislator knows that both complimenting and damaging articles in the *Gazette* will be noticed by local media.

For this thesis I polled every member of the West Virginia House of Delegates and Senate, in an effort to generate a statistical sample large enough to draw conclusions about not only state lawmakers' opinions of their area media in general, but specifically between the two differently politically-oriented legislative newspapers of record. Since these papers have similar markets, any differences or biases in coverage perceived by legislators can be attributed more to political orientation than to geography or local issues. By analyzing these attitudes I hope to fill a gap in current journalism research into the relationship between media and government.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What role do the media play in the legislative process of state government? Bennett (1996) asserts that today's press system seems to have settled on the role of a passive information channel, with editors and news directors proclaiming that their audiences prefer to make up their own minds based on just the facts. Dan Quayle (1995) says that a few well-known journalists wield more influence in America than do most members of Congress. Is the reporter Fanny Seiler more influential in West Virginia state politics than the Speaker of the House? Probably not. But what role do the media play?

While there may be no clear consensus on whether the media actually govern, if they do have influence it seems to flow in the following way:

- In covering the legislature, the media affect public opinion by manipulating the quantity and content of their coverage.
- Public opinion is measured in surveys, polls, or through direct contact between voters and legislators.
- Polls and/or direct contact with voters influence legislative behavior.

The first and last steps in this process are based on assumptions. For the purposes of my research I will assume that state level politicians believe that the first step is true, and anticipating the coverage influences their behavior in the legislative process. Since this is a broad assumption, I will concentrate on one small area: if lawmakers think that different media outlets do influence public opinion, then those outlets are not a neutral transmission source, but in fact have their own agenda. This agenda may differ from a lawmaker's or be akin to it, but an essential factor in the agenda will be political orientation. I therefore studied the relationship between a legislator's

stated political orientation, the legislator's perceived political orientation of the media source, and the legislator's opinion of both the quantity and quality of that media source's coverage of the legislator and other lawmakers with similar political views. By asking for opinions on the quantity of coverage I attempted to identify the agenda-setting function of the press, and by asking for opinions on the quality of coverage I attempted to identify the opinion-making function. The key here is not necessarily to prove that the media actually have an influence on the public, but whether the politician believes they do and acts accordingly. If there is a relationship between political orientation and perceived quality of coverage, especially an adversarial one, then legislators cannot assume that the public will see their political decisions covered in an unbiased form. They would then necessarily have to make potential coverage part of their personal political decision-making process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“A fish could no more tell you what it is like to live out of water than an American could tell you what it is like to live without mass communication” (Sandman, Rubin and Sachsman, 1972, p. 6). Every part of modern American life is somehow linked to mass media, so it seems intuitive to assume that media shape politics and the legislative process. Direct effects have proven difficult to measure, but multiple studies in the area of agenda-setting have given rise to newer definitions of ways in which the media do influence public opinion, including framing and priming. Since this thesis is concerned with lawmakers’ perceptions of the media as well as the study of media influence from a journalist’s standpoint, I have reviewed literature in two areas. I looked to anecdotal evidence to illustrate the historical relationship between lawmakers and the media. To examine media influence on the political process, I reviewed summaries of communications research.

In 1529, only 79 years after the introduction of movable metal type to Europe, King Henry VIII nationalized the English printing industry to control religious conflict. Leaders have probably been wishing for the same power ever since, but controlling the press in America is impossible. The early Republican leaders of this country, with Jefferson as spokesman, believed freedom of the press to be crucial to the survival of American democracy and put it first in the Bill of Rights (Emery, 1965). Except for voluntary censorship during times of war, the press in this country has enjoyed liberties unknown in much of the world.

How the press has used its freedom as part of the political process has swung from the

fiercely partisan to the objectively factual. Newspapers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly the weeklies, merged news and opinion to support Republican or Federalist causes, and cared little for objectivity. It wasn't until the penny press of the 1830's began to bring news to the masses that popular papers started focusing more on timely commercial, political and foreign news. Nerone (1992) suggests that the rise of a market economy and the Industrial Revolution transformed the press from partisans to professionals. By 1857 the *New York Times* was publishing neutral articles, even on subjects as volatile as slavery (Sandman, 1972). Then the American Civil War made everyone take sides again, ushering in an era of partisanship and sensationalism culminating in "Hearst's war" between Spain and America in 1897. Sobel (1976) asserts that while Hearst's direct responsibility for the war is debatable, it is clear that in competing with Pulitzer's *World* he used the *New York Morning Journal* to create war fever, culminating in a declaration of war against Spain. After this heyday of yellow journalism, government took a stronger legislative role in dealing with pressing social issues, and newspapers began to get more business oriented. As newspapers became big businesses they became more conservative and ostensibly objective in their coverage. Today's perception of newspapers as passive information channels has been true for most of the twentieth century (Sandman, 1972).

After the turn of the century technological advances began really to put the "mass" in mass communication. The perceived success of propaganda techniques during WWI spurred widespread advertising for consumer products after the war. Initial investigations in the fields of politics and communications noted these developments and tried to assess the capability of mass communication messages to alter citizens' political views. Lippmann (1922) raised issues by

pointing out that our behavior is a response not to the actual environment but the pseudo environment pictured in our heads, laying the ground for media influence research.

Gosnell (1937) was one of the first to show the influence of the press on the public's attitudes toward elected officials, with his study of Chicago papers and President Franklin Roosevelt. He showed negative coverage could hurt the President's results at the polls with people who read the papers. This initial and inventive work was left largely in limbo in subsequent years, partly because the seminal study of Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944), based on a more adequate design and database in the 1940 Erie County Survey, did not directly support Gosnell's findings. Lazarsfeld found that most voters decided how to vote based on interpersonal communication--not on information learned directly from the mass media. Gosnell's results do fit nicely, however, in the "two-step flow" theory of mass-media influence. MacKuen and McCombs (1981) note that the survey techniques developed in the Lazarsfeld analysis opened up a rich area of analysis that concentrated on the individual characteristics of voters but generally ignored the role of media influences. MacKuen's research found that the press's power over the public's agenda is two or three times greater than the public's influence on editorial decisions. He decided that the problems of whether voters respond to and are influenced by the multitude of messages received through print, radio and television, and the extent to which these influences are translated into voting behavior, were key issues in a democratic society (MacKuen, 1981, p.147).

Research conducted from the 1930s to the early 1970s was concerned mostly with investigation of direct effects of the media on audience members' attitudes and overt behavior (Rogers, 1996). Results showed little evidence of direct influence, though Robinson (1972)

found that the largely pro-Nixon coverage carried by the newspapers in 1968 was responsible for a 6 percent edge for the candidate among users of the media source giving pro-Nixon coverage.

Lack of evidence supporting the expected strong influence of the media led to a search for a new paradigm. Inspired by Cohen's now-famous statement, "while the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about" (1963, p. 13), McCombs and Shaw began their classic 1972 study of agenda-setting in Chapel Hill, NC. Combining content analysis of news media important in Chapel Hill with survey interviews of a sample of 100 undecided voters, the Chapel Hill investigators were able to find a high correlation between (a) the rank order in salience of the five issues reported in news coverage of the presidential campaign and (b) the salience rank order of these issues that the undecided voters said were key in the campaign (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The correlation of .975 approached unity. They concluded that the media agenda became the agenda for the public, and established the basic paradigm for agenda-setting research.

A dominant paradigm in any scientific specialty can be dangerous in that a single approach to a central research problem may become prematurely standardized (Kuhn, 1970). Rogers, Dearing and Bregman (1993) identified 223 agenda-setting publications, most completed since 1971. Many followed the McCombs-Shaw methodology. The progression away from these cross-sectional studies to more sophisticated studies (aided, no doubt by the development of powerful statistical programs on desktop computers) put agenda setting through more of a time sensitive process. Single-issue, longitudinal studies on AIDS (Rogers, et al., 1991) and global warming (Trumbo, 1995) trace the confluence of media and public interest in those issues as they rise and fall in agendas. Researchers are now taking agenda-setting research into the

laboratory. In these experiments, respondents view (as their only source of news) a version of the evening television news that has been manipulated by the researchers. After a week they are asked which issues are most important to them. They typically respond that the experimentally emphasized issues are more salient (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982).

Iyengar and colleagues have added two important concepts to the repertoire of agenda-setting scholars. *Framing* is the subtle selection of certain aspects of an issue by the media to make them more important and thus to emphasize a particular cause of some phenomena (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11). *Priming* is the ability of the media agenda to affect the criteria by which individuals judge issues (Iyengar, 1991, p. 133). President Bush was the victim of priming during the 1992 campaign. When the Gulf War was the number one issue on the media agenda, Bush, known for his diplomatic prowess, was riding high. When the media switched to the economy as the number one agenda item, Bush's ratings dropped, as he was seen as not doing enough to bolster the economy (Miller & Krosnik, 1997).

To face of the growing body of evidence which tells us that not only does the press tell us what to think about, but how and when to think about it, I must turn to the idea of press bias in the coverage of politics. While the New York *Times* claims purview over all the news fit to print, Donovan (1995) found bias in its coverage of AIDS. Sobel (1976) and Abramson (1988) are scathing in their critique of the press. Reeves (1997) and Leo (1998) think that any bias in the elite press is more cultural than political, an unconscious byproduct of newsroom culture. Bagdikian (1997) asserts that bias is disappearing, as media outlets become part of larger and larger conglomerates looking for middle ground. Altheide (1976), Epstein (1973), Gans (1979), and Lippmann (1922) believe that the media agenda is driven by idiosyncratic editorial,

organizational or commercial constraints. Bennett (1988) believes the media are biased toward covering dramatic stories, and prefer pillorying public officials to discussing issues. Schorr (1997) says that the press use politicians and politicians use the press in a largely symbiotic relationship, filled with “leaks,” “spin control,” “damage control,” and the “message of the day.” With available modern satellite video technology, America is at a point where television images by themselves may drive the process, taking control out of the hands of the press and policy makers.

This can be seen on the state level. Within hours of the mass shootings in Littleton, CO the governor was on the scene calling for action in regulating the sale of guns. He had to be there. His constituency was already watching and reacting to the horrible images. Legislators in West Virginia probably saw the images, and may relate to Governor Owens’ need to respond to reporters. Hansen (1994) reports that while state legislatures are stronger and more effective than at any time in history, according to public opinion polls they are widely viewed as unresponsive and incapable. She asserts that the press, “whose historic role toward those in government is adversary, often finds confrontation, scandal and acrimony more newsworthy than compromise, consensus and the tedium of lawmaking.” In 1991 the National Conference of State Legislatures, concerned about the steep decline in public regard for the legislature, created the Legislative Institution Task Force, which published a report recommending media strategies for legislators. Martin Linsky, former legislator and journalist, says “legislators and legislatures have it within their power to do something to restore their tarnished images, but they will have to begin by understanding the press, its drives and its constraints” (1994). Several lawmakers who served in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate decided not to run for another term because of

changes in the way the media covered Capitol Hill (Carter, 1995).

In this atmosphere, learning how the West Virginia legislators feel about the press can add to the body of literature on the relationship between politicians and the press.

HYPOTHESES

The work in this thesis is based on the following assumptions:

1. Legislators make political decisions based in part on anticipated media coverage of themselves and their decisions;
2. These anticipatory actions are influenced by each lawmaker's perception of the media source in question;
3. Political orientation is a crucial factor in these perceptions.

A review of the literature shows that while direct media influence in politics is indicated by studies in agenda-setting, framing and priming, that influence is taken for granted by lawmakers and politicians. They already accept their relationship with the media as mostly adversarial.

To support this conclusion I hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between the political ideology of lawmakers and their perceptions of the quantity and quality of their personal media coverage, based on the perceived political ideology of the source of that coverage.

Specifically, I anticipated that:

1. Conservative legislators would rate the Charleston *Daily Mail's* quantity and quality of coverage higher than that of the Charleston *Gazette*.
2. Liberal legislators would rate the Charleston *Gazette's* quantity and quality of coverage higher than that of the Charleston *Daily Mail*.
3. Ratings of local media sources would follow similar patterns based on liberal/conservative lines.

These results would help me develop a model for classifying media coverage based on perceived political orientation of the media source and the self-declared political orientation of the rater.

METHODOLOGY

To properly assess state lawmakers' perceptions of local mass media I determined to attempt a cross-sectional survey of every member of the Seventieth West Virginia Legislature. Taking a random sample would result in too small a population, by including all 134 members of the body, I could assume a normal distribution (Blalock, 1960).

I chose to use a self-administered questionnaire as my instrument for data collection. The major advantage of the self-administered questionnaire is a saving of time and expense when compared to telephone and face-to-face surveys. Self administered questionnaires also avoid biases due to interviewers, ensure standardized presentation of questions, give respondents more privacy (important for sensitive questions), and may increase the validity of responses that require the respondent to check information or to think about his or her answer (Stemple III & Westley, 1989, p. 155). Questionnaires were sent to legislators at the mailing addresses published in Vol. 73 of the West Virginia Blue Book (1991). The legislature was not in session at the time. Included in the mailing with the questionnaire was a cover page introducing me and explaining the reason for the survey, and a stamped envelope addressed to the Pearly Isaac Reed School of Journalism.

The survey asked for demographic data including: name (optional); county; number of years in office; political party; branch of legislature; profession; gender; birth date; race; education level; and yearly income. It then asked the respondent to rate his or her own political orientation on a seven-point ordinal scale with one being "very liberal" and seven being "very conservative." The survey then asked for similar ratings of the two daily newspapers published

in Charleston, the respondent's local newspaper, and major local television station.

The next eleven questions asked respondents to rate the quantity and accuracy of coverage of them both individually and as part of a group with similar political views. To keep the look of the questionnaire consistent I used a seven-point scale for all questions. For analysis purposes, however, I chose to treat questions about the quantity of coverage on what I call a Goldilocks-type ordinal scale, with 1 being "not enough," 4 being "just right" and 7 being "excessive." Questions about the accuracy of coverage are measured on a seven-point interval scale with 1 being equivalent to the zero point or "completely inaccurate," 4 being "50% accurate" and 7 being "completely accurate." The final question of the survey asked participants to rate at what level the press influences their political decisions, on a seven-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "completely."

To maximize response rate I tried to keep the questionnaire short (two sides of a single page) and easy to read. To spark interest I put by-line photographs of four well-known news columnists found in the *Gazette and Mail*, and asked the question: "Are you happy to see these faces?" To encourage honest replies I stressed the confidentiality of the responses and assured potential respondents that I would be doing all the analysis myself. A copy of the mailing is included in Appendix I.

There are flaws in the way some of the questions ask for demographic data that would be changed in future surveys. Instead of asking respondents to circle one of a somewhat arbitrarily divided ordinal group for numerical information, such as "Years in Office" or "Yearly Income," I would leave a blank to be filled in with an amount, though some respondents might be unwilling

to divulge exact income amounts.* This numerical data could then be divided into segments for percentages of the population, or simply averaged. Scale data is far more flexible for certain statistical functions than ordinal or nominal data (SPSS, 1998).

In order to maximize the ability to analyze the data on political orientation, in future surveys I would use an 8-point response scale instead of a 7-point scale. For a researcher interested in the direction of an opinion, an even numbered scale forces respondents to indicate an opinion, avoiding a neutral response (Hornsby, Jr. & Schimmel, 1996). I could then divide the total population into two groups, based on political orientation, instead of three. This would maximize the utility of a small sample size and make better use of statistical techniques such as the Mahalanobis procedure for stepwise discriminant analysis (Hair & Colleagues, 1992).

* Another option would be to borrow from other research to get income divisions that would yield approximately equal segments. "Years in Office" could be renamed "Terms in Office."

FINDINGS

Sixty-two of 134 legislators returned a completed survey, for a 46.3% response rate.

Fifty-five came from among the 100 members of the House of Delegates, four were from the 34 members of the Senate, and three respondents chose not to name their legislative body. This is an above average return rate for a mail survey (Stempel III, Wesley, 1989), most likely due to a perceived high salience of the project by the participants.

To illustrate how West Virginia’s legislators compare demographically to state legislators nation-wide, I chose to compare my data with that gathered by Woo (1994) in a two-year study on lawmakers’ characteristics. Woo surveyed 900 legislators from 16 states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas. Where applicable, I have included data from her study as well as statistics from the 1990 United States Census.

Table 1. Demographics

	West Virginia Legislature	Legislators Nationwide	1990 Census
Average Age In Years	49.6	50	33
<u>Political Party</u>			
Democrat	69.4%	58.5%	
Republican	27.4%	40.5%	
Independent		1.0%	
No Reply	3.2%		
Average Number of Years in Office	6	9	
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	79.0%	70%	49%
Female	17.7%	27%	51%
No Reply	3.2%	3%	

	West Virginia Legislature	Legislators Nationwide	1990 Census
<u>Race</u>			
White	87.1%	89%	80.3%
African American		5%	12.3%
Asian American		6%	2.9%
No Reply	12.9%		
<u>Education Level</u>			
High School	-	7%	79.4%*
Some College	14.5%	12%	43.5%*
College graduate	16.1%	35%	21.4%*
Post Graduate	64.5%	47%	*results are cumulative
No Reply	4.8%		
<u>Yearly Income</u>		Approximate	
<\$20,000	4.8%	2%	Approximately \$26,000 for a full-time Civilian Worker
\$20-30,000	9.7%	8%	
\$30-40,000	21.0%	10%	
\$40-50,000	11.3%	10%	
\$50-70,000	12.9%	29%	
>\$70,000	25.8%	31%	
No Reply	14.5%	10%	
<u>Political Ideology*</u>			
Liberal	30.6%	21%	
Moderate	22.6%	44%	
Conservative	45.6%	32%	
No Response	1.6%	3%	

*The West Virginia Legislators were not asked this question directly. To echo my three analysis groups, I divided responses on a seven-point scale in to these divisions: 1-3 Liberal, 4 Moderate, and 5-7 Conservative.

Analysis was done using SPSS 8.0, a comprehensive statistical software system designed to handle all steps in an analysis ranging from data listing, tabulations, and descriptive statistics to complex statistical analysis. To summarize and describe this set of data I used discriminant analysis. Discriminant analysis is the appropriate statistical technique when the dependent variable is categorical (nominal or nonmetric) and the independent variables are metric (Hair & Colleagues, p. 75, 1992). In many cases, the dependent variable consists of two groups or classifications, for example, male versus female or high versus low. In this case a three-group

categorical classification was involved--Liberal, Moderate and Conservative. Discriminant analysis is capable of handling either two groups or multiple groups (three or more). When two classifications are involved, the technique is referred to as two-group discriminant analysis. When three or more classifications are identified, the technique is referred to as multiple discriminant analysis (MDA).

Discriminant analysis involves deriving the linear combination of the two (or more) independent variables that will discriminate best between a priori defined groups. This is achieved by the statistical decision rule of maximizing the between-group variance relative to within-group variance; this relationship is expressed as a ratio. It is the appropriate technique for testing the hypothesis that the group means of two or more groups are equal. If the means are not equal then we test for statistical significance by measuring the difference between the means. If the distance is large enough then the factor can possibly be used to correctly discriminate between groups in the dependent variable. This technique allowed me to use the responses to independent variables such as rating the political orientation of a local mass media outlet to classify the political orientation of the respondent (the dependent variable) with a high degree of probability.

The first group of factors compared was the ratings of the types of media sources.

Table 2. Comparing Means of Media Outlets

Comparing Means of Media Outlets between Self-Rated Political Groups

Self Political Orientation		Political Orientation Daily Mail	Political Orientation Gazette	Political Orientation Local	Political Orientation TV
Liberal	Mean	5.53	2.74	5.31	4.68
	N	19	19	16	19
	Std. Deviation	1.47	1.19	1.40	1.16
	Std. Error of Mean	.34	.27	.35	.27
	Skewness	-1.415	2.755	-.307	.458
Moderate	Mean	5.43	2.64	5.36	3.92
	N	14	14	11	12
	Std. Deviation	1.40	1.34	1.86	1.31
	Std. Error of Mean	.37	.36	.56	.38
	Skewness	-1.502	.546	-.651	.181
Conservative	Mean	5.00	1.57	4.22	3.12
	N	26	28	23	26
	Std. Deviation	.85	.88	1.41	1.18
	Std. Error of Mean	.17	.17	.29	.23
	Skewness	-.851	2.410	-.421	-.399
Total	Mean	5.27	2.18	4.82	3.81
	N	59	61	50	57
	Std. Deviation	1.22	1.22	1.59	1.37
	Std. Error of Mean	.16	.16	.22	.18
	Skewness	-1.023	1.588	-.266	.015

Table 3. Anova

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Political Orientation Daily Mail * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.496	2	1.748	1.191	.311
		Linearity	3.205	1	3.205	2.184	.145
		Deviation from Linearity	.290	1	.290	.198	.658
	Within Groups		82.165	56	1.467		
	Total		85.661	58			
Political Orientation Gazette * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	19.261	2	9.630	8.007	.001
		Linearity	16.707	1	16.707	13.891	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	2.554	1	2.554	2.124	.150
	Within Groups		69.756	58	1.203		
	Total		89.016	60			
Political Orientation Local * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	15.484	2	7.742	3.372	.043
		Linearity	12.431	1	12.431	5.415	.024
		Deviation from Linearity	3.053	1	3.053	1.330	.255
	Within Groups		107.896	47	2.296		
	Total		123.380	49			
Political Orientation TV * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	27.201	2	13.601	9.455	.000
		Linearity	27.199	1	27.199	18.908	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	.003	1	.003	.002	.966
	Within Groups		77.676	54	1.438		
	Total		104.877	56			

Table 4. Measures of Association

	R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
Political Orientation Daily Mail * Self Political Orientation	-.193	.037	.202	.041
Political Orientation Gazette * Self Political Orientation	-.433	.188	.465	.216
Political Orientation Local * Self Political Orientation	-.317	.101	.354	.125
Political Orientation TV * Self Political Orientation	-.509	.259	.509	.259

In comparing means liberals, moderates and conservatives among the mass media outlets, two areas stood out between the liberals and conservatives: the Political Orientation of the *Gazette* and the Political Orientation of the local television station. Both show differences in means significant past the .05 level. These two factors are included in the stepwise model for MDA.

The second groups of factors for analysis were the quantities of coverage of the three groups by the media outlets. These factors were hampered for analysis because they were set on an ordinal, not an interval, scale. With only a four-point difference between “Not Enough” coverage and “Just Right” coverage and four points between “Just Right” and “Excessive” coverage, the majority of responses were grouped in a narrow range. This limited analysis of dispersion.

Table 5. Comparing Means of Quantity of Media Coverage

Comparing Means of Quantity of Media Coverage between Self-Rated Political Groups

Self Political Orientation		Quantity of Mail's Coverage	Mail's Quantity of Others	Quantity of Gazette's Coverage	Gazette's Quantity of Others	Local Paper Quantity of Coverage	Quantity of TV Coverage
Liberal	Mean	2.94	3.29	3.22	3.72	2.88	2.53
	N	17	17	18	18	16	19
	Std. Deviation	1.14	1.40	1.11	1.45	1.45	1.22
	Std. Error of Mean	.28	.34	.26	.34	.36	.28
	Skewness	-.724	.019	-.778	.416	.246	-.171
Moderate	Mean	3.50	3.85	3.21	3.85	4.00	3.17
	N	14	13	14	13	11	12
	Std. Deviation	1.29	1.21	1.25	1.34	1.61	1.53
	Std. Error of Mean	.34	.34	.33	.37	.49	.44
	Skewness	-.380	-.648	-.743	-.160	-1.224	-.150
Conservative	Mean	3.22	3.31	2.89	2.39	3.67	2.96
	N	23	26	27	28	24	27
	Std. Deviation	1.41	1.19	1.74	1.40	1.09	1.16
	Std. Error of Mean	.29	.23	.33	.26	.22	.22
	Skewness	-.210	-.500	.847	1.072	-.138	-.562
Total	Mean	3.20	3.43	3.07	3.12	3.49	2.86
	N	54	56	59	59	51	58
	Std. Deviation	1.29	1.26	1.45	1.54	1.38	1.26
	Std. Error of Mean	.18	.17	.19	.20	.19	.17
	Skewness	-.287	-.311	.301	.406	-.338	-.219

Table 6. Anova

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Quantity of Mail's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.405	2	1.203	.710	.496
		Linearity	.580	1	.580	.343	.561
		Deviation from Linearity	1.825	1	1.825	1.078	.304
	Within Groups		86.354	51	1.693		
	Total		88.759	53			
Mail's Quantity of Others * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.954	2	1.477	.924	.403
		Linearity	.018	1	.018	.011	.917
		Deviation from Linearity	2.936	1	2.936	1.836	.181
	Within Groups		84.760	53	1.599		
	Total		87.714	55			
Quantity of Gazette's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.594	2	.797	.371	.691
		Linearity	1.327	1	1.327	.619	.435
		Deviation from Linearity	.266	1	.266	.124	.726
	Within Groups		120.135	56	2.145		
	Total		121.729	58			
Gazette's Quantity of Others * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	28.188	2	14.094	7.176	.002
		Linearity	21.952	1	21.952	11.177	.001
		Deviation from Linearity	6.235	1	6.235	3.175	.080
	Within Groups		109.982	56	1.964		
	Total		138.169	58			
ANOVA (cont.)							

Local Paper Quantity of Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	9.662	2	4.831	2.725	.076
		Linearity	5.116	1	5.116	2.886	.096
		Deviation from Linearity	4.546	1	4.546	2.565	.116
	Within Groups		85.083	48	1.773		
	Total		94.745	50			
Quantity of TV Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.530	2	1.765	1.111	.336
		Linearity	1.846	1	1.846	1.162	.286
		Deviation from Linearity	1.684	1	1.684	1.060	.308
	Within Groups		87.366	55	1.588		
	Total		90.897	57			

Table 7. Measures of Association

	R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
Quantity of Mail's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	.081	.007	.165	.027
Mail's Quantity of Others * Self Political Orientation	-.014	.000	.184	.034
Quantity of Gazette's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	-.104	.011	.114	.013
Gazette's Quantity of Others * Self Political Orientation	-.399	.159	.452	.204
Local Paper Quantity of Coverage * Self Political Orientation	.232	.054	.319	.102
Quantity of TV Coverage * Self Political Orientation	.143	.020	.197	.039

In this set of factors the only example with statistical significance was the *Gazette's* Quantity of Coverage of Others. It will be included in the stepwise model for MDA.

The last group of factors for analysis included all self-ratings among the three groups for the accuracy of coverage. This area of analysis was the easiest to work with statistically, because it was an interval scale, well suited to MDA.

Table 8. Comparing Means of Media Accuracy

Comparing Means of Media Accuracy between Self Rated Political Groups

Self Political Orientation		Accuracy of Mail's Coverage	Mail's Accuracy of Others	Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	Gazette Accuracy of Others	Accuracy of Local Paper	Accuracy of TV Coverage
Liberal	Mean	4.94	4.69	4.94	5.00	4.75	4.44
	N	17	16	18	17	16	18
	Std. Deviation	1.60	1.20	1.55	1.46	1.88	1.92
	Std. Error of Mean	.39	.30	.37	.35	.47	.45
	Skewness	-.308	.160	-.322	-.549	-.275	-.610
Moderate	Mean	4.64	4.38	4.57	4.46	4.82	5.27
	N	14	13	14	13	11	11
	Std. Deviation	2.06	1.80	1.74	1.81	1.99	1.01
	Std. Error of Mean	.55	.50	.47	.50	.60	.30
	Skewness	-.238	-.383	.268	-.227	-.717	.767
Conservative	Mean	5.14	5.23	3.09	3.07	5.60	5.08
	N	21	26	23	27	25	25
	Std. Deviation	1.31	1.31	2.33	1.75	1.53	1.53
	Std. Error of Mean	.29	.26	.49	.34	.31	.31
	Skewness	-1.018	-.814	.520	.851	-1.235	-.452
Total	Mean	4.94	4.87	4.07	3.96	5.17	4.91
	N	52	55	55	57	52	54
	Std. Deviation	1.61	1.43	2.11	1.87	1.76	1.59
	Std. Error of Mean	.22	.19	.28	.25	.24	.22
	Skewness	-.543	-.560	-.136	.070	-.771	-.686

Table 8. Anova

			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Accuracy of Mail's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.100	2	1.050	.394	.677
		Linearity	.475	1	.475	.178	.675
		Deviation from Linearity	1.625	1	1.625	.609	.439
	Within Groups		130.727	49	2.668		
	Total		132.827	51			
Mail's Accuracy of Others * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	6.979	2	3.490	1.760	.182
		Linearity	3.748	1	3.748	1.890	.175
		Deviation from Linearity	3.231	1	3.231	1.629	.208
	Within Groups		103.130	52	1.983		
	Total		110.109	54			
Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	39.510	2	19.755	5.131	.009
		Linearity	36.299	1	36.299	9.428	.003
		Deviation from Linearity	3.211	1	3.211	.834	.365
	Within Groups		200.199	52	3.850		
	Total		239.709	54			
Gazette Accuracy of Others * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	42.847	2	21.424	7.557	.001
		Linearity	41.061	1	41.061	14.484	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	1.786	1	1.786	.630	.431
	Within Groups		153.083	54	2.835		
	Total		195.930	56			

ANOVA (cont.)							
Accuracy of Local Paper * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	8.806	2	4.403	1.451	.244
		Linearity	7.713	1	7.713	2.543	.117
		Deviation from Linearity	1.093	1	1.093	.360	.551
	Within Groups		148.636	49	3.033		
	Total		157.442	51			
Accuracy of TV Coverage * Self Political Orientation	Between Groups	(Combined)	6.071	2	3.035	1.205	.308
		Linearity	3.801	1	3.801	1.509	.225
		Deviation from Linearity	2.270	1	2.270	.901	.347
	Within Groups		128.466	51	2.519		
	Total		134.537	53			

Table 9. Measures of Association

	R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
Accuracy of Mail's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	.060	.004	.126	.016
Mail's Accuracy of Others * Self Political Orientation	.185	.034	.252	.063
Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage * Self Political Orientation	-.389	.151	.406	.165
Gazette Accuracy of Others * Self Political Orientation	-.458	.210	.468	.219
Accuracy of Local Paper * Self Political Orientation	.221	.049	.236	.056
Accuracy of TV Coverage * Self Political Orientation	.168	.028	.212	.045

In this area once again it was ratings of the *Gazette* that showed the greatest deviation from the mean. In rating both the *Gazette's* coverage of themselves and others with similar political viewpoints, the groups showed a significant deviation among means. The centroids of liberals and conservatives were one full point away from the expected mean, in opposite directions.

Table 11. Selected Group Statistics

Self Political Orientation		Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid N Unweighted
Liberal	Political Orientation Gazette	2.50	.63	16
	Political Orientation TV	4.38	.96	16
	Gazette's Quantity of Others	3.56	1.46	16
	Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	4.69	1.45	16
	Gazette Accuracy of Others	4.94	1.48	16
Moderate	Political Orientation Gazette	2.36	1.29	11
	Political Orientation TV	3.82	1.33	11
	Gazette's Quantity of Others	3.91	1.45	11
	Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	4.18	1.60	11
	Gazette Accuracy of Others	4.45	1.63	11
Conservative	Political Orientation Gazette	1.62	.97	21
	Political Orientation TV	3.10	1.18	21
	Gazette's Quantity of Others	2.62	1.53	21
	Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	2.86	2.31	21
	Gazette Accuracy of Others	3.00	1.84	21
Total	Political Orientation Gazette	2.08	1.03	48
	Political Orientation TV	3.69	1.26	48
	Gazette's Quantity of Others	3.23	1.56	48
	Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	3.77	2.04	48
	Gazette Accuracy of Others	3.98	1.87	48

Comparison of Group Means

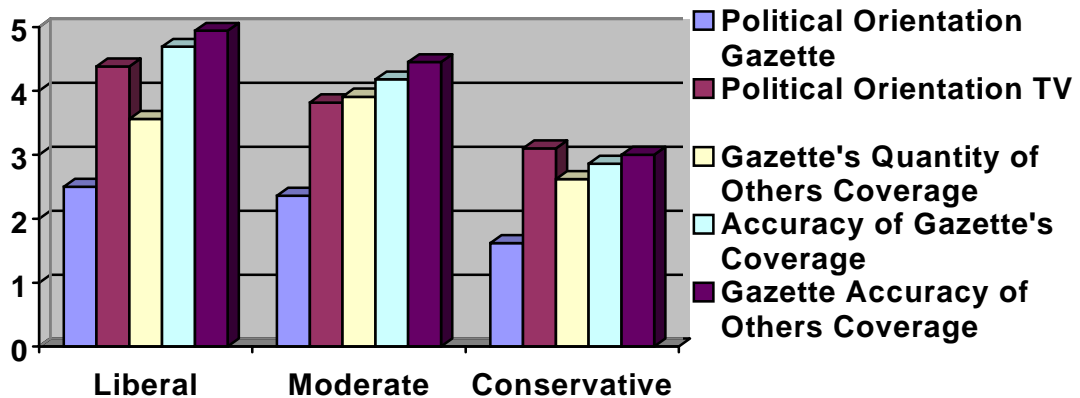


Table 12. Tests of Equality of Group Means

	Wilks' Lambda	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Political Orientation Gazette	.836	4.429	2	45	.018
Political Orientation TV	.797	5.746	2	45	.006
Gazette's Quantity of Others	.872	3.310	2	45	.046
Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	.833	4.514	2	45	.016
Gazette Accuracy of Others	.774	6.576	2	45	.003

After identifying five statistically significant factors, discriminant analysis was run on the sample. Two computational methods were used to validate the discriminant functions. First a stepwise method, which involves entering the independent variables one at a time on the basis of their discriminating power, was used. The Mahalanobis procedure, in general, is the preferred procedure when one is interested in the maximal use of available information (Hair & Colleagues, p. 94, 1992). When used as part of the SPSS package the procedure is designed to develop the best one-variable model followed by the best two-variable model, and so-forth, until no other variables meet the desired selection rule.

Table 13. Stepwise Method/Mahalanobis Distance Procedure

Step	Entered	Min. D Squared					
		Statistic	Between Groups	Exact F			
				Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1	Political Orientation TV	.236	Liberal and Moderate	1.536	1	45.00	.222
2	Gazette Accuracy of Others	.289	Liberal and Moderate	.921	2	44.00	.406

At each step, the variable that maximizes the Mahalanobis distance between the two closest groups is entered. Maximum number of steps is 10. Minimum partial F to enter is 3.84. Maximum partial F to remove is 2.71.

Table 14. Variables in the Analysis

	Step	Tolerance	F to Remove	Min. D Squared	Between Groups
1	Political Orientation TV	1.000	5.746		
2	Political Orientation TV	.986	3.417	.082	Liberal and Moderate
	Gazette Accuracy of Others	.986	4.165	.236	Liberal and Moderate

Table 15. Wilks' Lambda

Step	Number of Variables	Lambda	df1	df2	df3	Exact F			
						Statistic	df1	df2	
1	1	.797	1	2	45	5.746	2	45.000	
2	2	.670	2	2	45	4.882	4	88.000	
Test of Function(s)		Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square		df	Sig.			
1 through 2		.670	17.836		4	.001			
2		.996	.200		1	.654			

Table 16. Prior Probabilities for Groups

Self Political Orientation	Prior	Cases Used in Analysis	
		Unweighted	Weighted
Liberal	.333	16	16.000
Moderate	.229	11	11.000
Conservative	.438	21	21.000
Total	1.000	48	48.000

Table 17. Classification Results*

			Predicted Group Membership			Total
	Self Political Orientation		Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	
Original	Count	Liberal	13	0	4	17
		Moderate	5	0	6	11
		Conservative	3	0	22	25
	%	Liberal	76.5	.0	23.5	100.0
		Moderate	45.5	.0	54.5	100.0
		Conservative	12.0	.0	88.0	100.0

* 66.0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

The Mahalanobis procedure chose “Political Orientation of local TV” and “Gazette Accuracy of Others” as the two most indicative factors. Using those two factors it was able to classify 66 % of the cases correctly. To rate this discriminant we can compare these results to results expected purely by chance. Using the maximum chance criterion (based on the largest sample size) we get a criterion of 43.8 %. Hair (1992) suggests that classification accuracy should be at least 25 % greater than that achieved by chance. In this case the classification accuracy exceeds the required 54.8 %.

Proportional chance criterion takes into account the different sizes of the examined groups. Using the proportional chance criterion formula

$$C_{\text{proportional}} = p^2 + (1 - p)^2$$

where

p = the proportion of individuals in group 1

$1 - p$ = the proportion of individual in group 2

we find a criterion of 35.5%. Our classification accuracy of 66% exceeds the required 44.4% by

a wide margin. These chance model criteria are more effective when computed using holdout samples. This sample was too small to be divided, so instead of developing a discriminant function using the analysis sample and applying it to the holdout sample, the function was used to classify the original group.

The second computational method available in SPSS for deriving a discriminant function is the simultaneous or group method. In this case I decided that I could get a better classification model using all five of the identified factors, regardless of the power of each independent variable.

Group Method

Summary of Canonical Discriminant Functions

Table 18. Eigenvalues

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	.802(a)	96.0	96.0	.667
2	.033(a)	4.0	100.0	.180
First 2 canonical discriminant functions were used in the analysis.				

Table 19. Wilks' Lambda

Test of Function(s)	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1 through 2	.537	26.722	10	.003
2	.968	1.409	4	.843

Table 20. Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function	
	1	2
Political Orientation Gazette	.462	.214
Political Orientation TV	.472	-.610
Gazette's Quantity of Others	.520	.760
Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	.197	.124
Gazette Accuracy of Others	.342	-.227

Table 21. Structure Matrix

	Function	
	1	2
Gazette Accuracy of Others	.603(*)	-.192
Accuracy of Gazette's Coverage	.498(*)	-.218
Political Orientation Gazette	.495(*)	.039
Gazette's Quantity of Others	.399	.763(*)
Political Orientation TV	.549	-.648(*)
Pooled within-groups correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions		
Variables ordered by absolute size of correlation within function.		
* Largest absolute correlation between each variable and any discriminant function		

Table 22. Functions at Group Centroids

	Function	
	1	2
Self Political Orientation		
Liberal	.889	-.172
Moderate	.565	.303
Conservative	-.974	-2.761E-02
Unstandardized canonical discriminant functions evaluated at group means		

Table 23. Classification Results*

			Predicted Group Membership			Total
			Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	
Original	Count	Liberal	14	1	1	16
		Moderate	4	4	3	11
		Conservative	3	1	17	21
	%	Liberal	87.5	6.3	6.3	100.0
		Moderate	36.4	36.4	27.3	100.0
		Conservative	14.3	4.8	81.0	100.0
* 72.9% of original grouped cases correctly classified.						

By grouping these five independent factors I was able to correctly classify 72.9% of the grouped cases, indicating a strong relationship between the political orientation of the respondents and their ratings of the *Gazette* and the local television station.

Since four of the five identified classification factors involved the *Gazette* I decided to run a function using only the *Gazette* factors. That model correctly classified at a 57.7% rate, statistically valid but far less than attainable when using the local TV rating as part of the function.

The findings of this research can be summarized as follows. Specifically concerning the three anticipated results stated in the hypotheses:

1. Conservative legislators did rate the Charleston *Daily Mail's* quantity and quality of coverage higher than that of the Charleston *Gazette*. The difference was statistically significant.
2. Liberal legislators did not rate the *Gazette's* quantity and quality of coverage higher than the *Daily Mail*. They were statistically equal.
3. Ratings of quantity and quality of local media sources were not statistically different.

Additional findings of interest included:

- Liberal lawmakers' view perceived conservative media sources as more conservative than both moderates and conservatives. They do not perceive any difference in the quantity and accuracy of coverage, however.
- Conservative lawmakers' view perceived liberal media sources as far more liberal than moderates and liberals did. They perceive much more inaccuracy in the *Gazette* than the other legislators do.
- Conservatives lawmakers rate local television as more liberal than do the other two groups. They do not, however, perceive any difference in the quantity and accuracy of coverage.
- No group of lawmakers indicated that the press influenced their political decisions.

- There was an initial indication that the more extreme a lawmaker's self rating, the more extreme the political rating of an oppositely oriented media source. However, the size of the samples, when broken into seven different groups based on an ordinal ranking of 1 – 7, were too small to be useful for statistical analysis.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to lend support to the theory that state lawmakers are influenced in their political decision-making process by the media, by proving that legislators do not think of the media as a neutral news-transmission source, but rather as another player (even opponent) in the political arena. While this theory is in evidence at the national level (Reeves, 1997), current research pays less attention to lawmakers at the state level. By showing a relationship between the personal political ideology of legislators, and their perception of the ideology of local media outlets, I hoped to illustrate that lawmakers, whether they admitted it or not, believed media sources to be biased reporters of news, influenced by politics.

The research in this thesis indicates that while 32% of West Virginia lawmakers said the press had no influence on their political decisions and another 39% said the influence was low, the lawmakers do not perceive the media to be a neutral transmission source. Conservatives in particular rate the state capitol's Democratic paper as very liberal, with inaccurate reporting of conservative members. This evidence supports the assumption that lawmakers are not treating media as neutral players.

The Charleston Gazette is one of the last independently owned midsize daily newspapers in the United States (Bagdikian, 1997; Glover, 1998). The Chilton family has owned the *Gazette* since 1912, so its editors may not feel the restraints that other newspapers, owned by media conglomerates, operate under. Further research on the *Gazette*, using a combination of content analysis and lawmaker opinions, could determine whether or not the paper is biased in its coverage toward conservatives. This thesis indicates that the perceived inaccuracies in coverage

are more strongly felt by conservatives than the other political groups. The perception of liberal political orientation, however, is not unique to the *Gazette*. The political conservatives also perceived local television outlets as more liberal.

The discriminant analysis was successful in developing a statistically significant function, able to classify, with high confidence, the political orientation of lawmakers based on their responses to survey questions. Refinements in questioning techniques and increasing the response rate could enable researchers to develop even more indicative models using lawmaker's perceptions and opinions of local mass media as a function of political orientation.

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VITA

Timothy Shaw Penn, B.A.

Timothy Shaw Penn received a bachelor's degree in literature/creative writing from the University of California Santa Cruz in 1983. In 1985 he was graduated from the Academy of Military Science in Knoxville, TN, and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the West Virginia Air National Guard, United States Air Force. He was graduated from Undergraduate Navigator Training in 1986 and began flying as a navigator on the Lockheed C-130 Hercules in 1987. Penn began graduate studies at West Virginia University in 1989. In 1990 his studies were interrupted when he was called to active duty in response to Operation Desert Shield. He is a combat Veteran of the Gulf War, and has been working full time for the United States Air Force since 1992. He was graduated from the United States Air University Squadron Officer School in 1993. In March of 2000 he was graduated from the USAF Air University's Air Command and Staff College. Major Penn's current position is Air National Guard Advisor to Twenty-First Air Force Standards and Evaluations Division at McGuire AFB, New Jersey.

APPENDIX I

Name(optional)_____

County _____ Years in Office 1-3 4-8 9-12 13-16 17-20 21+

Political Party: Dem Rep Ind Other House or Senate? House Senate

Profession_____ Sex: M F

Birth Date _____ Race: White African-American Asian Hispanic Other_____

Education Level: High School Some College College Grad Post Graduate

Yearly Income: Less than 20,000 20-30 30-40 40-50 50-70 More than 70,000

Comments_____

1) Where would you put yourself politically on this scale?

Very Liberal			Neutral			Very Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2) Where would you put the Charleston Daily Mail politically on this scale?

Very Liberal			Neutral			Very Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3) Where would you put the Charleston Gazette politically on this scale?

Very Liberal			Neutral			Very Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4) Where would you put your local paper (_____) on this scale?

Very Liberal			Neutral			Very Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5) Where would you put the major television station (_____) in your area on this scale?

Very Liberal			Neutral			Very Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6) How would you rate the Charleston Daily Mail's quantity of coverage about you?

Not enough			Just Right			Excessive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7) How would you rate the accuracy of that coverage, if any?

Inaccurate			50% accurate			Accurate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8) How would you rate the Charleston Daily Mail's quantity of coverage of other legislators who take positions similar to yours?

Not enough				Just Right			Excessive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

9) How would you rate the accuracy of that coverage, if any?

Inaccurate			50% accurate			Accurate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10) How would you rate the Charleston Gazette's quantity of coverage about you?

Not enough			Just Right			Excessive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11) How would you rate the accuracy of that coverage, if any?

Inaccurate			50% accurate			Accurate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12) How would you rate the Charleston Gazette's quantity of coverage of other legislators who take positions similar to yours?

Not enough			Just Right			Excessive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13) How would you rate the accuracy of that coverage, if any?

Inaccurate			50% accurate			Accurate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14) How would you rate the quantity of your local paper's coverage about you?

Not enough			Just Right			Excessive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15) How would you rate the accuracy of that coverage, if any?

Inaccurate			50% accurate			Accurate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16) How would you rate the quantity of your local television station's coverage of you?

Not enough			Just Right			Excessive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17) How would you rate the accuracy of that coverage, if any?

Inaccurate			50% accurate			Accurate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18) To what extent would you say the 'press' influences your political decisions?

Not at all						Greatly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7