INDIVIDUAL AND ROUTINE FORCES IN GATEKEEPING

By Pamela J. Shoemaker, Martin Eichholz, Eunyi Kim, and Brenda Wrigley

Lewin's concept of "force" is explored in this study, which shows support for the proposition that newspaper gatekeeping is influenced more by forces on the routine level of analysis than by individual staff writers' characteristics. Newspaper stories about fifty Congressional bills were content analyzed, and two surveys were conducted of the stories' writers and of editors at their newspapers. No individual-level force was related to the quantity of coverage the bills received, whereas editors' aggregated assessment of bills' newsworthiness was positively related to quantity of bills' newspaper coverage.

The theory of gatekeeping is one of the oldest in the field of mass communication research. Psychologist Kurt Lewin first proposed a gatekeeping process in his post-World War II research on social change.[1] Although this research was not originally applied to the study of communication, Lewin did suggest that his theory of how "items" are selected or rejected as they pass through "channels" could be applied to the flow of news. This idea was quickly picked up by communication scholar David Manning White, whose case study of a newspaper wire service editor's selection of the day's news set into motion a line of research on news selection that has persisted in the past half century.[2]

In its simplest conceptualization within mass communication, gatekeeping is the process by which the vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are actually transmitted by the news media. It is often defined as a series of decision points at which news items are either continued or halted as they pass along news channels from source to reporter to a series of editors. However, the gatekeeping process is also thought of as consisting of more than just selection, to include how messages are shaped, timed for dissemination, and handled.[3] In fact, gatekeeping in mass communication can be seen as the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed, and is not just a series of "in" and "out" decisions.

This study will look at one of the more interesting but least explored concepts from Lewin's theory—that items (e.g., news events or issues) have "forces" which either facilitate or constrain their passage through the gatekeeping process. Forces may vary in intensity and in polarity, i.e., they may be positive or negative.

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These forces are the variables that influence the movement of news items through media channels. For example, the force of newsworthiness should be positively related to an event passing through a news gatekeeper —the more newsworthy, the more likely the event is to be covered by the news media. However, if an event requires much expense and/or unavailable technology to produce the story, this may work against passage through the gate. Whether the event becomes news depends on the relative intensity of these two forces, along with other forces yet to be identified.

This paper will investigate the relative importance of two sets of forces in determining how prominently major Congressional bills were covered by U.S. newspapers between 1996 and 1998. We build on Shoemaker's[4] synthesis of the gatekeeping literature, which incorporates gatekeeping into the hierarchical model of news influences proposed by Shoemaker and Reese.[5] This permits the analysis of how the gatekeeping process occurs on five levels of analysis—individuals, routines of communication work, organizational characteristics, social institutions, and the social system.

In this study, we compare the relative importance of forces on the individual level and routine level, comparing staff writers' individual characteristics with editors' assessments of the newsworthiness — based on judgments made at the routine level of the newsgathering process — of the Congressional bills studied. Because some scholars have suggested that journalists' characteristics differ from that of average Americans,[6] there has been an implication that journalists' personal characteristics are important in shaping the news. This study investigates the importance of these individual forces relative to the routine-level force of newsworthiness through the use of a content analysis and two surveys.

Theory

Lewin's original "theory of channels and gate keepers" was used to explain how social change might occur by affecting food consumption.[7] He proposed a model that illustrated how food items that came from varying "channels" (e.g., the grocery or garden) had to pass through several "gates" before being available for consumption at the family table.[8] The term "gate keeper" was used to refer to the person or persons buying, transporting, and preparing the food items. Channels were divided into "sections" in which the food items would be manipulated.

In applying Lewin's model to communications processes, Bruce Westley and Malcolm MacLean perceived of the channels as gates "manned by Cs who in various ways alter messages."[9] The "Cs" in the Westley and MacLean model are the individuals or organizations in the communications process—the reporters and editors, for example, or the media outlets that they work for—who select information for audiences "especially when the information is beyond the immediate reach" of the audience members.[10]

The physical metaphor used by Lewin (and later Westley and MacLean) is clearly not meant to be taken literally, but rather refers to elements of the process through which news items (for example) pass on

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their way from discovery to transmission. In the context of the mass media, channels refer to communication linkages, whether they are passages in the source-journalist relationship or within media organizations themselves. Sections are events or states of being that occur within each channel, e.g., the editing process, and a channel may have multiple sections, such as multiple editing points. Gates are decision points at which items may be stopped or moved from section to section or channel to channel. Gatekeepers are either the individuals or the sets of routine procedures that determine whether items pass through the gates.[11]

This definition of "gatekeeper" is critical for this study, because when we adapt Shoemaker and Reese's[12] hierarchical model to the study of gatekeeping, we must acknowledge that the routinized practices of news work may act as surrogates or shortcuts for individual people's decisions. For example, there are news industry-wide and commonly held views about whether an event is newsworthy: Whereas usual activities of no particular social significance will rarely make the news, more unusual events of interest or social importance are more likely to be included in the day's newspaper. This study addresses the question of whether individual or routinized factors are more important in predicting media coverage.

Such factors were termed "forces" by Lewin, who thought of them as either constraining or facilitating the flow of items through gates, and subsequently through sections and channels. In the example of news flow, forces can be identified on all levels of analysis. For example, the prestige or previous success of an individual reporter might facilitate the flow of a news item through the editorial gate, even if the story seems of doubtful credibility to the editors, just as inexperience on the part of a reporter might act as a negative force in getting the same story accepted. Routines of assessing newsworthiness and meeting deadlines mean that a story of moderate newsworthiness may be more likely to get accepted far in advance of the deadline (if editors thought that nothing more newsworthy would come in), whereas a very newsworthy story would replace lesser stories, even if very near the deadline. Organizational forces could include policies about covering topics in certain ways, whereas social institutional forces could come from interest groups or government. At the systems level, we know that the acceptability of some events as news (e.g., rape) varies among cultures.

In White's study, "Mr. Gates" made decisions influenced both by his personal beliefs and by his knowledge of news routines.[13] Weaver and Wilhoit have identified three role conceptions that describe how journalists define their jobs and, presumably, their ideas about which potential news items should be permitted through the gates.[14] Bass suggests that the type of job journalists hold (i.e., news gatherers or processors) affects their news judgment.[15]

Among studies looking at routine forces, Abbott and Brassfield show that medium-specific routines influence decisions, with television gatekeepers being more interested in news with good visual resources: the more visuals, the more positive the force.[16] In addition, newspaper wire editors slow their rate of accepting stories as their deadlines ap-

proach, supposedly because they have already filled most of the available space.[17] Therefore, proximity to the deadline may be a negative force unless there is a countervailing positive force of high newsworthiness. There is some suggestion that there may be a strong positive force only for events of the highest newsworthiness and that individual differences among gatekeepers play more of a role in stories of lesser importance.[18]

Routines are crucial in determining which items move through the news channel and which are rejected, and the distinction between individual forces and routine forces on news gatekeeping must be made if we are to evaluate the extent of each separately. Even if an individual person appears to be a news gatekeeper, we must ask the extent to which the person is merely carrying out a set of routine procedures. If these routines are more important, we would expect to see uniformity in selection across gatekeepers. Variation across individuals would indicate that characteristics of the individuals are more important.[19]

Hypotheses

Our hypotheses use the Congressional bill as the unit of analysis, with individual characteristics of staff writers and editors' assessments of newsworthiness aggregated. For example, we have the editors' average assessment of each bill's newsworthiness and the average journalistic experience (in years) of those who wrote about each bill. Listed below are the three sets of variables we used, with the first set containing the dependent variables.

Quantity of newspaper coverage of the bills
- Number of articles about each bill.
- Number of words about each bill.

Forces from individual staff writers
- Percentage who voted for a 1996 presidential candidate.
- Mean number of years working as a fulltime journalist.
- Mean political ideology.
- Percentage who are female.
- Mean education.
- Percentage who are white.

News routine force attributed to bills
- Editor's mean assessment of each bill's newsworthiness.

Two hypotheses are tested in this study to compare the relative influence of individual and routine forces:

H1: The routine gatekeeping force of assessing a bill's newsworthiness will be related to how prominently a bill is covered.

H2: The individual journalist forces will be related to how prominently a bill is covered. The individual forces

include education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender, and voting behavior. We do not make predictions about the direction of these relationships; although the literature contains descriptive examples of journalists' characteristics on such variables,[20] and anecdotal speculation exists about the influence of variables like political ideology on content,[21] there is little empirical evidence to support directional hypotheses.

More important for this study, we expect that the routines of news work exert more control on content than individual forces, and therefore predict that H1 will receive more support than H2—that routine forces will have more of an impact on how prominently Congressional bills are covered than will individual forces. Our rationale comes from Shoemaker and Reese, who suggest that individuals exert minimal influence on content unless they hold substantial power within the organization.[22] This emphasis on routine forces is also consistent with the news media's own unwritten canon, which specifies that routine processes like editing are effective in removing personal biases of reporters that may be present in early drafts of stories.[23]

Method

The Congressional bills we examined were passed by the 104th and 105th Congresses between 1 May 1996 and 30 April 1998. We used the Library of Congress "THOMAS" website (http://thomas.loc.gov) to identify 50 major Congressional bills during this time period.[24]

Quantity of Newspaper Coverage of the Bills. Based on the bill-related information found on the THOMAS website, we conducted a quantitative content analysis using the Lexis-Nexis database to examine the prominence of a bill's coverage in national newspapers.[25] Based on the search results, the number of articles and words about each bill were calculated.[26]

Forces from Individual Staff Writers. We used the newspaper articles resulting from our Lexis-Nexis search to identify all staff writers who covered one or more of the 50 Congressional bills.[27] These 480 staff writers who worked at 40 different newspapers provided the sampling frame for an anonymous, self-administered mail survey, which we conducted in three waves between August and October 1998. Additional follow-up phone calls were made in November 1998. After eliminating wrong addresses and job changes, the sampling frame was eventually reduced to 432. Of these staff writers, 214 completed questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 50%. This is consistent with response rates from similar surveys conducted with professionals.[28] Comparison of respondents and nonrespondents on gender and their newspapers' geographic region showed that there were minor differences, suggesting that nonresponse bias is minimal.[29]

On a one-page questionnaire, the journalist respondents were asked to provide the following information: whether they voted for a 1996 presidential candidate (yes, no), number of years working as a full-time journalist, political ideology (five-point scale from 5=very liberal to

1=very conservative), gender, education (scale from high school to postgraduate degree), and ethnicity.

Newsworthiness Routine Force. Parallel to the journalist survey, we conducted an anonymous, self-administered mail survey among the political editors of the 40 newspapers that covered the 50 selected Congressional bills. A three-page questionnaire asked the editors to rate the newsworthiness of each of the 50 bills on a scale from not at all newsworthy to exceptionally newsworthy. Again, the survey was conducted in three waves between August and November 1998. Of the 40 editors, 10 responded, equaling a response rate of 25%. Comparison of respondents and nonrespondents showed minor differences on gender, but more variation among regions due to the small sample size.[30]

In addition, statistical tests[31] comparing the newsworthiness ratings on bills among responding editors by region and gender revealed no differences, suggesting that editors' assessments of bills' newsworthiness are fairly homogeneous, as one would expect if they represent an industry-wide routine assessment of newsworthiness rather than their own idiosyncratic evaluations of the bills.

Results

Of the 50 major Congressional bills selected (see Appendix A), 19 had to be eliminated from the journalist sample: Nine bills were not covered at all by newspapers in the study. Five bills were covered, but not by staff writers and therefore not permitting us to identify the journalist-author for subsequent interviewing. That resulted in 36 bills with articles written by staff writers, but 5 of these received no responses from the journalists covering them.

(1) Of the nine bills with no coverage, four dealt with continuing appropriations. The others were on immigration vaccine, export-import bank authorization, visa waivers, Medicare and Medicaid data bank, and anti-car theft.

(2) The five bills with articles, but not by staff writers, dealt with population planning, dolphin conservation, tax return browsing, most-favored nation treatment for Cambodia, and healthy meals for children.

(3) Of the five bills which should have been included in the study, but which received no response from the journalist survey, two were about continuing appropriations. The other three bills dealt with FAA authorization, Amtrak authorization, and savings in construction.

An analysis of variance comparing these three groups of bills with the 31 included in the journalist survey reveals no statistically significant difference among their newsworthiness. However, the two groups of bills with the lowest newsworthiness were one and three—those that were not covered and those that were covered by staff writers, but of whom none responded to our survey.

The number of words in the 50 bills' newspaper coverage ranged from a low of 0 for noncovered bills to a high of 227,886,

TABLE 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Quantity of Bills' Newspaper Coverage, Editors'
Ratings of Bills' Newsworthiness, and Characteristics of Staff Writers Who Covered Bills*

Variables	Mean	SD	Range	N
Quantity of Bills' Newspaper Coverage				
# words about the bill	27,469.64	46,194.78	227,886.00	50
# articles about the bill	35.90	57.35	284.00	50
Characteristics of Staff Writers Who Covered Bills				
Political ideology*	3.33	.31	1.50	31
% female	23.70	19.80	63.60	31
% voted for 1996 presidential candidate	96.76	5.79	20.00	31
# years as full-time journalist	22.16	6.35	37.00	31
% white ethnicity	87.94	13.28	50.00	31
Education**	3.72	.49	2.00	31
*Editors' Ratings of Bills' Newsworthiness***	2.91	.60	2.42	50

* 1=very conservative, 2=conservative, 3=independent or moderate, 4=liberal, 5=very liberal.
** 1=high school, 2=some college, 3=bachelor's degree, 4=some postgraduate, 5=postgraduate degree.
*** 1=not at all newsworthy, 2=slightly, 3=moderately, 4=very, 5=exceptionally.

resulting in a mean of 27,470 words (Table 1). The number of articles written about the 50 bills ranged from 0 to 284, with an average of 36 articles.

The results in Table 1 also show that the 31 bills were covered by journalists who on average are political moderates, college educated, and very experienced. About one-fourth of the bills' newspaper coverage was provided by female journalists, and nearly 9 of 10 articles were written by white journalists. In addition, nearly all of the journalists covering the bills reported that they had voted for a 1996 presidential candidate.

The average editors' rating of a bill's newsworthiness was "moderately newsworthy," although bills ranged from very low to very high newsworthiness.

To test our two hypotheses, we used Pearson correlation coefficients. The results in Table 2 show that our predictions were generally supported. The editors' assessment of a Congressional bill's newsworthiness was significantly correlated with the number of words covering a bill ($r = .36, p < .05$) and the number of articles covering a bill ($r = .35, p < .05$), thus supporting the first hypothesis.

Our second hypothesis states that the individual journalist forces will be related to how prominently a bill is covered. The results reported in Table 2 reject this hypothesis. None of the characteristics of journalists

who covered a bill (education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender, and voting behavior) was significantly correlated with either of the variables measuring the quantity of a bill's coverage.

Taken together, these results support our expectation that the routines of news work exert more control on content than individual forces. The routine force of newsworthiness was positively related to the quantity of news coverage of Congressional bills, whereas no characteristics of individual journalists had any effect on any measure of how prominently the bills were covered in U.S. newspapers.[32]

Discussion

When a potential news event approaches a gate or gatekeeper, there are a number of forces that determine whether the event will become news or remain just one of millions of daily occurrences unnoticed by the general public. Because forces may vary in intensity and direction,[33] the set of forces around a news gate forms a competitive environment, with positive and negative forces canceling each other out if they are of equal intensity. Where one force is stronger than another, Lewin's theory predicts that the stronger will determine whether the event becomes news. In reality, there are probably many forces acting on the gatekeeping process, with their polarity and intensity interacting to determine the outcome. Potential news items fight to get past each news gate, and the forces attached to the gates determine the news items' success.

This study has combined Lewin's theory of gatekeeping with Shoemaker and Reese's[34] hierarchical model. We look at the relative influence of several forces—characteristics of individual staff writers and editors' routine assessments of newsworthiness—on how prominently U.S. newspapers cover major legislation over two Congressional sessions. With the Congressional bill as the unit of analysis, and forces taken from two levels of analysis, the study allows a glimpse at part of the competitive environment surrounding each bill's approach to newspaper gates.

As expected, the newspaper routine of determining an event's newsworthiness was a positive force in predicting the amount of coverage bills received from U.S. newspapers. Also as expected, the intensity of the routine newsworthiness force was greater than the forces of the characteristics of individual journalists. Because the individual forces were not statistically related to the quantity with which bills were covered, we infer that their intensity is low and that no positive or negative direction can be determined in this study.

Aggregating journalists' characteristics naturally raises the question of whether any variance remained in those variables, thus preordaining nonsignificance. However, as Table 1 shows, there was substantial variation in all of the individual journalist variables, with, for example, some bills being covered by more experienced journalists, or others by more women. Assignment of reporters to news stories is not random, and editors apparently have a sense that certain types of reporters are better suited to cover some bills than to others. Yet in this study these differences have failed to predict how prominently bills are

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TABLE 2

TABLE 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Quantity of Bills' Newspaper Coverage, Editors' Ratings of Bills' Newsworthiness, and Characteristics of Staff Writers Who Covered Bills

Variables	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Coverage (# words)	.99[b]	.36[a]	-.05	.09	-.21	.12	-.07	.06
	(50)	(50)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)
2. Coverage (# articles)	—	.35[a]	-.06	.12	-.19	.11	-.07	.07
		(50)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)
3. Editors' newsworthiness ratings *		—	-.04	.14	.08	.09	-.33	.01
			(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)
4. Political ideology**			—	.24	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.33
				(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)
5. % female				—	.12	-.28	-.10	.08
					(31)	(31)	(31)	(31)
6. % voted					—	-.06	.27	.08
						(31)	(31)	(31)
7. # years as journalist						—	.15	.12
							(31)	(31)
8. % white ethnicity							—	.15
								(31)
9. Education***								—

* 1=not at all newsworthy, 2=slightly, 3=moderately, 4=very, 5=exceptionally.
** 1=very conservative, 2=conservative, 3=independent or moderate, 4=liberal, 5=very liberal.
*** 1=high school, 2=some college, 3=bachelor's degree, 4=some postgraduate, 5=postgraduate degree.

[a] $p < .05$
[b] $p < .001$

covered. For example, stories covered by more women seem to get no more or less prominent coverage. Although journalists' political views were on average moderate across all bills, some bills were covered by journalists with more liberal or more conservative political ideology; yet these differences did not seem to predict coverage.

An important limitation of this study is its small sample size—50 bills were evaluated for coverage quantity and newsworthiness, while only 31 were covered by responding staff writers. We of course recommend that the sample size be increased and the response rates to the two surveys be improved, but practical considerations work against this on a study using an "event"—in this case a Congressional bill—as the unit of analysis. Not only was a content analysis of all newspaper stories (in

the data base specified) about each bill performed, but four waves of interviews were attempted with two instruments for two survey populations. Getting the cooperation of staff writers and editors in their place of employment—even locating them at times—proved very difficult. It remains to be seen whether a larger N would have yielded more statistical significance for some of the individual forces.

Still, this is the first study to compare the forces surrounding the gatekeeping decisions of multiple events, and we believe the results to be consistent with Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchical model.[35] The data support the idea that routine forces are more successful in winning the competition to determine what becomes news than are individual forces. Future research should not only strive to include more events, but to include other levels of analysis, such as organizational forces (e.g., newspaper circulation or profitability). This will permit our understanding of the gatekeeping process to become more sophisticated, extending beyond thinking of gatekeeping as a series of discrete decisions made by individuals to recognizing that news gates are surrounded on both sides by forces that compete with one another to move stories forward or stop them. In addition, the recognition that these forces may operate on multiple levels of analysis[36] makes gatekeeping research even more challenging. A theory that was once seen as simplistic is revealed to involve one of the more complex processes in mass communication.

Appendix A and Notes follow.

List of Congressional Bills Studied

- Population Planning Resolution
- Continuing Appropriation (first)
- Continuing Appropriation (second)
- Continuing Appropriation (third)
- Continuing Appropriation (fourth)
- Continuing Appropriation (fifth)
- Continuing Appropriation (sixth)
- Individuals With Disabilities Education
- Dolphin Conservation bill
- Airline Ticket Tax bill
- Adoption Promotion bill
- Drug Abuse bill
- Assisted Suicide bill
- Defense Department FY98-99 Authorization bill
- Tax Return Browsing bill
- FAA FY98-00 Authorization bill
- Flood Relief bill
- Budget Reconciliation bill (Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997)
- Budget Reconciliation bill (Balanced Budget Act of 1997
- Military Construction FY98 Appropriations bill
- Interior Department FY98 Appropriations bill
- Appropriations bill FY98, Veterans Affairs, HUD
- Foreign Operations FY98 Appropriations bill
- Agriculture FY98 Appropriations bill
- Transportation Department FY98 Appropriations bill
- Appropriations bill FY98, Energy and Water Development
- Legislative Branch FY98 Appropriations
- Appropriations bill FY98, Labor, HHS, Education
- Defense Department FY98 Appropriations bill
- Appropriations bill FY98, Commerce, Justice, State
- Appropriations bill FY98, Treasury, Postal Service
- Immigration Vaccine bill
- District of Columbia FY98 Appropriations bill
- Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act of 1997
- Lobbying Disclosure bill
- Prescription Drug bill
- Intelligence FY98 Appropriations bill
- Export-Import Bank Authorization bill
- Visa Waiver Pilot Program Extension bill
- National Gambling Impact Study Commission Act
- Food Quality Protection Act of 1996
- Most-favored nation treatment for Cambodia
- Healthy Meals for Children Act
- Megan's Law
- Taxpayer Bill of Rights 2
- Medicare and Medicaid Coverage Data Bank
- Savings in Construction Act of 1996
- Anti-Car Theft Improvements Act of 1996
- National Securities Markets Improvement Act of 1996
- Health Insurance Portability bill

NOTES

1. Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Science; Social Equilibria and Social Change," *Human Relations* 1 (June 1947): 5-40; Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II. Channels of Group Life; Social Planning and Action Research," *Human Relations* 1 (November 1947): 143-53; Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers* (NY: Harper, 1951).

2. David Manning White, "The 'Gate Keeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News," *Journalism Quarterly* 27 (fall 1950): 383-90.

3. George A. Donohue, Phillip J. Tichenor, and Clarice N. Olien, "Gatekeeping: Mass Media Systems and Information Control," in *Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research*, ed. F.G. Kline and P. Tichenor (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1972), 41-70.

4. Pamela J. Shoemaker, *Gatekeeping* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991).

5. Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (NY: Longman, 1996).

6. S.R. Lichter, S. Rothman, and L.S. Lichter, *The Media Elite* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986).

7. Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics;" Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II."

8. Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science*, 175. Also Shoemaker, *Gatekeeping*, 7.

9. Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communications Research," *Journalism Quarterly* 34 (winter 1957): 31-38.

10. Westley and MacLean, "A Conceptual Model for Communications Research," *Journalism Quarterly* 34 (winter 1957): 38.

11. Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science*, 186.

12. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*.

13. White, "The 'Gate Keeper.'"

14. D.H. Weaver and G.C. Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996).

15. A.Z. Bass, "Refining the 'Gatekeeper' Concept: A UN Radio Case Study," *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (spring 1969): 69-72.

16. E.A. Abbott and L.T. Brassfield, "Comparing Decisions on Releases by TV and Newspaper Gatekeepers," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (winter 1989): 853-56.

17. R.L Jones, V.C. Troldahl, and J.K Hvistendahl, "News Selection Patterns from a State TTS Wire," *Journalism Quarterly* 38 (summer 1961): 303-312.

18. E.L. Sasser and J.T. Russell, "The Fallacy of News Judgment," *Journalism Quarterly* 49 (summer 1972): 280-84.

19. Shoemaker, *Gatekeeping*.

20. Weaver and Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s*.

21. Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter, *The Media Elite*.

22. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*.

23. Stephen D. Reese, "The News Paradigm and the Ideology of Objectivity: A Socialist at the *Wall Street Journal*," *Critical Studies in Mass*

Communication 7 (December 1990): 390-409.

24. The Library of Congress THOMAS website defines major legislation as follows: "The Major Legislation link on the THOMAS homepage is a 'short cut' to direct you to bills that have undergone floor action, been the subject of hearings or debate in Congress, or that have received media attention. They are selected by legislative analysts in the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress" (http://thomas.loc.gov/home/majdef.html, 1998).

25. The Lexis-Nexis database used was MAJPAP (major papers), a sub-database of the NEWS database. A bill's "short title(s) as enacted" (provided on the THOMAS website) functioned as the main search term. The time frame for each bill was defined as the duration of legislative action plus one month. Thus, the generic search term was "KEYWORD W/S KEYWORD W/S KEYWORD ... AND DATE AFT ... AND DATE BEF ..." For the six bills that included several sub-bills and had more than one short title, a separate search for each sub-bill was conducted. The search results were combined, whereby we made sure that each article was counted only once.

26. Excluded from the analysis were international newspapers, Information Bank Abstracts, articles appearing more than once (unchanged) in other editions of the same paper, Journal of Commerce articles (weekly journal), Newswire articles, and PR wire articles.

27. We included only staff writers because they are directly influenced by the decisions their editors make. Lexis-Nexis articles usually identify staff writers. However, in cases where only a name was given, we assumed that the author was a staff writer. Excluded from our analysis were contributing writers, "Compiled by ..." authors, columnists, authors from other papers, news service writers, "Special to the ..." authors, guest writers (e.g., politicians, community representatives), and authors of letters to the editor. If an article had multiple authors, all of them were included in our survey.

28. One study of key leaders in urban affairs yielded a response rate of 50%. Other studies yielded 24.5% for members of the American Sociological Association, 53% for deans of professional schools, and 50% for university women faculty and staff members. (D.C. Miller, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* [Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991], 146-48.)

29. For gender, 30% of respondents were female, compared with 34% of nonrespondents; 70% of respondents were male, compared with 66% of nonrespondents. For geographic region, 39% of respondents' newspapers were located in the east (44% nonrespondents); 26% Midwest (27% nonrespondents); 19% south (16% nonrespondents); 16% Pacific (14% nonrespondents).

30. 20% of respondents were female, compared with 27% of nonrespondents; 80% of respondents were male, compared with 73% of nonrespondents. For geographic region, 20% respondents in the east (33% nonrespondents), 40% Midwest (27% nonrespondents), 40% south (20% nonrespondents), and 0% Pacific (20% nonrespondents).

31. F for gender = .18, ns; F for geographic region = 1.71, ns.

32. Had we observed statistically significant bivariate relationships

between journalists' characteristics and how prominently bills were covered, we had planned to run hierarchical regression analysis to determine whether routine forces would predict coverage quantity even when controlling for individual forces. As Table 2 shows, this became unnecessary, because the control variables were unrelated to the dependent variables.

33. Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics"; Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II"; Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science*.

34. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*.

35. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*.

36. Shoemaker, *Gatekeeping*.

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