POLITICAL SCIENCE

The nationalization of news

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In the United States, the closure of local newspapers and the consolidation of print and televised journalism into a small number of comparatively well-resourced national outlets has been a cause for concern, but relatively little scientific research has been done on the implications of this trend.

Gregory J. Martin, of Stanford University, and Joshua McCrain, of Emory University, addressed this gap by examining changes in local television stations that were acquired by a large national conglomerate in 2017. By modelling the content of over 7 million transcript segments, the authors found that changes in the media environment alter both the amount and type of news consumed. Following acquisition, stations reduced their coverage of local politics and increased the amount of time spent covering national politics. The ideological slant of national politics coverage also changed, with acquired stations becoming more politically conservative in their coverage, compared to other stations in the same market that did not change ownership. During the same period, viewership of the acquired stations declined. This pattern of results suggests that the cost-effectiveness of distributing prepackaged national content through a network of local stations creates supply-side pressures that facilitate the nationalization of the news.

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