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**Author**

Morgan, David

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**David Morgan  
School of Politics and Communication Studies  
University of Liverpool**

**Working Paper 95-4**

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**THE CALIFORNIA CAPITOL PRESS CORPS**

**1994**

**David Morgan**

**School of Politics and Communication Studies  
University of Liverpool**

"Political journalism then tends to be a least two steps removed from reality - and probably two steps behind it as well."

Dan Walters, *The New California* p.1(a)

### California-Reporters, State News and Politics

California is the most populous state in the US with a state budget larger than the national budgets of 80% of the member states of the UN. Almost since its establishment the state has been a pace-setter of social trends and recent decades have served only to underline this reputation. California for a time vied with New York in this respect but, Californians would say, the state long ago ceased to have any competition. California symbolised student leftism in the 1960s and the conservatism of the 1980s. Currently, in the public mind, the state is the anvil of lifestyle and environmental conflicts, of post industrial and post Cold War issues.

If, however, California is identified with modernity, the State government seems not to have a high profile in the minds of its voters despite its considerable role in framing their lives. While this is not at all unique to California it may be of real significance since, if the state led in prosperity, it now leads in recession, being the worst off in relation to its size in the US. (b) In this context it might be expected that the political arena would be filled with the sounds of conflict as federal, state and local governments are assailed voter by demands for appropriate economic responses. Sounds of conflict there certainly are but, at the state level at least, these are more on social matters - crime and immigration - despite the fact that 1994 is an election year. State news in California, as

elsewhere, seems to be the orphan child of government news despite the crucially important roles state government plays in the lives of voters. (c)

How far, if at all, does what is offered to voters as state news produce this 'orphan status'? Could it be that the realities of state government and its reportage in state news are locked in a downward spiral of unimportance as seen by editors and news consumers? Lacking the drama of Washington news and the immediacy of local news is state news destined to be only a very small part of voters' attention? (d) The evidence from such studies as exist suggests that popular interest in all political news is declining and that state news has been in that situation for a long time. (e) The burden of the literature on media effects is clear. Mass media achieve political effects primarily by the provision of information and not by open attempts at persuasion since these trigger defensive responses. The closer media-supplied information comes to the personal experience of voters the less effective such information will be if it contradicts that experience. The poor and unemployed, for example, cannot be persuaded by media coverage that their personal state has redeeming features. (f) Thus, in theory, news of state government could be making a direct contribution to the low esteem in which state politics and government are held either because it is insufficient in volume, unattractively presented, contradicts the personal experience of many voters or, of course, because it deserves no higher public esteem. It must be said that even if the latter were true - and give the reach of state government it should not be so - such a judgement would be bound to rest in

part on media supplied information. Thus state political news is important in any event and those who report it deserve attention.

If the literature on media in general affirms the importance of state news, this point is reinforced by a recent study on Statehouse Democracy which suggests that, as polities, states are responsive to popular opinion and that their electorates are neither ignorant nor uncaring of state government. On the contrary, the authors argue that state electorates put parameters around elective and appointive officials which both are only too well aware of. (g) Attentive publics are significant political actors for whom media supplied news is an important source of information which periodically mobilises them politically. In California this certainly appears to be the case and the Sacramento reporters and politicians cannot but be aware of this. What follows is a study of the press corps aimed at illuminating both its professional and more general world view since both influence its reportage. Like their Washington counterparts, as Stephen Hess showed, (h) the Sacramento bureaux of California newspapers have significant autonomy in the choice and treatment of news topics within their assigned beats. The news choices they make and the factors influencing those choices are thus of real significance in the state news that the voters read, see and hear.

The government these reporters are assigned to is large, complex with, hitherto, a reputation for progressive administration and legislation. Historically California has shown tendencies toward one party dominance - Republican from the 1890s through the 1950s, Democrat through the early 1960s and

the, gubernatorially at least, a return to Republican dominance with the two term governorships of Ronald Reagan, George Deukmejian and now Pete Wilson. This tradition of long periods of one party dominance has meant long periods of minority party impotence and long periods of special interest dominance centred on railroad and agricultural interests, more recently supplemented by the aerospace-military complex and by racial, ethnic and labour groups. All these conflicts have long histories and, latently or manifestly, can be seen in the current gubernatorial and senatorial elections. A consequence of its progressive and anti-party traditions is that California has elected cabinet officers surrounding the governor who, nevertheless, has considerable budget power via a line item veto and the constitutional requirement for a two-thirds vote on appropriations and taxing matters. A degree of constitutional and political gridlock is seemingly inevitable and the Progressive traditions of the state are visible in recent patterns of 'popular' policy-making via voter constitutional Initiatives - Propositions 13, 98 and 140 being very much in the minds of reporters currently as will become apparent. The end of the Cold War and the downsizing of military bases and aerospace plants have shrunk the state's revenues and increased its social service charges. Deficits are already large and likely to stay so in the foreseeable future. Politics then, in California are marked by increasing conflict over the economy, race, immigration and their collective impact on the state's local government and service delivery.(i)

All this must be borne in mind in any survey of press



attitudes. Journalists are citizens and cannot separate themselves from the popular moods of the 1990s. Of course in their actual news reporting professional demands dominate. Reporters know that they must report accurately what political and bureaucratic elites say on policies, the structures of decision-making and administration, and on a multiplicity of group and popular responses. But reporters also now know that what they cover and how they present information can help frame popular attitudes. As alluded to earlier, mass media tell voters not what to think but what to think about and, more than is normally realised, how to think about a variety of subjects. Reporters then are key gatekeepers in the political process - they know it and politicians know it even more. Indeed the politician-reporter relationship is framed by an inherent conflict over the supply of information and its dissemination. This is a conflict in which reporters are in a subordinate relationship vis a vis elected representatives, albeit a subordination all of them question in the name of the very voters who elect the representatives.

#### The Sacramento Press Corps

The Sacramento press corps, at most some 50 strong, is almost wholly now a print press corps. Television and radio no longer cover the state capitol as a routine matter. California derives its news of state government primarily, though not exclusively, from the members of the Capitol press corps who are assigned to Sacramento from all the major newspapers of the state. Who are these reporters? Some 23% are women - a rapid change over the past three years - with a median age of 40.5

years and an average age of 38. The men have a median age of 43 years and an average age of 42. The age profile is not particularly skewed for senior reporters - 36% of the men are under 40 years of age and more than 60% of the women reporters.(1) Sacramento is both a desirable assignment and a desirable place to live. The result is that, while there is a steady trickle of reporters back to their newspapers, to Washington, or into California state government, there is also a flow of reporters between the major bureaux in Sacramento, a fact which replicates what Hess noted in Washington. The willingness to stay in Sacramento may be increased by the number of reporters whose spouses or partners are also journalists or in media related jobs.

Just 45% of the reporters are native Californians while the remainder originate from a variety of states in the West, the Midwest and the Northeast and the South.(2) Only one of these reporters lacks a bachelor's degree while ten have masters' degrees. At both levels an average 55% of majors are in journalism or communications while the remainder spread themselves over a variety of subjects in the arts and social sciences.(3) These print press reporters(4) are best seen as reporters who have worked their way to Sacramento through newspapers large and small either in California (52%) of elsewhere (46%), usually in more than one state.(5) The press corps covering California state government comprises a body of experienced journalists both in California and elsewhere in the US. Only one had experience of foreign reporting and he had spent years in the Far East working for a wire service.

### Media Access

So what do reporters make of the access to information they are given by those involved in California government and politics? Their replies indicate that, among official sources the legislature is very accessible but the Governor's office and some executive agencies leave much to be desired. Only 43% are satisfied with the Governor's office and 23% with executive agencies. More will be said on the latter in due course but it can be said now that there is a general sense among reporters of the inadequacy of information release and, if anything, a sense that the government structure is becoming more secretive as the partisan temperature rises in an election year and the state's problems pile up. (6) Little wonder therefore that when asked how far their entrepreneurial skills are required to produce news more than 40% claim that 70% or more of their stories are owed to those skills. (7) Reporters are unhappy with this because 80% of them are satisfied with the volume of news their newspapers put out. (8) By and large these are reporters who have little trouble getting space for their stories but much more trouble getting stories to tell. "Of course," as one reporter observed, "we know they don't work for us but they do work for our readers". Another added, "they complain about what we do but don't let us do the job they say we're supposed to do".

### Media Sources

Reporters think a much better job could be done to keep voters informed. News sources are crucial and must now be identified. Despite reservations about access more than half the journalists cite the Governor's office as a frequent source of

official news while 41% also cite the executive agencies in similar vein. The comments reporters made indicated, however, that news from these sources was the stepping off point to dig for 'real news' elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, one of their principal other sources - and an invaluable one on the Governor - was the legislature both among elected members and even more their staffs.(9) Reporters, however, have to be careful about the personal preferences of legislators. Some "get mad if their staff are quoted and not them" said one reporter, while another cheerily observed "some politicians respond to everything - others lie low". These sources are also the most frequent sources of feedback on stories to journalists, along with state employee 'whistle blowers', colleagues, and local government employees. Less frequent sources of feedback were the general public and appointive officials, the latter no doubt aware both of political pressures to remain silent and, too often of, the counter-productivity of remonstrance.(10)

When asked to assess their sources of news of a non-official kind the responses revealed an interesting pattern. The single most frequently cited sources were public interest groups - cited by 71% followed by political consultants (40%) and spokespersons for professional organisations (41%). Clearly all three types were those dedicated to influencing politics and government in an ongoing way. Other sources - business, labour, farmer, religious or ethnic organisations - sought out journalists only when they had legislation or regulation to propose or oppose.

There are clearly two tiers of sources - the almost constant influence-seeking groups and those whose involvement is

intermittent. The latter, it must be said, are not less influential with journalists because they are sporadic in their appearances. (11) The first group consists of the more explicitly political actors and organisations and, on a daily basis, frame the world of the reporters. These are the information traders a journalist needs to be on good terms with - as they, of course, need to be on good terms with journalists and editors. Such groups contain the individuals journalists seek to cultivate - sources to go to for advice and information on other sources when a story breaks, or an angle on a story has to be elaborated quickly. When new sources appear journalists are well aware they need to be sure of their legitimacy before using them. When asked about the checks they run on news sources their responses were interesting. The track record of a group, if one existed, was the most important, but reporters turned to colleagues and other groups in a news area to evaluate a new source. (12) Colleagues are vital, said a reporter, adding "the press corps is cooperative when it doesn't compete". A self defined investigative reporter, however, rejected too much checking, arguing that "I must be the judge of the significance of their message". These responses seem to repudiate allegations that journalists 'tune out' new groups or, conversely, give publicity to unrepresentative groups or those without real standing in the political arena.

#### Agencies and News Release

Many of the sources journalists have to rely on are concerned primarily with the implementors of policy, the executive agencies. All the reporters assented to the proposition

that access to news varied widely between agencies. When asked why, some reporters asserted that the problems lay more within their newspapers. One said bitterly "we aren't interested in covering issues and policies here". Most reporters, however, identified the prime cause as decisions on access made by agency leaderships (38% of mentions) and tied this generally to the political sensitivity of their functions (24%). Some noted that some agencies were improving rapidly with experience, but others appeared not to learn - Corrections and Caltrans were the most frequently cited. Interestingly, however, some tied the opaqueness even hostility of some agencies to the quality of their media and public information officers (PIO's).(13) Some of the latter, journalists reported, were headed by people who defined the press as 'the enemy' and let that show in their own subordinates' conduct. One experienced reporter said of such people "I'm amazed they are in that position". For her colleagues the explanation both of their incompetence and attitude was, as one put it "politics and the electoral cycle - the nearer the election, the more the spin".

Most senior journalists develop their own sources within bureaucracies but all would prefer a helpful press and public affairs office since covert hostility can sometimes prevent documentation being released, slow down routine news-gathering and inhibit other sources. Only 25% of journalists claimed a good or very good relationship with PIOs but all made clear that some were quite impossible to deal with and this shaded their view of the agency.(14) Allied to this were the views of reporters on the quality of documentation - from press releases to reports -

issued by agencies which, while generally accepted as reliable (76%) was sometimes difficult to acquire and often marked by a degree of obfuscation.(15) A bureau chief observed "we have to take it as reliable until proven otherwise" whilst another reporter characterised the position as being that "agencies don't lie but it is not the whole truth, of course". Some of these faults were seen by reporters as partisan in origin. Governor Wilson, reporters alleged, appears to have used PIO jobs as 'parking lots' for his campaign staff. This fact is not exclusive to California but is still unfortunate if it means that PIOs are visibly ignorant of the agency business they are supposed to explain. Since many journalists also see a pattern of declining expertise in the legislature, due to the impact of term limits and budget cuts on staffing levels, many feel that government in both its executive and legislative faces will seem increasingly less expert, even ignorant, and thus may easily be portrayed as self interested, uncaring, and out of touch. More on this later.

#### Constraints on News

As seen by journalists what are the constraints on the reporting of political and governmental news? When probed, a pattern quickly emerged of an emphasis on public lack of awareness of the importance of state news when compared with both Washington and local news.(16) Some of this was seen by journalists as intrinsic to state news, the "invisible beef in the hamburger" as one put it. There was, however, a repeated assertion that this situation was partly reinforced by mistaken editorial perceptions which inhibited efforts to educate the public into seeing the true significance of state news.(16b) The

result was that when asked how often state news publication was constrained by a variety of factors journalists cited space (63%) as a frequent constraint despite earlier protestations to the contrary. Significant minorities also cited editorial judgements on policy stories and editorial perceptions of media audience considerations as frequent constraints.(17) One reporter noted that her editor had internalised the tenets of political correctness. "It's an attitudinal thing," she explained, "the editor says I should cover stories which are for women". Market pressures can reinforce niche marketing - a Sacramento Bee journalist explained that "we must satisfy our readers who are state employees", while a Los Angeles Times reporter noted that, because of the time zone difference, "we know what the New York Times and Washington Post are running and we have to watch that". More generally many reporters claimed to sense what one called a 'tabloidisation' of news values while another talked of "not less political news, but a diminution of enthusiasm" for all such news, but especially for state news. A well educated press corps of senior reporters, a generally accessible state government and a growing number of interest groups bent on using mass media; all make for a plenitude of news. Yet, too, among reporters fears of growing partisanship in patterns of news release and, more, a fear that their editors are less interested in state news and under increasing commercial pressures to reduce all political news because of perceived public disdain for it.

#### Journalists and California Governance

To see why and how these tensions arise it is necessary now to look behind the narrowly professional concerns and see



journalists in their larger context. For the Sacramento press corps California is at a critical point in his history-economically, socially and politically. When asked most journalists were ready to talk generally of California government and politics, a small number prefacing their remarks with a statement to the effect that, in so doing, they spoke as private citizens and not as journalists per se.

Asked whether they saw any change in the balance of power between the Governor and the legislature over the course of the previous five or more years the responses were unambiguous. Nearly 70% replied that the Governor's role and powers had increased at the expenses of the legislature, citing the Governor's veto power and the two-thirds voting requirement on money matters. Some reporters, however, felt that the change was mostly cosmetic. "Wilson", said a sceptic, "has no real White House ambitions and finds common ground with key Democrats while using television to go around the legislature when he needs to". A long serving reporter asserted that the Democrats were lying low and "giving the Governor the rope to hang himself". A senior colleague flatly disagreed with both views saying that "The legislature in a nonentity in which Democrats do not use the power they have".(18)

Asked what changes, if any, were desirable in California government, reporters provided a long list which, at base, revealed a high degree of consensus around three basic propositions. Firstly, journalists asserted, there is the need to broaden the electorate by bringing into it the large number of unregistered but eligible voters. As one senior columnist

noted, "The will of the people is not the will of the majority here". A dimension of this is the need, reporters asserted, for public financing of elections to weaken the inordinate influence of lobbies of one kind or another. Secondly, many journalists feel that the state budgetary processes need radical change - from changing the constitutional two-thirds voting requirement through repealing Propositions 13, 98 and 140 so that flexibility could be given to budget makers at state and local level along with clear lines of accountability.

Many journalists, thirdly, drew attention to the need for a state constitutional convention to streamline government by redrawing county lines, abolishing redundant structures, incorporating ad hoc bodies and cutting government's own costs. California, the general feeling seemed to be, has an aging, well educated, overwhelmingly white electorate which is content with its control over an archaic set of government structures and, in Sacramento, an essentially cosy governmental world in which periodic electoral theatrics are not taken too seriously. Thinking of the Assembly Speaker, a senior journalist expostulated "Willie Brown says he just wants to get Democrats re-elected but he means friendly Republicans too". For the journalist concerned this epitomised a dangerous cosiness.(19)

Meanwhile, as seen by some reporters, the new multicultural and predominantly non-white California which is coming into existence may be born in unnecessary racial and ethnic conflict which will damage an already weakened economy. When asked whether they were optimistic or pessimistic about California's ability to manage its problems more than 80% were pessimistic, though in

a minority of cases differentiating between short term pessimism and long term optimism. Even among the optimists there was a degree of gloom though most reporters echoed a native Californian colleague who said "California has always muddled through and will do so again".(20)

The probing of these views proves useful. When journalists were asked whether the 1980s were good or bad for California 59% answered 'bad' and a further 14% said 'mixed', meaning usually that the 1980s were good at the time but the consequences are now seen to be much less good. When, additionally, reporters were asked about a Reagan legacy for California the responses were almost exactly similar. Reporters pointed to the state's economic overdependence on defence, aerospace and allied expenditures, with no real planning for diversification even when it became clear the Cold War had ended. A much respected reporter noted "the political leadership tried and failed to go for planning just when Reagan's policies meant the federal deficit got so huge that Washington now can't help California when the help is needed". Other reporters echoed one who said "the trouble began in California when Reagan was governor. Long before he became president his philosophy had been sold here and now we must pay for it".(21)

The consequences, as seen by reporters, become clear in their responses to a question on the current lines of cleavage in California politics. Seemingly, cleavages are easily discerned; racial and ethnic divisions account for over 45% of mentions, while perceived socioeconomic divisions account for a further 22% making a total overall of nearly 70%. Such cleavages,

as journalists well know, partly overlap with cleavages of an urban-rural, city-suburb, north-south, coast-hinterland kind (46% of mentions) which have long been the stuff of California politics. Finally, and this was stressed in interviews, there are gender, age, and environmental concerns which many journalists see as increasing in force. Expressed in coded appeals to the electorate on 'illegal immigration', 'crime', 'welfare abuse', these are very visible in current gubernatorial and senatorial races in California, the results of which, journalists think, will make them more pessimistic on California's future. As one journalist put it "If we wish to become a Third World country like Brazil, we're doing all the right things for it".(22)

Given this analysis of California politics, it is hardly surprising that journalists have clear ideas on their role within the California system. All of them saw that role as primarily informational rather than promotional of people or policies. Over 60% of them subscribe to the view that it was their job to explain government and politics to voters and evaluate the candidates and policy proposals of those competing for office. "We can't just shovel data at voters", one said, "we must involve them in their government". For a further 21%, promotional writing was strictly for the editorial page - "not the business of a news writer" as one put it. For a small minority even a limited promotional role was really unacceptable. Some clearly felt that promotional activities tainted the integrity of their news service while others were unhappy with the particular activities of their own newspapers.(23)

This latter point may link up with their perspectives on

whether media ownership has been a significant factor in moulding Californian voter attitudes particularly in reinforcing local, not to say parochial, loyalties. Some reporters found the question puzzling because, as they saw it, most newspapers were now chain owned. As such they were unlikely to foster local loyalties and were overwhelmingly profit-oriented, particularly in a recession during which they were in tough competition with television for advertising revenue. Some 48% however, answered the question and, of those, only one third saw the ownership dimension as significant. Working journalists in Sacramento bureaux are conscious of relative autonomy in this respect and these replies are not really surprising. When, however, they were asked a supplementary question on whether media could do more to encourage statewide loyalties and awareness, more than 75% of those who replied said they thought media could do so. Given their own analysis of the policy dilemmas facing California, and the visible tensions these create, this implicit concern over market led localism in their coverage is eloquent. One reporter agreed strongly with an increased media role but added "it is too noble for newspapers, I'm afraid", while another added, "California at base consists of two large media markets which compete for power in the nation and the state".(24)

Sacramento is outside both those markets and its government and politicians are easily portrayed as marginal to the powerful cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Its press corps shows a high degree of stability of membership. As earlier noted a few journalists leave for the Washington bureaux of their newspapers or return to the newsrooms they came from. A few join California

government in the public affairs sections of agencies or on the staffs of legislators; more switch between bureaux in Sacramento or between newspapers in California and elsewhere. Most, however, have been in post several years and admit to being in no hurry to leave. As one prominent journalist put it "many come for a while seeing it as a step up. They find the job interesting and Sacramento a nice place to raise a family so why leave?" Pressed on ambition to go to Washington a colleague noted, "California is a vital state. All the powerful come here and so I write about them. Why go to expensive, pressured Washington with thousands of other hacks? We all count here!" Such motives - understandable if a little surprising - give the press corps a community spirit which professional competition only rarely mars. Strongly as some may feel on the need for change in California, these reporters are mostly reconciled to a modest role in assisting that change both for themselves and their newspapers. They are well aware that, despite the often sterile charade of Sacramento high politics, change will come - driven by demographics, fiscal stress, post Cold War adjustments and popular expectations. Some reporters already see changes in greater local government collaboration on service provision, and signs of a realisation within California politics that the economy will suffer quickly unless political structures come into line with economic and social realities. Others, as is clear, are deeply sceptical having a perverse faith in the capacity of California political elites to fail the state. Either way, as a senior reporter put it, "Suddenly you're 45 years old and not unhappy to be an observer".

### Towards Conclusions

What conclusions, however provisional, may be drawn from this analysis? Five at least appear to be suggested.

California, firstly, appears to reporters to be a clear case of state responsiveness - but to the electorate and not, increasingly, to a majority of the populace. Journalistic preferences for greater openness in government, public financing of elections and structural reforms are rooted in this ground.

Secondly, the press corps are fearful of the economic and social consequences for California of failures by the political leadership in many arenas. As one reporter noted, "It can't be good for poor people if both parties are singing the same tune". Others spoke of the chilling effects of political correctness in general but, especially currently, that emanating from the so-called Christian Right. More generally the view was that expressed by one reporter, "Crime and illegal immigration are substitutes for the real issues of California".

The press corps, thirdly, find their traditional beats frustrating, if only because they think that they can see better ways to cover state government, and ways which would jolt the political elites. "I would leave most of what we do here currently to the wires and concentrate on developing an agenda in areas of real need" said a much respected journalist. Paradoxically, conversations with editors suggest the opposite, namely that reporters are too happy with run of the mill coverage of office holders and are unwilling to change their routines. Both sides could use a systematic dialogue, it appears. The observer would know if such change was on foot by a rising tide

of discontent among politicians and voters.

Fourthly, these reporters acknowledge and deplore the power of television to spark controversy and public interest.(25) Most reporters continue to assert about television that "we set the agenda and they follow" but this seems increasingly like whistling in the dark. Most, anyway, are willing to concede that at election times and occasions when television gets its teeth into an issue, its power to mobilise opinion and scare politicians and bureaucrats is awesome. For many newspaper reporters, improved television coverage could galvanise state government and engage voters' interest in ways that the press could then satisfy with the necessary follow up news in detail.

Finally, there is the perceived tie between television influence, the dominant Los Angeles media market and changing news values. If television drives Los Angeles politics and they, in turn, drive California politics, does this mean that Los Angeles television drives California politics and political coverage? The answer may be yes, but with reference not to Los Angeles television so much as television itself with its headline service glibness, its phoney talk show participation and its increasingly 'showbiz' news presentation. If television is the popular medium of choice then journalists need to accommodate themselves to it as politicians have done. Softer and more speculative news analysis, more investigation and more lightness of touch might actually help engage readers and, eventually, make all media create an upward spiral of popular information and informed participation. For the foreseeable future print journalists should reflect that nothing can replace their



capacity to provide detail and time for voter reflection. California and its Capitol press corps will be the beneficiaries of such an evolution.

## Notes

- a. Walters, Dan The New California. Facing the 21st Century Sacramento CA: California Journal Press, 1992 p.1
- b. ibid. Chapter 1
- c. Jennings M Kent and Harmon Zeigler "The Saliience of American State Politics" American Political Science Review, 64, June 1970 523-35.
- d. On this see inter alia my The Capitol Press Corps. Newsmen and the Governing of New York State Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1978
- e. See inter alia Dionne E.J. Why Americans Hate Politics N York: Simon and Schuster 1991
- f. From a huge literature on mass media see the contrasting discussions in Bennett, W. Lance News. The Politics of Illusion New York: Longman, 1983 and Lichter, S. Robert, Stanley Rothman and Linda Lichter The Media Elite Bethesda MD Alder and Adler, 1986. See also my The Flacks of Washington. Government Information and the Public Agenda Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986 and Ansolabehere, Stephen, Ray Behr and Shanto Iyengar The Media Game. Politics in the Television Age New York: Macmillan 1993
- g. Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Right and John P. McIver Statehouse Democracy Public Opinion and Policy in the American States Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993
- h. Hess, Stephen The Washington Newsmakers Washington D.C: The Brookings Institution, 1981
- i. Bell, Charles G. and Charles M Price California Government Today. Politics of Reform Belmont, CA Wadsworth Inc, 1992 and Lubenow, Gerald C. Ed. California Votes. The 1990 Goveror's Race Berkeley, CA: IGS Press, UC Berkeley, 1991
- j. For a useful discussion of the larger issues involved see Davis, Richard The Press and American Politics. The New Mediator New York: Longman, 1992, Part V.

### Questionnaire for Journalists

all figures in %

Respondent

1.	Gender and Age	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	N	%
	Up to 29	(10) 30.3	(12) 36.4	(8) 24.2	(1) 3.0	34 =	72.3
	Male	(7) 63.3	(3) 27.3	(1) 9.1		10 =	22.7
	Female						
2.	Place of Birth	CA (18)	45% Other USA (22)	55%		N=40	
3.	Education	BA (34)	77.2 Major (22)	50% in Journalism/Communications			
		MA (10)	22.7 Major (6)	60%			
4.	Media career	(44) from print journalism					
5.	Career outside California	Media	Other		N		
	Male	(14) 41.2	(1) 2.9		34		
	Female	(9) 90			10		

Access

6.	Generally, do you consider that the branches of State government in California are adequately accessible to journalists?	Yes	No	Mixed	N=44
	Governor	(19) 43.2	(10) 22.7	(15) 34.1	
	Legislature	(30) 68.1	(2) 4.5	(12) 27.3	
	Executive Agencies	(10) 22.7	(12) 27.3	(21) 47.7	
	Judiciary		(3) 6.8	(2) 4.5	
7.	What proportion of your political news would you say is derived from your own investigation and reconstruction?	30% or less	31-70%	71% or more	N=44
		(8) 18.2	(17) 38.6	(19) 43.2	

8. Compared with other media outlets, how satisfied are you with the volume of state political and governmental news that your media outlet puts out?

Very satisfied (11) 25.0	Satisfied (25) 56.8	Dissatisfied (8) 20.0	Very Dissatisfied	Other	N=44
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9. What are your principal official of California political news?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely/Never	Other	N
Governor	(25) 56.8	(16) 36.4	(3) 6.8		44
Executive Agencies	(18) 40.9	(25) 56.8	(1) 2.3		44
Legislative - Staff	(34) 80.9	(8) 19.0			42
Legislative - Members	(26) 65.0	(13) 32.5	(1) 2.5		40
Judiciary	(1) 4.5	(8) 36.4	(13) 59.1		22

10. How often does something you write produce feedback of any sort? Who feeds back?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Other	N
Public	(11) 25	(31) 70.4	(1) 2.3	(1) 2.3	44
Lobbyists	(6) 14.3	(21) 50.0	(15) 35.7		42
Colleagues	(16) 38.1	(26) 61.9			42
Politicians	(20) 45.4	(24) 54.5			44
Appointive Officials	(8) 19.5	(28) 48.8	(5) 12.2		41
Legislative Staff	(11) 78.6	(3) 21.4			14
Editor	(1) 50.0	(1) 50			2
Researchers	(1) 50.0	(1) 50			2
Labour	(1) 100				1
State Employees	(4) 80	(1) 20			5
Local Government	(1) 100				1

11. What are your principal non-official sources of State news?		Frequently	Sometimes	Never	N
Business	(11) 25	(28) 63.6	(5) 11.4	44	
Labour	(9) 23.1	(29) 74.3	(1) 2.6	39	
Farmers	(3) 6.8	(30) 75	(11) 25	44	
Public interest groups	(30) 71.4	(10) 23.8	(2) 4.8	42	
Religious organisations	(3) 7.5	(28) 70	(9) 22.5	40	
Ethnic organisations	(2) 5	(32) 80	(6) 15	40	
Professional organisations	(18) 40.9	(24) 45.4	(2) 4.5	44	
Political consultants	(21) 48.8	(20) 46.5	(2) 4.5	43	
P R Firms	(2) 100	(1) 100		1	
Legislative Staff	(4) 66.7	(2) 33.3		2	
State Employees	(4) 100			6	
Printed Sources				4	

  

12. What tests do you use to gauge an interest group's representativeness before publicising its views?		Check other groups	Finances	Membership	Relevant Message	N
Mentions Colleagues	Track Record	(10) 14.3	(7) 10	(11) 15.7	(11) 15.7	70
(8) 11.4	(23) 32.8					

  

13. Generally speaking, does access to news vary depending on the department or agency concerned? If so, do you have any idea why?

Mentions	Complexity of news area	Political sensitivity	Agency leadership decisions	PIO Quality	News Definitions	Don't know
(5) 5.9	(20) 23.8	(32) 38.0	(22) 26.2	(4) 4.7	(1) 1.1	

N=84

  

14. How are your relations with the public information sections of State agencies?		Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Other	N
(5) 11.4	(18) 40.9	(12) 27.3	(5) 11.4	(3) 6.8	44		

15. In general, what is your opinion of the reliability of documentation issued by state agencies?

Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Other	N
(2) 4.5	(9) 20.4	(22) 50.0	(8) 12.5	(2) 4.5	44

Constraints

16a. Do you think that State political news is overshadowed by local and/or Washington news?

Local:	Yes	(18)	40.9	No	(17)	38.6	Mixed	(7)	15.9	N=44
Washington:	Yes	(24)	54.5	No	(12)	27.2	Mixed	(8)	18.1	

16b. If so, is this owed to Mentions N = 60

Editorial perceptions?	Intrinsic to state news?	Quality of Journalists?	Public Awareness?	Other
(18) 30.0	(19) 31.7	(2) 3.3	(20) 33.3	(1) 1.6

17. How often is the publication of political news constrained by?

	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	N
Law	(41) 97.6		(1) 2.4		42
Space	(10) 25.0	(1) 2.5	(25) 62.5	(5) 12.5	40
Source Production	(36) 87.8	(2) 4.8	(11) 26.2	(1) 2.4	42
Editor attitudes on policy stories	(20) 47.6	(4) 9.5	(16) 38.0	(2) 4.8	42
Media audience considerations	(24) 58.5	(3) 7.3	(13) 31.7	(2) 2.4	41
'Political correctness'	(30) 75.0	(4) 10.0	(4) 10.0	(2) 5.0	40
New definitions		(1) 33.3	(2) 67.6		3
Access			(1) 100		1

18. What, if any, are the changes in the balance of power between Governor and Legislature in California?

More Powerful Governor (30) 68.1	More Powerful Legislature	Mixed (10) 22.7	Don't know (4) 9	N 44
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19. What structural changes, if any, would you like to see in California government?

Mentions N = 93

Tax law changes	(26)	27.2
Streamline government	(17)	18.3
Public finance of elections	(13)	18.9
Abolish term limits	(10)	11.8
More open government	(9)	10.0
Reform school budgeting	(5)	5.3
Reform initiative process	(3)	3.2
Career civil service advisors	(2)	2.1
Regional government	(2)	2.1
Unicameral legislature	(2)	2.1
Part time legislature	(2)	2.1
Parliamentary system	(2)	2.1
Bigger legislature	(1)	1.1
Ombudsman	(1)	1.1

20. Generally speaking, are you optimistic or pessimistic about California's ability to manage its political problems?

General Optimistic (8) 18.0	Generally Pessimistic (36) 81.8	N 44
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21. On balance, were the 1980s good or bad for California? Is there a legacy in California from the Reagan presidency?

Good for CA (10) 22.7	Bad for CA (26) 59.1	Mixed (6) 13.6	Don't Know (2) 4.5	N 44
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22. What lines of cleavage do you see in California State politics?

Mentions	N = 169		
Racial	(40)	23.7	
Socio-economic groups	(37)	21.8	
Ethnic	(35)	20.7	
Urban vs rural	(30)	17.7	
North vs south	(24)	14.2	
Age	(6)	3.5	
Inland vs coast	(6)	3.5	
Religion in Republican Party	(3)	1.7	
Conflicts over values	(2)	1.2	
Environment alism	(1)	0.59	
Suburbs vs cities	(1)	0.59	
Gender conflicts	(1)	0.59	

23. In general, what roles do you think the media should play in California politics?

Informing the public	(44)	100	N = 44
Promoting policies	(27)	62.8	
Expose poor policies	(19)	20.9	
Editorial page only	(6)	13.9	(1) 2.3
Asbolutely note			Don't know

24. Do you think that patterns of media ownership help California voters too localistic in their loyalties?

Yes	(7)	33.0	No	(14)	66.7	N = 21
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Can the media do more to create statewide loyalties and awareness?

Yes	(16)	76.2	No	(1)	4.8	Don't know	N = 18
						(1)	4.8



25. Of the mass media, which do you think plays the most influential role in state government and politics?

Print  
(32) 72.8

Television  
(12) 27.3

Radio

N = 44

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