

Arnold, R. Douglas. *Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006. xi, 279pp.

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This is a magnum opus relating to the local American newspaper. Using examples of local newspapers from across the USA, Arnold has analysed the manner in which newspapers cover their local representatives and legislators during the 1993-1994 Congressional Session. He examines why some newspapers provide more coverage of legislators than others. Questions relating to the frequency of coverage, the content, the reasons for different coverage and the extent to which the variations affect the public's knowledge and awareness are examined in detail.

Techniques used by Arnold are hardly novel. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of coverage of all manner of data and people are accompanied with comparison studies of the data and valences and distribution of articles, as the reader is deluged with vast amounts of information. Arnold may have forgotten the old show business maxim, "less is more".

The underlying theme of the book is accountability, and the Framers' belief that the success of a democracy rests on a well-informed citizenry. Arnold tests the extent to which the Fourth Estate is successful in this endeavour. As such, he reaches some interesting conclusions. For example, Arnold opines that running against Congress, i.e. criticising the work of Congress and promising to reform it if elected, is not a good political or electoral strategy. Another instance arises where there is multiple political representation. Here, local coverage is diminished in comparison to an area with one representative. The same applies to areas with one newspaper, as opposed to two or more titles, when political representatives receive less coverage.

What Arnold has ignored is the question of bias in the journalist world. It would have been helpful to have had an analysis of who owned or controlled the local newspapers cited. In *The Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian has set out how U.S. media outlets are controlled effectively by seven super-large corporations. To what extent (if any) would such corporations determine the nature of reporting in local newspapers? Eric Alterman's *What Liberal Media?* suggests that the so-called liberal media is not as liberal as may be anticipated, or at least to the degree promoted by Republican interests. Arnold could have taken this into account when reviewing the reportage of the local newspapers.

The importance of the local newspaper is much diminished since its heyday of the early twentieth century. Arnold devotes no time to the present day rival news outlets locally and the effect of the Internet. Also, he ignores the fact that he has written a study of media which is so entirely different now, even from 1993/4. He also takes little account of the importance of tabloid journalism and the effect it

may have on a politician's career. Accordingly, to this extent, the value of the book must be queried.