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# Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time

*As newspapers employ fewer statehouse reporters, nonprofits are filling much of the void*

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## How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this study to provide data on the number of journalists covering state capitols across the U.S., updating and adding to a [2014 study](#) on the same topic. Center researchers spent roughly six months reaching out to editors, reporters and other news media employees; legislative and gubernatorial press secretaries; and other experts on state government to gather as complete as possible an accounting of the nation's statehouse reporting pool. The study breaks down the number of statehouse reporters by state and media sector and also examines how they correlate with each state's population and legislative session length.

The study is made up of three components: a census of reporters covering statehouses, conducted with the goal of being as complete as possible; a set of 24 qualitative interviews with statehouse reporters and other stakeholders on their experiences in the field and the changes they have seen; and a study on reporters covering tribal governments in Native American communities, including eight additional interviews.

For the census of reporters, researchers compiled a list of news outlets covering state issues from several different industry sources and the original 2014 study, and then sent invitations to journalists working at those outlets to participate in an intake questionnaire. The questionnaire asked respondents about statehouse reporting at their outlet, while also asking them to identify other outlets that may have statehouse reporters. In addition, researchers followed up (by email and phone) with 1) outlets identified by other statehouse reporters working in the same state, 2) outlets included in the state's press association list, and 3) outlets that were identified by legislative and press staff at the state's capitol. Researchers verified the information for each outlet included in the study, though this accounting ultimately relies on self-reported data and responses. Data was collected between Sept. 23, 2021, and March 11, 2022. Since this time period, staffing may have shifted due to the commencement or ending of legislative sessions and/or newsroom layoffs, departures, restructuring or hiring.

The 24 interviewees familiar with statehouse reporting were selected nonrandomly from contacts who responded to the study, as well as other political stakeholders and other industry experts. The interviewees were selected to represent a range of states, outlet types and outlet sizes, among other variables. Each interview was conducted by a senior writer with a journalism background and typically took between 20 and 30 minutes.

The data on coverage of tribal governments was gathered through outreach to contacts identified from various sources as having experience at outlets covering Native American communities, and additional in-depth interviews with eight people.

For more details, see the Methodology.

This report was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Arnold Ventures. It is the latest report in Pew Research Center's ongoing investigation of the state of news, information and journalism in the digital age, a research program funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

# Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time

*As newspapers employ fewer statehouse reporters, nonprofits are filling much of the void*

**CORRECTION** (Oct. 27, 2023): This report has been corrected throughout to reflect new information, received in August 2023, that reduced the number of student statehouse reporters in Nebraska from 40 to three. While many figures in the report were changed in the process, including in graphics and tables, the new information does not affect the substantive conclusions of the study. For questions, please email [info@pewresearch.org](mailto:info@pewresearch.org).

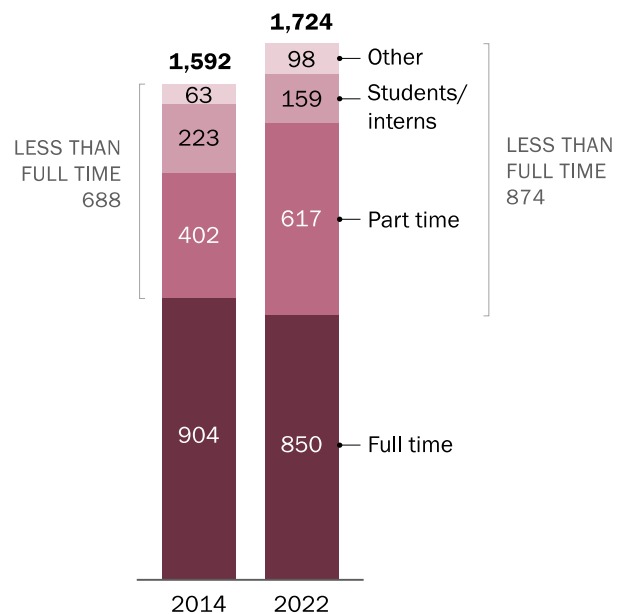
From [voting rights](#) and [redistricting](#) to [abortion](#) and [public education](#), state capitols across the United States are at the epicenter of the nation's key public policy debates. This has been especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic, as state capitol buildings became [ground zero](#) in the debate over mask and vaccine mandates and other [pandemic policies](#).

A new Pew Research Center study finds that the total number of reporters assigned to the 50 state capitols to inform citizens about legislative and administrative activity has increased by 8% since 2014, [the last time this study was conducted](#). The gain comes largely from two main developments: new nonprofit news outlets that are employing statehouse reporters, and a shift to more part-time statehouse reporting.

Indeed, although the total number of statehouse reporters has increased, fewer reporters are now covering state governments full time. Out of the 1,724 statehouse reporters identified by this study,

## Statehouse reporter pool larger than in 2014, but with fewer full-time reporters

Total number of U.S. statehouse reporters with each employment status



Note: Figures from 2014 have been recalculated in this report so that session-only reporters are included in the full-time category. See the Methodology for further details.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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just under half (850, or 49%) report on the statehouse full time. This means that they are assigned to the state’s capitol building to cover the news there on a full-time basis – either year-round or during the legislative session – reporting on everything from legislative activity to the governor’s office to individual state agencies. Being fully devoted to this coverage often provides the greatest opportunity to engage with the statehouse and produce stories that go beyond the basic contours of daily news. The remaining 874 statehouse reporters either cover the beat part time, are students/interns (whether at a university-run news service or at another news outlet) or are other supporting staff.

This is a notable change from 2014, when more than half of statehouse reporters were covering state government on a full-time basis. The total number of full-time statehouse reporters nationally has fallen from 904 in 2014 to 850 in 2022, while the number of reporters covering statehouses less than full time has risen markedly (from 688 to 874).

### **Different types of statehouse employment status**

**Full-time statehouse reporters:** Reporters who are assigned full time to cover the statehouse year-round or when the legislature is in session. (Note: In the 2014 study, year-round and session-only reporters were separated in the final analysis. Full-time figures for 2014 have been recalculated for this report to include both year-round and session-only journalists.)

**Part-time statehouse reporters:** Reporters who cover the statehouse only some of the time, typically alongside other areas of coverage.

**Student reporters/interns:** Interns or college or university students who cover the statehouse, typically at a university-run news service or as a student intern at a news organization.

**Other supporting staff:** Staff who do not fit into any of the above categories, but nonetheless provide support to statehouse reporters, such as editors, producers or videographers.

There has also been a significant shift in the types of outlets employing these reporters – if not a full changing of the guard. After years of staff cutbacks in the [newspaper industry](#), nonprofit news outlets have moved in to fill a legacy media gap.



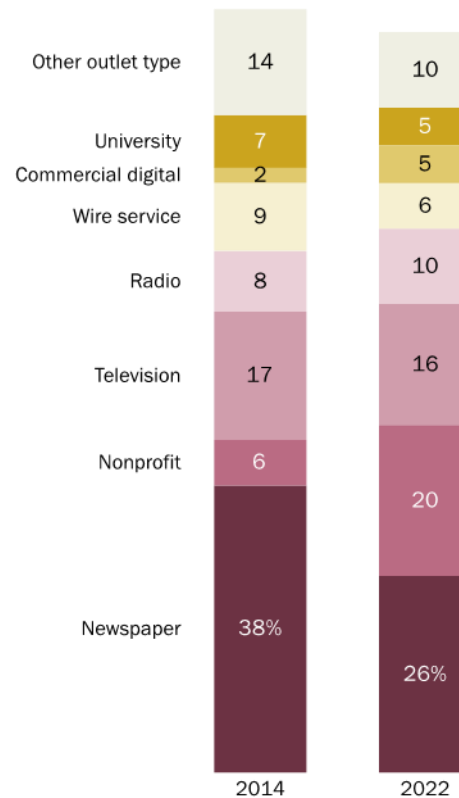
Nonprofit reporters alone (whether full time or less than full time) now constitute 20% of the statehouse corps, up from 6% in 2014.<sup>1</sup> In total numbers, that translates to 353 statehouse reporters working for nonprofit news organizations in 2022, compared with 92 in 2014. Nonprofit statehouse reporters now make up the largest portion of the statehouse corps in 10 states, and the second largest in 17 states.

The overwhelming majority of these nonprofit news organizations either launched since 2014 or are new in employing statehouse reporters, and thus were not identified as a part of the reporting pool in the 2014 dataset. For example, [States Newsroom](#) launched in 2017 and has expanded to more than 20 states, [Spotlight PA](#) was founded in 2019 to cover the Pennsylvania state government, and [CalMatters](#) was founded in 2015 to cover the Capitol in California.

Newspaper statehouse staffing declined the most between the two studies, although this sector still accounts for the largest portion of reporters nationally. As of 2022, 448 statehouse reporters work at newspapers, making up 26% of the statehouse corps, down from 604 – 38% of the total – in 2014.

## Nonprofits are now the second-largest employer of statehouse reporters, following newspapers

*% of U.S. statehouse reporters working at each outlet type*



Note: "Other outlet types" includes the following: Government insider publications, business/professional publications, ideological outlets, multiplatform outlets and outlets coded as "other." Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> This category does not include public radio and television stations, which are categorized as radio and TV outlets respectively. In addition, nonprofit university outlets are categorized separately in the university outlet category.

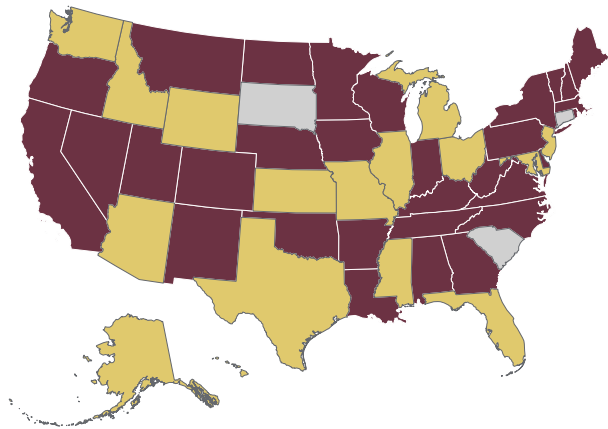
## Changes in statehouse reporters vary by state

Although the total number of reporters covering statehouses increased overall, that is not the case for each individual state. In 31 states, the total number of statehouse reporters increased between 2014 and 2022, while about one-third of states – 16 in total – experienced decreases. Three states – Connecticut, South Carolina and South Dakota – retained the same overall numbers of statehouse reporters.

The largest increase and decrease at the state level – New Mexico and Missouri, respectively – are attributable to a major increase or loss of part-time or student reporters covering the statehouse. Still, some states also have experienced notable changes in the number of full-time statehouse reporters. This includes California, which has 21 more full-time reporters on the beat than in 2014, and Texas, where there are now 16 *fewer* full-time reporters covering the Capitol than there were eight years ago.

### In more than half of states, the number of reporters covering the statehouse increased from 2014 to 2022

- Increased in 31 states
- Decreased in 16 states
- Stayed the same in 3 states



Note: N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.  
 Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.  
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The size of the statehouse press corps in a given state is often linked with two characteristics: the state’s population and the length of its legislative sessions. States with larger populations and longer legislative sessions are more likely to have more full-time statehouse reporters. Of the 10 most populous states, seven are among those with the 10 largest full-time statehouse press corps. And of the 10 least populous states, seven are among those with the 10 smallest full-time statehouse press corps. (For more information on state level data, see the sortable table.)

## Challenges and changes to statehouse reporting brought on by COVID-19

Since the pandemic emerged in early 2020, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on statehouse reporting, [shutting down capitols](#) and at least temporarily scattering many reporters and legislators from their workplaces.

As part of this study, Pew Research Center conducted 24 interviews with individuals involved in statehouse coverage between August 2021 and February 2022. The majority of interviewees work at news outlets, but a few work as either legislative leaders' chiefs of staff or as statehouse communications officials. In addition to other insights regarding changes in statehouse reporting, these interviews revealed several common threads about the impact COVID-19 has had on statehouse coverage and access.

According to these interviews, many legislatures have responded by substantially expanding [live streaming of meetings](#) and sessions, which allows for remote coverage while at the same time curtailing the ability of reporters and legislators to engage in person and build relationships. Some also told us that working remotely led them to reevaluate how to most efficiently do their jobs. Finally, a number of interviewees noted how the public policy debate over COVID-19 protocols became a major topic of coverage for journalists reporting on statehouses.

Chapter 4 includes details from the interviews. Remarks from interviewees also are included throughout the report to add context and personal experience to the quantitative data gathered in the accounting of statehouse reporters.

## Coverage of Native American tribal governments

Within the United States, there are 9.7 million Native Americans (as of the 2020 U.S. census).<sup>2</sup> About a quarter of Native Americans live on reservations or other trust lands, many of which have their own governments that exist alongside state and federal governments and can enact and enforce laws and regulations.<sup>3</sup> As with other government activities, reporters can play a key role in informing citizens about the policy debates and legislative activity in these entities.

The study verified 134 reporters covering tribal governments across 44 outlets. Additionally, researchers interviewed eight journalists and editors with experience working at outlets that cover tribal governments. One key difference between the media organizations that cover U.S. statehouses and the Indigenous media organizations that cover Indigenous governments is the relationship between the media outlets and the governments they cover. Some of the outlets identified are connected in some way with the tribe itself, whether through funding or operations. Interviewees brought up press independence as a key issue for indigenous outlets covering tribal governments.

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### More than 100 reporters working at Indigenous outlets cover tribal governments



**9.7** million Native Americans live in the U.S.

They live across more than 150 tribal groupings, such as Navajo and Cherokee.



Tribal governments represent and make laws for those Native Americans that live on reservations or trust lands.



In our research, we were able to identify **134** reporters at **44** different outlets that cover tribal governments, representing **29** different tribal groupings.

Note: 9.7 million figure includes all American Indians and Alaska Natives alone or in combination with one or more other ethnicities. 22% of Native Americans live on tribal reservations or trust lands, according to the 2010 census, the most recent data available. See the Methodology for more details.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020 and 2010 census; Pew Research Center data collected Nov. 8, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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<sup>2</sup> Census figures in this chapter include all American Indians and Alaska Natives, alone or in combination with one or more other ethnicities. See Methodology for more details.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 2010 census (the most recent data available), 22% of Native Americans in the U.S. live in reservations or other trust lands.

## 1. About half of statehouse reporters cover statehouse legislative sessions full time

In total, 1,724 journalists cover state governments around the country, an increase from 1,592 statehouse reporters identified by Pew Research Center in 2014. But not all journalists dedicate the same amount of time to the statehouses. For example, some cover the statehouse only when a bill is relevant to their beat, while others cover legislative sessions full time.

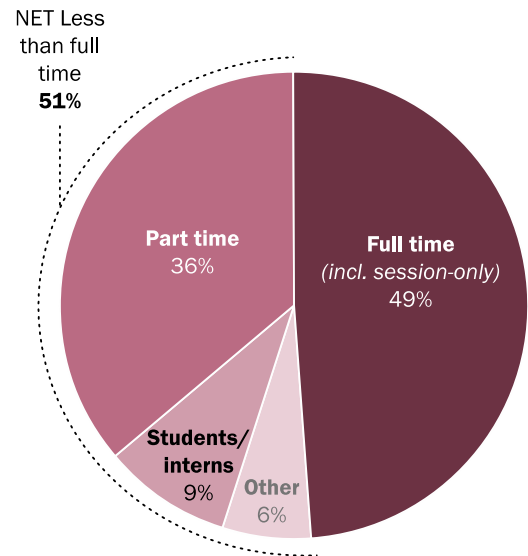
About half of the statehouse reporters identified by this study (49%, or 850 reporters) report on the statehouse full time, including those who do this just when the legislature is in session and those who do so year-round.<sup>4</sup>

The rest (874, or 51%) cover the country's statehouses on less than a full-time basis. This group includes three subcategories:

- About a third of all the statehouse reporters in this study (36%) cover the capitol part time. Many of these journalists cover other topic areas and are dispatched to cover the capitol when there is need. For example, an education reporter might go to the statehouse to cover a piece of legislation that impacts public schools.
- Roughly one-in-ten statehouse reporters in this study (9%) are students or interns. These 159 reporters often cover the statehouse for short periods of time, such as a semester, typically either as part of work for a university news outlet or as temporary staff embedded in a specific news outlet for an internship.

### About half of all statehouse reporters cover capitols full time

% of U.S. statehouse reporters who cover the statehouse ...



Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014. Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2014, the definition of "full-time" statehouse reporters included only reporters who covered state government year-round, whether the legislature was in session or not. Those who covered the statehouse only when the legislature was in session were measured separately. This analysis combines the two groups into one full-time category.

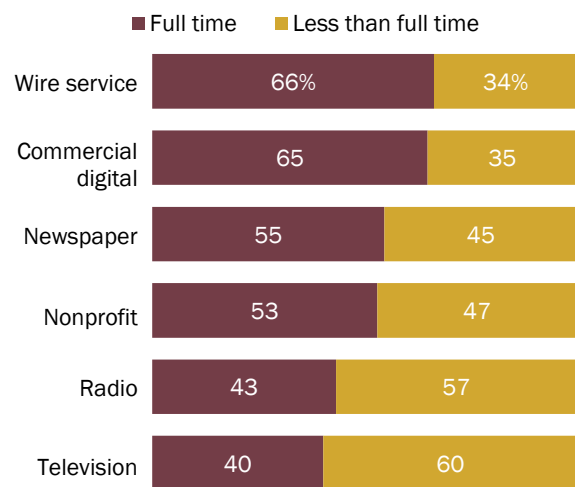
- Researchers also identified 98 supporting staff (6% of total) who didn't fit into any of the above categories. These staff are identified by outlets as providing significant support – such as editors dedicated to managing statehouse coverage, digital producers, or videographers for television stations.

As with the number of reporters overall, the categorization of employment type relies on the information news outlets provided. One outlet, for example, might list an editor dedicated to a statehouse team as a part-time statehouse reporter, while another outlet might categorize them as other supporting staff. Researchers verified the employment status of reporters as necessary, but ultimately had to rely on the outlets' descriptions of their employees working on statehouse coverage.

Some types of outlets rely more heavily upon full-time staffers than others. For example, 66% of statehouse reporters working at wire services are on the beat full time. By contrast, most reporters who cover the statehouse for radio (57%) or television stations (60%) do *not* focus on the statehouse full time.

### Journalists who cover statehouses at TV outlets are less likely to do so full time than at most other outlet types

% of U.S. statehouse reporters working *at each outlet type* who cover the statehouse ...



Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Full-time statehouse reporters declined in number between 2014 and 2022

One of the important indicators of in-depth statehouse coverage is the number of full-time reporters, as full-time positions allow for more ongoing and in-depth reporting on statehouse issues and events. Sarah Gamard, a former state government reporter for the News Journal of Wilmington in Delaware, said that statehouse reporters “often have other jobs or they often have other obligations, myself included. ... In a perfect world, there would be one of me sitting in the committee meetings and listening to every single debate just looking for nuggets.”

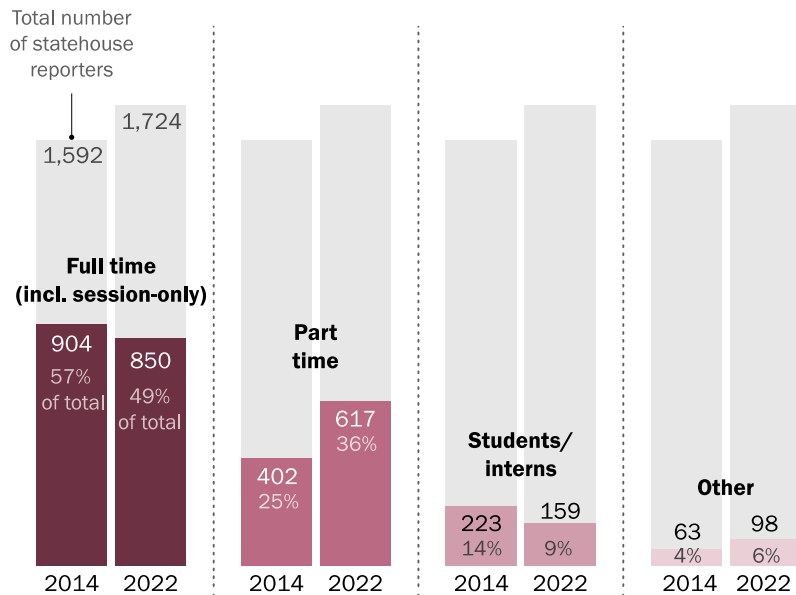
The number of full-time reporters covering statehouses in 2022 is smaller than when last measured in 2014.

At that time, full-time statehouse reporters (including those who are full time only during legislative sessions) accounted for 57% of all statehouse reporters, a figure that dropped to 49% in 2022. In total numbers, this represents a drop from 904 full-time statehouse reporters in 2014 to 850 in 2022.

The number of part-time statehouse journalists, however, increased from 402 in 2014 (25%) to 617 in 2022 (36%). Students and interns, at 159 reporters, make up 9% of the pool, down from 223 reporters (14% of the total) in 2014. Other supporting staff made up less than 10% of the total in both studies.

### Number of reporters who cover statehouses full time has decreased since 2014

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters with each employment status



Note: “Full-time” statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## 2. Statehouse reporters by outlet type: Nonprofit news grows as newspaper presence declines

The 1,724 reporters covering the nation's statehouses work for a range of outlet types. In 2022, nearly half work for either a newspaper (26%) or a nonprofit news organization (20%).

Television stations are the next biggest employer, with 16% of statehouse reporters. The rest of the statehouse pool works for radio stations (10%), wire services (6%), commercial digital sites (5%), university publications (5%) or other outlet types (10%), such as professional trade publications, alternative weeklies or magazines.

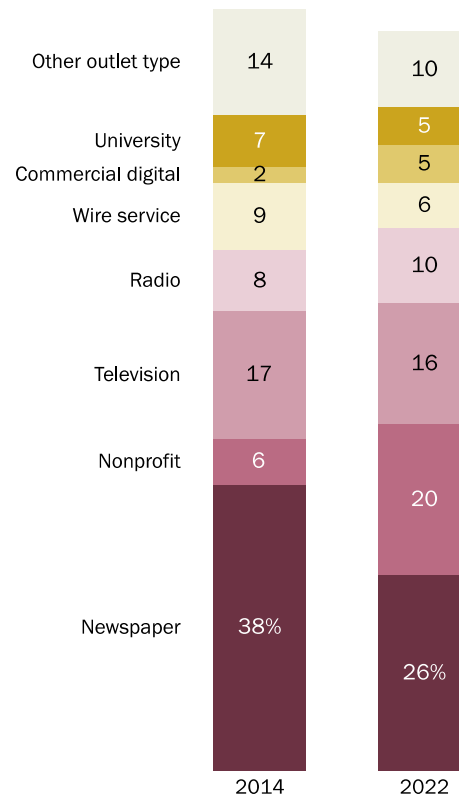
Nonprofit statehouse reporters now account for a far larger portion of all statehouse reporters than they did in 2014: One-in-five statehouse reporters work for a nonprofit news outlet, compared with just 6% in 2014.

Commercial digital sites also grew, roughly doubling their share of the statehouse reporting pool, though they still make up just 5% of statehouse reporters (compared with 2% in 2014).

While newspapers are still the biggest employer of statehouse reporters, their staffing contribution has declined. As of 2022, newspaper statehouse reporters constitute 26% of the statehouse corps, down from 38% in 2014.

### Nonprofits are now the second-largest employer of statehouse reporters, following newspapers

*% of all U.S. statehouse reporters working at each outlet type*



Note: "Other outlet types" includes the following: Government insider publications, business/professional publications, ideological outlets, multiplatform outlets and outlets coded as "other." N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014. Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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Wire services also make up a smaller portion of the total (6%, or 107 reporters) than in 2014, when they made up 9% of the total, or 139 reporters. Reporters from university outlets also have declined slightly as a share of the total (from 7% to 5%).

Other types of outlets account for about the same share of the statehouse reporting pool as in 2014, with a slight increase in their total numbers. For instance, TV reporters make up 16% of the total (283 reporters), about on par with 2014 (17%, 263 reporters). And statehouse reporters from radio stations currently make up 10% of the total, compared with 8% in 2014 – again with an increase in total numbers (from 124 in 2014 to 178 in 2022).

The rest of this chapter looks at reporters from each outlet type in greater detail.

**Different types of outlets that employ statehouse reporters [DROPDOWN]**

**Newspapers:** Legacy newspapers with a substantial print presence.

**Nonprofits:** Nonprofit news organizations. These outlets are typically digital but are not included in the commercial digital category due to their nonprofit status. Public radio and television stations are included in the “radio” and “television” categories respectively. Nonprofit university outlets are included in the “university” category. A small number of nonprofit outlets that have an explicitly stated ideological stance are categorized as “other” (ideological).

**Television:** Television stations and networks.

**Radio:** Radio stations and networks, including public radio stations.

**University:** Outlets based in colleges or universities, typically staffed by student reporters.

**Wire service:** News agencies that supply syndicated news to other outlets. Both national and locally focused.

**Commercial digital:** Outlets whose primary mode of publication is digital and are not a nonprofit. A small number of digital outlets that have an explicitly stated ideological stance are categorized as “other” (ideological).

**Other:** Includes newsletters and websites aimed at government insiders or other news publications; business/law journals and professional trade publications; outlets with an explicitly stated ideological stance; alternative weeklies; freelance reporters; and the few outlets that publish and have statehouse reporters on multiple platforms, such as a television and radio station that share a statehouse reporter.

See the Methodology for more details.

## Newspapers

Newspaper reporters constitute the largest segment of both the total statehouse news corps (26%, or 448 reporters) and full-time statehouse reporters (29%, or 245 reporters). Still, the number of statehouse reporters working for newspapers has fallen considerably in recent years.

Between 2014 and 2022, the total number of statehouse reporters from newspapers fell by about a quarter, from 604 to 448 (a 26% decline). The number of newspaper reporters who cover the statehouse full time dropped by about a third, from 374 in 2014 to 245 in 2022, and the number of students and interns covering state government for newspapers fell by 80% (from 66 to 13).

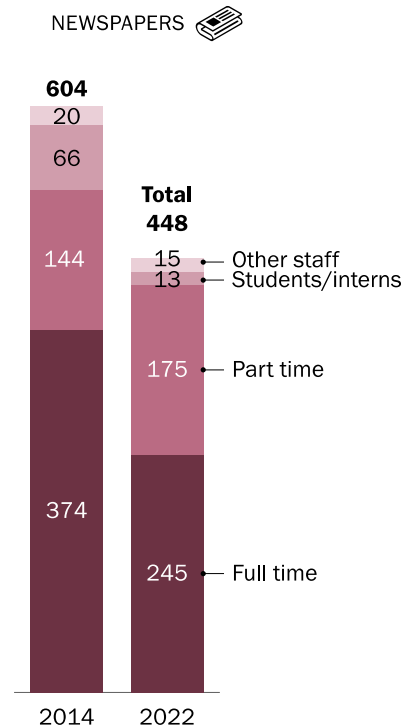
Marianne Goodland, chief statehouse reporter at Colorado Politics, has witnessed the decrease in newspaper reporters in the Colorado statehouse. When she started there nearly 25 years ago, “you had all these newspapers, and all of them daily print publications,” she recalled. “We probably had nine or 10 newspapers that had reporters who were there every day. Almost all of those papers don’t have people at the Capitol anymore.”

This drop in statehouse reporting resources is reflective of the newspaper industry’s ongoing economic crisis. From 2014 to 2020 (the latest data available), [newsroom employment at U.S. newspapers](#) fell 33% – from roughly 46,000 jobs to about 31,000.

Still, some newspapers are newly prioritizing statehouse coverage. Janis Ware, publisher of the Atlanta Voice, said that although the African American-focused outlet was founded in 1966, the

### Number of newspaper statehouse reporters – especially full-timers – declined between 2014 and 2022

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at newspapers, with each employment status



Note: “Full-time” statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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decision to have someone report on the statehouse is a relatively new one. “Sometimes I think we have to recognize that what is done at the state [level] controls everything.”

The statehouse cutbacks at newspapers are not uniform across the country. Statehouse staffing among newspapers fell in 32 states between 2014 and 2022, while it increased in 14 states and remained the same in four states.

## Nonprofit news organizations

Nonprofit news organizations [have grown](#) in the past years, in many cases replacing newsroom losses in the newspaper industry. Reporters at nonprofits now make up the largest portion of the entire group of statehouse reporters in 10 states, and the second largest in 17 states.

Nonprofit statehouse employees now account for the second-largest portion of all statehouse reporters, more than tripling from a total of 92 reporters in 2014 to 353 in 2022. About half (187) of these reporters are covering state government full time, while 105 reporters do so part time. The rest are either students/interns or other supporting staff.

Much of this growth is due to new nonprofit outlets that cover the statehouse. The study identified 59 nonprofit outlets that had at least one statehouse reporter in 2022, either full time or part time, and were not included in the 2014 study. Some were launched since 2014 with the express goal of providing more coverage of state politics. [States Newsroom](#), for example, launched in 2017 as a large nonprofit network of outlets and now has 23 affiliate news outlets throughout the country.

“This whole project is based on our belief that when you consider the impact that state government has on people’s lives these days and the small amount of coverage in most places, it just felt like that was the place where we could have the most impact,” said Chris Fitzsimon, founder and publisher at States Newsroom. “There are tons of small papers, medium-size towns or even smaller towns who can’t afford an AP subscription anymore and they don’t have a capitol reporter. We make all of our content available for free. A lot of people carry our coverage.”

Other examples include [Spotlight PA](#), which was launched by the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the (Harrisburg) Patriot-News to provide a central source of investigative journalism on state politics,<sup>5</sup> and [CalMatters](#), a nonprofit organization that focuses

### What is included in the ‘nonprofit’ category

The outlets in this group all have a nonprofit status. Some of these nonprofits publish only online but are separate from the commercial digital category because they are not commercial (i.e., not-for-profit). Additionally, a small number of nonprofit outlets that have publicly stated political orientations or policy goals (by themselves or their parent organizations) are counted in a separate “ideological” category below, not in this nonprofit category.

<sup>5</sup> Spotlight PA, a nonprofit, is separate from its founding organizations (the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the (Harrisburg) Patriot-News, all newspapers). All – if any – reporters directly employed by those newspapers to cover the statehouse are counted separately in the newspaper category.

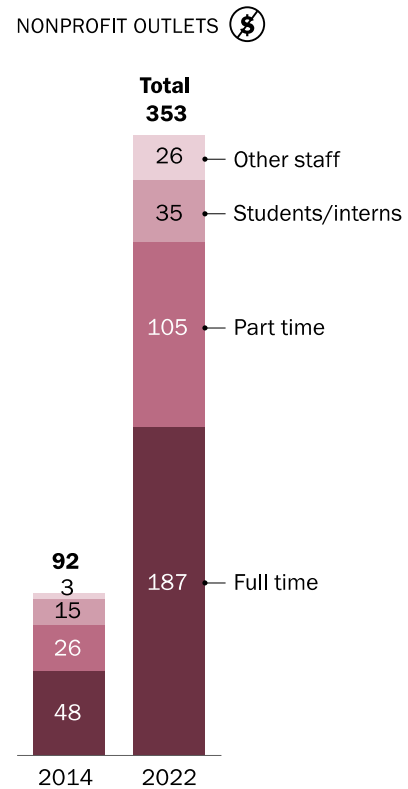
on California political and policy reporting and describes itself as “founded to fill the gap left by a shrinking press corps.”

Some of these arrangements are similar to how wire services traditionally share content with many individual outlets. Jim Friedlich, executive director of the nonprofit Lenfest Institute for Journalism, a major funder and supporter of Spotlight PA, explained that it distributes its content for free “as a public service” to news outlets around the state, which sign a memorandum of understanding regarding the use and presentation of the content.

“The miracle of Spotlight PA is that there are now, at last count, 79 news partners all over the state,” Friedlich said. “Spotlight is a hybrid – the nimbleness of a nonprofit digital news start-up matched with the benefit of large-scale legacy news partnerships and legacy news distribution.” Addressing the idea of the Spotlight PA model spreading to other states, Friedlich said, “I’ve talked to folks in California and people in Syracuse, New York, most recently in Omaha. There’s a great deal of interest in replicating the model of collaborating between digital startups and trusted legacy brands and distribution.”

### Number of statehouse reporters working for nonprofit news outlets increased sharply since 2014

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at nonprofit news organizations, with each employment status



Note: “Full-time” statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.  
 Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.  
 “Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time”

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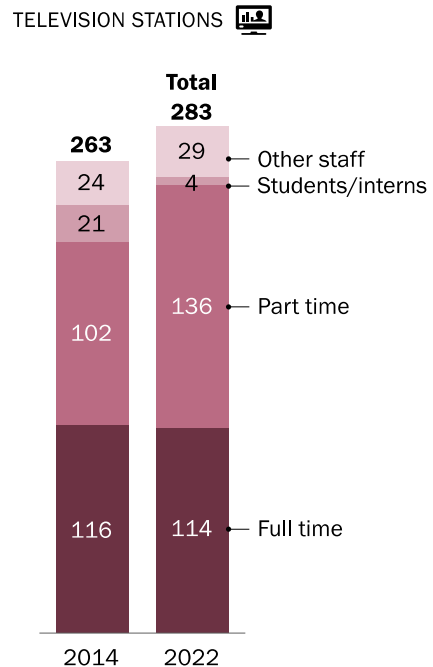
## Television stations

At television stations across the country, 283 journalists provide statehouse coverage, amounting to 16% of all statehouse reporters. This is a slight increase from 2014, when 263 statehouse reporters worked for television stations (though the portion of statehouse reporters from TV stations as a share of all statehouse reporters remained about the same).

The largest group of these reporters (136) cover the statehouse on a part-time basis. These are journalists who often have other assignments and are dispatched to cover the capitol when needed. A smaller group of 114 TV reporters now cover the statehouse full time. Nationwide, 39 states have at least one full-time television reporter covering the statehouse.

### Number of statehouse reporters at TV stations has grown slightly since 2014

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at television news stations, with each employment status



Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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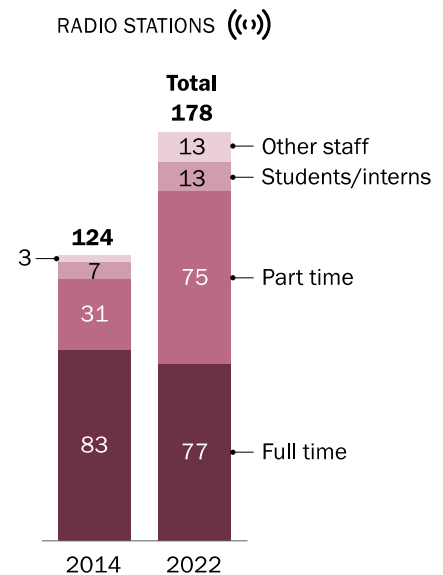
## Radio stations

Radio reporters constitute a smaller segment of the statehouse press corps (10%) than their television counterparts. That amounts to 178 reporters in all, including 77 who cover the statehouse full time and 75 who do so part time. While the total number of radio statehouse reporters increased by 54 from 2014, the number who cover the statehouse full time shrank by six.

The study identified 85 radio stations assigning statehouse reporters across the country. Most of these are public radio stations, which account for the bulk of the statehouse reporters: Of the 85 radio stations identified, 62 were public radio stations.

### Number of statehouse reporters at radio stations increased since 2014, mostly due to part-timers

*Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at radio stations, with each employment status*



Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.  
Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Wire services

Newspapers sometimes rely [on wire services such as The Associated Press](#) for statehouse reporting rather than employing the personnel themselves. Reporters working for wire services represent 6% of all statehouse reporters, which amounts to 107 reporters in 2022. This is a decline since 2014, when 139 wire reporters covered the statehouse. This decline was mainly seen in the loss of reporters covering the statehouse full time.

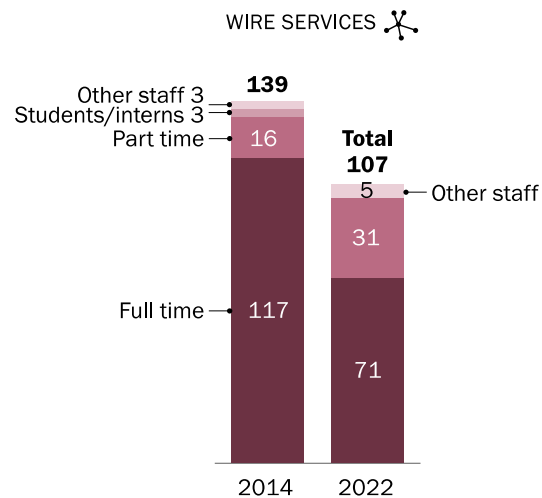
“When I started at the Capitol, the Associated Press had a very large presence, but COVID has reduced ... that presence,” said Goodland, the chief statehouse reporter at Colorado Politics. “We rarely see the AP people at the Capitol.”

While wire services have a smaller overall presence at statehouses than in the past, the reach of their work still can be much larger than any single news outlet. Wire stories are distributed by an array of local outlets that typically, though not always, pay to be able to carry their content. The AP has the largest footprint (supplied at least in part by the [nonprofit Report for America](#) – which is not its own news outlet but instead funds reporters to be stationed in other newsrooms), but other wire services studied here include Forum News Service (which operates in multiple states) and Capitol News Service in Florida.

According to Noreen Gillespie, AP’s deputy managing editor for U.S. news, “AP has made an institutional commitment to maintaining our 50-state footprint and is proud of the ability to strengthen that footprint through our partnership with Report for America. AP covers every statehouse and counts the vote in every state.” She added that the AP’s work is aimed at “helping citizens understand critical decisions made by state governments, how democracy operates, and the forces that threaten free and fair elections.”

### Number of wire service statehouse reporters declined since 2014

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at wire services, with each employment status



Note: “Full-time” statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.  
Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Commercial digital-first outlets

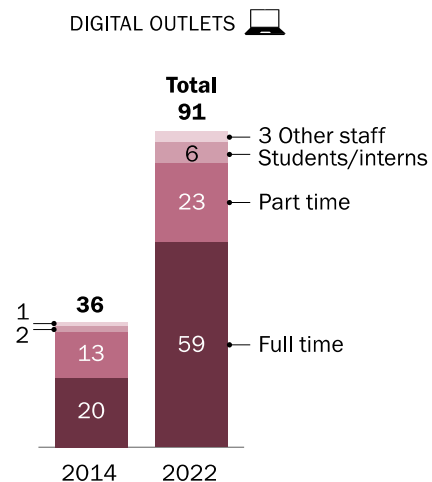
In addition to nonprofits, another [growing sector of news outlets](#) in recent years includes for-profit organizations that primarily – or in many cases only – publish on the web, whether or not they were initially launched there.<sup>6</sup> Those identified here include new locally focused digital outlets like [Iowa Starting Line](#) and the [Colorado Sun](#), new state-level entities of larger news websites like Politico, Axios and Bloomberg News, and some outlets that were already a part of the reporting pool in 2014 (such as [Civil Beat](#) in Hawaii).<sup>7</sup> A small number of digital-first outlets whose self-descriptions or founders have stated editorial viewpoints or policy goals are included in the “ideological” category below because of their clear ideological leanings.

Today, there are more than twice as many statehouse reporters at commercial digital-first outlets than in 2014 (91 vs. 36). This includes an increase at both the full-time level (from 20 in 2014 to 59 in 2022) and the part-time level (from 13 to 23). Reporters at these types of outlets account for the largest segment of all statehouse reporters in two states, and second-largest in five.

Betsy Russell, statehouse reporter with Idaho Press and president of the Idaho Capitol Correspondents Association, noted a transition among digital outlets in that state. Several years ago, “there were a number of digital startups covering the statehouse and it was a whole new thing for us,” Russell said. “Most of those that we had then have gone away, but new ones have come in. And some of them are really solid and have really taken hold.”

### Number of statehouse reporters working at digital outlets increased dramatically since 2014

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at digital outlets, with each employment status



Note: “Full-time” statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.

N=91 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=36 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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<sup>6</sup> This category does not include legacy newspapers, even if they have a large online presence.

<sup>7</sup> In 2014, this category included only outlets that were specifically *launched* on the web – just 11 different outlets, mostly locally focused and recently launched news websites like Civil Beat in Hawaii, or CTNewsJunkie.com in Connecticut. In 2022, researchers also included outlets that may have launched on another platform but are now primarily published online.

## University outlets

News outlets based out of colleges and universities provide 5% of all statehouse reporters, 88 in total. This number is a slight decrease from 2014, both in total number and as a share of the statehouse reporting pool overall. Nearly all the reporters at these outlets are students or interns, although some students and interns also report for other outlet types.

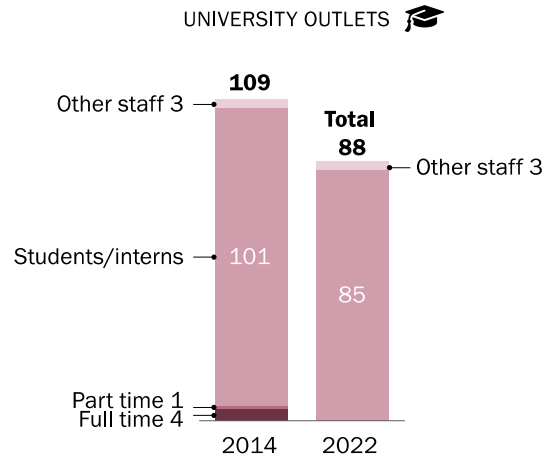
These university and college outlets sometimes have a model similar to wires and some nonprofits, in which their reporting is carried by a number of local news outlets. Christopher Drew, director of Louisiana State University’s Manship School News Service, described how they provide important content for outlets that don’t have statehouse reporters. “We’ve built it up to where 89 news sites in Louisiana and Mississippi have now run at least one of our stories,” he said. “They get professional-quality coverage. Then, a lot of these papers are crying for stories and legislative coverage. It’s great for readers and good public service for the school.”

The LSU Manship News Service has about 10 students reporting on the statehouse.

“Those programs are so integral to the current biosphere of statehouse reporting,” said Sarah Gamard, a former state government reporter for the News Journal of Wilmington in Delaware and graduate of the LSU Manship program. “They are so necessary because statehouse reporting is dwindling. ... I just think it’s such a good idea for the newspaper industry, because now you’re getting more daily coverage. ... It just wouldn’t get covered otherwise, and those [students] are learning.”

### Number of statehouse reporters at colleges and universities decreased slightly

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters working at university outlets, with each employment status



Note: “Full-time” statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session.  
Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Other types of outlets

Employees reporting on statehouses for other types of outlets than the ones mentioned above make up 10% of all of the reporters identified in this study.

Outlets geared toward government insiders make up 4% of the reporters in this study. These outlets, typically subscription-based, focus entirely on the goings-on inside the statehouse and are sometimes oriented around a specific policy issue or the legislative schedule.

Business and law journals and professional or trade publications also employ a small number of reporters covering state capitols (1% of the total reporting pool), typically part time.

Outlets with stated ideological stances also fall into this “other” category. They include outlets that have explicitly stated ideological stances or policy goals either themselves or via their founding organizations. These types of outlets, which tend to publish online only and often have nonprofit status, employ 19 reporters (1% of the total).

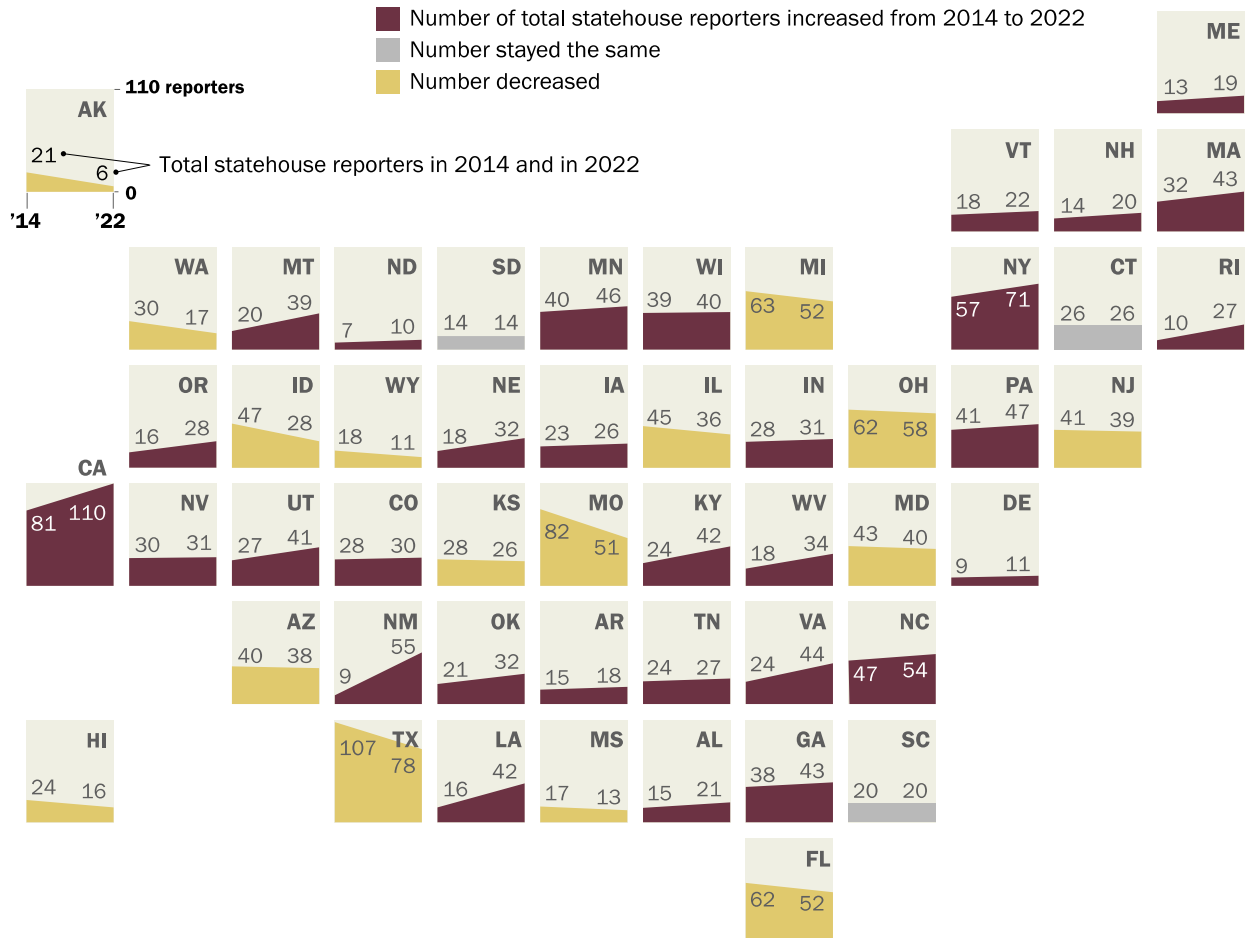
### **3. Statehouse press corps grows in most states, with some notable exceptions**

Trends in the number of statehouse reporters vary from state to state. In more than half of states – 31 – the number of statehouse reporters increased between 2014 and 2022, following the national pattern of growth in the total number of reporters covering statehouses. But about one-third of states – 16 in total – experienced decreases in their total numbers of statehouse reporters, including highly populous states such as Florida and Texas and less populated states like Wyoming and Alaska. Three states – Connecticut, South Carolina and South Dakota – retained the same overall numbers of statehouse reporters.

Among those with increases, the size of the increase ranged from the addition of one reporter, like in Wisconsin (from 39 reporters in 2014 to 40 in 2022), to an increase of 46 reporters in New Mexico (from nine reporters in 2014 to 55 in 2022). New Mexico's press pool grew by a whopping 511%, also the largest gain in percentage terms, largely due to an increase in the number of reporters covering the statehouse part-time.

## Number of statehouse reporters increased in most states between 2014 and 2022

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters in 2014 and 2022



Note: N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.  
 Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.  
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The other states with the largest growth of statehouse reporters were California, Louisiana, Virginia and Montana. In California and Montana, the increases between 2014 and 2022 were driven by the addition of full-time reporters in each state. In other cases, these increases are largely due to growing numbers of part-time and student reporters.

The five states with the largest declines in their statehouse press corps were Missouri, Texas, Idaho, Alaska and Washington. Missouri's loss of 31 reporters amounts to a 38% decrease in its total number of statehouse reporters since 2014. This was driven primarily by a decline from 51 student reporters in 2014 to 26 in 2022.

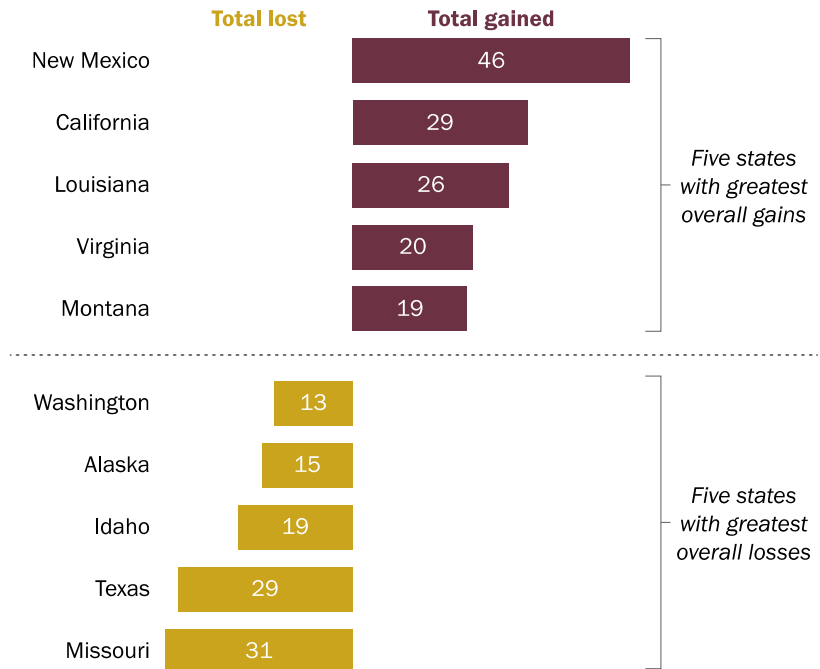
Texas' statehouse press corps shrank from 107 in 2014 to 78 in 2022; this decrease was seen across outlets, with many outlets in Texas losing one or two statehouse reporters since 2014. Meanwhile, Idaho lost a total of 19 statehouse reporters and Alaska and Washington dropped by 15 and 13 since 2014, respectively. In these states, these losses stemmed from multiple outlets downsizing the number of staff dedicated to statehouse reporting.

Betsy Russell of the Idaho Press noted the slow decline of the newspaper's Boise bureau: "I had three reporters, and then it went down to two, and then it went down to one, and that one just left – and we're hiring."

[\(See detailed tables for more data on the number of statehouse reporters by state\)](#)

## Texas, Missouri had largest decreases in statehouse reporters between 2014 and 2022

*Five largest gains and losses of statehouse reporters among U.S. states between 2014 and 2022*



Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.  
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## Where full-time statehouse reporters increased, decreased most

One important indicator of a news organization's focus on statehouse reporting and the resources available for statehouse coverage is the size of its full-time statehouse reporting staff, which often allows for more ongoing reporting on statehouse issues and events. Focusing on full-time staff also allows researchers to look beyond the volatility in the numbers of part-time staff and students or interns.

Looking only at the 850 reporters who cover the statehouse full time (either when the legislature is in session or year-round), California rises to the top in terms of most reporters gained from 2014 to 2022 (from 44 to 65). The next four states with the largest increases in full-time statehouse reporters are Montana, Wisconsin, Michigan and New Hampshire.

The states with the largest declines are Texas, Alaska, Vermont, Minnesota and New Jersey, with each state losing between nine and 16 full-time statehouse reporters between 2014 and 2022. Texas had the largest decline, going from 60 full-time statehouse reporters in 2014 to 44 in 2022, a loss of 16.

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### California had largest increase in full-time statehouse reporters

*Five largest gains and losses of full-time statehouse reporters among U.S. states between 2014 and 2022*

	2014	2022	Change
California	44	65	+21
Montana	11	26	+15
Wisconsin	21	30	+9
Michigan	19	26	+7
New Hampshire	5	10	+5
<hr/>			
New Jersey	37	28	-9
Minnesota	29	19	-10
Vermont	15	5	-10
Alaska	17	6	-11
Texas	60	44	-16

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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### **States with larger populations and longer legislative sessions tend to have more full-time statehouse reporters**

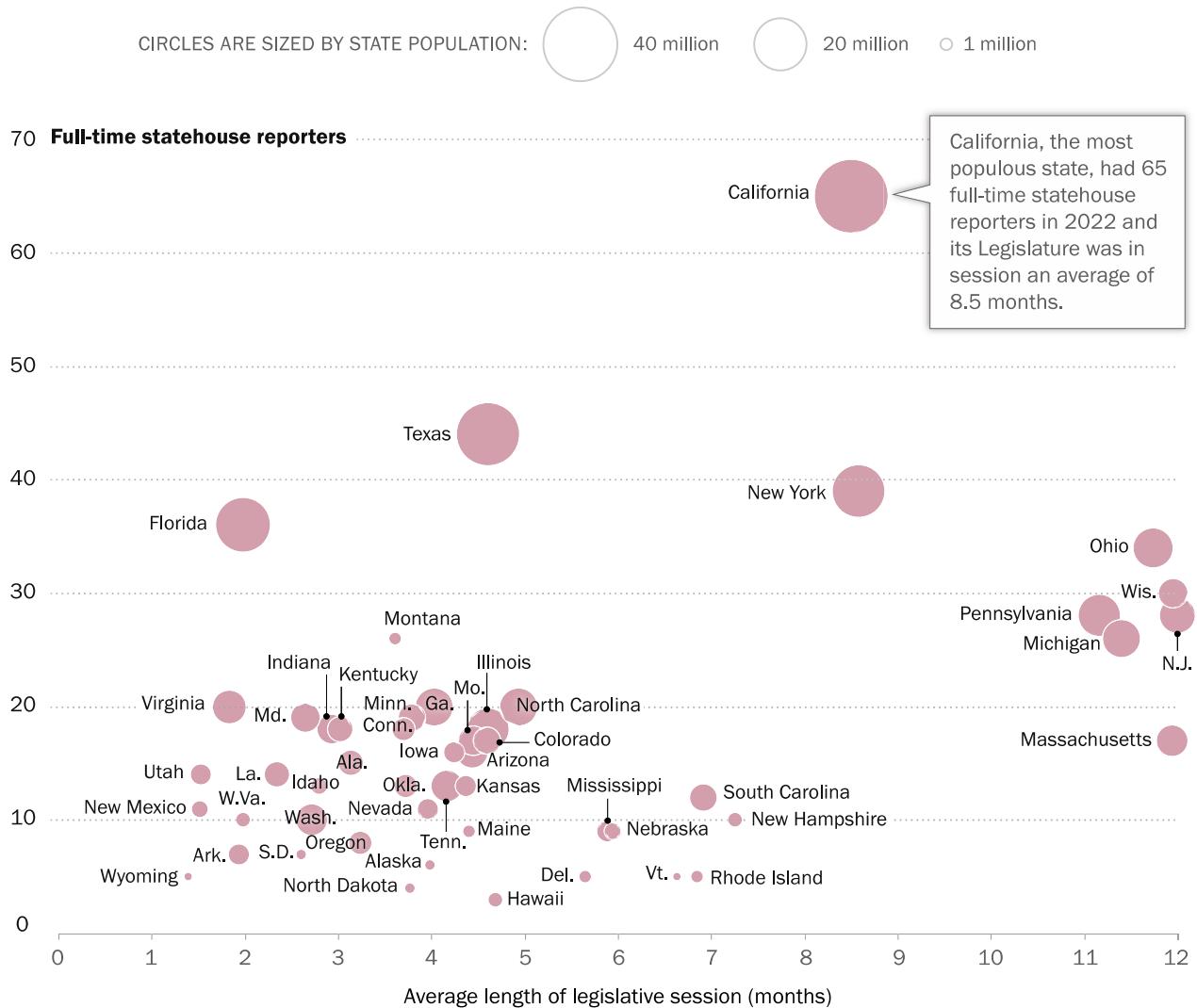
The number of full-time statehouse reporters varies dramatically from state to state, ranging from three in Hawaii to 65 full-time statehouse reporters in California. Researchers analyzed two factors that might relate to these differences in statehouse news staffing in each state.

As was the case in 2014, these two factors continue to be related to the number of full-time statehouse reporters in each state. The first is population: In general, the larger a state's population, according to the 2020 census, the more likely a state is to have a greater number of full-time statehouse reporters.

For instance, seven states – California, Florida, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas – are among both the 10 most populous states and the 10 with the largest full-time statehouse press corps. In 2014, this was true for eight states. Similarly, seven states – Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming – are now among both the 10 least populous and the 10 with the smallest full-time statehouse press corps.

## States with larger populations and longer legislative sessions tend to have more full-time statehouse reporters

Number of full-time U.S. statehouse reporters compared to length of legislative session and state population



Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. Legislative session length represents the average of the 2019 and 2020 sessions. See Methodology for more details. N=850 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=904 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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Also similar to 2014, the length of time a state legislature spends in session is related to the number of full-time statehouse reporters in that state. States with longer average legislative

sessions tend to have a greater number of full-time statehouse reporters, while states with shorter average session lengths tend to have fewer.<sup>8</sup>

[SORTABLE TABLE HERE]

Of the 10 states with the longest average legislative sessions, seven are among those with the 10 largest full-time statehouse press corps.

The relationship between session length and the number of full-time statehouse reporters, however, is not as strong as the population relationship.<sup>9</sup> Florida, for example, has one of the shortest legislative session lengths, at an average of about two months, but it has the fourth-largest full-time statehouse press corps. This might be explained by Florida's large population, as well as other factors.

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<sup>8</sup> Average legislative session was calculated as the average of the 2019 and 2020 sessions. See Methodology for more details.

<sup>9</sup> In the model using *total* staff as the dependent variable (not only full-time staff), only population is significant.

## 4. How COVID-19 has impacted the work of some statehouse journalists

Like [many aspects of U.S. society](#), coverage of the nation’s statehouses appears to have been significantly – and perhaps permanently – affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Amid [shutdowns of capitols](#), shifting [public health protocols](#) inside those buildings and [COVID-19 outbreaks](#) within statehouses, legislators and state officials, along with the reporters who cover them, have increasingly [done their jobs from remote locations](#).

To better understand these changes, researchers conducted two dozen interviews with statehouse reporters and staff. It is clear from the conversations that responses to the COVID-19 outbreak varied from statehouse to statehouse, often depending on its political makeup. But several key themes emerged about the realities of covering state legislative politics in the midst of a lengthy and evolving pandemic. These realities included:

- The expanded use of livestreaming or other online platforms for legislative meetings and sessions;
- The reduction of in-person contact between reporters, legislators and state officials;
- A change in work habits of some statehouse journalists and an opportunity to rethink how they do their jobs; and
- The public policy debate over COVID-19 protocols as a major topic of coverage for journalists reporting on state politics.

Describing these uncertain and changing circumstances, Betsy Russell, president of the Idaho Capitol Correspondents Association, recounted how an early 2021 legislative session in her state opened with “basically no precautions,” and then had to be [shut down](#) after a major COVID-19 outbreak infected scores inside the Capitol. “Nothing like that has ever happened,” said Russell, who covered her first Idaho legislative session in 1986.

Chad Blair, the politics and opinion editor of Honolulu Civil Beat, described [a similar pandemic disruption](#) at Hawaii’s Capitol. “We all went into emergency lockdown period with the Capitol

### Details about these interviews

As part of this report, Pew Research Center conducted and recorded interviews from August 2021 through February 2022 with 24 individuals involved in statehouse coverage. The majority of them work for news outlets, but a few work as either a legislative leader’s chief of staff or a statehouse communications official. Interviewees were selected from study respondents with the goal of representing a range of states, outlet types and outlet sizes, among other factors. The interviews took between 20 to 30 minutes. For more details about the qualitative interview parameters, see the [Methodology](#).

itself. It actually had to be evacuated when a state senator tested positive. He had visited Las Vegas, came back, wasn't feeling well, got a test, and then they just flat-out shut down the Capitol completely," Blair said. "Essentially business had to stop because of COVID."

## **An expansion of livestreaming and other video platforms**

While COVID-19 created chaos and forced reporters, at least temporarily, out of many U.S. statehouses, some of those interviewed said the outcomes were not all bad. The pandemic triggered much more extensive live video coverage of legislative meetings and sessions – a decision that enabled more live public access to the workings of state government and helped journalists function more efficiently in a difficult environment.

Jason Thompson, communications director for Pennsylvania Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman, quantified the expansion of livestreaming during the pandemic: He said the Pennsylvania State Senate livestreamed more than 300 meetings in 2021, including every Senate session and almost every committee hearing.

Thompson believes that the initiative produced more public engagement, adding that he sometimes saw a substantial number of citizens "tuning in to watch during the course of a committee hearing, which is something that was relatively unheard of before COVID. ... It's been by necessity, but it's been a great public access tool."

Some statehouse journalists say the more extensive livestreaming helped them do their job during the strain of the pandemic.

Before COVID-19 struck, the Delaware General Assembly did not offer video livestreaming of proceedings, but after the building was shut down by the pandemic, "they transitioned pretty much immediately to Zoom and some version of livestreaming," said Sarah Gamard, a former state government reporter for the News Journal of Wilmington. "They've upgraded their technology over the past two years."

Gamard, who said the legislature may have been planning more livestreaming even before COVID-19, characterized the video livestream as a big improvement over audio-only recordings. "You can get the video; you can see who's talking. It's even archived to show if you want to only look up a certain bill. You can click on the timestamp of the bill, and it's already laid out for you. It's very convenient."

Annmarie Timmins, a veteran statehouse reporter who is now a senior reporter at the 1-year-old nonprofit New Hampshire Bulletin, said that as a result of COVID-19, “legislators were meeting remotely over Zoom. The remote piece, I liked it. It also allowed [reporters] to be in two places at once because we could record one [meeting] and then be in another and multitask.”

Addressing the public benefits of livestreaming the meetings, Timmins said she [wrote a story](#) “on what that remote access did for being able to have the public engaged in democracy.”

## A reduction in personal contact

While livestreaming and other digital platforms may have helped journalists cover meetings when they weren’t in the building, a number of those interviewed said the pandemic significantly reduced their opportunities to personally approach and talk with legislators and officials – interactions that can improve the quality of reporting.

“Since COVID hit, I could count the number of days, quite frankly, that I’ve been in the State Capitol on two hands,” said Gary Warner, who covers Oregon politics for the EO Media Group. “The State Capitol was closed to the public [with] very limited access to the press.”

“In some ways it’s easier, because everybody expects that you’re going to have to get phone calls, you’re going to have to exchange messages,” Warner continued. “At the same time, you lose that ability to go sit in a lawmaker’s office and just chat up.”

Noting the impact of the pandemic on reporting in the Pennsylvania Capitol, Thompson observed that “working in the building is a bit of a challenge. Even today, a lot of Senate offices ... are dark on non-session days. ... I’m sure it creates a challenge for [reporters] in getting ahold of the folks they need to get ahold of.”

The physical distancing between reporters and legislators during the COVID-19 pandemic may be exacerbating a problem that observers also attribute to the reduced contingent of statehouse reporters in many states: There is less relationship-building between reporters and those they cover.

“I think that the downside of having fewer reporters is, again, there’s probably less effort and availability for reporters to build those relationships” with legislators, said Mat Bahl, chief of staff for Florida’s House speaker. Many rank-and-file members of the Florida House, he added, “probably don’t have very many interactions with the press.”

## New work habits and approaches

For many statehouse journalists, the COVID-19 pandemic forced basic changes in where and how they work. Whether these changes endure after the pandemic subsides is uncertain. But from the interviews, it is clear that some journalists are rethinking how best to do their jobs.

“Before the pandemic, I worked in the Capitol every day,” said Jeremy Turley, the Bismarck, North Dakota, correspondent for Forum News Service. “During the pandemic, I started working at home and realized I was more productive ... with the caveat that during the legislative session, I was in the Capitol every day.”

The North Dakota Legislature meets for four months every two years, and with no legislative session scheduled this year, Turley said he doesn’t plan on working steadily out of the Capitol until 2023. Once the session starts, however, “it helps a lot to be 100 feet away from where the story is,” he said.

Olivia Krauth is an education reporter at the Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky, whose work sometimes takes her to the Capitol, a 50-minute commute from her home. During the course of the pandemic, she began watching more livestreamed events and going to the building less often. She pointed out that the teachers she would interview when they showed up at the statehouse for key votes or protests could no longer be there when the building was shut to the public.

Now, Krauth is more conscious about what stories require her presence at the statehouse, adding, “It’s just been a decision I make with my editor about, ‘Okay, we really need to limit how often we’re there.’ I’m still there if it’s a really big deal, something like that.”

When [Oregon’s Capitol shut down](#) to the public for more than a year, and with reporters’ and legislators’ access to the building greatly reduced, Warner, a veteran reporter in his 60s, changed his schedule.

“Because, frankly, [of] my age, my boss and I decided that I would cover the state politics beat primarily via ... the Oregon Legislature’s website that has livestreaming of virtual committee hearings and the few floor sessions,” Warner said. “I’ve also used agency and executive office systems for interviews, press calls and briefings. I do interviews by Zoom or cell call. I’ll swap text messages and emails.”

## Covering COVID-19: A big part of a statehouse reporter's job

During the pandemic, many statehouses became ground zero in the public policy battles over COVID-19 protocols – from [shutdowns](#) to [mask mandates](#) to [school closings](#) – with legislatures, and [particularly governors](#), at the forefront of these debates. Reporters say that has added a major new subject to the list of stories dominating statehouse coverage.

“Just the politics of getting vaccinated has been incredibly contentious,” said Timmins, of the New Hampshire Bulletin, who covers the pandemic as part of her beat. “There’s over 30 bills coming up this next session, just on vaccines. Should they be mandated? Should they be outlawed? There was a lot of legislation last year around trying to stop the governor from having too much executive authority. ... COVID really dominated a lot last year.”

As Seattle Times statehouse reporter Joseph O’Sullivan explained, “First of all, COVID was just such a big increase in coverage because all of the statewide orders were coming from Olympia and the governor. That added breaking news, but also a ton of enterprise and investigative coverage looking into these things.”

O’Sullivan also cited “massive” pandemic-related protests against a governor (Jay Inslee), who implemented “some of the strictest COVID-19 rules through the entire pandemic. ... Between COVID and the rising political turbulence, the range of [topics] we’re covering [now] is much broader. Now we’re even busier.”

Krauth, of the Courier-Journal in Louisville, said that the pandemic has become a key topic in Kentucky state politics, one driven by the state’s increasingly rare divided state government. “We have a Democrat governor and a Republican supermajority in the statehouse. They have had some issues determining what’s worthy of the mandate [and] who gets to determine the state policies, and that’s still going on.”

For his part, Warner estimated that since 2020, roughly half of the coverage of state politics in Oregon has been about COVID-19 because the state has been under a state of emergency since March 2020, and “all of the decisions come out [of] Salem and out of the governor’s office.”

Russell, a veteran Idaho statehouse correspondent, provided a sense of the persistence of the COVID-19 storyline by describing what happened when the statehouse reopened following a major outbreak. “They shut everything down and then they came back, and they fought some more about how we shouldn’t do anything to respond to COVID.”



## 5. Coverage of tribal governments: In many cases, a struggle for editorial independence

Within the United States, there are 9.7 million Native Americans ([as of the 2020 U.S. census](#)).<sup>10</sup> About a quarter of Native Americans [live on reservations](#) or other trust lands, many of which have their own governments that [exist alongside](#) state and federal governments and can [enact and enforce laws and regulations](#).<sup>11</sup> As with other government activities, reporters can play a key role in informing citizens about the policy debates and legislative activity in these entities. In a separate analysis, Pew Research Center identified 134 reporters who cover tribal governments for 44 media outlets.

Of these 134 reporters, 78 work for outlets that cover specific tribes, while 56 work at outlets that cover indigenous governments regionally or nationwide instead of focusing on one single tribal government. The reporters identified cover tribal governments that represent 29 of the more than 150 [tribal groupings that are tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau](#). This includes reporters who cover tribal governments connected to three of the five largest tribal groupings – Cherokee, Navajo and Chippewa, each with populations over 150,000, according to the 2010 census.

Because individual tribal nations are largely disparate – both geographically and in their governing structures – accurate data on all of the journalists covering these governments is difficult to gather. The Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) reports having [more than 1,000 members](#), which includes not only journalists but also interested Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the community. To better understand the number of reporters covering

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### More than 100 reporters working at Indigenous outlets cover tribal governments



**9.7** million Native Americans live in the U.S.

They live across more than 150 tribal groupings, such as Navajo and Cherokee.



Tribal governments represent and make laws for those Native Americans that live on reservations or trust lands.



In our research, we were able to identify **134** reporters at **44** different outlets that cover tribal governments, representing **29** different tribal groupings.

Note: 9.7 million figure includes all American Indians and Alaska Natives alone or in combination with one or more other ethnicities. 22% of Native Americans live on tribal reservations or trust lands, according to the 2010 census, the most recent data available. See the Methodology for more details.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020 and 2010 census; Pew Research Center data collected Nov. 8, 2021-March 11, 2022.  
“Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time”

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<sup>10</sup> This report uses the terms “Native American” and “Indigenous” to discuss those individuals identified in the U.S. census category “American Indian and Alaska Natives.” Census figures in this chapter include all American Indians and Alaska Natives, alone or in combination with one or more other ethnicities. See Methodology for more details.

<sup>11</sup> According to the 2010 census (the most recent data available), 22% of Native Americans in the U.S. live in reservations or other trust lands.

tribal governments and structures behind them, Center analysts reached out to outlets covering Native American communities, and also interviewed eight journalists and experts with experience in this space.

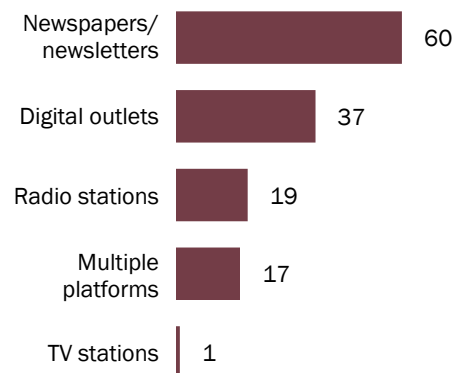
The study found that these 134 journalists covering tribal governments cut across a range of news outlet types. The plurality (60) of these reporters work for either a newspaper or newsletter, while 37 work for digital outlets, 19 work for radio stations, one works for a television station, and 17 work at outlets that cover multiple platforms (such as both a radio station and a newspaper). Additionally, a number of radio stations covering Indigenous issues noted that while they don't have a specific reporter, they broadcast the audio of their local tribal council meeting on the radio. Of the 37 reporters working for digital outlets, 32 work for Indian Country Today, an outlet that covers Indigenous news nationwide.

Some of these outlets – 18 of the 44 – also have one or more reporters covering the local statehouse. In some cases, the same reporter is assigned to cover both a tribal government and a statehouse – each on a part-time basis.

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### Among reporters identified as covering tribal governments, most work at a newspaper, newsletter or digital outlet

*Number of tribal government reporters working at each type of outlet*



Source: Pew Research Center data collected Nov. 8, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Financing and ownership structure of Indigenous news outlets

One key difference between the media organizations that cover U.S. statehouses and the Indigenous media organizations that cover Indigenous governments is the relationship between the media organizations and the governments they cover.

The study identified some independently run outlets, but many outlets covering tribal governments are connected in some way with the tribe itself, whether through funding or operations. For example, of the 44 outlets with tribal government reporters identified by researchers, 13 have websites hosted directly on the tribal government website; researchers also identified at least 24 that have some form of stated tribal funding or support. Some outlets are fully run by the tribal government itself.

The financial support provided by tribes can have significant implications for how outlets operate and how much editorial independence they have. Sterling Cospers, membership manager for NAJA and former manager of Mvskoke Media, which serves the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma, did not offer a very bullish assessment of the state of editorial independence among Indigenous outlets covering tribal governments. Many of them, he said, are effectively precluded from doing investigative journalism and reporting aggressively on sensitive topics.

Cospers said the issue of editorial independence “comes back to the funding. If there was more available funding out there, I would say we operate under a public media model.” Additional sources of revenue, he noted, would help these outlets become “more self-sufficient.”

Reflecting on his time at Mvskoke Media, Cospers said the community began questioning the quality of its journalism when an embezzlement conviction of a tribal leader exposed a large difference between the Tulsa World’s coverage and what Mvskoke Media was able to report. According to Cospers, this, along with other scandals afterwards, was a factor in the introduction and passing of the tribe’s first free press law. He resigned from Mvskoke Media in 2018 when the tribe repealed a free press law it had previously enacted.

“I think that maybe five or six tribes that we know of have free press protections. A lot of them are at that codified level. Then you think about all the other tribes,” Cospers said. To illustrate the connection to financial support, he said those in the tribal community opposed to editorial independence say things like: “People are welcome to start their own outlet.”

Paul DeMain, who was managing editor of Wisconsin-based News from Indian Country before it [ceased publishing in 2019](#), said, “I am not aware of any independent Indigenous media covering

tribal governments in Wisconsin. ... All tribal publications are more attuned to publishing enhanced tribal council news release PR since they are funded by the same tribal government.”

## The campaign for press access and independence

Dean Rhodes, the editor of Smoke Signals, which covers the Grand Ronde Tribe community in Oregon, said his news organization is funded by tribal revenue from casino proceeds. In 2016, the tribal council for that community approved an independent tribal press ordinance for Smoke Signals – [giving the news outlet editorial independence](#). But generally, he noted, tribes that fund their media outlets have a good deal of leverage over them.

“I think it’s a very big ask for tribal governments to carve out a newspaper and let them do whatever they want,” Rhodes said. “Very few have done it.”

Another example is KSUT Radio, based in Ignacio, Colorado, home of the Southern Ute Tribe. KSUT was founded in 1976 and became an NPR affiliate in the 1980s, according to Executive Director Tami Graham. The tribe allowed the station to transform into an independent nonprofit and now, “the tribe doesn’t control in any way, our programming or anything,” Graham said. “We do have a lot of in-kind support from the tribe like HR and accounting and things like that. We’re still located on the tribal campus, but we’re an independent nonprofit.”

Once his tribe granted Smoke Signals editorial independence, Rhodes said, their freedom to report increased significantly. “Beforehand, we just knew there were places we couldn’t go and stories we shouldn’t cover if we wanted to keep our jobs,” he explained. Since then, “we have covered stories where we have gotten significant blowback, but we’ve stood up for them. We covered a tribal elder who was convicted of embezzling money from a committee. That would never have happened before.”

Rhodes estimated that there are “five or six Native American newspapers that are able to do what they feel is journalistically appropriate,” adding that “the last time I went to a NAJA conference, we put on a seminar about [press independence], and the biggest question we kept getting was, ‘How do we get our tribe to do that for us?’”

Angel Ellis, the current director of Mvskoke Media, said her operation is funded by the tribe. But, she added, it also derives some supplemental income through a printing business and is looking to apply for some grants. And she described a long, but ultimately successful, campaign to win editorial independence at her organization, a battle that included a long period in exile.

In 2011, she was fired as assistant editor from Mvskoke Media (then MCN Communications) following the organization’s aggressive coverage of a scandal involving a tribal leader. She went to work in the non-Native American media, but she returned to Mvskoke Media as a reporter seven years later, in August 2018. Three months after that, the tribe’s press freedom law was repealed.

Due in part to her advocacy, the tribe agreed to a 2021 referendum to allow the community to decide if it supported press freedom. The measure carried easily, with 76% favoring that independence.

The tribal press reform that followed that vote stipulated that “the tribe would always fund [Mvskoke Media] and they would not interfere with our funding,” Ellis explained. But she also suggested that independence for her organization would best be safeguarded with a more arms-length financial arrangement.

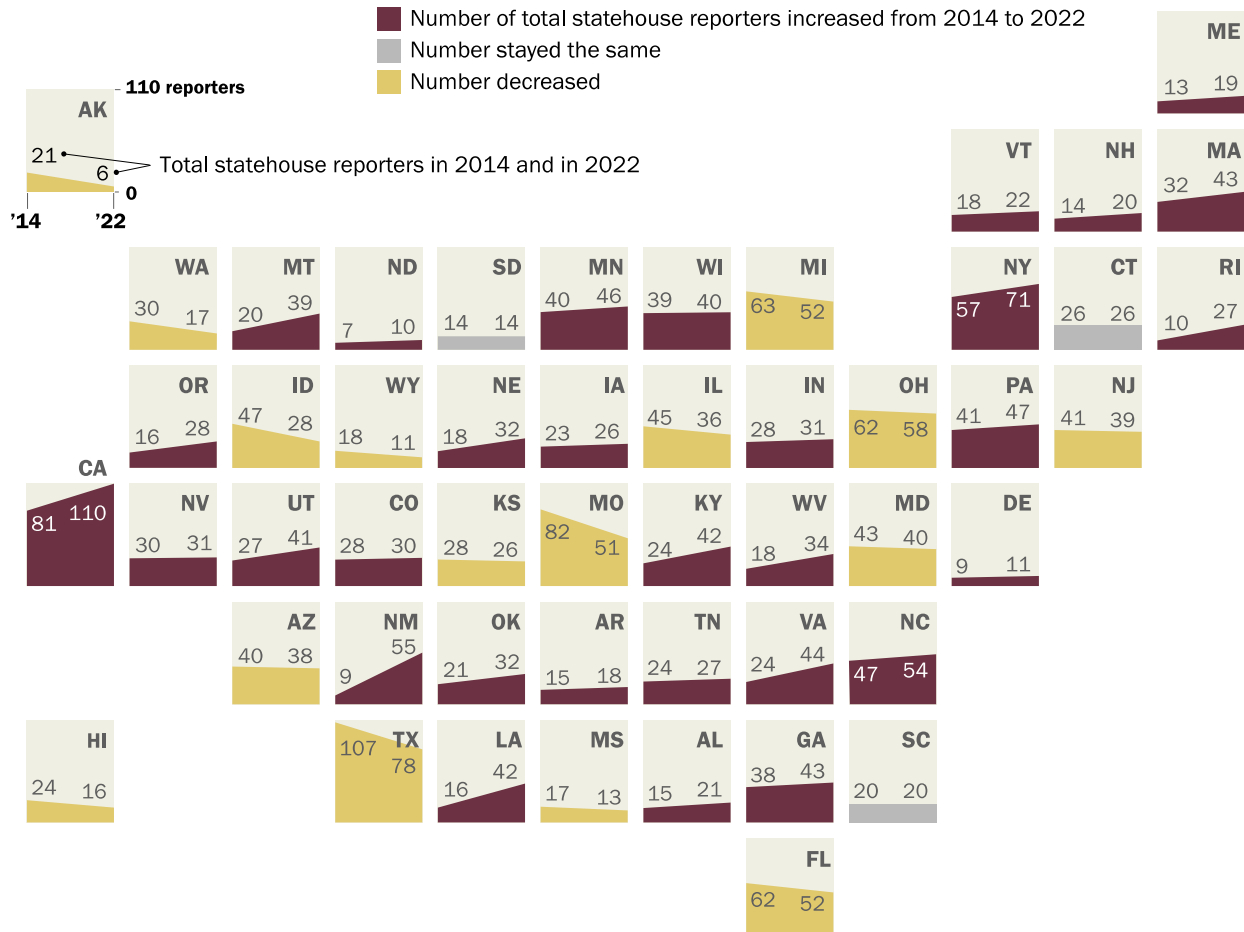
“We want all the freedom in the world,” she said. “What we want to push for is eventually to break off into a 501(c)(3), have the government maybe chip us in some funding once a year” – something much more like the public media model.

Asked if other Indigenous media organizations have asked for advice on how to win editorial independence from the tribal government, Ellis said: “I didn’t think about that after the victory and what that would entail. ... It has been very overwhelming to be reached out to by so many people who are wanting to know about what we did and wanting to know how we did it, and what advice we might have. It’s just been insane. It’s a joy, too.”

# Appendix A: Number of statehouse reporters by state in 2014 and 2022

## Number of statehouse reporters increased in most states between 2014 and 2022

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters in 2014 and 2022



Note: N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.  
 Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.  
 "Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time"

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## Appendix B: Detailed tables

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### Statehouse reporters by employment status

*Number and % of U.S. statehouse reporters, by employment status*

	2014		2022		Change from 2014 to 2022 (based on number of reporters)
	Number	Share of all reporters %	Number	Share of all reporters %	
Full time ( <i>incl.</i> <i>session-only</i> )	904	57	850	49	-54
Part time	402	25	617	36	215
Students/interns	223	14	159	9	-64
Other	63	4	98	6	35

Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. "Part-time" includes reporters who cover the statehouse fairly often but typically have other assigned areas of coverage. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014. Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022. "Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time"

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## Statehouse reporters by outlet type

Number and % of U.S. statehouse reporters, by outlet type

	2014		2022		Change from 2014 to 2022 (based on number of reporters)
	Number	Share of all reporters %	Number	Share of all reporters %	
Newspaper	604	38	448	26	-156
Nonprofit	92	6	353	20	261
Television	263	17	283	16	20
Radio	124	8	178	10	54
Wire service	139	9	107	6	-32
Commercial digital	36	2	91	5	55
University	109	7	88	5	-21
NET Other outlet types	225	14	176	10	-49
Government insider	73	5	77	4	4
Multiple platforms	38	2	28	2	-10
Business/professional publications	27	2	25	1	-2
Ideological	53	3	19	1	-34
Other	34	2	27	2	-7

Note: "Other outlet types" includes the following: Government insider publications, trade publications, ideological outlets, multiplatform outlets and outlets coded as "other." In 2014, category was "Commercial digital native." See the Methodology for further details.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Statehouse reporters by outlet type and employment status

Number of U.S. statehouse reporters, by outlet type and employment status

	2014					2022					Share of all reporters (based on totals)	
	Full time (incl. session- only)	Part time	Students/ interns	Other	Total	Full time (incl. session- only)	Part time	Students/ interns	Other	Total	2014 %	2022 %
Newspaper	374	144	66	20	604	245	175	13	15	448	38	26
Nonprofit	48	26	15	3	92	187	105	35	26	353	6	20
Television	116	102	21	24	263	114	136	4	29	283	17	16
Radio	83	31	7	3	124	77	75	13	13	178	8	10
Wire service	117	16	3	3	139	71	31	-	5	107	9	6
Commercial digital	20	13	2	1	36	59	23	6	3	91	2	5
University	4	1	101	3	109	-	-	85	3	88	7	5
NET Other outlet types	142	69	8	6	225	97	72	3	4	176	14	10
Government insider	54	15	2	2	73	60	13	2	2	77	5	4
Multiple platform share	26	8	3	1	38	12	14	-	2	28	2	2
Business/professional publications	10	16	1	-	27	5	20	-	-	25	2	1
Ideological	32	19	2	-	53	9	9	1	-	19	3	1
Other	20	11	-	3	34	11	16	-	-	27	2	2

Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. "Part-time" includes reporters who cover the statehouse fairly often but typically have other assigned areas of coverage. "Other outlet types" includes the following: Government insider publications, trade publications, ideological outlets, multiplatform outlets and outlets coded as "other." In 2014, category was "Commercial digital native." See the Methodology for further details. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Statehouse reporters by state

*Total number of statehouse reporters covering each state*

	Total number of statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Alabama	15	21	6
Alaska	21	6	-15
Arizona	40	38	-2
Arkansas	15	18	3
California	81	110	29
Colorado	28	30	2
Connecticut	26	26	-
Delaware	9	11	2
Florida	62	52	-10
Georgia	38	43	5
Hawaii	24	16	-8
Idaho	47	28	-19
Illinois	45	36	-9
Indiana	28	31	3
Iowa	23	26	3
Kansas	28	26	-2
Kentucky	24	42	18
Louisiana	16	42	26
Maine	13	19	6
Maryland	43	40	-3
Massachusetts	32	43	11
Michigan	63	52	-11
Minnesota	40	46	6
Mississippi	17	13	-4
Missouri	82	51	-31

*(continues below)*

Note: 17 reporters cover statehouses in multiple states. In this table, they are counted in every state that they report on. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014. Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

"Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time"

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## Statehouse reporters by state

*Total number of statehouse reporters covering each state (continued)*

	Total number of statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Montana	20	39	19
Nebraska	18	32	14
Nevada	30	31	1
New Hampshire	14	20	6
New Jersey	41	39	-2
New Mexico	9	55	46
New York	57	71	14
North Carolina	47	54	7
North Dakota	7	10	3
Ohio	62	58	-4
Oklahoma	21	32	11
Oregon	16	28	12
Pennsylvania	41	47	6
Rhode Island	10	27	17
South Carolina	20	20	-
South Dakota	14	14	-
Tennessee	24	27	3
Texas	107	78	-29
Utah	27	41	14
Vermont	18	22	4
Virginia	24	44	20
Washington	30	17	-13
West Virginia	18	34	16
Wisconsin	39	40	1
Wyoming	18	11	-7

Note: 17 reporters cover statehouses in multiple states. In this table, they are counted in every state that they report on. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

“Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time”

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## Full-time statehouse reporters by state

Number of **full-time (incl. session-only)** statehouse reporters covering each state

	Number of full-time statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Alabama	14	15	1
Alaska	17	6	-11
Arizona	15	16	1
Arkansas	11	7	-4
California	44	65	21
Colorado	15	17	2
Connecticut	21	18	-3
Delaware	7	5	-2
Florida	39	36	-3
Georgia	24	20	-4
Hawaii	11	3	-8
Idaho	15	13	-2
Illinois	25	18	-7
Indiana	16	18	2
Iowa	14	16	2
Kansas	10	13	3
Kentucky	16	18	2
Louisiana	14	14	-
Maine	10	9	-1
Maryland	18	19	1
Massachusetts	15	17	2
Michigan	19	26	7
Minnesota	29	19	-10
Mississippi	9	9	-
Missouri	21	17	-4

*(continues below)*

Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Full-time statehouse reporters by state

Number of **full-time (incl. session-only)** statehouse reporters covering each state (continued)

	Number of full-time statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Montana	11	26	15
Nebraska	16	9	-7
Nevada	7	11	4
New Hampshire	5	10	5
New Jersey	37	28	-9
New Mexico	8	11	3
New York	40	39	-1
North Carolina	20	20	-
North Dakota	6	4	-2
Ohio	32	34	2
Oklahoma	19	13	-6
Oregon	12	8	-4
Pennsylvania	25	28	3
Rhode Island	8	5	-3
South Carolina	15	12	-3
South Dakota	9	7	-2
Tennessee	18	13	-5
Texas	60	44	-16
Utah	13	14	1
Vermont	15	5	-10
Virginia	20	20	-
Washington	18	10	-8
West Virginia	10	10	-
Wisconsin	21	30	9
Wyoming	10	5	-5

Note: "Full-time" statehouse reporters include those who report on the statehouse full time all year and those who report on the statehouse full time only during the legislative session. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Part-time statehouse reporters by state

Number of *part-time* statehouse reporters covering each state

	Number of part-time statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Alabama	1	4	3
Alaska	2	-	-2
Arizona	6	15	9
Arkansas	4	11	7
California	26	24	-2
Colorado	13	12	-1
Connecticut	2	8	6
Delaware	2	6	4
Florida	17	8	-9
Georgia	11	17	6
Hawaii	10	9	-1
Idaho	31	15	-16
Illinois	6	11	5
Indiana	2	6	4
Iowa	8	10	2
Kansas	6	8	2
Kentucky	7	11	4
Louisiana	2	14	12
Maine	3	10	7
Maryland	11	10	-1
Massachusetts	7	13	6
Michigan	26	14	-12
Minnesota	6	13	7
Mississippi	5	4	-1
Missouri	9	8	-1

*(continues below)*

Note: "Part-time" statehouse reporters include those who cover the statehouse fairly often but typically have other assigned areas of coverage. Seven reporters cover statehouses in multiple states. In this table, they are counted in every state that they report on.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

"Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time"

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## Part-time statehouse reporters by state

Number of *part-time* statehouse reporters covering each state (continued)

	Number of part-time statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Montana	5	9	4
Nebraska	2	19	17
Nevada	10	13	3
New Hampshire	9	9	-
New Jersey	4	10	6
New Mexico	1	40	39
New York	9	31	22
North Carolina	20	31	11
North Dakota	1	6	5
Ohio	13	13	-
Oklahoma	2	17	15
Oregon	4	19	15
Pennsylvania	6	10	4
Rhode Island	2	12	10
South Carolina	3	8	5
South Dakota	3	5	2
Tennessee	4	13	9
Texas	25	18	-7
Utah	11	24	13
Vermont	3	17	14
Virginia	4	13	9
Washington	6	5	-1
West Virginia	8	14	6
Wisconsin	16	8	-8
Wyoming	8	5	-3

Note: "Part-time" statehouse reporters include those who cover the statehouse fairly often but typically have other assigned areas of coverage. Seven reporters cover statehouses in multiple states. In this table, they are counted in every state that they report on.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Student and student intern reporters by state

Number of *student/intern* statehouse reporters covering each state

	Number of student/intern statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Alabama	-	2	2
Alaska	1	-	-1
Arizona	16	7	-9
Arkansas	-	-	-
California	11	5	-6
Colorado	-	-	-
Connecticut	-	-	-
Delaware	-	-	-
Florida	3	1	-2
Georgia	2	2	-
Hawaii	1	1	-
Idaho	-	-	-
Illinois	11	6	-5
Indiana	9	7	-2
Iowa	1	-	-1
Kansas	11	4	-7
Kentucky	1	10	9
Louisiana	-	11	11
Maine	-	-	-
Maryland	6	10	4
Massachusetts	9	11	2
Michigan	16	9	-7
Minnesota	2	7	5
Mississippi	1	-	-1
Missouri	51	26	-25

*(continues below)*

Note: "Student/intern" statehouse reporters include interns and college or university students who conduct statehouse reporting, which could be as part of a university-run news service or as student interns at a news organization. 10 reporters cover statehouses in multiple states. In this table, they are counted in every state that they report on.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Student and student intern reporters by state

Number of *student/intern* statehouse reporters covering each state  
(continued)

	Number of student/intern statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Montana	4	2	-2
Nebraska	-	3	3
Nevada	12	-	-12
New Hampshire	-	1	1
New Jersey	-	1	1
New Mexico	-	-	-
New York	7	1	-6
North Carolina	2	3	1
North Dakota	-	-	-
Ohio	16	10	-6
Oklahoma	-	-	-
Oregon	-	-	-
Pennsylvania	-	-	-
Rhode Island	-	-	-
South Carolina	2	-	-2
South Dakota	2	-	-2
Tennessee	-	1	1
Texas	17	12	-5
Utah	3	-	-3
Vermont	-	-	-
Virginia	-	11	11
Washington	5	2	-3
West Virginia	-	10	10
Wisconsin	1	2	1
Wyoming	-	1	1

Note: "Student/intern" statehouse reporters include interns and college or university students who conduct statehouse reporting, which could be as part of a university-run news service or as student interns at a news organization. 10 reporters cover statehouses in multiple states. In this table, they are counted in every state that they report on.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

"Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time"

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## Other supporting statehouse reporting staff by state

Number of *other* supporting staff covering each state

	Number of other statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Alabama	-	-	-
Alaska	1	-	-1
Arizona	3	-	-3
Arkansas	-	-	-
California	-	16	16
Colorado	-	1	1
Connecticut	3	-	-3
Delaware	-	-	-
Florida	3	7	4
Georgia	1	4	3
Hawaii	2	3	1
Idaho	1	-	-1
Illinois	3	1	-2
Indiana	1	-	-1
Iowa	-	-	-
Kansas	1	1	-
Kentucky	-	3	3
Louisiana	-	3	3
Maine	-	-	-
Maryland	8	1	-7
Massachusetts	1	2	1
Michigan	2	3	1
Minnesota	3	7	4
Mississippi	2	-	-2
Missouri	1	-	-1

*(continues below)*

Note: "Other supporting staff" include those who do not fit into the category of full time, part time, or student/intern, but nonetheless provide support in the production of statehouse reporting, such as editors, producers or videographers assigned to a statehouse team. N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Other supporting statehouse reporting staff by state

Number of **other** supporting staff covering each state (continued)

	Number of other statehouse reporters		Change from 2014 to 2022
	2014	2022	
Montana	-	2	2
Nebraska	-	1	1
Nevada	1	7	6
New Hampshire	-	-	-
New Jersey	-	-	-
New Mexico	-	4	4
New York	1	-	-1
North Carolina	5	-	-5
North Dakota	-	-	-
Ohio	1	1	-
Oklahoma	-	2	2
Oregon	-	1	1
Pennsylvania	10	9	-1
Rhode Island	-	10	10
South Carolina	-	-	-
South Dakota	-	2	2
Tennessee	2	-	-2
Texas	5	4	-1
Utah	-	3	3
Vermont	-	-	-
Virginia	-	-	-
Washington	1	-	-1
West Virginia	-	-	-
Wisconsin	1	-	-1
Wyoming	-	-	-

Note: "Other supporting staff" include those who do not fit into the category of full time, part time, or student/intern, but nonetheless provide support in the production of statehouse reporting, such as editors, producers or videographers assigned to a statehouse team.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Newspapers have the most statehouse reporters of any outlet type in many states, followed by nonprofits and TV

*Number of states where each outlet type accounts for the most or second-most reporters at the statehouse*

	<b>Number of states where ___ was the most common</b>	<b>Number of states where ___ was the second-most common</b>
Newspaper	21	21
Nonprofit	10	17
Television	10	10
Radio	8	4
Digital	2	5
University	1	4
Government insider	1	2
Wire service	1	2
Business/professional publications	0	0
Ideological	0	1
Multiple platforms	0	2
Other	0	0

Note: In the case of a tie, both outlet types were counted as being most/second-most common for that state.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022; N=1,592 in 2014.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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## Methodology

The findings in this report are based on several distinct methodologies and data sources.

Researchers conducted a census of reporters covering all 50 statehouses in the United States. This census was conducted with the goal of being as complete as possible, knowing that the accounting was dependent on self-reported data that researchers would take steps to verify. The census took place from Sept. 23, 2021, to March 11, 2022. Through this process, researchers identified 1,724 statehouse reporters in the U.S.

Researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with reporters, editors, legislative staff and industry experts to gather further insights on statehouse coverage. This information is incorporated throughout the report and featured in Chapter 4.

Finally, researchers gathered information from contacts in the Native American community about how reporters are covering tribal governments.

This report was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Arnold Ventures. It is the latest report in Pew Research Center's ongoing investigation of the state of news, information and journalism in the digital age, a research program funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

## Statehouse reporter data collection

### Contact list

Researchers found no publicly available, comprehensive database that lists every news organization and every journalist covering statehouses across the United States. Therefore, researchers compiled as comprehensive a list as possible of news organizations in the U.S. and their journalists' contact information, pulled from many different industry sources, directories, media and public relations databases, statehouse accreditation lists, and statehouse press association membership lists.

These are the main industry sources used to create the initial list of outlets, bureaus and networks. When contact information was missing in these lists, web searches and other external media contact lists were used to fill in any contact information for the news organizations in the lists below.

- *Newspapers*: Researchers collected 1,624 individual newspapers (sources: Editor & Publisher, Alliance for Audited Media).
- *Local television stations*: Researchers collected 954 local television stations that had a news director (source: BIA Advisory Services' MEDIA Access Pro).
- *Radio stations*: Researchers collected 397 radio stations that had a news director (source: BIA Advisory Services' MEDIA Access Pro).
- *Public radio*: Researchers collected 129 public radio licensees (source: Public Media Futures, a project funded by the Wyncote Foundation).
- *Digital nonprofits*: Researchers collected 143 active outlets that were previously included in the 2014 sample. Outlets that had gone defunct were removed (source: Pew Research Center database of digital nonprofit news outlets).
- *New nonprofits*: In addition to the digital nonprofits above, researchers collected 329 nonprofit news outlets not included in our prior study (source: Institute for Nonprofit News, The Future of Media Project's Index of Emerging Nonprofit Media and Donors (Harvard), and Michele's List).
- *AP state bureaus*: Researchers collected every bureau of The Associated Press (source: [AP website](#)).
- *Legislative correspondent association members*: Researchers collected contact information for reporters and news outlets included in public membership lists for legislative correspondent associations (source: online membership lists for state legislative correspondent associations).  
Members include the following: Colorado (41 members), Illinois (25 members), Iowa (12 members), Kentucky (25 members), Louisiana (14 members), Massachusetts (21 members), Minnesota (55 members), Missouri (12 members), New York (47 members), North Carolina (34 members), Ohio (50 members), Pennsylvania (29 members) and Virginia (38 members).
- *Statehouse reporters*: Researchers identified 50 journalists in an external media contact database that included "statehouse" or "state house" in their job title.
- *State, local and regional reporters*: Researchers identified 205 journalists in an external media contact database that cover state government, local news or regional news.

As the lists were not mutually exclusive, duplicates were removed. The list of outlets and their contact sources were used as the initial contact list. Researchers then relied on other methods described below to collect complete data on the number of statehouse reporters.

After the initial data collection, researchers updated the original list of outlets, bureaus and networks based on various validation steps that were taken. These included: consolidating outlets in group entities if staff is shared (e.g., newspaper networks, groups of television stations), marking outlets as defunct if they were no longer operating, and adding outlets learned about via the data collection process.

### The intake form

Researchers designed an intake form as the first step in identifying statehouse reporters and then having those reporters help identify others. The form asked individuals for the number of statehouse reporters their organization employed – whether full time, part time, students or other – and to name other individuals or organizations covering the same statehouse. The intake form also asked them which statehouses their organization covered, and other details about their statehouse reporting.

### News outlets with multiple or joint bureaus

The Associated Press, which has bureaus across the U.S., provided researchers with staffing information for all of their statehouse reporters, though some follow-ups were needed to confirm employment status information. Researchers also contacted several large newspaper chains, which often have joint bureaus, to confirm staffing information and to remove any overlapping or duplicated data.

### Initial outreach

From Sept. 23 to Dec. 16, 2021, Pew Research Center invited approximately 5,000 news organization contacts nationwide to provide input on the number of statehouse reporters at their news outlets.

## Outlets by outlet type in the study

*Number of outlets, bureaus and networks with verified data in the study among each outlet type*

	<b>Number of outlets with verified data</b>	<b>Number of outlets with verified data and statehouse reporters</b>
Newspaper	380	183
Television	210	126
Nonprofit	155	80
Radio	136	85
Wire service	72	60
Commercial digital	47	36
Government insider	35	29
Ideological	33	9
Business/ Professional publication	21	13
University	16	12
Multiple platforms	15	10
Other	24	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,144</b>	<b>659</b>

Note: The 1,144 outlets include all outlets with verified data, whether or not they employ statehouse reporters. Of these, 659 employ statehouse reporters. For definitions of what these outlet groups include, see the Methodology.

N=1,724 statehouse reporters in 2022.

Source: Pew Research Center data collected Sept. 23, 2021-March 11, 2022.

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The form was distributed via SurveyMonkey and email. All respondents were granted anonymity in their responses to the intake form unless they agreed to an interview. At least two rounds of email reminders were sent to ensure maximum participation, and if a contact did not respond to three outreach attempts, researchers then reached out to another contact at that organization, if one existed in the database. In total, 443 reporters and editors completed the form through SurveyMonkey. All data gathered from responses, as well as contact attempt histories, were stored in a database.

### **Additional steps for data collection**

To complement data collected through the intake form, researchers employed two additional steps.

*Step 1:* Between November 2021 and March 2022, researchers contacted, by phone and email, state government officials in the states that did not have a publicly available legislative correspondents list. This was done to help identify any news organization with a statehouse reporting presence that we did not have data for. These officials were legislative and gubernatorial press secretaries and other employees who credential and interact with journalists. As part of this outreach, officials were also asked to confirm that our lists of current statehouse reporters were accurate. Some newsroom staff who had responded to our intake form were also asked to confirm our current list for a given statehouse. At the end of this process, researchers compiled as exhaustive a list as possible of all the news organizations covering each statehouse.

*Step 2:* After this process was completed for each state, researchers determined where staffing information was missing for specific outlets in a given state, paying special attention to outlets mentioned as having statehouse reporters by other outlets, and outlets that were included in the 2014 study but were missing from the current data. In this last step, between November 2021 and March 2022, researchers contacted reporters and editors at individual outlets to confirm their staffing information.

If researchers could not verify an organization's information with the organization itself, they verified that information requiring two external sources, which could include 1) a statehouse reporter covering the same statehouse, 2) a legislative correspondents' association list, 3) a state official at that statehouse, or in some rare cases 4) information from a reporter's social media (e.g., describing themselves as a statehouse or legislative reporter) or from an outlet's staff list on their website.

In addition, many respondents provided the names of reporters from other organizations they knew covered the statehouse in their state. Researchers collected these names and contact information and reached out to these individuals for confirmation. In cases where contact information was not provided, researchers asked other statehouse reporters in that state, used media contact lists, and conducted internet searches to acquire the contact information of these individuals. The outlets that employed these individuals received multiple follow-ups by phone and by email, if necessary, for confirmation. In total, researchers verified information for 1,099 outlets, bureaus and networks, including 440 that had no statehouse reporters.

### **Discrepancies**

Throughout this multilayered process, researchers maintained a detailed database containing the information and contact history for every organization included in the study. In the multiple follow-up stages, discrepancies sometimes occurred. These usually came up when two respondents from the same organization provided different staffing information. Researchers contacted these individuals directly to clarify such cases.

With staffing sometimes in flux, a small number of respondents provided a range for the number of reporters covering the statehouse, especially when it varied depending on the year, or (for university-connected outlets) the semester. In these rare cases, researchers entered the lower number provided in the final dataset. Note: This accounting was conducted September 2021 to March 2022. Since this time period, staffing may have shifted due to the commencement or end of legislative sessions and/or newsroom layoffs, departures, restructuring or hiring.

### **Data analysis**

Statehouse reporters were tracked by news outlet, which researchers then categorized according to the outlet's publication platform or business model. Researchers determined the statehouse a given reporter covers by requesting this information in the intake form; researchers did not determine which state the reporters covered based on the outlet's physical location.

Unfilled statehouse reporting positions were counted as statehouse reporters if the outlet had plans to fill the position imminently. Vacant positions that the outlet had no immediate plans to fill were not counted.

## Definitions of the different types of statehouse employment status

Due to restrictions and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these reporters were not required to be physically stationed at the capitol. More specifically, the following definitions were employed:

- *Full-time statehouse reporter:* This category includes reporters assigned full time either year-round or during the legislative session at the time of the study. A year-round statehouse reporter covers the statehouse when the legislature is in session *and* when it is not in session. In other words, the statehouse is the journalist’s full-time beat. A session-only reporter covers the statehouse full time *only* when the legislature is in session.<sup>12</sup>
- *Part-time statehouse reporter:* This category includes reporters who cover the statehouse fairly often, but also have other assigned areas of coverage, or work only part time.
- *Student reporter/intern:* This category includes interns and college or university students who conduct statehouse reporting, which could be as part of a university-run news service or as student interns at a news organization.
- *Other supporting staff:* This category includes staff who do not fit into any of the above categories but nonetheless provide support in the production of statehouse reporting, such as editors, producers or videographers assigned to a statehouse team.

## Categorization of news outlets

All the news organizations in the study were categorized into 12 outlet types following a similar categorization as in 2014: newspaper, nonprofit, television, wire service, radio, university, government insider, ideological, commercial digital, business or trade publication, and other. The small number of outlets that fell into multiple categories were categorized as other.

The definitions for each outlet type are as follows:

- *Newspapers:* Legacy newspapers with a substantial print presence.
- *Nonprofits:* Nonprofit news organizations. These outlets are typically digital but are not included in the commercial digital category due to their nonprofit status. Public radio and television stations are included in the “radio” and “television” categories respectively. Nonprofit university outlets are included in the “university” category. A small number of nonprofit outlets that have an explicitly stated ideological stance are categorized as “ideological.”
- *Television:* Television stations and networks.

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<sup>12</sup> This approach is a departure from our previous study, in which year-round and session-only reporters were separated in the final analysis. Full-time figures for 2014 have been recalculated for this report to include both year-round and session-only journalists.

- *Radio*: Radio stations and networks, including public radio stations.
- *University*: Outlets based in colleges or universities, typically staffed by student reporters.
- *Wire service*: News agencies that supply syndicated news to other outlets. Both national and locally focused.
- *Commercial digital*: Outlets whose primary mode of publication is digital and are not a nonprofit. A small number of digital outlets that have an explicitly stated ideological stance are categorized as “ideological.”
- *Government insider*: Newsletters or websites focused on government affairs and aimed at government insiders or other news publications.
- *Business/professional publications*: Business/law journals and professional trade publications.
- *Ideological*: Outlets that have publicly stated political orientations or policy goals, by the outlets themselves or their parent organizations.
- *Multiple platforms*: Outlets that publish and have statehouse reporters on multiple platforms, such as a television and radio station that share a statehouse reporter.
- *Other*: Includes outlets that do not fit into the above categories, including alternative weeklies and freelance reporters.

In most cases, researchers categorized outlets based on their affiliation within industry associations such as Editor & Publisher, Alliance for Audited Media or BIA Advisory Services' MEDIA Access Pro. In the rest of the cases, researchers reviewed how news organizations self-identified (typically on the “about” pages of their websites) and used that self-identification to categorize them.

Outlets in 2022 were considered “commercial digital” if they primarily published on the web, did not have a substantial print presence and were not a nonprofit; they were not required to be “born on the web” as they were in 2014. Public radio stations were categorized as radio stations.

In 16 cases, outlets were categorized differently in 2014 and 2022 due to a shift in the outlet’s platform or a discrepancy with the original coding in 2014. These changes do not substantially impact the report’s findings and are based on an assessment of the outlet’s platform in 2022.

### **State population and legislative session length analysis**

Researchers looked at the connection between the number of statehouse reporters and two other variables: state population and legislative session length. The state population data was gathered from the 2020 census residential population count. The legislative session length data was collected from the Council of State Governments’ The Book of the States from 2020 and 2021

(which included 2019 and 2020 data, respectively). Average session length was calculated by averaging the length of each state's legislative sessions in 2019 and 2020. If states had a two-year session, this length was divided by two, and capped at 12 months.

To test the association between the number of statehouse reporters and a state's population or session length, researchers ran several regression analyses to determine if state population and legislative session length was correlated with either the number of total statehouse reporters or the number of full-time statehouse reporters. The model using the total number of statehouse reporters found that there was *not* a significant relationship between legislative session length and total statehouse reporters. However, the model with only full-time statehouse reporters did indicate a significant relationship with both variables. State population and legislative session length are both significantly and positively correlated with the number of full-time statehouse reporters at  $p < 0.05$ .

## In-depth interviews

The findings in most of this report were reinforced and contextualized through interviews with 24 professionals involved in statehouse reporting conducted by Pew Research Center staff. Additionally, Center staff interviewed eight professionals about reporting on tribal governments, discussed below.

The interviews were conducted from Aug. 19, 2021, to Feb. 14, 2022, with people involved in statehouse reporting, in order to better understand the changes and challenges faced by the industry. Interviews and recruitment were handled internally by Center staff, and all candidates consented to have their conversation recorded.

Researchers reached out to four types of professionals involved in statehouse reporting: 1) statehouse reporters, some of whom are also leaders of statehouse press corps or associations; 2) other newsroom staff in editorial or managerial roles at outlets that conduct statehouse reporting; 3) government staff who interact with statehouse reporters; and 4) industry experts.

A total of 76 interview candidates were invited to participate in the study, with a final goal of 20 to 30 interviews. Interview data are not representative of the U.S. public or of members of the statehouse reporting industry. Interview candidates were identified based on several criteria to increase the diversity of the interview pool. Researchers selected potential interviewees to ensure representation across news sectors (newspaper, digital, radio, television, nonprofit, wire service, etc.), outlet sizes, geographical regions of the U.S., partisan control of state governments, job roles

of the potential interviewees, and ideological lean of the outlets. Interviewees were recruited on a rolling basis.

A total of 24 interviews were conducted: five with industry experts, three with legislative staffers, four with newsroom staff in editorial or managerial positions, 12 with statehouse reporters (including three leaders in statehouse press corps associations), and five with industry experts.

Each person interviewed was asked a similar set of about a half dozen questions, with some variation for the individual’s job

responsibilities, and follow-up questions were asked when relevant. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed using a third-party transcription service. These transcriptions were used for qualitative analysis and quotations in the report.

## Reporting on tribal governments

Researchers gathered information from contacts in the Indigenous community about the number of reporters covering Native American tribal governments.<sup>13</sup> To better understand the number of reporters covering tribal governments and structures behind it, Center analysts reached out to reporters, editors, managers and directors from outlets that cover tribal governments and also interviewed eight people with experience in this space.

### Data collection

Researchers initially reached out to Native American-affiliated outlets from a list provided by a contact at an outlet that covers Indigenous issues, starting on Nov. 8, 2021, and concluding on March 11, 2022. This initial list included 184 contacts. Contacts were asked whether their organizations had any reporters that cover tribal governments, and if so, how many of them were there and how much they focused on that beat (i.e., whether they also spent time reporting on other topics). Researchers also asked contacts if they had any reporters that covered any U.S.

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### Interview candidates invited to participate in 2022 statehouse study

	Invited	Interviewed
Statehouse reporters	33	12
Other newsroom staff	16	4
Industry experts	5	5
Government staff	22	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>24</b>

Note: Pew Research Center conducted interviews between August 2021 and February 2022. Interviewees who were in leadership of press associations are counted under statehouse reporters. “Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time”

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<sup>13</sup> This report uses the terms “Native American” and “Indigenous” to discuss those individuals identified in the U.S. census category “American Indian and Alaska Natives.”

statehouses, and if so, included those responses into the tally of statehouse reporters for the main study.

Researchers also gathered outlet and contact names using information provided by contacts from the initial list and online searches. Researchers then contacted these new outlets. In addition, researchers reached out to other contacts at the same outlet by researching online their staff and about pages. Researchers emailed a contact at each outlet at least twice and followed up via phone call if there was no response.

## Outlet categorization

All the news organizations that cover tribal governments were categorized into five outlet types: 1) newspaper or newsletter, 2) digital news outlet, 3) radio, 4) television or 5) multiple outlet types. This was determined in a similar way as in the main analysis: Researchers reviewed how news organizations self-identified (typically on the “about” pages of their websites) and used that self-identification to categorize them.

Researchers also reviewed the outlets’ affiliation with the tribe and recorded whether the news outlet was either owned by or affiliated with the tribal government. There were two outlets in the data where researchers could not confirm any affiliation. Researchers gathered this information from the tribal government website and the outlets’ websites.

## External sources

Researchers used data from the 2020 census to determine the current number of self-identified Native Americans living in the United States; it includes any individual identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native (including those who self-identified as being American Indian and Alaska Native in combination with another race). The census and this analysis **do not include** Native Hawaiians.

Researchers also used tribal grouping metrics from the census to classify each tribal government into a larger tribal grouping; in this case, data from the 2010 census was used, as it was the most current iteration of the tribal grouping data as of March 2022.<sup>14</sup>

## In-depth interviews

Researchers conducted in-depth interviews to better understand how outlets cover tribal governments in Native American communities.

Researchers conducted these interviews with individuals involved in reporting on tribal governments, including reporters and those in editorial or managerial roles in outlets with tribal government reporters. Eight individuals were interviewed in a total of seven interviews (one interview included two participants).

Each person interviewed was asked a similar set of about a half-dozen questions, with some variation for the individual’s job responsibilities, and follow-up questions were asked when

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<sup>14</sup> From the 2010 census to the 2020 census, the American Indian and Alaska Native population **increased** from 5.2 million to 9.7 million, an 86.5% increase. This increase reflects both demographic changes as well as changes from the 2010 census on question designs, data processing and coding.



relevant. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed using a third-party transcription service. These transcriptions were used for qualitative analysis and quotations in the report.