

GOVERNMENT DISTORTION IN INDEPENDENTLY OWNED MEDIA: EVIDENCE FROM U.S. NEWS COVERAGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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Abstract

This study provides evidence of government distortion of news coverage amongst independently owned media outlets in a democratic regime. It uses data from 1946–2010 and documents that U.S. news coverage of human rights abuses committed by foreign governments was associated with membership on the United Nations Security Council and the degree of political alliance with the United States. For countries that were not allied with the United States, coverage increased with membership; for countries that are strongly allied with the United States, coverage decreased with membership. There is an analogous effect on reports of human rights abuses by the U.S. State Department, but no such effect on human rights practices according to other measures. The results are driven by the Reagan and Bush Sr. Administrations, 1981–1992, a period during the which the government was known to have actively influenced the press. (JEL: P16, N4)

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