

The Determinants of Media Bias in China

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Abstract:

In this paper, we measure the political bias of newspapers in China and investigate the determinants of this bias. Based on the content of 110 general-interest newspapers from 1998 to 2011, we construct a measure of newspaper political bias. We find that, in addition to serving as a top-down communication device, the political bias of newspapers is used by the Chinese governments to monitor corruption among local bureaucrats and provide an intelligence device for political leaders to gather information from bottom up. To examine the determinants of bias, we build a model of competing newspaper owners -- Communist Party Committees -- with both political and economic goals. Consistent with the model, our empirical findings point to three key factors that mitigate the political bias of Chinese newspapers: the growth of advertising market, the discrepancy in the valuation of political control between local and national governments, and the competition between local governments.