

On the Front Lines and Front Pages of Democracy: Evaluating Media Coverage of Election Officials

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**Election Science, Reform, and Administration (ESRA)
Conference**

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- News coverage represents one of the few opportunities for voters to learn about **who** runs their elections
- **Motivation:** This underscores the need for a [systematic analysis](#) of news coverage of election officials

Research Questions

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- In what **states** do election officials receive the most coverage?
- How often are election officials **quoted** in news stories?

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Data Collection & Classification

- Articles collected via LexisNexis API and Factiva/Feedly databases
- Classified using LLM and expanded “voting process coverage” (VPC) dictionary (Searles et al. 2024)
- Contains 37 unique topic categories, including one for election officials

Measuring Coverage of Election Officials

- **Topic:** Article substantively reports on election officials (roles, duties, conduct, selection method)

Measuring Coverage of Election Officials

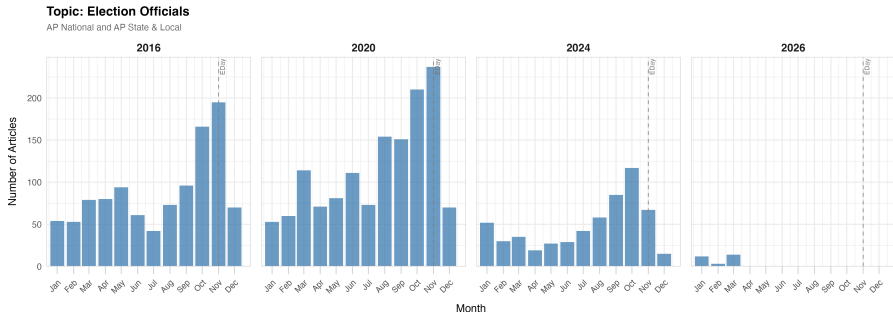
- **Topic:** Article substantively reports on election officials (roles, duties, conduct, selection method)
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Measuring Coverage of Election Officials

- **Topic:** Article substantively reports on election officials (roles, duties, conduct, selection method)
- **Named:** Article mentions a specific election official by name
- **Quoted:** Article quotes or attributes information to an election official

Results: Election Officials as Main Topic

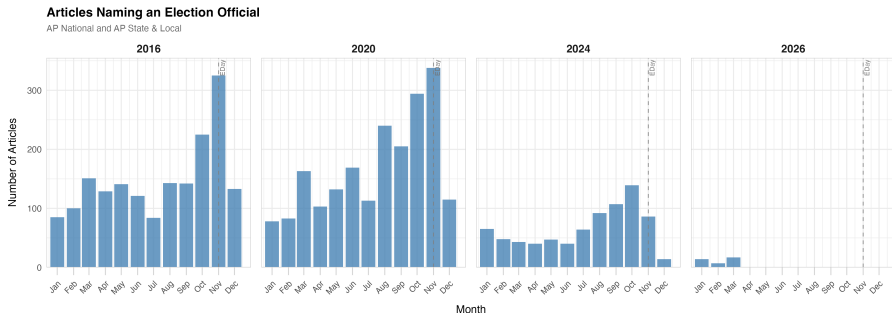
Figure 1. Articles [Reporting](#) on Election Officials
(AP and AP State & Local)



- Coverage spikes sharply near Election Day each cycle
- 2020 shows the highest peak volume across all years
- A low but consistent baseline of coverage exists beyond Election Day

Results: Election Officials as Named Subjects

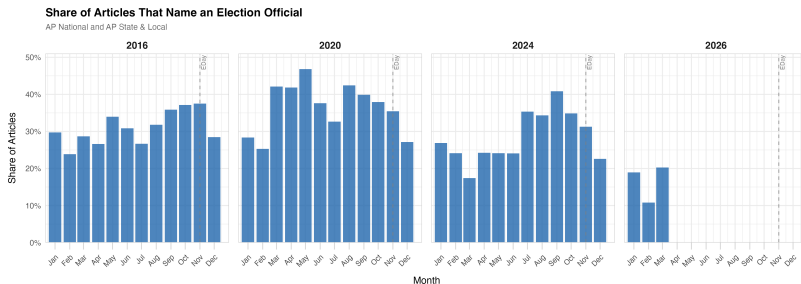
Figure 2a. Number of Articles **Naming** an Election Official
(AP and AP State & Local)



- Articles that name specific election officials also increase around Election Day across election cycles
- 2020 had greatest volume of coverage reporting on election officials by name
- Q1 2026 counts are lower than in prior cycles

Results: Election Officials as Named Subjects

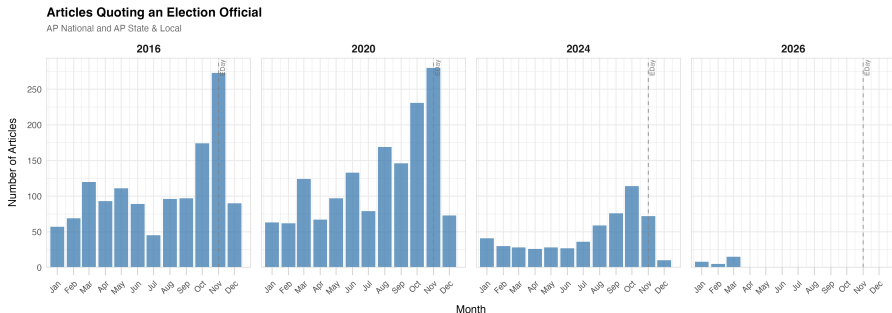
Figure 2b. Share of Articles **Naming** an Election Official
(AP and AP State & Local)



- About 30-40% of AP's election administration articles name a specific election official across election cycles
- Share is slightly lower so far in Q1 2026

Results: Election Officials as Quoted Sources

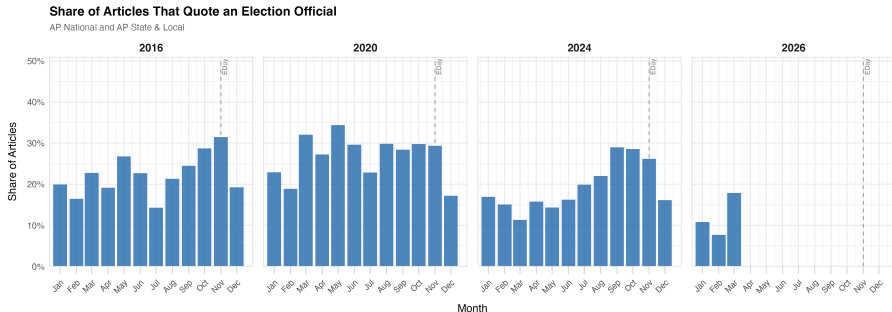
Figure 3a. Number of Articles **Quoting** an Election Official
(AP and AP State & Local)



- Number of AP articles quoting election officials increases near Election Day
→ reflecting election officials' roles as “trusted messengers”
- Election officials are quoted most frequently during 2020 cycle

Results: Election Officials as Quoted Sources

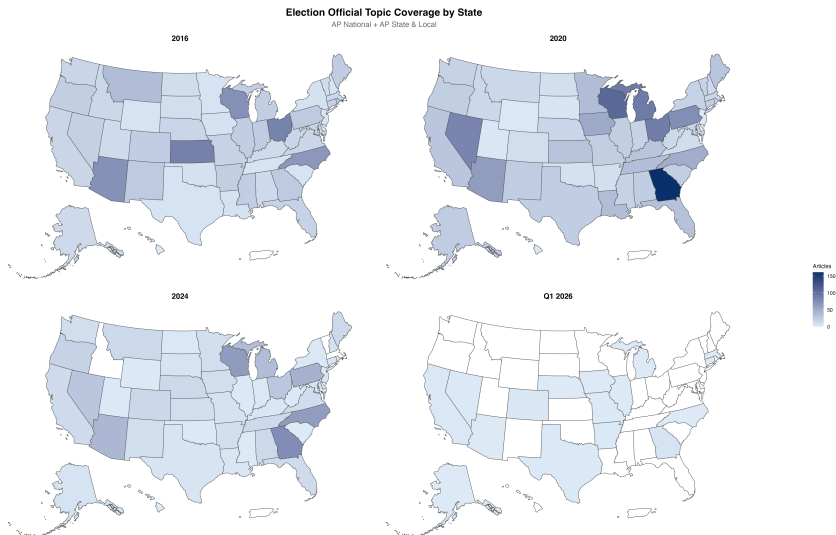
Figure 3b. Share of Articles **Quoting** an Election Official
(AP and AP State & Local)



- Election officials' voices are included in a small but meaningful share (20-25% on avg.) of AP's election administration coverage

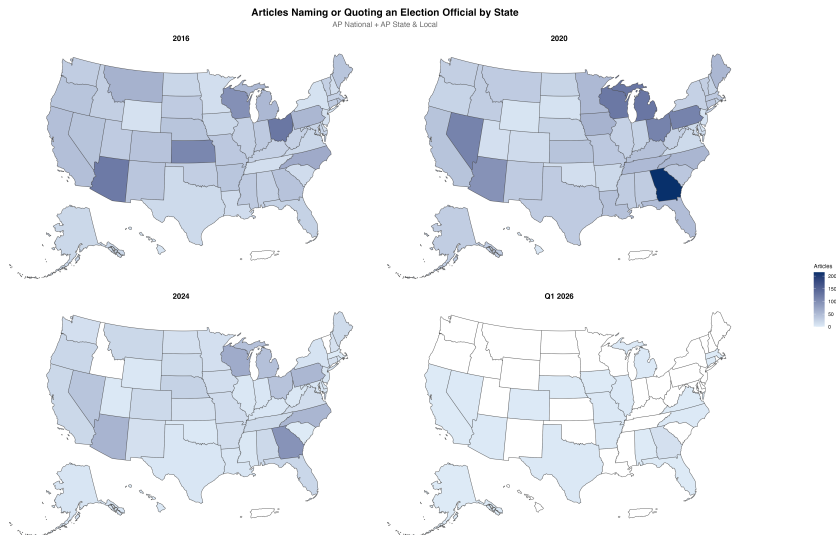
Results: Variation by State

Figure 4a. Articles [Reporting](#) on Election Officials
(AP and AP State & Local)



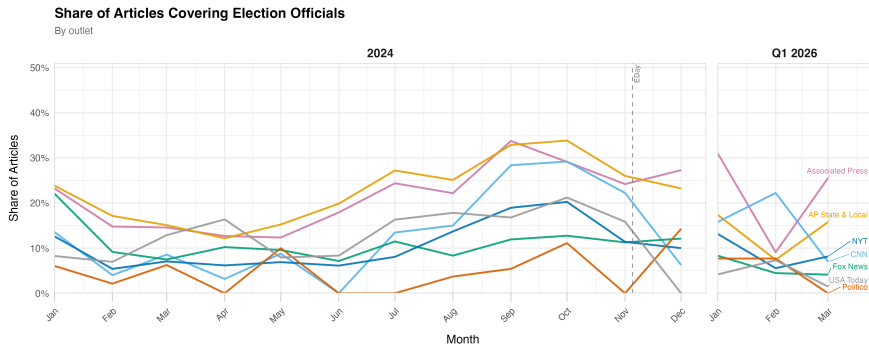
Results: Variation by State

Figure 4b. Articles **Naming** or **Quoting** Election Officials
(AP and AP State & Local)



Results: Variation by Outlet

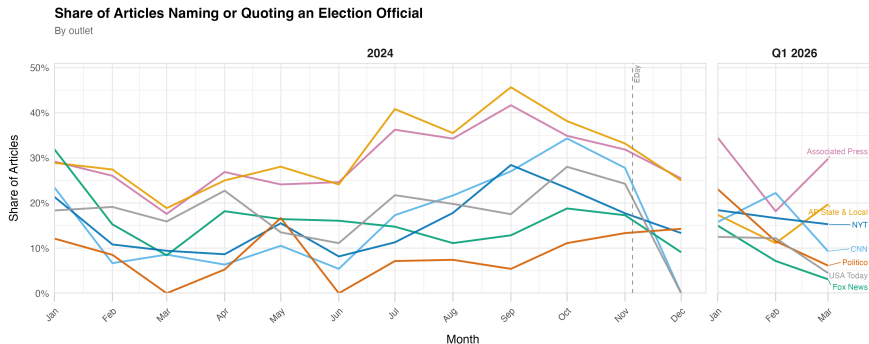
Figure 5a. Share of Articles **Reporting** on Election Officials, by Outlet
(All Outlets for 2024 and 2026)



- Variation in how often news outlets report on election officials as main topics

Results: Variation by Outlet

Figure 5b. Share of Articles **Naming or Quoting** an Election Official, by Outlet
(All Outlets for 2024 and 2026)



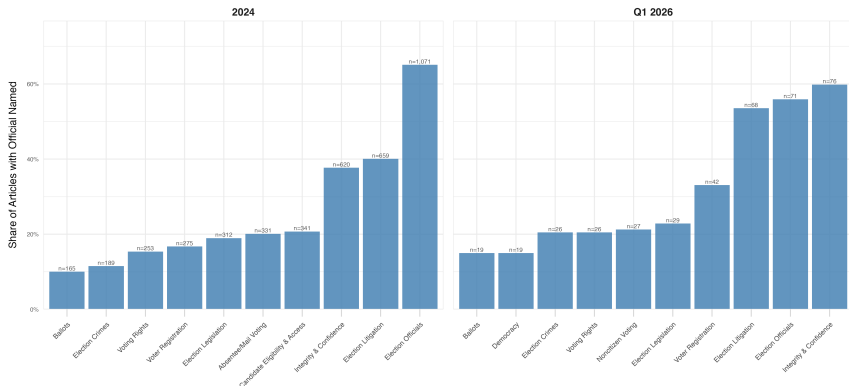
- Outlets also differ in how frequently they include election officials' names or voices in coverage
- AP and AP State & Local rank highest in naming or quoting election officials

Results: Topic Context

Figure 6a. Top 10 Topics in Articles **Naming** an Election Official (All Outlets)

Top 10 Topics in Articles With Official Named

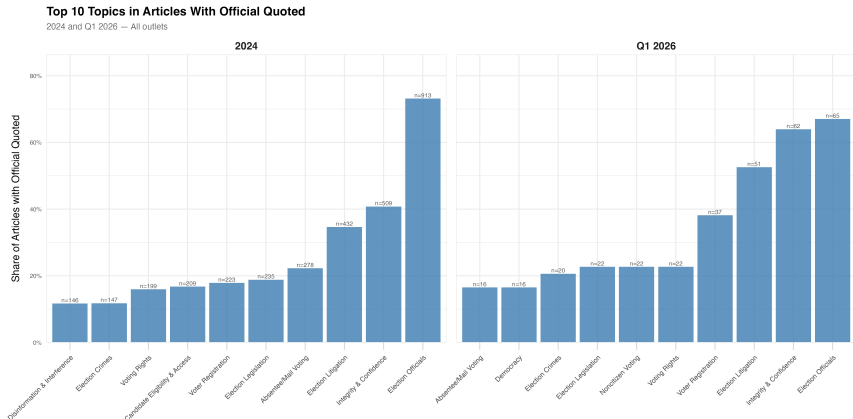
2024 and Q1 2026 — All outlets



- In 2024, election officials are named most often in articles about election litigation and integrity
- In Q1 2026, voter registration becomes more prominent

Results: Topic Context

Figure 6b. Top 10 Topics in Articles **Quoting** an Election Official (All Outlets)



- Similar pattern: when quoted, election officials appear most often in articles about election integrity and litigation

Key Findings

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- **Geography:** Battleground states dominated AP coverage across cycles; redistricting states more prominent in Q1 2026

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- **Outlets:** Coverage of election officials varies across outlets

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- **Quoted:** About a quarter of AP articles on avg. quoted an official
- **Geography:** Battleground states dominated AP coverage across cycles; redistricting states more prominent in Q1 2026
- **Outlets:** Coverage of election officials varies across outlets
- **Context:** When officials are named or quoted across outlets, in 2024 it is most often in articles about election litigation and integrity; in Q1 2026, voter registration is also increasing

Implications and Future Directions

- A small but meaningful share of election administration coverage features election officials; this varies by outlet, state, and cycle

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- A small but meaningful share of election administration coverage features election officials; this varies by outlet, state, and cycle
- Geographic and outlet-specific variation has implications for election officials' communication strategies with reporters (Gong et al. 2026)
- **Future work:** Analyze articles' tone, problem context, and state vs. local election officials; downstream effects of news coverage of election officials on public trust

Interested in the EAMD? Let's get in touch!

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Bibliography I

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