

Progress in Measuring Legal Literacy: How Print News Cover Sedition

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A democratic republic hinges on the public's ability to understand and carry out the laws with which it governs itself. Such knowledge of a nation's basic laws, codes, and institutions can be defined as legal literacy. News media are privy to an incredible amount of influence when examining the public's legal literacy. This study works to pioneer a method researchers can use to measure the legal literacy news media. Specifically, it analyzes how the topic of sedition in relation to the Jan. 6 Capitol breach of 2021.

On Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, sedition re-entered the American vocabulary. As Congress met to certify president-elect Joseph Biden as the winner of the 2020 presidential election, supporters of Donald Trump gathered in Washington, D.C. to support Trump's dispute of the election results. The day began as a mundane political ritual; it ended as an insurrection of the U.S. Capitol. This begs the question: How are print news media covering sedition? Subsequently, what could analysis of these trends reveal about America's current state of legal literacy?

This study uses a content analysis with a quantitative process to record the number of appearances of "sedition" in its sample and a qualitative process to analyze the context in which "sedition" was used in coverage related to Jan. 6. The study finds that "sedition" was used sparingly as a theme.