

Media deserts project creates searchable media access research atlas

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Ohio University's new Media Access Research Atlas maps the circulation of daily newspapers in the United States and how much of the population in that area is subscribing to the newspaper.

The new Media Access Research Atlas provides an interactive search of all the places in the country where people live in media deserts - places where it is difficult to [access](#) daily, local news and information. The map is part of the Media Deserts Project, a joint research project of the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, the Department of Geography and the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University.

"Media deserts are created when there is a lack of access to daily news and information," says Dr. Michelle Ferrier, principal investigator for the project. "The map shows changes over time, helping us visualize the media landscape down to the local, ZIP code level."

In "Media Deserts: Mapping the Changing Media Ecosystem," in *The Communication Crisis in America and How to Fix It* (2016), Ferrier, Dr. Gaurav Sinha of the Geography Department and Michael Outrich, an undergraduate of Ohio University, (now a graduate student at Ohio State University), argue that the [newspaper](#) and local media have been key mediators in democratic processes in many communities. But as the reach, penetration and accessibility of the media landscape changes, it is important to track who has been affected by these changes and if these declines are a cause for concern.

The Media Access Research Atlas has updated estimates of media access using 2010 census data. The new locator allows users to search by state, county, and ZIP code to see the number of daily newspapers in a region and the percent of the population over the age of 18 that are reading them.

Light yellow areas in the atlas indicate geographies served by one or two daily newspapers. Red areas indicate areas with multiple newspapers and a higher concentration of adults receiving the newspaper.

Recent analysis of newspaper circulation data has demonstrated an effect of the lack of daily local news on political participation. POLITICO conducted an analysis of voting patterns and showed how Donald Trump avoided mainstream outlets and appealed to voters in "news deserts"—who voted for him in higher-than-expected numbers. Politico's analysis showed that in tight races with Hillary Clinton in states like Wisconsin, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, the decline in local media could have made a decisive difference.

This erosion has direct impact on the health of communities.

"Understanding local assets and conditions are critical to creating better local communications infrastructure," Ferrier said. "We are going beyond the AAM data and using digital ethnography techniques to provide deeper analysis at the county and ZIP code level of media sources, local assets and social [media](#) activity. "

Through these additional measures, updated data and added layers of detail, the Media Access Research Atlas builds on past research to provide researchers, city planners, nonprofit organizations and policy makers a more nuanced view of the factors that impact whether local residents can be informed - and engaged - in their local communities.

The Media Deserts Project map can be seen here:

<http://test.voinovichschool.ohio.edu/media/media.htm>.

More information: www.mediadeserts.com/

Data for the newspaper display is drawn from the Alliance for Audited Media. Smaller newspapers may not report circulation numbers to AAM and may not be displayed in a geography. Please report additions or corrections to: <https://goo.gl/forms/2brIERTRTYMePV3q2> or ferrierm@ohio.edu.

Provided by Ohio University

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