

County Hubs When Reporting Thins

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The County Is the Door said the short version: the city is a filter; the county is the door. This paper adds the desert fact. When local reporting thins, people still need one shelf to open.

Medill's 2025 count: **212** counties with no local news source; **1,525** with only one left; about **50 million** people with limited or no local news. Nearly **80%** of deserts are rural. UNC's earlier maps showed the same pattern forming — zero-paper and one-paper counties, ghost titles, coverage that no longer walks every meeting.

Journalism and public notice are not the same trade. But they used to share a hallway. When the hallway empties, rumor fills social feeds (Medill's desert survey: many daily consumers lean on non-journalistic sources). The instruments — liens, hearings, bids — still live in county books.

Findings synopsis

- News-desert research (Medill 2025; UNC / Abernathy) finds large and growing numbers of counties with zero or one local outlet; deserts are mostly rural; millions of people live with thin local reporting.
- Consumption research (Pew 2024; Medill desert survey) finds people shifting to digital and social paths, and desert residents often not hunting for a journalistic replacement.
- That is a reporting gap. It is also a **wayfinding** gap for anyone who needs the official announcement, not the feed.

What a county hub is

On Notice Nearby, a county hub is a door to notices filed for that county equivalent — county, parish, borough, independent city where the register maps that way. It is a map of placements. It is not a newsroom. It does not replace the clerk's own posting rules. It is not Legal Publication. It is not government.

A congressional district hub is a join of those doors, not a second court. A QR sheet that points at a hub is a pointer. It helps someone open the live page. It is not an official organ.

When reporting thins, start at the county door. The city name may be what you search first. The county page is what opens the shelf.

Sources

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