

Newspaper notice as a government transparency mechanism: Evidence from Florida^{*}

Kimberlyn Munevar^a, Anya Nakhmurina^b, and Delphine Samuels^c

^aTexas A&M University

^bYale School of Management

^cUniversity of Chicago Booth School of Business

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Abstract

This paper studies the role of newspaper notices—legally required announcements published in news outlets to inform citizens about local government activities—on citizen engagement. We examine a recent Florida legislation that revokes the requirement that public notices appear in news outlets and allows local governments to publish notices on their county’s website instead. We find that local governments located in counties with a public notice website significantly reduce newspaper notice after the legislation, particularly for topics that tend to encourage citizen engagement, such as public hearings, planning and zoning proposals, or upcoming elections. By contrast, we find no discernible changes in website traffic of counties’ public notice websites. Consistent with a decrease in citizen awareness of public notices in affected cities, we find a decline in public meeting attendance after the legislation. We also find an increase in the number of commercial zoning permits, consistent with reduced citizen activism against new construction. Overall, our results suggest that the removal of newspaper notices removes information about local government activities and reduces citizen engagement.

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1. Introduction

Public notices are legally required announcements that inform citizens about government or government-related activities. These notices, along with open meeting and freedom of information laws, are designed to ensure that citizens have access to the information they need to participate in the governance of their country and communities. Public notices are issued before elections, government meetings, and public hearings, giving citizens the opportunity to engage and express their views. They also inform citizens about government contracts open for bidding, municipal budgets, petitions, foreclosures, and other official proceedings that can encourage public participation.¹

Until recently, a distinguishing feature of public notices in the United States was the requirement that they appear in qualified newspapers to ensure that every citizen has a realistic opportunity to read them.² As of 2024, 20 states also require that newspapers qualified to print notices also make them freely accessible on their own websites and/or post them on the statewide public notice website managed by their state press association ([PNRC, 2024b](#)).³ Recent advances in the online presence of governments, however, have led certain policymakers to consider moving public notices to government websites to avoid the cost of newspaper contracts ([PNRC, 2016](#)). In 2022, Florida became the first state to pass legislation that revoked the requirement that public notices appear in newspapers,

¹Public notices are required to legitimize these types of government actions or proposed changes. Without proper notice, an action can be challenged in court. For example, the Oklahoma Supreme Court recently invalidated the results of a lodging tax election in November 2022 in McCurtain County for failure to follow statutory publication requirements ([PNRC, 2024a](#)).

²Newspapers must be officially designated to publish public notices. Although specific designation criteria vary by jurisdiction, they typically include circulation, publication frequency, and publication location ([Martin, 1997](#)).

³Florida has this requirement since 2013. Please refer to Section 2.2 for more details.

followed by Ohio in 2023.⁴

Newspaper organizations vehemently oppose these measures for at least three reasons. First, they argue that print and on-line news formats reach much larger audiences than government websites. Public notices are more easily spotted in news outlets as part of regular reading or browsing than on a government website, which requires citizens to actively seek them out and know where to look. Second, they argue that newspaper publishers are more adept at giving visible and well-marketed notice. Unlike newspapers, public officials are not pressured by markets to operate effective websites and often lack the training to do so. Finally, they claim that placing the responsibility for publishing notices about government activities in the hands of government officials is like “hiring foxes to guard the henhouses” and would incentivize officials to hide notices that do not serve their own interests (PNRC, 2018).

In light of this debate and the rapidly evolving landscape of public notices, we study the role of newspaper notice in citizen engagement, using the state of Florida as our testing ground. On October 10, 2022 Florida passed legislation revoking the requirement that public notices appear in newspapers (House Bill 7049). Beginning January 1, 2023, the reform allowed local governments to publish their public notices on county-operated websites—either on a dedicated section of the county’s official website or a separate website designated by the county for notice publication (hereafter referred to as “county public notice websites”)—instead of or in addition to newspapers. Combined with the availability of newspaper notice data on Florida’s state press association’s public notice website,⁵ this

⁴These measures are becoming increasingly more popular. In 2025 for example, 14 states have introduced similar bills, including Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Wyoming (PNRC, 2025).

⁵<https://floridapublicnotices.com/>

reform provides a useful setting to (i) describe the nature of public notices and their issuers, (ii) examine whether fewer newspaper notices are published after they are no longer legally required, and if so, (iii) examine the consequences of this reduction in newspaper notice for citizen engagement.

First, we describe the nature and frequency of public notices issued by local governments in Florida between 2021 and 2024. Cities issue the most notices (about 3.3 per month), followed by counties, special districts, and schools. A majority (56%) are notices of public hearings, including proposals for changes in planning and zoning, and announcements of ordinances (i.e., local regulations). The remainder include budgets, calls to bid on government contracts, information about special districts, and elections.

Second, we examine whether local governments opt to pull public notices from newspapers after the reform. Although some public officials argue that canceling newspaper notice contracts would result in significant savings for taxpayers ([Arco, 2016](#)), others are concerned about their ability to manage government websites and navigate the public notice process on their own ([Moran, 2016](#)). For governments located in counties with access to a public notice website (25 out of 67 counties), we find a 36% decline in the number of newspaper notices relative to those governments located in counties without a public notice website. The decline is particularly strong for cities, which reduce their newspaper notices by an average of 48%. The types of notices most affected include public hearings (a 37% decline), planning and zoning, ordinance proposals, and education. Overall, our results suggest that, conditional on having a public notice county website available, local governments choose to pull a wide range of notices from newspapers once the reform allows them to do so.

One possibility is that citizens simply transition to reading public notices on government websites after they are removed from newspapers, leaving their awareness of local government activities unaffected by the reform. However, this is unlikely, as we find no change in the website traffic of county public notice websites after the reform, consistent with the argument that citizens are unlikely to access notices on government websites.

Given the probable decline in public notice awareness for local governments with access to a county public notice website (hereafter referred to as “affected governments”), we next examine the potential consequences for citizen engagement through participation in public meetings. To assess participation, we leverage the common practice that citizens who speak at public meetings identify themselves by name. Using transcripts from public meeting videos posted on YouTube, we approximate participation by counting the number of unique names mentioned per meeting. Consistent with a decline in participation, we find that public meetings held in affected governments experienced a 16% decrease in the number of speakers after the reform, relative to those in unaffected governments.

Next, we focus on notices of planning and zoning board meetings, which are arguably among those with the greatest potential impact on citizens’ neighborhoods. Planning and zoning meetings discuss housing and development policy and are known to attract the participation of citizens who oppose new construction ([Einstein, Palmer, and Glick, 2019](#)). Consistent with the decline in newspaper notices of planning and zoning meetings reducing activism against new construction, we find a 35% increase in the number of commercial zoning permits in affected cities after the reform. Overall, our results suggest that revoking the requirement to publish newspaper notices removes information about local government activities, which reduces citizen engagement.

Public notice disclosures are required since the Act of the First Session of the First Congress in 1789. Yet, there is very little empirical evidence that describes their nature, frequency, and relevance to citizens today. Public notices are relatively short, timely, and readable pieces of information on nearly every local government activity. However, it is not clear to what extent citizens find them useful in today's environment, where newspaper readership is on the decline, and extant readers increasingly transition from print to online formats where it might be harder to come across them ([Pew Research Center, 2023](#)). Our findings suggest that newspaper notices are (still) relevant disclosures that help local constituents engage with their governments. To our knowledge, our paper is the first to provide empirical evidence on the nature and effectiveness of this form of government disclosure.

In this regard, we contribute to the literature on the monitoring role of local government disclosures. Compared to other forms of disclosure that help citizens monitor local officials, public notices are relatively unique. Unlike, for example, disclosures provided in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) ([Kwoka, 2015](#)) or financial disclosures ([Kim, Plumlee, and Stubben, 2022](#)), public notices are forward-looking and issued shortly before government actions or proposals, allowing citizens to engage with them in a timely manner. And unlike lengthy, complex, sporadic, and untimely financial statements issued primarily to manage municipal borrowing costs (e.g., [Cuny, 2016](#); [Gillette, Samuels, and Zhou, 2020](#); [Maffett, Samuels, and Zhou, 2024](#); [Nakhmurina, 2024](#); [Cuny, Li, Nakhmurina, and Watts, 2024](#)), public notices are short, concise, and relatively accessible to the average citizen.

We also contribute to a large literature on the role of newspapers in facilitating gov-

ernment transparency. Prior studies find that local newspapers help hold public officials accountable through their investigative and reporting efforts. For example, local newspapers can reduce corruption and effort aversion among local officials (e.g., [Waldman, 2011](#); [Snyder Jr and Strömberg, 2010](#)), increase voter turnout (e.g., [Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinkinson, 2011](#)), and reduce borrowing costs ([Cuny, 2018](#); [Gao, Lee, and Murphy, 2020](#)). In contrast to these investigative and reporting roles, newspapers serve primarily a *dissemination* role in the context of public notices ([Blankespoor, deHaan, and Marinovic, 2020](#)). By making citizens aware of public notices, newspapers facilitate citizen engagement, which further highlights their importance to local governance.

2. Background and Conceptual Underpinnings

2.1. *Conceptual framework and research questions*

The core principle of a self-governing society is that citizens are responsible for evaluating the decisions, policies, and actions of their elected officials. Within the political agency framework, citizens are principals who delegate authority to agents—namely, public officials—to act on their behalf. This delegation creates an informational advantage for public officials, who may exploit it to act opportunistically.⁶

One of the earliest institutional responses to this agency problem was the establishment of public notice laws. By providing citizens with information about government activities that affect their communities, public notices offer a mechanism for public oversight and engagement, helping to align government actions more closely with citizens' interests. In

⁶See Chapter 3 in Besley (2006) for a summary of political agency theory.

the United States, the first public notice mandate was enacted in 1789 with the Act of the First Session of the First Congress, which required that every bill, order, resolution, and vote be “published in at least three of the public newspapers printed within the United States,” ensuring that the public remained informed about government actions.⁷

Building on this federal precedent, states have enacted public notice laws grounded in the due process protections of federal and state constitutions, which guarantee citizens the right to be informed of government actions and to have an opportunity to be heard ([Martin, 1999](#)). These laws require government entities to provide notice of a wide range of activities and proposals, including new or amended laws (ordinances), upcoming public hearings, the formation of special districts, changes in zoning regulations, proposed budgets and tax rates, and elections.^{8,9} When proper notice is not given, these actions may be challenged in court and invalidated. To help ensure that notices reach the widest possible audience, public notice laws establish criteria that newspapers must meet to be designated as official vehicles for public notice. Although the specific requirements vary by jurisdiction, they generally include thresholds for circulation, publication frequency, and local presence ([Martin, 1997](#)).

Despite the longstanding role of public notices in facilitating due process, we have little systematic evidence beyond anecdotes regarding their effectiveness in informing citizens

⁷Ch. 14 at 2, 1 Stat. 68 (1789).

⁸See Exhibit OA1 for an example of a zoning change proposal notice issued by Franklin County, Florida. The notice provides a brief description of the proposed zoning change, the date and time of the public meeting scheduled to discuss the proposal, and how to obtain additional information about the proposal.

⁹Other entities are also required to give public notice of certain events. For example, corporations must give public notice of foreclosures, mergers, acquisitions, dissolutions, and “doing business as” notices (i.e. when operating under a name that is different from their legal name). In some states, individuals must give public notice when filing for divorce, adopting children, or legally changing their name. Because we are interested in public notices as a government transparency mechanism, notices issued by other entities are outside the scope of our paper.

and promoting civic participation. Moreover, little is known about the continuing role of newspapers in this process in today's evolving information environment. Whereas the use of newspapers to notify citizens was once uncontroversial in an era without alternative dissemination methods (since the invention of the printing press in the 15th century), the advent of online technologies has cast doubt on their continued relevance. Our paper addresses these questions by studying the first law to successfully revoke the requirement that public notices appear in newspapers.

2.2. Setting and predictions

Florida's HB 7049 was initially introduced in February 2022 and signed into law in November 2022 before officially taking effect on January 1, 2023. The bill allows local governments in Florida to publish notices on a publicly accessible website owned or designated by their county instead of or in addition to an officially designated newspaper.

Because counties and other local governments in the United States operate as independent entities, local governments are free to decide for themselves whether they want to adopt this alternative publication method. If they do, their only newspaper notice requirement is to publish a single notice per year in a publication "delivered to all residents and property owners throughout the government's jurisdiction" informing them that they can register to receive public notices by email or mail. Governments located in counties with populations less than 160,000 are also required to hold a public hearing and determine that residents have adequate access to broadband services before opting to publish notices on a county website.

The legislative debate surrounding the bill's introduction was highly contentious and reflects the broader tensions at the center of the current public notice policy debate. The bill's sponsor, Representative Randy Fine (R-Palm Bay), argued that requiring public notices to be published in newspapers is an outdated practice in the Internet era and unfairly subsidizes a declining newspaper industry. He maintained that allowing notices to be posted on county websites would increase public accessibility while lowering costs for taxpayers. Opponents of the bill, however, contended that shifting notices to less-trafficked county websites would make it easier for governments to obscure their actions from public scrutiny.¹⁰ They also alleged that the bill was motivated, at least in part, by Rep. Fine's desire to retaliate against local newspapers who wrote articles that were critical of his conduct ([Wood, 2022](#); [Dunbar, 2023](#)).¹¹

This policy shift raises two questions. First, do local governments with access to county public notice websites choose to discontinue newspaper notice publications? On one hand, avoiding newspaper notice fees could yield substantial cost savings, provide officials greater discretion over the visibility of notices—particularly those that may not align with their interests—and, in some cases, satisfy political motivations to penalize local newspapers that have been critical of their conduct.

However, eliminating newspaper notices could also have significant drawbacks for local governments. Under current law, newspaper-published notices in Florida must

¹⁰Anecdotes suggest that moving government notices online can result in a loss of information for citizens. For example, the EPA has allowed certain public notices of its state affiliates to be moved online, causing citizens to miss relevant announcements, such as a 2016 proposal to allow Nestle Waters to increase the volume of its groundwater extraction in Michigan, and a 2012 proposal to open a hog farm in Arkansas ([PNRC, 2018](#)).

¹¹Allegations that public officials threaten to cancel newspaper notice contracts as a form of retaliation against the press are fairly common. See, for example, recent cases in New York ([Flitter, 2023](#)) and New Jersey ([King, 2016](#)).

appear both in print and online—on the newspaper’s own website (in a section dedicated to public notices) and on the statewide public notice portal—both of which are freely accessible and offer email alert systems for registered users.¹² Transitioning to county websites may thus impose switching costs on residents accustomed to receiving notices via newspaper platforms, and local officials may be reluctant to risk frustrating constituents or disrupting their access to information by removing notices from newspapers. In addition, government-run websites are often slower, less navigable, and less reliable than newspaper sites, which are subject to market incentives to maintain usability and performance ([Castro and McLaughlin, 2018](#)). Finally, newspapers may have greater institutional experience with meeting statutory notice requirements—such as timely posting and providing affidavits of publication—thereby reducing the risk of procedural errors or due process violations ([PNRC, 2024a](#)). Ultimately, the extent to which local governments choose to publish notices on county websites instead of newspapers is an empirical question.

Second, for local governments that adopt county websites, a key question is whether the decline in newspaper notices affects citizen engagement. The answer depends on how, and to what extent, residents’ access to public notices changes after the reform. If citizens generally disregard public notices and instead rely on alternative sources of information—such as voluntary disclosures on local government websites, community Facebook groups, posters in public spaces, or monitoring by neighborhood organizations—then public notices primarily serve a legal or procedural function, and the delivery mode may have little bearing on participation. However, if public notices continue to provide meaningful information to

¹²Specifically, Florida law requires that as of July 1, 2012, newspapers upload public notices to [floridapublicnotices.com](#), a dedicated website maintained by Florida’s press association. By July 1, 2013, newspapers were also required to make public notices freely accessible on their own websites (Ch. 50.0211, Florida Statutes), and both platforms must provide email registry systems for public notice alerts.

residents, their accessibility becomes more consequential. In that case, two outcomes are possible. If, as the bill’s proponents suggest, residents are more likely to access notices on county websites than in newspapers, civic engagement may increase. In contrast, if citizens do not transition to the new platforms, the shift could reduce participation by diminishing public awareness of local government activity.

3. Data

3.1. Newspaper notice data

To construct our Florida public notice dataset, we collect a three-year sample of newspaper-published notices, classify them by topic, and identify their issuers.

We begin by scraping the Florida Press Association’s public notice website (floridapublicnotices.com), which has served as the state’s centralized public notice repository since July 1, 2012. The site displays notices from the past 35 days and provides archival access dating back three years. We collect all newspaper notices published between October 2020 and December 2024.

Each observation includes the notice date, a unique notice ID, the name and city of the publishing newspaper, and the full notice text in either machine-readable or PDF format. The majority of notices (97.94%) are fully machine-readable. A smaller share (2.023%) contains both machine-readable and PDF content (e.g., a brief summary accompanied by a PDF attachment with the full text). For these mixed-format cases, we compare the lengths

of the machine-readable and PDF versions and retain the longer one for processing.¹³ The remaining 0.037% of notices are available only in PDF format, which we convert to machine-readable text.

Next, we use the notice text to identify notices issued by local government entities and classify them into 14 non-mutually exclusive categories, listed in Table OA1. Our classification is based on (i) the official list of 18 notice types eligible for county-website-only publication under the Florida Statutes, and (ii) a set of citizen participation notices compiled by the Public Notice Resource Center, a nonprofit focused on public notice transparency ([PNRC, 2018](#)). Using these sources, we develop a dictionary of keyword-based regular expressions (also in Table OA1) to identify relevant notices.

We then match each notice to its issuing government entity. To do so, we compile a comprehensive list of Florida government bodies from multiple sources: counties and school districts from Wikipedia; cities, towns, and villages from the Florida Association of Counties; special districts from the Florida Department of Commerce; and public colleges from [stateofflorida.com](#). We supplement this with a list of state and federal entities from the Muni Atlas database to enable their exclusion. Using this list, we construct a dictionary of keyword-based regular expressions to fuzzy-match entity names to the text of each notice.

To minimize misclassification, we apply the regular expressions in a specific order, starting with the most uniquely named entities—educational institutions and special districts—followed by cities, counties, and finally state and federal entities. This sequencing reduces

¹³Technically, converting PDF text into machine-readable form can slightly increase its length due to added characters. To avoid misclassification, we select the PDF version when its length exceeds 85% of the machine-readable version.

false positives by prioritizing longer, more specific names before applying broader or more commonly referenced ones.¹⁴ We remove notices issued by state or federal entities, unmatched notices issued by non-government entities, and same-day duplicate notices, resulting in a final sample of 161,549 notices issued by 2,182 unique local governments between 2020 and 2024.

We supplement this dataset with institutional characteristics for each issuer, including issuer type (city, county, special district, or educational institution), county location, and, for special districts, subtype (e.g., development, water management, fire protection, or general-purpose).

3.2. *Public meeting participation data*

We construct a dataset on citizen participation in public meetings using video recordings from Florida cities. First, we manually identify the official YouTube channels of all 435 Florida cities in our sample and find active channels for 252 cities (58%).

Next, we use the YouTube API to collect metadata for these channels, including each video's publication date, title, description, duration, viewership statistics, and transcript, covering the period from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2024.¹⁵ We exclude videos shorter than 10 minutes or lacking a transcript, as these are generally advertisements or promotional content.

To identify relevant content, we retain only video transcripts associated with public

¹⁴For example, special district notices often reference the cities or counties in which they operate. If we began classification with cities or counties, we would risk misattributing these notices to the wrong issuer. Special district names are often ambiguous or overlap with those of other local governments, so we manually reviewed these matches and cross-validated them against known county jurisdictions and stated district functions to ensure accurate attribution.

¹⁵Because public meetings are often live-streamed, the video upload date is typically also the meeting date.

meetings. We do so by applying a dictionary of regular expressions characteristic of official meeting discourse. Finally, we use Python to extract all first and last names mentioned in each transcript, employing the natural language processing libraries spaCy, NLTK, and nameparser.¹⁶ We then count the number of unique names mentioned in each transcript and aggregate the data to the city-month level, resulting in 5,953 observations.

3.3. *Permit data*

We use CoreLogic’s *Building Permits* data to identify commercial construction permits at the city-month level. These data offer particularly strong coverage of permits issued in Florida ([Horton, LaPoint, Lutz, Seegert, and Walczak, 2020](#)). Each record includes a detailed text description of the proposed work, the location of the construction site, and the city that issued the permit. Following [Bellon, LaPoint, Mazzola, and Xu \(2024\)](#), we clean the data and identify permits associated with commercial development, yielding a sample of 14,899 observations.¹⁷

3.4. *Other data*

We collect data on county characteristics—including population, age distribution, racial composition, homeownership rate, average household income, college attainment, and unemployment rate—from the U.S. Census. We obtain voting outcomes from the 2022 U.S. Senate elections from the MIT Election Lab. To measure digital engagement, we use SimilarWeb data on county public notice website traffic at the county-year-month level,

¹⁶We remove common nouns, misidentified words, and duplicates prior to name counting.

¹⁷We exclude permits related to residential construction and those not associated with new development.

downloaded from Dewey. We map these traffic statistics to individual counties using a comprehensive, hand-collected list of county-specific URLs.

4. Descriptive Evidence

4.1. *Newspaper notices*

4.1.1. *Topics*

Figure 1 shows the relative frequency of the 14 non-mutually exclusive public notice topics in our sample of local government notices. The majority of notices concern public hearings (56%), followed by municipal or county ordinances (26%), planning and zoning matters (20%), education matters (18%), special district issues (18%), and budgets (11%). Summary statistics are provided in Panel C of Table 1.

To illustrate why these categories are not mutually exclusive, consider the zoning change example shown in Section 1 of Online Appendix 1. This notice pertains simultaneously to (1) a public hearing, (2) a planning and zoning matter, and (3) a county ordinance.

4.1.2. *Issuers*

Panel A of Table 1 presents the breakdown of public notices by issuing entity. The majority are issued by cities (40%), followed by counties (26%), special districts (23%), and educational institutions (12%).

Panel B provides a further breakdown of special districts—the most numerous category of issuers in our sample. The U.S. Census defines special districts as “all organized local

entities (other than counties, municipalities, townships, or school districts) authorized by state law to provide only one or a limited number of designated functions, and with sufficient administrative and fiscal autonomy to qualify as separate governments.” Consistent with this definition, we observe substantial heterogeneity among special districts in our sample. Over 70% are community development districts, a Florida-specific form of local government created to finance and manage infrastructure for community development, such as utilities. Other common categories include drainage, water, or wastewater systems (11%), fire control districts (2%), and transportation systems (2%).

4.1.3. *Publication timing*

Figure 2 shows the distribution of newspaper notice publications by month and weekday. Panel A indicates that notices are published relatively evenly throughout the calendar year, with a modest uptick in September followed by a slight decline in October, November, and December. We attribute this pattern to Florida municipalities’ fiscal year, which ends on September 30.¹⁸ As the fiscal year draws to a close, municipalities likely increase the pace of meetings and decision-making, followed by a lull in activity during the early months of the new fiscal year.

Panel B displays the distribution of notices by weekday. The majority are published on Wednesdays (26%), with substantial shares also appearing on Thursdays (17%) and Fridays (18%).

¹⁸Florida Statutes, Title XII, Chapter 166, Section 241.

4.2. *County public notice websites*

4.2.1. *Which Florida counties have a public notice website?*

Not all Florida counties have a dedicated website for posting public notices. Among those that do, some operate a standalone public notice site, while others include a public notice page as part of their official county website.

To identify which counties had a public notice website during our sample period, we use the Wayback Machine to trace the presence and availability of such sites over time. We find that 25 of Florida’s 67 counties had a public notice website in place before January 1, 2023, several of which launched their sites in the final months of 2022. An additional 7 counties launched a website later in 2023. Panel A of Figure 3 presents a map of Florida highlighting these counties.

4.2.2. *Determinants of having a county public notice website*

In this section, we examine the factors associated with whether a county maintains a public notice website. Panel B of Figure 3 presents a heatmap of the number of public notices by county. A visual comparison with Panel A reveals no clear relationship between the presence of a website and the volume of notices.

Table 2 reports associations between county-level characteristics and the existence of a public notice website, using data from the 2020 Census. Among the variables considered, only two—median age and the share of white residents—show meaningful associations with website adoption. However, given the cross-sectional nature of this analysis, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

4.3. *Sample descriptives*

To perform our analyses, we aggregate our sample of public notices to the month-year level for a total of 108,528 observations. We create three key variables for our analyses: $N\ Newspaper\ Notices_{i,t}$ is the number of newspaper notices issued by local government i in month-year t . $Post$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_{pre,c}$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website (either standalone or as part of its main website) before the beginning of 2023.

Table 3 Panel A reports descriptive statistics. Issuers publish an average of 1.45 public notices per month, with a notably large standard deviation of 7.55. The post-reform period begins January 1, 2023 and represents almost one half of our sample. 34% of issuers have access to a county public notice website prior to the reform.

5. Research Design and Results

5.1. *Change in newspaper notice after the reform*

To understand the consequences of revoking the requirement that public notices appear in newspapers, we begin by examining the change in number of newspaper notices following the passage of Florida's HB 7049.

Because the reform requires issuers to post public notices not published in newspapers to a county notice website, we leverage the variation in governments' availability of county notice websites. Figure 3 Panel A shows a map of Florida's 67 counties that (i) had a

public notice website prior to the reform (i.e., pre-2023) (25 counties), (ii) created a public notice website after the reform (5 counties), and (iii) never had a public notice website (37 counties). The figure highlights significant variation in whether a county has a website, and significant geographic dispersion among counties that do.¹⁹

Using this variation, we examine how the number of newspaper notices varies with issuers' access to a county notice website prior to the reform. Specifically, we estimate the following difference-in-differences Poisson regression²⁰:

$$N\text{ Notices}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PN\text{ Website}_{pre,c} \times Post_t + \beta_2 PN\text{ Website}_{pre,c} + \beta_3 Post_t + \gamma_c + \gamma_i + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{i,t}, \quad (1)$$

where the coefficient of interest β_1 estimates how the number of newspaper notices changes for issuers with access to a county notice website, relative to those without. Standard errors are clustered by issuer and year-month.

Results appear in Table 3, Panel B. Column (1) includes county fixed effects γ_c , suppressing the coefficient on $PN\text{ Website}_{pre}$. Column (2) adds issuer fixed effects γ_i , and column (3) adds both issuer and year-month fixed effects γ_t to remove common time-trends, suppressing the coefficient on $Post_t$. In all columns, β_1 is equal to -0.44 , equivalent to a 36% decrease in the number of newspaper notices for issuers in affected counties relative to those in unaffected counties, and is statistically significant at the 1% level.²¹ This suggests a robust and meaningful decrease in newspaper notices after the reform in counties with

¹⁹Panels B and C of Figure 3 suggest that there is no obvious overlap between the variation in counties with a website and the number of public notices, or number of public notices per capita. This alleviates concerns that having a public notice county website is predictably correlated with the number of notices.

²⁰We employ a Poisson regression rather than OLS, as it is better suited for estimating average treatment effects when the outcome variable is non-negative and may take on zero values (Chen and Roth, 2024). Our inferences are robust to using OLS regressions.

²¹In Poisson regressions, coefficients are interpreted on the log scale. A coefficient of $\beta = -0.44$ implies that the expected outcome changes by $(1 - e^{-0.44}) \times 100 \approx -36\%$.

a public notice website. The model in column (3) serves as our baseline estimation in subsequent analyses.

5.2. *Heterogeneity in issuers and notice topics*

To better understand the implications of our findings, we next examine how our results vary by type of local government issuer. In Table 4, we estimate separate regressions of our baseline estimation from Table 3, Panel B, Column (3) by type of issuer. Column (1) presents results for cities, column (2) for counties, column (3) for special districts, and column (4) for educational institutions. We find that our results are particularly strong for cities, for which β_1 is equal to -0.66 and statistically significant at the 1% level, suggesting that cities located in counties with a public notice website publish 48% fewer newspaper notices after the reform. The result in column (4), for which β_1 is equal to -0.39 and statistically significant at the 1% level, implies that educational institutions located in counties with a public notice website publish 32% fewer newspaper notices. We fail to find a statistically significant result for counties or special districts at conventional levels.

Because issuers can choose which notices to pull from newspapers, we next examine how our results vary by type of public notice topic. In Table 4, we estimate separate regressions of our baseline estimation by the top six most common notice types (see Table 1 Panel C). In each of Table 4's six columns, the dependent variable is the number of each respective type of public notice. Because all local governments can issue every type of public notice, we use the full sample of issuers for the analysis. We find statistically and economically significant results for newspaper notices of public hearings, ordinances, planning and

zoning, and education. Only results for special districts and budgets (columns (4) and (6), respectively) are not significantly different from zero.

Overall, these results suggest that cities with access to a public notice county website are the most likely to pull notices from newspapers and that the notices most likely to be pulled are relevant to citizens.

5.3. *County website traffic*

A common argument from public officials is that access to public notices on government websites should not reduce (and may even increase) their visibility. This argument would suggest that citizens seamlessly transition to reading public notices on government websites instead of newspapers, leaving their awareness unaffected by the decline in newspaper notices. In this case, we would expect to observe no change, or even an increase in the website traffic of county public notice websites after the reform.

To test this conjecture, we estimate the model in Equation 1 using OLS regressions at the county-year-month level. Our dependent variable is the county's total website traffic in a given year-month, scaled by 10,000 ($PN\ Website\ Traffic_{c,t}$). Results appear in Table 5. Column (1) presents results without fixed effects, column (2) adds county fixed effects, and column (3) adds county and year-month fixed effects. In all columns, β_1 is not significantly different from zero at conventional levels, suggesting there was no discernible change in public notice visibility of governments located in counties with a public notice website.

5.4. *Citizen engagement*

5.4.1. *Public meeting participation*

In this section, we assess how the reform may have affected citizen engagement by tracking participation in public meetings. Under Florida law, all local government meetings must be open to the public and provide time for citizen commentary.²² In practice, members of the public are invited to speak after agenda items are presented, introduce themselves before commenting, and are typically allotted a brief window (about three minutes) to address the board. We leverage this structure by counting the number of unique names appearing in YouTube transcripts of meeting videos. If the reform did not alter citizens' awareness of public meetings, participation levels should remain unchanged. By contrast, reduced awareness would likely manifest as fewer individuals attending, speaking, and commenting on the issues under discussion.

To evaluate whether attendance changed following the reform, we estimate Equation 1 using the total number of speakers in all meetings held at the city-month level as our dependent variable. To account for the fact that some cities may have more (or longer) meetings than others, we control for the number of meetings and the natural logarithm of the aggregate meeting length in these regressions.

Table 6 presents the results. Consistent with a decline in participation, we find that the number of speakers at public meetings declines in cities located in counties with a public notice website following the reform. Depending on the specification, the effect size ranges from a 14.7 to 15.6% decrease.

²²Florida Constitution Article I, Section 24(b) and Florida Statutes Sections 286.011(1) and 286.0114.

5.4.2. Zoning permits

Next, we examine whether the decline in citizen engagement at public meetings after the reform affected the approval of new construction permits. Proposals for new development must be reviewed at planning and zoning board meetings before a construction permit can be issued. These meetings often attract opposition from local residents—especially against housing projects perceived as threats to property values—and are well known for drawing vocal citizen participation (Einstein et al., 2019). For instance, in Titusville, an unusually large crowd of 30 residents attended a planning and zoning meeting to oppose a proposed apartment building, and the committee ultimately recommended denying the zoning change.²³

To evaluate the impact of the reform on permitting outcomes, we estimate Equation 1 using the number of commercial permits issued by cities in a given month-year as the dependent variable. Table 7 shows that cities located in counties with a public notice website issued significantly more construction permits after the reform. The estimated coefficient, $\beta_1 = 0.30$, is statistically significant at the 1% (5%) level with county (issuer) and year-month fixed effects, corresponding to a 35% increase in commercial permits. This result is consistent with reduced citizen opposition to development in jurisdictions where planning and zoning notices were shifted away from newspapers.

²³<https://talkoftitusville.com/2024/07/09/titusville-residents-push-back-against-proposed-multifamily-project/>

6. Additional Analyses and Robustness Tests

6.1. *Cross-sectional analyses*

In this section, we perform two cross-sectional analyses to assess how our results vary with key demographics of the underlying issuer. In Panel A of Table 8, we present results from our baseline analysis for our sample of cities split by median population age. β_1 is significantly more negative in the sample of cities with younger populations. This suggests that cities with access to a county notice website pull significantly more notices from newspapers when they have younger populations.

In Panel B of Table 8, we present results from our baseline analysis, split by county population size. In counties with populations below 160,000, issuers must conduct public hearings to evaluate population broadband access before deciding whether to pull notices from newspapers and post them on county notice websites. Although we find that β_1 is negative and significant in counties with larger populations, the coefficient is not significantly different from those with smaller populations, which is inconsistent with the notion that issuers in counties with larger populations are more likely to pull notices from newspapers.

6.2. *Robustness tests*

In this section, we assess the robustness of our findings to two alternative treatment samples.

In our baseline results, we defined an issuer as being “treated” if it had access to a

county public notice website prior to January 1, 2023, i.e., when the reform took effect. In Panel A of Table 9, we present results after including issuers with access to a county notice website at anytime in our sample period in our treatment group. Results are robust, with the magnitude of β_1 dropping from -0.44 to -0.31 . The lower magnitude is consistent with issuers in counties having launched a public notice website sometime during 2023 also having pulled fewer notices from newspapers in that year.

In Panel B Table 9, we drop the issuers located in counties that launched a public notice website sometime in 2023 from our sample (i.e., excluding them from both the treatment and control groups). Our results remain robust, with a similar sized β_1 of -0.42 .

7. Conclusion

Public notices have long informed the public about government activities and decisions. Traditionally, these notices were required to be published in newspapers to guarantee broad accessibility. Over the past decade, policymakers across the U.S. have considered shifting public notices to government websites, with the aim to reduce the cost of newspaper publications. This paper examines the implications of such a shift, focusing on the state of Florida, which enacted the first legislation allowing local governments to publish public notices on county-operated websites instead of newspapers.

We investigate the nature and frequency of public notices in Florida, the impact of Florida's legislative reform on the publication of these notices in newspapers, and the subsequent effects on citizen engagement. We find a notable reduction in the number of newspaper notices in counties that had public notice websites before the reform was

in force. This reduction was particularly pronounced for city-issued notices and notices related to public engagement, such as public hearings on planning and zoning changes.

We find no evidence that the transition to government website notices increased their website traffic, suggesting that citizens did not seamlessly shift from reading them in newspapers to government websites. Instead, we find evidence consistent with a reduction in citizen participation at public meetings and an increase in the issuance of commercial zoning permits.

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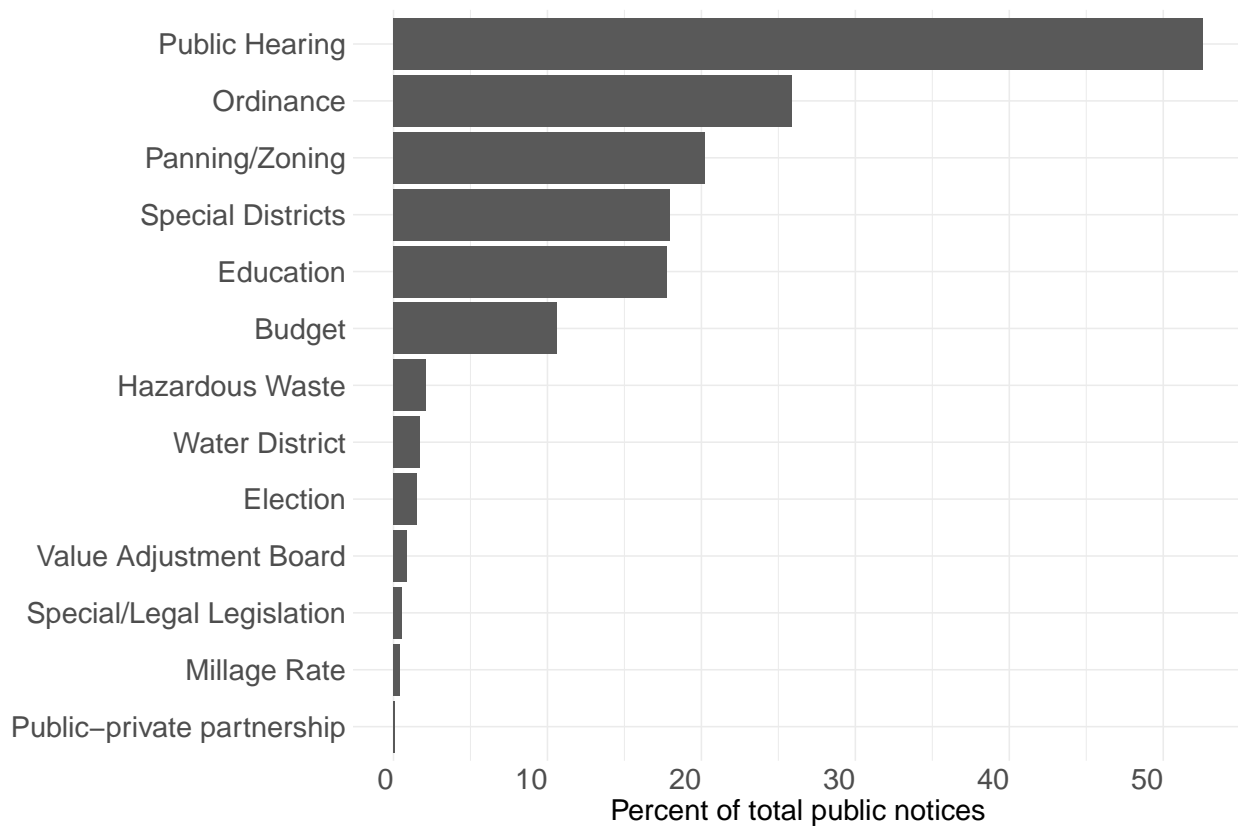
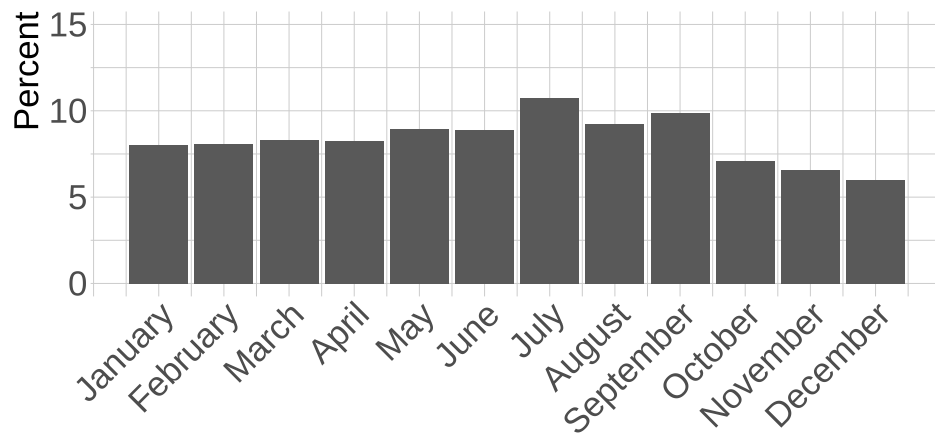
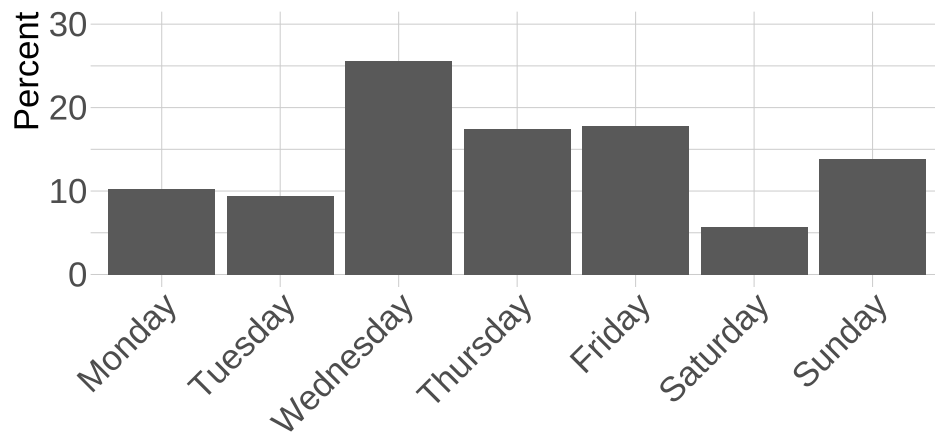


Fig. 1 Public notice topics. This figure presents the relative frequency of the 14 non-mutually exclusive public notice topics in Table OA1 in our sample of local government notices. Summary statistics are provided in Panel C of Table 1.



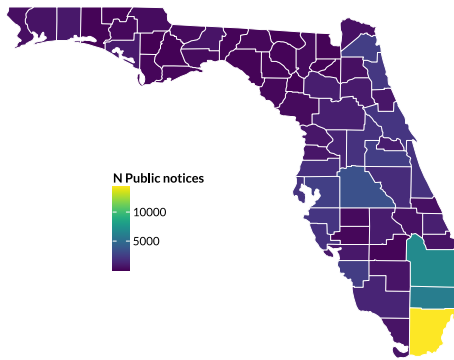
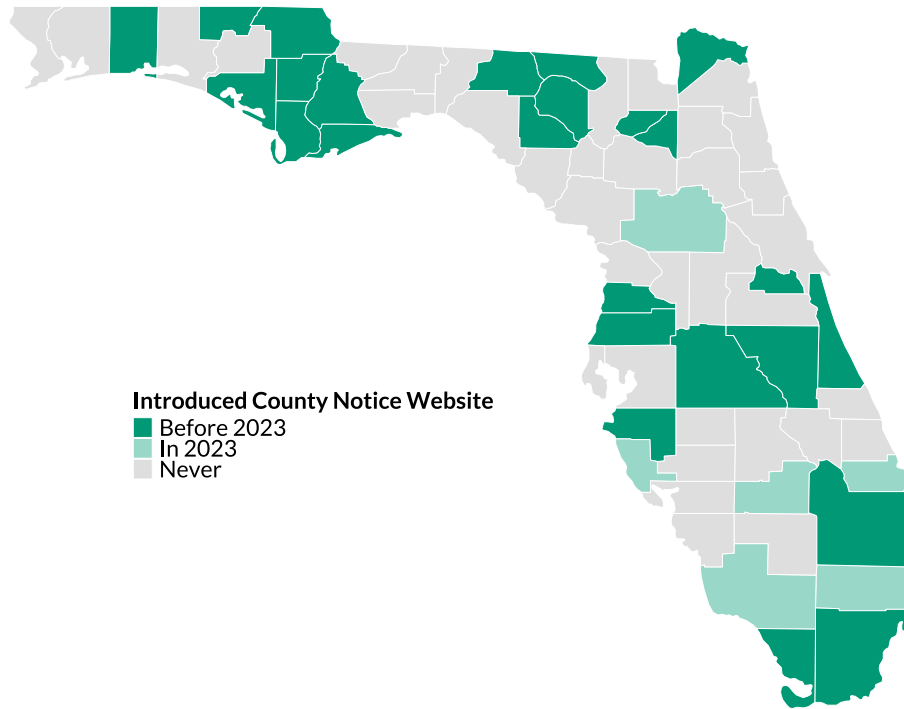
(a) Percentage of public notices published on a given calendar month



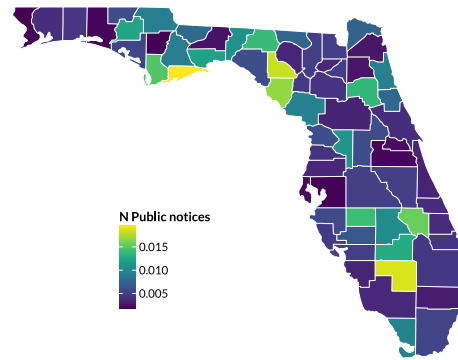
(b) Percentage of public notices published on a given weekday

Fig. 2 Percentage of governmental public notices, by weekday and by calendar month. This figure presents the percentages of the public notices by the filing date. Panel (a) shows the share of public notice postings by filing calendar-month. Panel (b) presents the share of public notice postings by weekday.

(a) Map of county notice websites



(b) Number of public notices



(c) Number of public notices per capita

Fig. 3 Map of county notice websites. Panel (a) displays the map of counties with and without county-operated public notice websites. Counties shaded in dark green introduced the website before the law took effect in 2023. Counties in light green adopted the website in 2023. Grey counties have not implemented the website as of December 2023. Panels (b) and (c) show the pre-reform number of public notices and the pre-reform number of public notices per capita by county, respectively.

Table 1
Newspaper notice summary statistics

Panel A: Notices by type of issuer								
	N Notices	% Notices	N Issuers	% Issuers				
City	63,983	39.61%	386	17.69%				
County	41,440	25.65%	67	3.07%				
Special District	37,538	23.24%	1,622	74.34%				
School or College	18,588	11.51%	107	4.90%				
Total	161,549	100.00%	2,182	100.00%				
Panel B: Breakdown of special districts								
	N Notices	% Notices	N Issuers	% Issuers				
Community development	28,030	71.62%	1,004	61.90%				
Drainage, water and/or wastewater systems	4,310	11.01%	78	4.81%				
Fire control and rescue	870	2.22%	41	2.53%				
Transportation systems or infrastructure	823	2.10%	40	2.47%				
Capital improvements	599	1.53%	17	1.05%				
Health care	419	1.07%	17	1.05%				
Recreational facilities / programs	366	0.94%	10	0.62%				
Housing	349	0.89%	29	1.79%				
Green/resilience improvements to real property	257	0.66%	2	0.12%				
Utility systems / services	180	0.46%	6	0.37%				
Other	2,933	7.49%	378	23.30%				
Total	39,136	100.00%	1,622	100.00%				
Panel C: Notices by topic								
	Mean	StDev	p ^{10%}	p ^{25%}	p ^{50%}	p ^{75%}	p ^{90%}	Obs.
Public hearing	0.56	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	161,549
Ordinance	0.26	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	161,549
Planning and zoning	0.20	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	161,549
Education	0.18	0.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	161,549
Special districts	0.18	0.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	161,549
Budget	0.11	0.31	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	161,549
Water districts	0.02	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549
Hazardous waste	0.02	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549
Election	0.02	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549
Special/Legal legislation	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549
Value adjustment board	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549
Public private partnership	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549
Millage rate	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	161,549

This table reports summary statistics for our newspaper notice data. Panel A shows newspaper notices by type of local government. Panel B breaks out types of special districts. Panel C shows newspaper notices by topic.

Table 2
Determinants of public notice county websites

Panel A: Pairwise Correlations

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]
[1] Number of issuers										
[2] Log(Population)	0.78									
[3] Top age decile	-0.08	0.09								
[4] Top decile of Rep. vote share	-0.25	-0.43	-0.12							
[5] Share White	-0.32	-0.32	0.20	0.38						
[6] Share Black	-0.12	-0.21	-0.28	-0.06	-0.62					
[7] Percentage of homeowners	-0.41	-0.49	0.34	0.26	0.48	-0.28				
[8] Avg. household income	0.44	0.62	0.15	-0.24	-0.08	-0.35	-0.18			
[9] College degree rate	0.46	0.78	0.10	-0.37	-0.17	-0.22	-0.36	0.78		
[10] Unemployment rate	0.49	0.57	0.18	-0.36	-0.34	-0.14	-0.30	0.16	0.27	

Panel B: Regressions

	PN Website _{pre}										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Number of issuers	0.00 (0.88)									0.01** (2.64)	
Log Population		-0.04 (-0.94)								-0.28*** (-2.70)	-0.07 (-0.98)
Top age decile			-0.38** (-2.05)							-0.32 (-1.50)	-0.48** (-2.42)
Top decile of Rep. vote share				0.25 (1.34)						0.07 (0.35)	0.17 (0.77)
Avg. household income					0.00 (-0.25)					0.00 (0.76)	
Share White						0.01 (1.60)				0.02** (2.41)	0.02* (1.98)
Share Black						0.01 (1.31)				0.02 (1.62)	0.01 (1.44)
College degree rate							0.00 (-0.55)			0.01 (1.17)	0.01 (1.03)
Unemployment rate								0.01 (0.29)		0.15** (2.46)	0.14** (2.31)
Percentage of homeowners									0.00 (-0.60)	-0.01 (-0.72)	
Intercept	0.30*** (3.88)	0.76* (1.69)	0.38*** (6.36)	0.32*** (5.16)	0.41 (1.52)	-0.66 (-1.08)	0.48* (1.92)	0.27 (0.97)	0.66 (1.23)	0.26 (0.15)	-1.57 (-1.28)
R ²	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.30	0.18
Observations	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67

This table presents associations between the county's decision to have a website and county-level characteristics.

Table 3
Changes in newspaper notice after the reform

Panel A: Sample descriptives

	Mean	StDev	p ^{10%}	p ^{25%}	p ^{50%}	p ^{75%}	p ^{90%}	Obs.
N Newspaper Notices	1.45	7.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	3.00	108,528
Post	0.47	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	108,528
PN Website _{pre}	0.34	0.47	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	108,528

Panel B: Change in newspaper notice conditional on having a county public notice website

	N Newspaper Notices		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	-0.44*** (-3.10)	-0.44*** (-2.92)	-0.44*** (-2.91)
Post	0.09 (1.16)	0.09 (1.13)	
Number of issuers	2,128	2,128	2,128
County fixed effects	Yes	No	No
Issuer fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	No	No	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.06	0.61	0.63
Observations	108,528	108,528	108,528

This table presents analyses for the change in number of newspaper notices after the reform. Panel A presents descriptive statistics for the variables used in our analyses. $N\ Notices_{i,t}$ is the number of newspaper notices issued by local government i in month-year t . $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. Panel B presents results for Equation 1 estimating the change in number of newspaper notices after the reform for issuers located in counties with a public notice website using a Poisson regression. Standard errors are double-clustered at the issuer and year month level. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 4
Heterogeneity

Panel A: Changes in newspaper notice by issuer type

	City	County	N Newspaper Notices Special District	School or College
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	-0.66** (-2.33)	-0.22 (-1.28)	-0.11 (-1.18)	-0.39** (-2.31)
Mean dependent variable	3.25	12.13	0.42	3.41
Number of issuers	386	67	1,568	107
Issuer fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.61	0.59	0.21	0.38
Observations	19,686	3,417	79,968	5,457

This table presents regressions of the number of public notices at the issuer level, by issuer type. Column 1 displays the results for the subsample of city issuers. Column 2 shows the results for county issuers. Column 3 presents results for special issuers. Column 4 shows the results for schools and colleges. $N\ Notices_{i,t}$ is the number of newspaper notices issued by local government i in month-year t . $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. Standard errors are double clustered by issuer and year month. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 4
Heterogeneity, Continued

Panel B: Changes in newspaper notice by topic

	N Newspaper Notices					
	Public Hearing (1)	Ordinance (2)	Zoning (3)	Sp. district (4)	Education (5)	Budget (6)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	-0.46* (-1.95)	-0.34** (-2.37)	-0.34** (-2.09)	-0.12 (-1.37)	-0.31*** (-2.59)	-0.10 (-1.01)
Mean dependent variable	0.85	0.39	0.30	0.26	0.26	0.15
Number of issuers	2,128	2,128	2,128	2,128	2,128	2,128
Issuer fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.63	0.67	0.68	0.33	0.73	0.31
Observations	108,528	108,528	108,528	108,528	108,528	108,528

This table presents regressions by the type of public notice (for the top six most popular categories). $N\ Notices_{i,t}$ is the number of newspaper notices issued by local government i in month-year t . $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. Standard errors are clustered by issuer and year month. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 5
County website traffic

	Website Traffic, 10k	
	(1)	(2)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	1.95 (0.47)	1.86 (0.44)
Post	0.17 (0.09)	
Number of issuers	60	60
County fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	No	Yes
R ²	0.96	0.97
Observations	2,964	2,964

This table presents regressions of the total traffic on the county websites (scaled by 10,000 for interpretability). $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. Standard errors are clustered by county. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 6
Meeting attendance

	N Spoken Names		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	-0.17** (-2.50)	-0.16** (-2.23)	-0.17** (-2.36)
Post	0.43*** (6.24)	0.45*** (6.22)	
Video Length	0.57*** (15.56)	0.59*** (13.61)	0.60*** (17.94)
N Videos	0.02*** (4.80)	0.02*** (3.00)	0.02*** (4.07)
Number of issuers	233	217	217
County fixed effects	Yes	No	No
Issuer fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	No	No	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.49	0.57	0.61
Observations	5,953	5,944	5,944

This table presents the effects on city-level public meeting attendance, as inferred from YouTube video transcripts. $N\ Names_{i,t}$ is the number of unique names that are mentioned across all videos posted by a city i in month-year t . $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. We include controls for the $N\ Videos_{i,t}$, the number of videos posted in a year month, and $Video\ Length_{i,t}$, the natural logarithm of the aggregate transcript lengths of all videos posted in a year-month. Standard errors are clustered by city and year month. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 7
Zoning permits

	(1)	N permits (2)	(3)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	0.30*** (4.15)	0.30*** (4.06)	0.30** (2.28)
Post	-0.11 (-0.90)		
Number of cities	317	317	317
County fixed effects	Yes	Yes	No
Year Month fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Issuer fixed effects	No	No	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.13	0.14	0.62
Observations	14,899	14,899	14,899

This table presents the effects on the number of zoning permits for commercial new construction and demolition. $N\text{ Permits}_{i,t}$ is the number of commercial permits i in month-year t . Post_t is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. PN Website_c is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. Standard errors are clustered by city and year month. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 8
Cross-sectional analyses

Panel A: Splitting by citizen age (cities)

	N Newspaper Notices	
	Older (1)	Younger (2)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	-0.09 (-0.48)	-0.86*** (-2.65)
Number of issuers	162	223
Older - Younger		0.78*
Issuer fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.47	0.66
Observations	8,262	11,373

Panel B: Splitting by county size

	N Newspaper Notices	
	Large (1)	Small (2)
PN Website _{pre} × Post	-0.35** (-1.98)	-0.32 (-1.55)
Number of issuers	1,769	359
Large - Small		0.03
Issuer fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.65	0.54
Observations	90,219	18,309

This table presents regressions of the number of public notices at the issuer level by issuer characteristics. Panel A presents cross-sectional comparisons by population age. *Older* (*Younger*) is a subsample where the median age exceeded (was below) 45 in 2020 (last available Census data). The statistical comparison between columns 2 and 3 is based on the coefficient from a fully interacted model. Panel B presents cross-sectional comparisons by county size. *Large* (*Small*) county refers to counties with a population of more (less) than 160,000 people. Issuers in small counties are required to conduct a public hearing before posting notices on county websites. The statistical comparison between columns 2 and 3 is based on the coefficient from a fully interacted model. $N\ Notices_{i,t}$ is the number of newspaper notices issued by local government i in month-year t . $Post_t$ is an indicator variable equal to one in month-years beginning January 2023. $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website before 2023. Standard errors are clustered by issuer and year month. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Table 9
Robustness

Panel A: County had a PN website before or at some point in 2023.

	N Newspaper Notices		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
PN website \times Post	-0.31** (-2.57)	-0.31** (-2.44)	-0.31** (-2.43)
Post	0.09 (1.02)	0.09 (0.99)	
Number of issuers	2,128	2,128	2,128
County fixed effects	Yes	No	No
Issuer fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	No	No	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.06	0.61	0.63
Observations	108,528	108,528	108,528

Panel B: Excluding counties that introduced PN websites in 2023 from the sample.

	N Newspaper Notices		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
PN Website _{pre} \times Post	-0.42*** (-2.64)	-0.42** (-2.49)	-0.42** (-2.48)
Post	0.09 (1.02)	0.09 (0.99)	
Number of issuers	2,128	1,725	1,725
County fixed effects	Yes	No	No
Issuer fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes
Year Month fixed effects	No	No	Yes
Pseudo R ²	0.07	0.62	0.63
Observations	87,975	87,975	87,975

This table presents robustness to our main analyses in Table 3. Panel A presents regressions where $PN\ Website_c$ is an indicator variable equal to one if the issuer's county c has a public notice website at any point in time. In Panel B, we repeat the analyses of Table 3, dropping the data from the counties that introduced public notice websites in 2023. Standard errors are clustered at the issuer and year-month level. t-statistics are reported in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote p-values less than 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.

Online Appendix to

Public notices as a government transparency mechanism: evidence from Florida

Appendix OA1: Public notice examples, classification, and keyword dictionary

Section 1: Public notice example

The following is a public notice example that falls into three topic categories: public hearing, county ordinance, and zoning.

NOTICE OF ZONING CHANGE

The Franklin County Board of County Commissioners proposes to adopt the following by ordinance: AN ORDINANCE REZONING 5 +/- ACRES OF LAND IN SECTION 10, TOWNSHIP 9 SOUTH, RANGE 8 WEST, FROM R-3 SINGLE FAMILY ESTATE RESIDENTIAL TO R-2 SINGLE FAMILY MOBILE HOME DISTRICT. A public hearing on the proposed change will be held on Tuesday, June 7, 2022, at 10:30 a.m. at the County Commission meeting room in the Franklin County Courthouse Annex, 34 Forbes Street, Apalachicola, Florida. More information can be obtained, and the proposed changes may be inspected at the Franklin County Planning Department, 34 Forbes Street, Suite 1, Apalachicola, Florida 32320 (telephone 850-653-9783).

Section 2: Public notice classification into topic categories

In this section, we describe our process of identifying notices issued by government entities and classifying them into 14 non-mutually exclusive categories.

First, we refer to the official list of 18 notices that can be published using the county-website only option according to the Florida Statutes:²⁴

List of 18 notices eligible for county-website only publication:

1. Notices related to special or legal legislation pursuant to s. 11.02.
2. Educational unit notices pursuant to s. 120.81.
3. Retirement system notices pursuant to s. 121.0511.
4. Notices related to inclusion of positions in the Senior Management Service Class of the Florida Retirement System pursuant to s. 121.055.
5. Notices proposing the enactment of county ordinances pursuant to s. 125.66.
6. Code enforcement notices published pursuant to s. 162.12.
7. Notices proposing the enactment of municipal ordinances pursuant to s. 166.041.
8. Special district meeting notices pursuant to s. 189.015.
9. Establishment and termination notices for community development districts pursuant to ss. 190.005 and 190.046, respectively.
10. Disclosures of tax impact by value adjustment boards pursuant to s. 197.037.
11. Advertisements of real or personal property with delinquent taxes pursuant to s. 197.402.
12. Advertisements of hearing notices, millage rates, and budgets pursuant to s. 200.065.
13. Turnpike project notices pursuant to s. 338.223.
14. Public-private partnership notices pursuant to ss. 348.0308 and 348.7605.
15. Notices of prime recharge area designations for the Floridan and Biscayne aquifers pursuant to s. 373.0397.
16. Water management district notices pursuant to s. 373.146.
17. Hazardous waste disposal notices pursuant to s. 403.722.
18. Forfeiture notices pursuant to ss. 849.38 and 932.704.

²⁴Please refer to this link for the source document.

From this list, we exclude court notices (items 11 and 18), notices issued by federal agencies (item 13), and notices that are extremely rare or irrelevant to citizen participation in local government activities (items 3, 4, and 15).

Next, we refer to the following list of citizen participation notices made available by the Public Notice Resource Center (an NGO dedicated to educating the public about public notices):²⁵

List of citizen participation notices provided by the PNRC:

1. Government Meetings and Hearings.
2. Meeting Minutes or Summaries.
3. Agency Proposals.
4. Legislation and Resolutions.
5. Financial Reports.
6. Proposed Budgets and Tax Rates.
7. Land and Water Use.
8. Property Tax Assessments.
9. State Employee Salaries.
10. Creation of Special Tax Districts.
11. Election Dates and Polling Places.
12. School District Reports.
13. Zoning, Annexation and Land Use Changes.
14. Capital Improvement Plans.

Using both lists of topics, we create 14 distinct, non-mutually exclusive local public notice categories, which are defined and described in the Florida Statutes. Please refer to Table OA1 for the category names, legal definitions, examples, and related sections of the Florida Statutes.

Section 3: Dictionary of keyword-based regular expressions

Finally, we develop a dictionary of keyword regular expressions (listed in Table OA1) based on our 14 topic categories. Due to the highly non-standardized nature of public notices, we spent considerable time and effort reading the output generated by our keywords and fine-tuning them to minimize false positives.

²⁵Please refer to p.3 of [PNRC \(2018\)](#).

Table OA1**Detailed Topic Definitions, Laws, and Regular Expressions**

Topic	Legal Definition	Representative Example	Regular Expressions	Related Section HB 7049
Public Hearing	A public hearing is a formal meeting held by a governmental body to gather public input on specific matters such as ordinances, zoning changes, budgets, or other policy decisions, as required by law under Florida's Sunshine Law (Section 286.011, Florida Statutes). These are official announcements that local governments must publish to inform the public about upcoming hearings where decisions about property taxes, budgets, and millage rates will be discussed and possibly decided. The purpose is to ensure transparency and give the public an opportunity to attend and participate in the decision-making process.	<p>CITY OF CRESTVIEW NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS.</p> <p>NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, pursuant to Florida Statute, the City Code, Land Use Regulations and Operating Policies, the City of Crestview proposes to adopt the following Ordinances set forth by title. A Public Hearing will be held before the Planning and Development Board on Monday, March 6, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as possible to consider and make recommendations to the City Council regarding the requests. The purpose of the public hearing is to receive comments from the public and make decisions regarding the above matters.</p> <p>Public hearings for the first readings of the Ordinances will be held before the Crestview City Council on Monday, March 13, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as possible. The second and final readings will be held before the Crestview City Council on Monday, March 27, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as possible to consider enactment of the Ordinances.</p> <p>All meetings will be held in the City Hall Council Chambers, 198 Wilson Street North, Crestview, Florida 32536...</p>	public hearing	Section 200.065
Ordinances (municipal, county)	<p>A municipal ordinance is a legislative action passed by a city or town council to regulate matters within its jurisdiction, as authorized by Chapter 166, Florida Statutes, the Municipal Home Rule Powers Act.</p> <p>A county ordinance is a law enacted by a county commission to address local issues or regulations, authorized under Section 125.01, Florida Statutes, granting counties broad home-rule authority. County Ordinance Notices are public notices issued by the county government to inform the public about proposed ordinances.</p>	<p>NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER AMENDMENT OF ORDINANCE REGULATING STOPPING, STANDING AND PARKING OF VEHICLES WITHIN HENDRY COUNTY.</p> <p>Notice is hereby given that the Hendry County Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on December 13, 2022, at 6:00 p.m., in the Commission Room, Hendry County Courthouse, 25 East Hickpoochee Avenue, LaBelle, Florida, to consider an ordinance amendment relating to stopping, standing and parking of vehicles within Hendry County entitled as follows: <i>An ordinance of the board of county commissioners of hendry county, florida, amending the hendry county code of ordinances, chapter 1-14, article iii, specifically section 1-14-77 placement of official signs and section 1-14-80 violation, enforcement, penalties; providing for severability; providing for conflicts of law; providing for codification, inclusion in code, and scrivener's errors; and providing for an effective date.</i></p> <p>Interested parties may appear and be heard at the public hearing with respect to the proposed ordinance...</p>	ordinance	Sections 166.041 125.66

Planning/Zoning	<p>Planning and zoning involve regulating land use and development through comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, as governed by sections 163.3184 and 166.041, Florida Statutes, the Community Planning Act. Planning and Zoning Public Notices are official announcements issued by local governments to inform the public about proposed changes to land use, zoning regulations, or specific properties within the community.</p>	<p>NOTICE OF ZONING CHANGES IN UNINCORPORATED MANATEE COUNTY.</p> <p>NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Board of County Commissioners of Manatee County will conduct a Public Hearing on June 17, 2021, at 9:00 a.m., or as soon thereafter as same may be heard at the Manatee County Government Administration Building, 1st Floor Patricia M. Glass Chambers, 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton, Florida, to consider and act upon the following matters: <i>PDC-20-22(P) CASTOELLENTON/ NORTH RIVER VILLAGE RESTAURANT CASTO NORTH RIVER II, LLC PLN2011-0049.</i></p> <p>An Ordinance of the Board of County Commissioners of Manatee County, Florida, regarding land development, approving a Preliminary Site Plan for a 2,325 square foot restaurant with a drive-through along with associated parking and infrastructure; the approximately 1-acre site is generally located east of I-75 along US 301 North in the North River Village Shopping Center and is commonly known as 6020 US 301 North, Ellenton (Manatee County); subject to stipulations as conditions of approval; setting forth findings; providing a legal description; providing for severability, and providing an effective date...</p>	<p>zoning, planning and zoning, reuse, redevelopments, rezone, land use, land-use, annexation, residential development</p>	Section 166.041
Special Districts	<p>A special district is a unit of local government created for a specific purpose, such as water management or fire protection, and governed by the Special District Accountability Act (Chapter 189, Part II and III, Florida Statutes).</p>	<p>NOTICE OF LANDOWNERS MEETING AND ELECTION AND MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE TOWN OF KINDRED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT.</p> <p>Notice is hereby given to the public and all landowners within Town of Kindred Community Development District (District) the location of which is generally described as comprising a parcel or parcels of land containing approximately 321 acres, located east of Kings Highway, north of Henry Partin Road, approximately mile south of Partin Settlement Road, and west of Neptune Road, in Osceola County, Florida, advising that a meeting of landowners will be held for the purpose of electing three (3) person/people to the Districts Board of Supervisors (Board, and individually, Supervisor). Immediately following the landowners meeting there will be convened a meeting of the Board for the purpose of considering certain matters of the Board to include election of certain District officers, and other such business which may properly come before the Board...</p>	<p>fire, community development district, utility district</p>	Section 189.015

Education	Education notices pertain to public meetings, funding, and decisions related to schools, school districts, colleges, and universities. These notices are governed by Chapter 1000-1013, Florida Statutes, which outline the roles of school boards, district school boards, and the governance of public colleges and universities. Educational Unit Public Notices are official announcements issued by educational units, including district school boards, college districts, and universities, to inform the public about various actions or rule changes.	<p>The Clay County School Board will hold a School Board Workshop on Tuesday, September 26, 2023, at 9:00 a.m., in the District Multi-Purpose Center located at the corner of Walnut Street and Gratio Place in Green Cove Springs, Florida, 32043, for the purpose of reviewing the agenda for the October 5, 2023 Regular Meeting. Additional items may be discussed.</p> <p>The meeting is open to the public and all interested parties are invited to attend. <i>Any person requiring special accommodations to attend or participate in public meetings should advise the School District at least 48 hours before the meeting by contacting the Superintendent's Office...</i></p>	school, college, university	Section 120.81
Budget	Budget notices inform the public about proposed or adopted budgets of local governments or special districts, as required by Chapter 129 for counties and 166.241 for cities, Florida Statutes, detailing revenues, expenditures, and tax rates.	<p>NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARING.</p> <p>The City of Minneola has tentatively adopted a budget for fiscal year 2021-2022. A public hearing to make a FINAL DECISION on the Budget AND Taxes will be held on: Tuesday, September 21, 2021 6:30 P.M. Minneola City Hall Council Chambers 800 North U.S. Hwy. 27 Minneola, FL 34715 LF-26353454.</p>	budget	Section 200.065
Procurement	Procurement refers to the process by which public entities acquire goods, services, or construction projects, regulated by Section 287.057, Florida Statutes, emphasizing competitive bidding and transparency.	<p>SUCRN ITB NO. 23-050 ASPHALT CONCRETE PUBLIC NOTICE INVITATION TO BID ITB No. 23-050</p> <p>Asphalt Concrete Mix Type SP-9.5 and Type SP-12.5 also Liquid Emulsified Asphalt Grades SS-1 and AE-90 or comparable Citrus County Florida (County) invites interested parties to submit bids to furnish Type SP-9.5 and Type SP-12.5 asphalt concrete mix and liquid emulsified asphalt grades SS-1 and AE-90. This asphalt concrete mix and liquid emulsion is used in the maintenance of potholes and edge repair on approximately 2,600 miles of County maintained roadways. This maintenance is necessary for the safety of the motoring public.</p> <p>A NON-MANDATORY Pre-Bid Conference will be held on March 27, 2023, at 10:00 am. The Conference will be held via Microsoft Teams meeting. See Solicitation Document for details. SEALED Bids - Electronic Bid submittals are to be submitted on or before April 20, 2023, at 2:00 pm. It is the sole responsibility of the Bidder to ensure that their Bid is submitted through VendorLink no later than the time and date specified in the Solicitation or subsequent addenda. See Solicitation Document for details...</p>	request for bids, invitation to bids, advertisement for bids, bid	Chosen by the authors for a separate topic

Election (municipal)	Election notices inform voters about elections, candidates, referenda, and voting procedures, governed by the Florida Election Code (Chapters 97-106, Florida Statutes).	<p>CITY OF OAKLAND PARK NOTICE OF SPECIAL ELECTION.</p> <p>MARCH 19, 2024 One (1) City Commission Position (8 month term) NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Special Election of the City of Oakland Park, Florida, will be held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024, for the purpose of electing one (1) City Commissioner to serve at large for an eight (8) month term. Persons seeking a city commission position must qualify with the City Clerk at the City of Oakland Park City Hall, 3650 NE 12 Avenue, from noon, Tuesday, January 2, 2024, until noon, Monday, January 8, 2024. Candidate qualifying will be available by appointment. Please email the City Clerk at Renees@oaklandparkfl.gov, or call 954-630-4300 for more information. The special municipal election shall be held in accordance with the laws of the State of Florida and in accordance with the Charter and Code of the City of Oakland Park, Florida and will be held March 19, 2024, in all regular Broward County polling places in Oakland Park, Florida from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.</p> <p>All qualified electors of the City of Oakland Park whose names appear upon the registration books in the office of the Supervisor of Elections of Broward County, Florida, will be eligible to vote in said election. Absentee voting will be permitted in this Special Election through the office of Broward County Supervisor of Elections...</p>	municipal elections, presidential elections, referendum	Chosen by the authors for a separate topic
Hazardous Waste	Hazardous waste notices pertain to the management, transportation, or disposal of hazardous materials, regulated under Section 403.721, Florida Statutes, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection rules.	<p>FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.</p> <p>NOTICE OF INTENT TO ISSUE THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (DEP OR DEPARTMENT) GIVES NOTICE OF ITS INTENT TO ISSUE A PERMIT MODIFICATION UNDER SECTION 403.722, FLORIDA STATUTES (F.S.), AND CHAPTERS 62-4 AND 62-730 OF THE FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE CODE (F.A.C.) TO SOUTHERN WOOD PIEDMONT COMPANY.</p> <p>This permit relates to the facility located at 900 North Center Street, Baldwin, Duval County, Florida, having assigned facility ID number FLD 004 053 450 and is issued as part of DEPs hazardous waste management program, authorized pursuant to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments (RCRA/HSWA). The draft Permit Modification contains the modifications for Permit 72515-006-HF...</p>	hazard, hazardous waste	Section 403.722

Water District	A water district is a special district responsible for managing water resources, governed by Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, and overseen by water management districts like the South Florida Water Management District.	<p>SUCRN HOMOSASSA SPECIAL WATER DISTRICT PUBLIC NOTICE.</p> <p>The Homosassa Special Water District would like to announce that the Regular Monthly Board Meeting will be held on Monday, May 17, 2021. The meeting will begin at 4:00 PM. Due to the current circumstances and the office not being open to the Public this meeting will be held as an in person with Board Members only and through the following webinar (virtually). Members of the public may listen to the meeting by dialing the Zoom audio link. Public comments for the meeting can be submitted via email to hswd@tampabay.rr.com or by calling 352-628-3740. Any persons with disabilities needing a special accommodation to participate in the proceeding should contact Teresa Olds, Office Manager, hswd@tampabay.rr.com or 352-628-3740 no later than 12:00 noon prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Caitlin Wilcox Chairman of the Board Published May 16, 2021...</p>	water district, water management district	Section 373.146
Value Board	Adjustment A Value Adjustment Board (VAB) is a county-level body that hears disputes regarding property tax assessments, governed by Section 194.015, Florida Statutes.	<p>NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING.</p> <p>The Value Adjustment Board for Pinellas County, Florida, hereby gives notice that on March 10, 2021 commencing at 9:00 a.m., in the Clerk's Large Conference Room, Fourth Floor, Pinellas County Courthouse, 315 Court Street, Clearwater, Florida, a meeting will be held to act upon the Special Magistrate recommendations for the 2020 tax year, to approve the Final Certification of the 2020 tax rolls, and to consider any and all other matters that may legally come before said board. Persons are advised that if they decide to appeal any decision made at this meeting/hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings, and, for such purpose, they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.</p>	value board adjustment	Section 197.037
Special/Legal Legislation	Special or legal legislation refers to proposed laws affecting specific areas, districts, or entities, requiring public notice under Section 11.02, Florida Statutes, before introduction in the Florida Legislature.	<p>NOTICE OF INTENT TO SEEK LEGISLATION TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:</p> <p>Notice is hereby given of intent to apply to the 2021 Florida Legislature, in the 2021 regular or any special or extended legislative sessions, for passage of an act relating to Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District, Lee and Hendry Counties, amending certain powers of the district, and amending the appointment process for board member vacancies.</p> <p>BY: David Lindsay, District Manager Date: 1/21/20 AD 4568213 1/23/2021.</p>	legislation	Section 11.02

Milage Rate	The millage rate is the property tax rate set per 1,000 of assessed value, requiring public notice and hearings as governed by Section 200.065, Florida Statutes.	<p>CITY OF MADEIRA BEACH NOTICE OF RESCHEDULED HEARING.</p> <p>The final hearing adopting a millage rate and budget on September 28, 2022 at 5:30 p. m. for the City of Madeira Beach is being rescheduled due to Hurricane Ian. A rescheduled final budget hearing will be held on: October 5, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. at City of Madeira Beach Patricia Shontz Commission Chambers 300 Municipal Drive Madeira Beach, FL 33708.</p>	millage rate	Section 200.065
Public-private Partnership	A public-private partnership (P3) is a contractual arrangement between a government entity and a private partner for the development, financing, and operation of public projects, governed by Section 255.065, Florida Statutes.	<p>Notice of Proposal/Request for Proposal.</p> <p>NOTICE OF UNSOLICITED PROPOSAL FOR PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY CONSTRUCTION OF A FIRE STATION LOCATED AT 2121 N. LAKEWOOD AVE., OCOEE, FLORIDA 34761 (NORTHWEST OCOEE AREA).</p> <p>City of Ocoee 1 N. BLUFORD AVENUE Ocoee, FL 34761 RFP 23-011 <i>NOTICE OF UNSOLICITED PROPOSAL FOR PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY CONSTRUCTION OF A FIRE STATION LOCATED AT 2121 N. LAKEWOOD AVE (NORTHWEST OCOEE AREA)</i>. Pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 255.065, Florida Statutes, the City of Ocoee notifies the general public and all interested parties that the City has received an unsolicited public private partnership proposal for the construction of a Fire Station located at 2121 N. Lakewood Ave, Ocoee, FL 34761 (Northwest Ocoee Area). The City invites any person or organization, interested in submitting an alternative proposal for the construction of a new Fire Station located at 2121 N. Lakewood Ave, Ocoee, FL 34761 (Northwest Ocoee Area) to submit such proposals to the City for evaluation and consideration. The City requires that the Fire Station be located on a City-owned site at 2121 N. Lakewood Ave, Ocoee, FL 34761.</p> <p>All proposals shall account for a Fire Station that is a minimum of 7,500 square feet with 3-bays...</p>	public-private partnership, public private partnership	Sections 348.0308, 348.7605