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ABSTRACT

How transparent are state governments in the United States? While important research has suggested administrative noncompliance with government transparency laws, few scholars have explored how variation in state administrative law and practice shapes the culture of transparency in state government. We fill this gap by examining differences that exist among one of the most widely-recognized transparency policies - Freedom of Information (FOi) laws - across all 50 states. We then utilize an exploratory field experiment to analyze the implementation of those policies by five similar agencies {agriculture, budget, commerce, education, and health) in each of the 50 states. Finally, using standards provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, we apply the results of our analysis to create an index representing the strength of each state's transparency regime. Considered as a whole, our findings suggest important variations in transparency culture across and within state governments.