

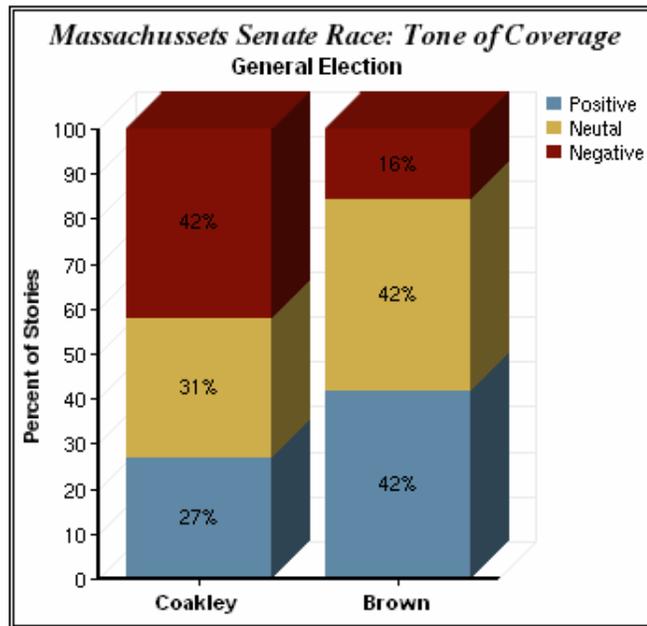


Hiding in Plain Sight, From Kennedy to Brown: Press Coverage of the 2010 Massachusetts Senate Special Election

The national media lost interest almost immediately, and then horse-race coverage dominated what was considered a fairly dull and utterly local contest. And when it became clear something was up, it was polling—not journalistic reporting—that caught the wave in the race to succeed Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy.

In the end, a campaign that first seemed to lack drama and star power was the most important and intensely covered political story in the country. And while they were certainly not alone, the press never saw it coming.

These are some of the findings in a new study produced by Boston University and the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism about how newspapers covered the Massachusetts special election to fill the seat created by Kennedy's death. The study covered two time periods. The first was the Democratic and Republican primary races from September 1-December 8, 2009. The second was the final two weeks of the general election campaign from January 6-19, 2010, when the media began to sense there was an actual contest for the seat.



That second period began one day after a Rasmussen Report's poll that showed the overwhelming Republican underdog, Scott Brown, climbing to within single digits (nine points) of Martha Coakley. That poll, perhaps more than anything else, signaled that a possible upset was brewing and galvanized both the media and political worlds.

Brown's January 19 victory was seen as such a stunning national bellwether that it was the second-biggest story in the national media the week of January 18-24. But it followed a primary season that was largely static and devoid of drama. A cautious Coakley

campaign outdistanced three challengers on the Democratic side, and in a race that got scant media attention, Brown defeated a marginal candidate in a landslide.

To understand how the campaign played out in the press, the study examined how the two newspapers in Boston—The Boston Globe and the Boston Herald—covered the race both in their news and opinion pages. It also examined how the national print media covered the race by examining the coverage by the Associated Press and the New York Times.

Among the findings:

- The media, even locally, were utterly surprised by the support for Scott Brown. He was barely covered in the primaries. Brown got far less coverage than any of the four top Democrats and only moderately more coverage (8%) than ex-Congressman Joseph Kennedy (4%), who never entered the race. In addition, there were only about 70 stories about the general election in the month after the primary before the extent of Brown's surge became known.
- In the two weeks after the Rasmussen poll, coverage picked up frantically. The New York Times and Associated Press produced almost twice as many stories in final the two weeks from January 6-19 as they did in the entire three months from September 1-December 8. Locally, nearly one-quarter of all the Boston Globe's election coverage occurred in the final two weeks. Herald coverage accelerated further, with nearly 40% of all its campaign stories published in that period.
- The depiction of the players shifted just as dramatically. Democrat Martha Coakley went from being portrayed as a cautious but competent and clean politician to an incompetent bumbler. In the primaries, positive coverage outweighed negative coverage of her 45% to 27%. In the final two weeks of the campaign, those numbers became a virtual reverse image, 27% positive, 42% negative. Conversely, Scott Brown went from receiving a polite but dismissive portrayal of a good looking non-contender to a surging populist star, with positive stories in the general election outweighing negative ones by more than 2 to 1.
- There were big differences between the two major papers in Boston, particularly in the tone of candidate coverage. In the primaries, both papers endorsed the Democrat who was treated most favorably in their pages—Michael Capuano in the Herald and Alan Khazei in the Globe. In the general election, the Herald treated Brown much more favorably (43% positive and 17% negative) than the Globe did (26% positive and 29% negative). The Globe's tone on Coakley (38% positive and 29% negative) was much more positive than the Herald's (14% positive, 63% negative).
- One reason the press may have missed what was occurring in the state and how the race would eventually play out is that the papers rarely ventured outside of the city of Boston. In the primary election, only 2% of the stories bore a dateline from

a Massachusetts location other than Boston. In the general election, that number grew to 6%, but that is still less than the 10% of stories with either a New York or Washington dateline. That data at least raises the possibility that some of Brown's momentum went undetected because reporters weren't getting around the state on a regular basis.

- Following intense initial interest, it became clear that the national media, and to some extent local media, turned their attention to other matters once some well-known personalities—such as Joseph Kennedy and ex-Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling—decided not to run. Indeed, the No. 1 topic of all media coverage of the primary from September 1-December 8 involved speculation over who would run, accounting for 20% of all of the primary campaign stories.

Trajectory of the Coverage

The Primary Campaign

A look at the trajectory of the coverage of the Senate race shows a kind of roller coaster ride of media attention that made this initially, the race that almost wasn't.

Back in early September, the national and local press seemed geared up for a star-studded battle to succeed Kennedy. Early speculation centered around a number of high-profile candidates who might enter the race including: Ted Kennedy's nephew and former Massachusetts Congressman Joe Kennedy; former George W. Bush chief of staff Andrew Card; and ex-Red Sox pitcher and "bloody sock" hero of the 2004 post-season Curt Schilling.

Between September 1 and September 12, for instance, the New York Times ran seven stories about the race. In the next three months before the December 8 primary, it published only three more. Eight of those 10 Times stories, moreover, dealt with the issue of decisions by candidates on whether to run.

An examination of Associated Press stories appearing in any newspaper in the country as measured by the Nexis database, found something similar. Fully 13 of the 23 AP stories that were found ran between September 1 and September 12. And 18 of those stories also focused on the question of who was getting in the race and who was not.

Indeed, the question of who would run was a subject that dominated all the early coverage of the campaign examined in this study. A third of all stories written about the race from September 1 to December 8 appeared in September, and a solid majority of these, 57%, concerned speculation about the field of candidates.

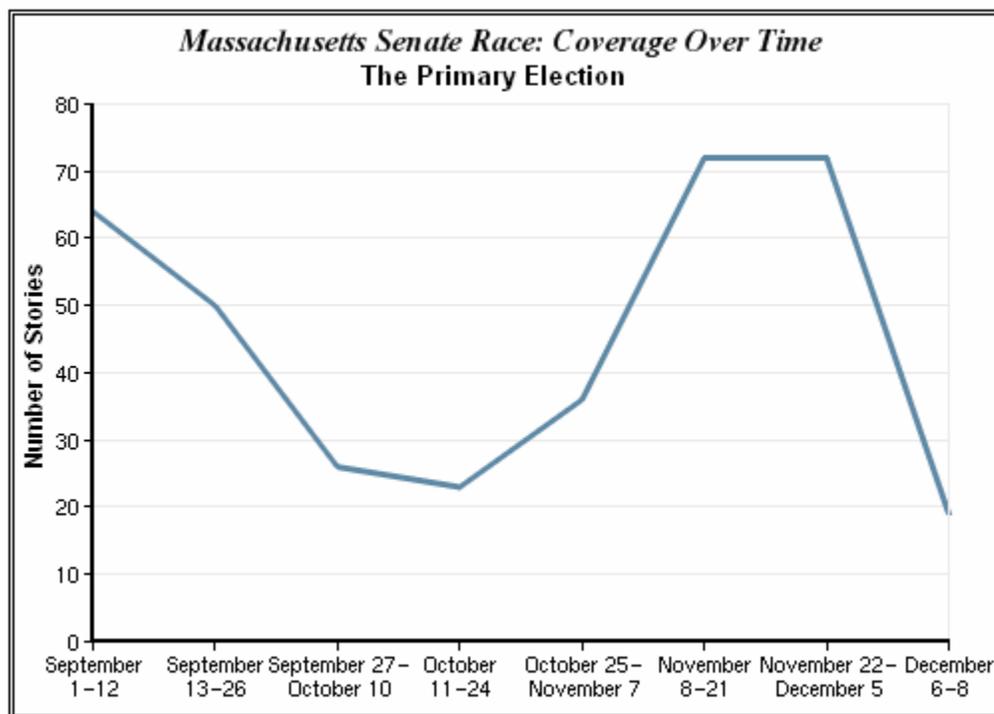
By the time it was over, one out of every five stories about the primary campaign had focused on who would run, a subject that was effectively put to rest by October 1. That accounted for 20% of the Herald's primary campaign coverage and 11% of the Globe's.

There were 16 stories in which Joseph Kennedy, who never entered the race, was a significant newsmaker. There were 10 stories about Curt Schilling, who indicated on his blog that he might run, though it wasn't clear how serious he was. And there were seven stories involving former George W. Bush chief of staff Andrew Card, also an ex-member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

Those three non-candidates combined for more primary season coverage than Scott Brown, the Republican nominee and eventual winner, who was a significant factor in 28 stories.

After the field of candidates was settled in late September without the celebrated figures involved, there was a measurable lull in the coverage for six weeks. In the interval between September 27 and November 7, less than a quarter (23%) of the total primary coverage was published.

The media did not pay significant attention to the primary race again until the final month, when coverage again intensified. Fully 45% of all the stories about the primary race appeared from November 8 through primary day, December 8, and virtually all of it was produced by the Globe and Herald.



If September's coverage was overwhelmingly focused on which hats would be tossed into the ring, the candidate debates were the top story in two other months of primary coverage. They accounted for 21% of the somewhat scant coverage in October and 30% of the coverage in the beginning of December leading up to the vote.

In November, the leading story was the one policy issue that really emerged in the campaign narrative, the health care debate, which accounted for 20% of the stories that month. That was followed by attention to endorsements of candidates, which accounted for another 15%.

General Election

Following a period of more intense coverage at the end of the primary campaign, the media fell into a virtual blackout period, given the general consensus that Martha Coakley would cruise to an easy victory over Scott Brown.

For the month-long interval from December 9 until January 5, the Globe, Herald, New York Times and the Associated Press combined to publish only 68 articles and columns about the race. Clearly the press did not foresee the dramatic turn the campaign would take.

Coverage Over Time: The General	
	<u>Number of Stories</u>
December 9, 2009 - January 5, 2010	68
January 6 - 12, 2010	47
January 13 - 19, 2010	148

Two days after the primaries, for example, a December 10 Boston Globe column lamented how lackluster the ensuing race and general election would be, speculating that snow and the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday would keep most voters away from the polls on January 19.

The same day, the Herald ran a column suggesting that perhaps Brown should lower his sights and aim to be Massachusetts attorney general.

However, the media narrative and the pace of coverage changed dramatically with about two weeks left to go.

After the New Year, Brown began to gain momentum. On January 4, he got a much-publicized endorsement from 2008 GOP presidential candidate and Arizona Senator John McCain. In a Herald interview published on January 4, Massachusetts' Republican National Committeeman Ron Kaufman foreshadowed a key dynamic of the campaign.

“There’s a huge anger out there,” he said. “If you can tap into that, nothing is more important than that, politically speaking.”

Then came a crucial moment. A poll by Rasmussen Reports published on January 5 showed that Brown trailed Coakley by single digits, only 9 points, a much closer race than previously thought. The Herald quoted Rasmussen President Scott Rasmussen saying, “It has nothing to do with Brown and everything to do with the political environment we’re seeing nationally.”

Five days later, The Boston Globe released its own poll that still showed Coakley ahead by 15 points. But by then, faced with a suddenly competitive race with major national

implications—and with a potential Brown victory denying Democrats a veto-proof majority in the Senate and threatening to derail health care reform—coverage ramped up.

Indeed, during the final two weeks of the campaign, the four outlets studied published a total of 195 stories about the race, nearly three times as many as had been published the entire previous month.

That frenzied pace of coverage in the last two weeks occurred on both the national and local level. The Associated Press ran 41 stories during the final two weeks of the general campaign compared with only 23 stories during the entire three-month primary campaign. And The New York Times published 17 stories compared with only 10 stories during the primary campaign season.

In Boston, the Herald's output grew dramatically. From January 6-19, it published 78 stories, compared with 55 for the final five weeks of the primary campaign (November 1-December 8). The Globe's increase was more moderate; the paper ran 59 stories in the final two weeks of the general campaign, as opposed to 115 during the last five weeks of the primary season (November 1-December 8).

There was even a significant change week to week. There were 47 stories published in the next-to-last week of the general election campaign (January 6-12), a number that skyrocketed to 148 in the final week (January 13-19) as the election became the most important political story in America.

One way of measuring that is PEJ's News Coverage Index. For the week of January 18-24, which included Election Day and the post-mortems, the Massachusetts Senate race was the No. 2 story in the mainstream media, accounting for 21% of the newshole. Only the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti (27%) generated more coverage.

Topics of Coverage

The dynamics of the Massachusetts Senate race changed dramatically from the fall to the winter. What had been a polite primary contest on the Democratic side and a Republican race that garnered minimal attention turned into a heated general election contest between two candidates with major policy disagreements.

Despite that, the focus of coverage did not change markedly from the primary election to the general election.

This study examined that focus two different ways: first by the nominal "topic" of each story—what was being discussed—and also by the "framing" of those topics, or the narrative theme by which the subjects were approached. A debate over domestic policy, for instance, could explore the differences between the candidates on the subject. Or it might be cast in a tactical lens, focusing on the possible political motives for a candidate staking out a particular position. The framing can shape the way audiences respond.

Primary Campaign

When it came to the topics covered during the primary campaign, the question of who would run dominated, accounting for 20% of all the coverage. Endorsements accounted for another 10%, and evaluations of how the candidates performed on the stump—often in closely watched debates—filled another 10%.

In all, politically oriented topics constituted two-thirds (67%) of all the primary coverage.

Two other topics that shed light on candidates—their personal and family lives as well as their records in public life—combined to make up 17% of all the stories.

The primary campaign was not marked by significant discussion of the issues—perhaps because there weren't major disagreements among the top Democratic competitors. All of the coverage even nominally about policy accounted for 14% of stories.

Top Campaign Topics: The Primary		
Percent of Stories		
Political Topics		67.4%
Decisions to Run	20.4	
Strategy, Momentum, Horse Race	16.0	
Endorsements	10.5	
Performance Critiques	9.7	
Fundraising	3.6	
Advertisements	3.3	
Internal Campaign Workings	2.2	
Electoral Calendar	1.1	
Political Topics Other	0.6	
Policy Topics		13.5
Health Care	4.4	
Economy	3.0	
Death Penalty	1.1	
Domestic Policy Other	3.9	
Foreign Policy	1.1	
Public Record Topics		9.4
Public Record	4.7	
Political Affiliations	2.5	
Public Record Other	2.2	
Personal Topics		7.2
Gender	1.9	
Personal Topics Other	5.2	
Other		2.5

The overwhelming majority of those policy issues were domestic, led by health care (about 4% of all stories), a debate that erupted in November after Martha Coakley announced she would not support a health care reform bill that limited coverage of abortion. It proved to be one of the very few policy flashpoints in the Democratic field.

The only other issue to generate even moderate coverage was economics, which accounted for 3% of all of the stories.

Foreign policy topics barely registered on the radar screen, at a combined 1% of the coverage. The only specific overseas hotspot to generate any coverage at all (two stories) was the escalating conflict in Afghanistan.

To some degree, coverage of the primary season was also distinguished by what topics didn't generate much coverage—including some that generally tend to be larger components of the strategic narrative.

Advertising accounted for only 3% of all of the coverage, perhaps because with few exceptions, the campaign ads in this primary election were relatively restrained and light on negativity. Attention to polls, measures of strategic and tactical success that can often

drive a horse-race based media narrative was almost nonexistent here, accounting for less than 1% of the coverage (or one story, which was about a Suffolk University poll.)

General Election

As was the case in the primary election, political topics dominated coverage from January 6-19 as the horse-race and strategic coverage intensified.

Fully 69% of the general campaign stories were about political topics (it had been 67% during the primaries). The specific focus of these political topics was slightly different, however. About a third (32%) of all stories during the general election were about the horse race, twice the percentage in the primary campaign (16%). During the final two weeks of the race, a number of prominent national politicians, including Barack Obama, Rudy Giuliani, John McCain, and Bill Clinton came to the state to make final pushes for their prospective candidates. And endorsements were a bigger part of the story (15%) in the general election than in the primary (10%).

Top Campaign Topics: The General		
Percent of Stories		
Political Topics		69.2%
Strategy, Momentum, Horse Race	31.8	
Endorsements	14.9	
Performance Critiques	10.8	
Advertisements	4.6	
Poll Focused	2.6	
Fundraising	1.0	
Political Topics Other	3.6	
Policy Topics		15.9%
Health Care	6.2	
Abortion	2.6	
Taxes	1.0	
Social Issues	1.0	
Domestic Terrorism	1.0	
Domestic Policy Other	4.1	
Public Record Topics		6.2%
Political Affiliations	2.6	
Public Record	1.5	
Public Record Other	2.1	
Personal Topics		1.5%
Other		7.2%

The general election also saw a moderate increase in the percentage of stories that were focused on domestic policy issues, largely because of speculation, which in the end turned out to be wrong, about how the outcome of the Senate race might kill health care reform. During the final weeks of the campaign, 16% of the stories were about domestic policy topics, compared with 12% during the primaries. Health care was the issue that drew the most attention, as Brown made his opposition to Obama's health care reform plan a centerpiece of his campaign. More than a third of that policy coverage, or fully 6% of the stories during the final weeks, was about that issue.

Other aspects of the campaign that generated little attention during the primaries also got largely ignored in the final stages of the general campaign. Only 1% of the stories focused on the campaign fundraising, despite large amounts of money being donated to both campaigns from other states. And there were no stories in the study that centered on foreign policy issues.

Frame of Coverage

Then there is the more subtle issue of how the coverage was framed, or the narrative that the journalists build around.

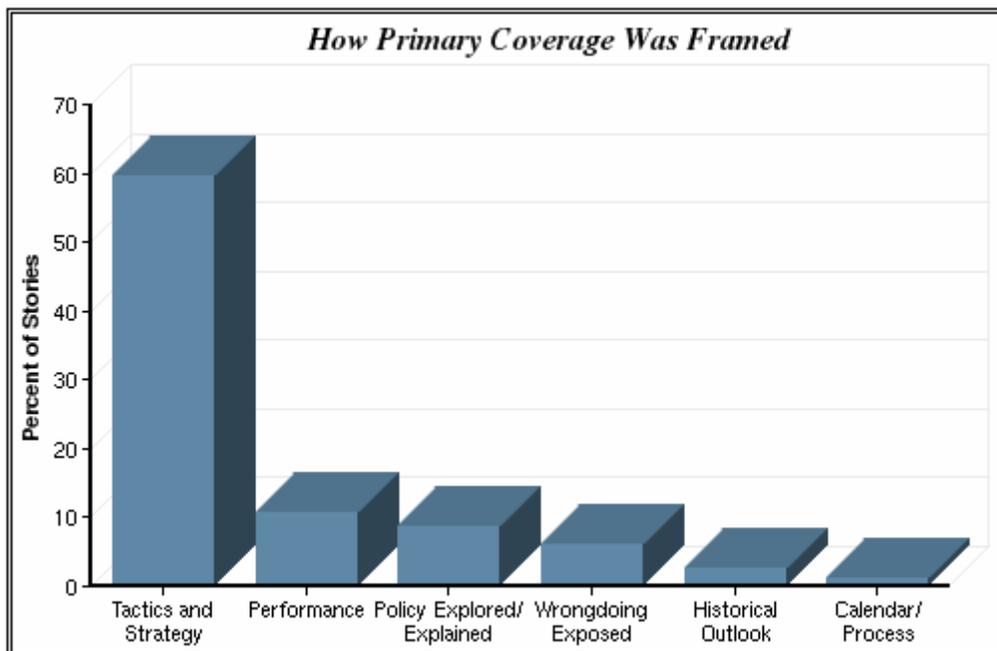
Here, tactics and strategy loomed even larger, policy shrunk even further and evaluation of a candidates' performances grew somewhat.

The Primary Campaign

From September 1-December 8, fully 60% of all primary stories were written through a tactical narrative lens. That was more than six times the amount of stories about policy (9%).

The national media outlets again stood out for their single-minded coverage. All of the primary campaign stories in both the New York Times and Associated Press followed the tactics and strategy framework.

The horse-race frame also was the dominant aspect of Globe and Herald coverage, accounting for more than half of the stories in each paper, albeit slightly more in the Globe (58%) than in the Herald (52%).



A look at story framing over time also reinforces the finding that the early coverage was dominated by speculation over who would enter the contest. In September, before the field settled, fully 79% of all of the stories produced featured the politics and strategy frame, while the policy frame accounted for about 3% of the stories.

Horse race coverage diminished significantly in October (44%) and the first eight days of December (49%) when the performance frame comprised 25% and 26% of the coverage respectively as the media focused on candidate debates.

November was the one month when attention to the policy frame exceeded 10% of the coverage. The 17% of overall stories from that perspective in that month reflect the debate over health care reform legislation, which grabbed attention.

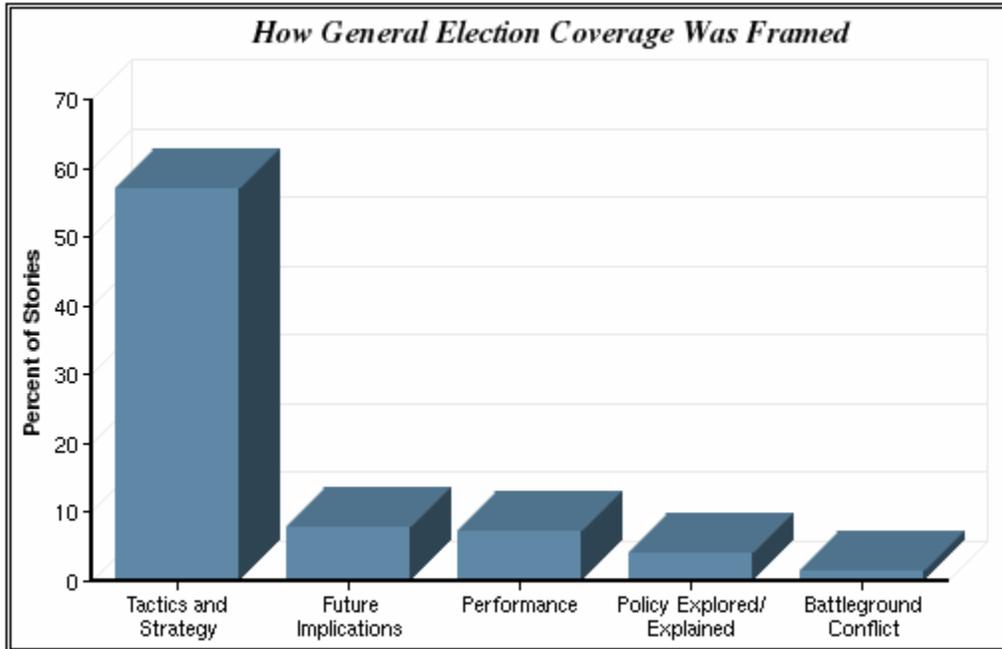
One other framing finding during the primary suggests this was not a campaign marked by much journalistic vetting of candidates' claims, either on the stump or in advertisements. The reality check frame, which would cover that kind of aggressive journalism, accounted for 1% of the stories examined.

General Election

During the two weeks of general election coverage studied, almost the same percentage of stories (57%) were written through a tactical narrative lens as during the primary (60%).

The number of stories framed around policy differences actually decreased from January 6-19 compared with the primary campaign (4%, down from 9%). Even though Brown and Coakley had significant disagreements on key issues, most of the news coverage about those differences discussed their impact on the election and was conveyed through a political frame.

For example, a January 13 article in the Globe was titled, "Abortion takes stage in Senate race; Candidates air attack ads in final week before special election." While the topic of the story was the candidates' position on abortion, the frame of the story was how each candidate was attacking the other's position in the hopes that it would give them an advantage with voters.



There was another significant change in the framing of stories from the primary season to the general election. During the last weeks of the general campaign, there were many more stories framed about the future implications of the election. Almost 8% of the general election stories were framed in that manner, compared with 0.3% during the primaries. Most of these were focused on the impact of the outcome on the Obama administration and the health care reform effort.

Dateline

One other variable reveals some hints about why the print press, both nationally and locally, may have been so caught off guard by the insurgent feeling about the Democratic Party and the rising support for Brown.

In both the primary and general election campaigns, the dateline, or the location from which a story originated, was overwhelmingly oriented toward Boston, the biggest city, capital and media center of Massachusetts—and also among the most Democratic cities in the state. There were not many stories that originated from the other 350 municipalities in the commonwealth.

In the primary period from September 1-December 8, fully 96% of the campaign stories carried Boston datelines, compared with 2% from other communities in the state and another 2% from

Datelines of Stories: General vs. Primary		
	Percent of Stories	
	<u>General Election</u>	<u>Primary Election</u>
Boston, Massachusetts	84.1%	95.6%
Massachusetts Other	5.6	2.2
Washington, D.C.	5.1	0.3
New York City	5.1	1.9

the national media capital of New York.

In the two-week period of the general election studied—January 6-19—those numbers shifted modestly, with 84% of the stories originating from Boston. The number of stories from other Massachusetts cities and towns edged up to 6%, presumably as reporters began following the candidates more regularly in their travels.

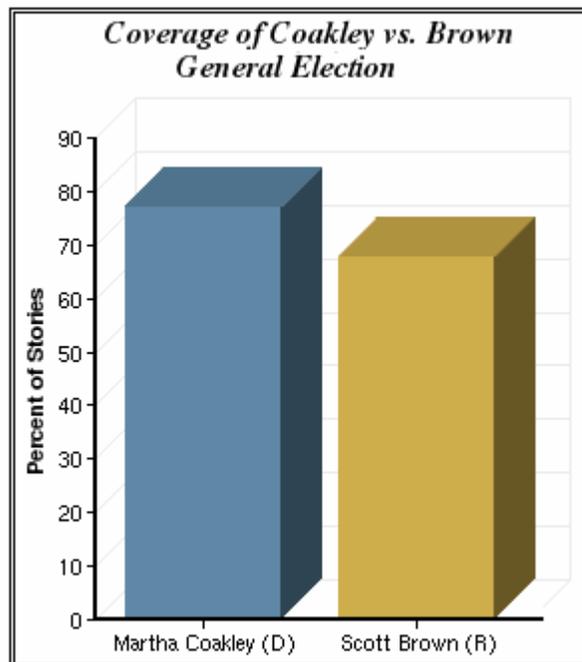
Yet the biggest increase occurred in two major cities outside of the state as stories with a New York or Washington dateline combined to account for 10% of the coverage—a sure sign that the race had been nationalized and was attracting widespread interest outside of Massachusetts.

Does the dateline breakdown tell us anything important about the coverage? It's difficult to draw firm lessons. But the relative scarcity of datelines from Massachusetts communities outside Boston does at least raise the possibility that the centralized geographic coverage made it more difficult to detect Brown's building momentum at the grassroots level, something that might have been more readily apparent if journalists had explored more of the state.

Amount of Coverage by Candidate

In both the primary and general election cycles examined in this study, Democrat Martha Coakley was the leading newsmaker. But the bigger story was Republican Scott Brown's emergence from near obscurity to a major newsmaker in the course of a few days.

In the final two weeks of the general election campaign, Brown was a significant presence in 68% of the 195 stories and opinion pieces studied in this report. (To register as a significant presence, someone has to appear in at least 25% of that story.) That still lagged slightly behind Coakley, who was a significant presence in 77% of the stories from January 6-19. But it marks a dramatic increase in coverage for someone who was almost an afterthought during primary season. And it also suggests that in the media narrative at least, this race was less about him than about Coakley, the Democrats and Obama.



From September 1-December 8, Brown was a significant figure in only 8% of the primary campaign stories (28 stories in all). One reason clearly was the perception that a Republican couldn't win a Senate race

in Massachusetts. Another was the lack of a competitive primary race on the GOP side. Brown won 89% of the primary vote against perennial candidate Jack E. Robinson, who himself was a significant factor in a mere 1% of the primary stories.

It was a different story in the Democratic primary fight, which attracted far more media attention.

Who Received the Most Primary Coverage?		
	<u>Number of Stories</u>	<u>Percent of Stories</u>
Martha Coakley	183	50.6%
Michael Capuano	158	43.6
Stephen Pagliuca	128	35.4
Alan Khazei	100	27.6
Scott Brown	28	7.7
Jack E. Robinson	5	1.4
Joe L. Kennedy	1	0.3
<i>Candidate is present in 25% or more of the story</i>		

Coakley was the front runner from the start and the eventual winner in the multi-candidate Democratic field, with 47% of the votes cast. She received the most coverage of any candidate in the newspapers and wire copy studied. Of the 362 news stories, editorials and op-eds produced, she was a significant

figure in 51%, or 183 of them, more than any other candidate.

But besides Coakley, three other Democratic candidates received a substantial amount of coverage from September 1-December 8.

Michael Capuano, who finished second in the race with 28% of the vote, received the next most coverage, appearing as a significant figure in 44% of the primary campaign stories.

Stephen Pagliuca, who finished fourth with 12% of the vote, came next, a significant newsmaker in 35% of the stories. Alan Khazei, who narrowly edged out Pagliuca in the vote (13%), received somewhat less coverage, registering as a significant newsmaker in 28% of the primary coverage.

One candidate who was largely ignored by the media during the primary campaign fared little better in the general election—even though he was still on the ballot. Libertarian Party hopeful Joe L. Kennedy (no relation to the famous family) was a significant factor in less than 1% of the primary coverage and did only slightly better (2%) from January 6-19.

Tone of Coverage by Candidate

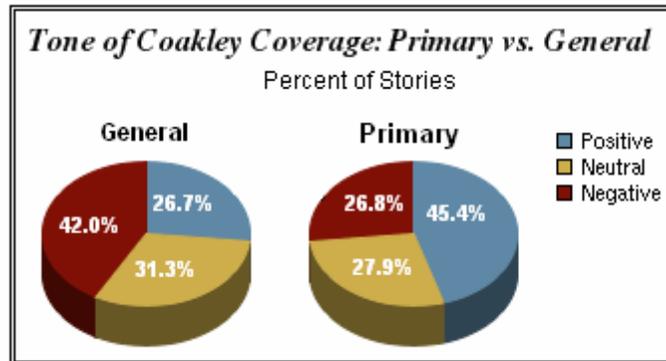
In the final two crucial weeks of the general election campaign, as Scott Brown came from behind to defeat Martha Coakley, the tone of coverage of the two candidates became a study in contrasts—and a portrait of how the press can turn on candidates that it once portrayed quite differently.

To assess the tone of coverage in this report, each story in which a candidate was a significant figure was examined for whether those assertions in total were predominately

negative, positive or mixed. For a story to be categorized as clearly positive, positive assertions about the candidate would have to outnumber negative ones by a factor of 1.5 to 1. For a story to be negative, the reverse would have to be the case. Any story that did not meet that threshold, or where the assertions were largely balanced, was categorized as neutral.

For Coakley, who had received largely positive coverage during her Democratic primary win, the tone of her coverage went decidedly south. Fully 42% of the stories and opinion pieces about her from January 6-19 were negative, compared with only 27% positive and 31% that were neutral.

Conversely, in that same period Scott Brown generated far more upbeat coverage as 42% of the stories about him were positive, compared with only 16% that were negative. Another 42% were neutral. He was clearly winning the media narrative and by a wide margin.



Those same differences in tone are closely reflected in the coverage of the dominant subject during the general election campaign—political topics. Indeed, 29% of political stories about Coakley were positive, 43% were negative and 29% were neutral, while 46% of Brown’s political stories were positive, compared with 15% negative and 39% neutral.

A PEJ study of the final weeks of the [2008 presidential campaign](#) when Barack Obama generated significantly more positive coverage than John McCain, indicated that the candidate who is doing better strategically—the one perceived to be winning or gaining—is likely to receive the more flattering coverage. That seems to be what happened in the final days of the Massachusetts campaign as well.

The tone of general election coverage in the New York Times and Associated Press supports that idea. While coverage of Coakley in the last two weeks of the general campaign was mixed in both the Times and AP, not one of the nearly 40 stories about Brown by those two outlets in that period was coded as negative in this study.

In those final weeks, Coakley, who had cruised to the Democratic nomination with a cautious and careful campaign, found the narrative turning against her as it became apparent she was squandering what had once been a 30-point lead in the polls. Some of that coverage was driven by unforced errors on her part.

Between January 6-12, a Coakley ad misspelled “Massachusetts” and another showed the destroyed World Trade Center towers as a symbol of Wall Street greed. While trying to make the point that the war on terror had moved beyond its original borders, she claimed

there were no more terrorists in Afghanistan, despite a recent spike in violence. After a fundraiser in Washington, D.C., one of her aides appeared to push a reporter for the conservative Weekly Standard to the ground as he attempted to question her.

Perhaps more unforgivable, in the heart of Red Sox nation, was that Coakley called ex-Sox pitching star Curt Schilling “another Yankee fan” during a radio interview. She claimed to have been making a joke, but the media and Schilling pounced, painting her as out of touch with one of the most common threads in the Bay State: its beloved baseball team.

The fact that Coakley appeared at fewer public events than Brown and had taken a six-day break in December also became part of the storyline. The Herald called the time off an “ignorant respite” that allowed Brown to “...define himself and to define her.” Coakley also snapped when a reporter asked about her campaign style, mocking the idea of a candidate shaking hands in the cold outside Fenway Park. This was a jab at Brown, who pressed the flesh outside a Boston Bruins outdoor hockey game at Fenway Park on News Year’s Day. The episode prompted a Globe op-ed to call her “sneering and elitist.”

When Coakley claimed to have campaigned thoroughly across the state, Globe columnist Brian McGrory wondered if “it was under the cover of darkness, under an assumed name.”

The Herald was even harsher. Columnist Margery Eagan called Coakley “...a lackluster, uptight bore” running a “let-them-eat-cake” campaign. Columnist Howie Carr repeatedly called the Democrat a “moonbat” and opened one of his pieces pleading with anyone to “buy Martha Coakley a clue.”

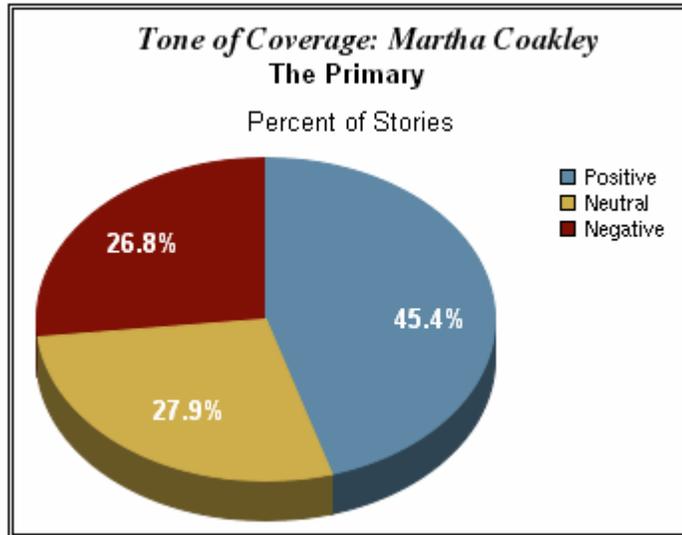
During a series of debates, Brown seemed to best Coakley at several key moments. In a January 8 face-off, Brown parried Coakley’s attempts to tie him to George W. Bush and Dick Cheney by saying “... you’re not running against them. I’m Scott Brown from Wrentham, and you’re running against me.” In the final debate on January 11, when Brown was asked if he would vote to block health care as the successor to the senator who it made it his signature issue, Brown responded, “It’s not the Kennedys’ seat. It’s not the Democrats’ seat. It’s the people’s seat.”

That was in keeping with Brown’s populist persona on the campaign trail, something he continually stressed by noting that he was from Wrentham (a small town southwest of Boston) and drove a truck.

And by the second week in January, polls either had Brown in a virtual tie with Coakley or even inching ahead.

Tone for Coakley and Brown in the Primary Campaign

Technically, Brown's positive coverage in the final weeks of the general election campaign was similar to the tone of his primary coverage. From September 1-December 8, a full 54% of his coverage was positive, compared with only 7% negative and 39%



mixed. But he generated so little attention in that period that those numbers don't tell us much.

But an examination of Coakley's primary coverage illustrates the dramatic downward spiral. From September 1-December 8, fully 45% of her coverage was positive in tone, compared with 27% that was negative, while 28% was mixed or neutral.

At least some of that positive coverage came from the horse-race orientation of the coverage and the sense that she was likely to win the nomination. But even then, the press generally portrayed Coakley as technocratic and competent if stiff and somewhat short on charisma, a portrait that in some ways foreshadowed her shortcomings in the general election campaign.

"A Charisma Shortage," read a Globe headline on November 20. "Caution, ambition mix in Coakley's methodical journey," read another three days before that.

As Globe columnist Adrian Walker put it November 20 in response to a Coakley speech, it "was all polished and professional, if devoid of sizzle; even the applause seemed dutiful. In that sense, it reflected a campaign that has always felt a tad mechanical."

Tone for the Other Democratic Primary Candidates

In the Democratic primary fight, Coakley did not generate the most positive coverage. That honor went to former community organizer Alan Khazei. Congressman Michael Capuano's coverage was more mixed, but his positive coverage exceeded his negative coverage. The candidate who had the toughest run was Stephen Pagliuca, the only Democratic competitor who was depicted more negatively than positively.

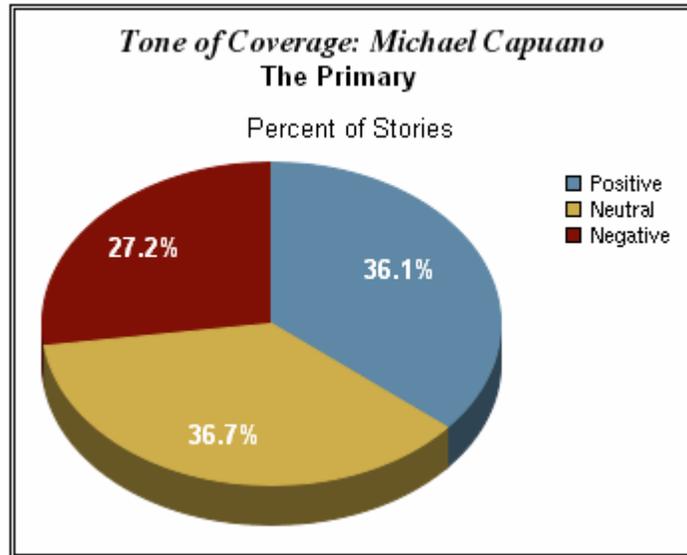
Michael Capuano

The media portrayed Congressman Michael Capuano, the scrappy ex-mayor of Somerville, as a man with a mercurial temper who prided himself on his local origins, working class roots and street smarts.

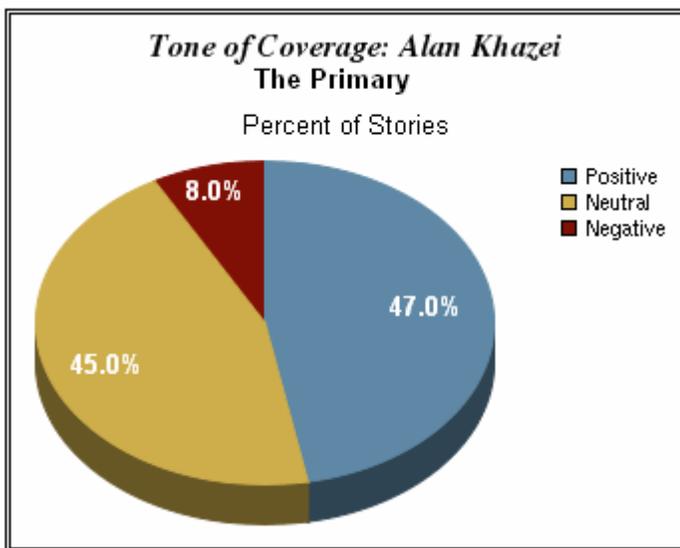
As the race went on, some press coverage described this as inauthentic in light of his Dartmouth education, his wealth, expense account trips to Europe and his establishment record. He was the biggest Kennedy loyalist in the race, portraying himself as Ted's natural successor.

In the end his coverage was more mixed than anything else, 37% neutral or mixed vs. 36% positive and 27% negative.

“The blunt, plainspoken former mayor of Somerville, has blue-collar roots...but an Ivy League pedigree after attending Dartmouth College,” the Associated Press described him on September 16.



Even the Herald endorsement in the primary had a qualified character in tone. “The reality is that as smart—and committed—as the Democratic contenders for U.S. Senate are, no flesh-and-blood human being can duplicate the four decades of experience the late Sen. Ted Kennedy brought to the job,” the Herald wrote on December 1.



Alan Khazei

Portrayed as a quixotic above-the-fray idealist, an intellectual and humanist, Alan Khazei was, by the numbers at least, the race's media darling.

He was also the closest thing to an Obama Democrat, a former community organizer with a “yes we can” audacity, a grassroots organization, popularity with young people and outsider status. The Brookline native and Harvard graduate, Khazei made his name

politically by creating the nonprofit program City Year, which deploys teenagers and young adults to community service work, such as mentoring school children.

It translated into clearly positive press. Overall, only 8% of the stories involving Khazei had a clearly negative tone. By contrast, 47% of his stories were clearly positive, and 45% were mixed or neutral.

Some of that coverage reflected amusement toward Khazei’s idealism. During a debate, Herald columnist Margery Eagan wrote on Oct. 27, “Khazei showed his quick Harvard brain and passionate outrage, particularly when he called on citizens ‘to rise up’ and join his crusade against casino gambling. They won’t but it was nice to hear him ask.”

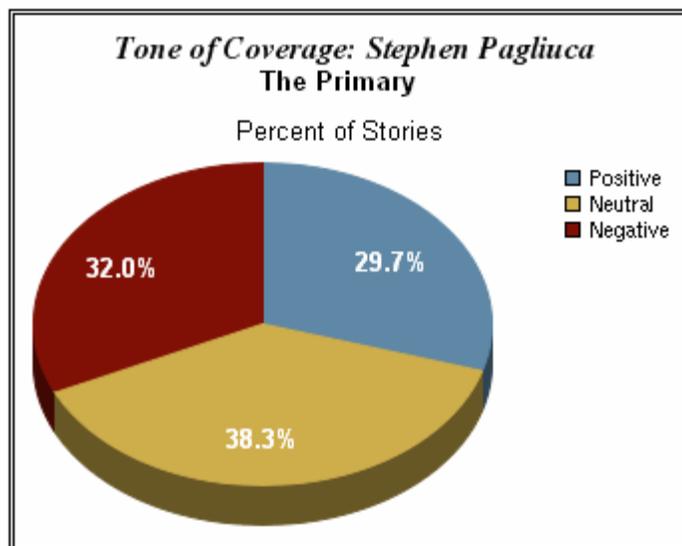
But some, such as a Globe piece about Khazei’s fundraising in Hollywood, were more strictly positive. “Alan Khazei clearly has the Hollywood buzz factor,” Matt Viser’s piece read, quoting the creator of the TV shows “Lost” and “Fringe” about the “urgent alarm” to get Khazei elected.

Stephen Pagliuca

If Khazei got the best press, Harvard Business School graduate Stephen Pagliuca, the millionaire co-owner of the Boston Celtics, got the worst, though it was not lopsidedly negative.

In the end, 32% of stories involving the businessman were negative, while 30% were positive. Most, 38%, were mixed or neutral.

But reading the stories carefully, Pagliuca was at times portrayed (especially in the Herald) as a dilettante millionaire seeking the Senate seat like a new toy. The media frequently drew attention to the apparent disconnect between his liberal populist program and his many years at Bain Capital, a private equity firm in Boston, his support for his former Bain partner Mitt Romney in the race for President and his past as a “corporate raider” responsible for factory buy-outs and closures. Because he funded his campaign largely from his own personal fortune, he got the nickname “Money Pags.”



Some of the Herald news reporting on Pagliuca read like a kind of snarky code. “Multimillionaire Stephen Pagliuca—who bought the Boston Celtics and toyed with the idea of taking over the Boston Globe—yesterday addressed concerns he’s a dilettante

trying to buy the seat vacated by Sen. Edward Kennedy,” Edward Mason reported in the Herald on September 18.

Some Globe coverage was not that different. “Latest megamillionaire eager to start his political career at the top,” declared a Globe article on October 3.

Herald vs. Globe

The Boston Globe and Boston Herald have more often than not been defined by their differences—broadsheet versus tabloid, liberal opinion pages versus conservative opinion pages and paper-of-record versus feisty underdog.

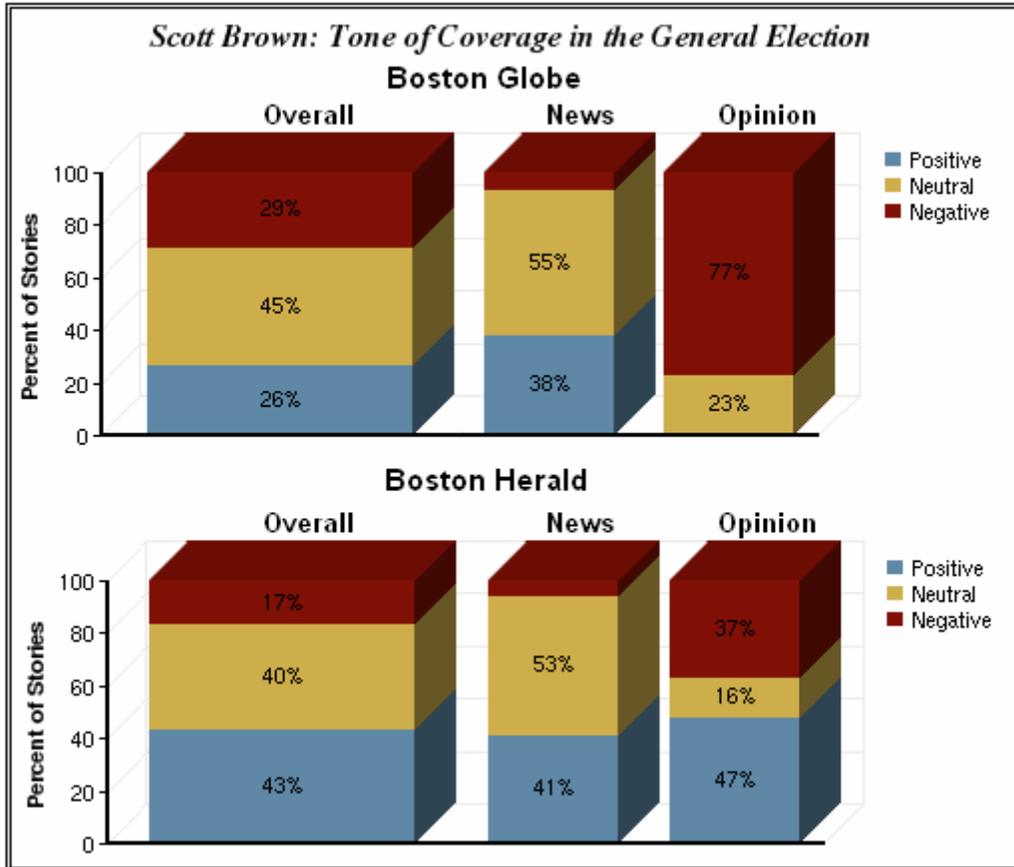
This study also found numerous differences in the coverage of the race between the two papers.

- During the primary season, neither paper devoted anywhere near the percentage of its coverage to the question of who was running as the AP and New York Times did. However, the Herald (20% of its primary stories) followed that theme more closely than the Globe (11%).
- The Globe, however, devoted considerably more attention than the Herald to one major aspect of the campaign: 14% of its stories during the primaries and general election were about the candidate debates, compared with 9% for the Herald.
- For the primary and general election campaigns combined, the Globe produced moderately more coverage on domestic policy issues (15%) than the Herald (12%). During the last two weeks of the general election campaign, however, the Globe far outstripped the Herald in domestic policy coverage—24% to 9%.
- The intensity of coverage for both papers picked up from January 6-19. But in the final week (January 13-19) of the general election campaign, the Herald flooded the zone with coverage, producing 58 stories on the race. That substantially outpaced the Globe, which produced 37 stories.

Globe and Herald Differences in the Tone of Candidate Coverage

But nowhere were the differences between the two papers more evident than in the tone of coverage toward the candidates, something that emerged in the primaries but became even clearer in the final two weeks of the general election.

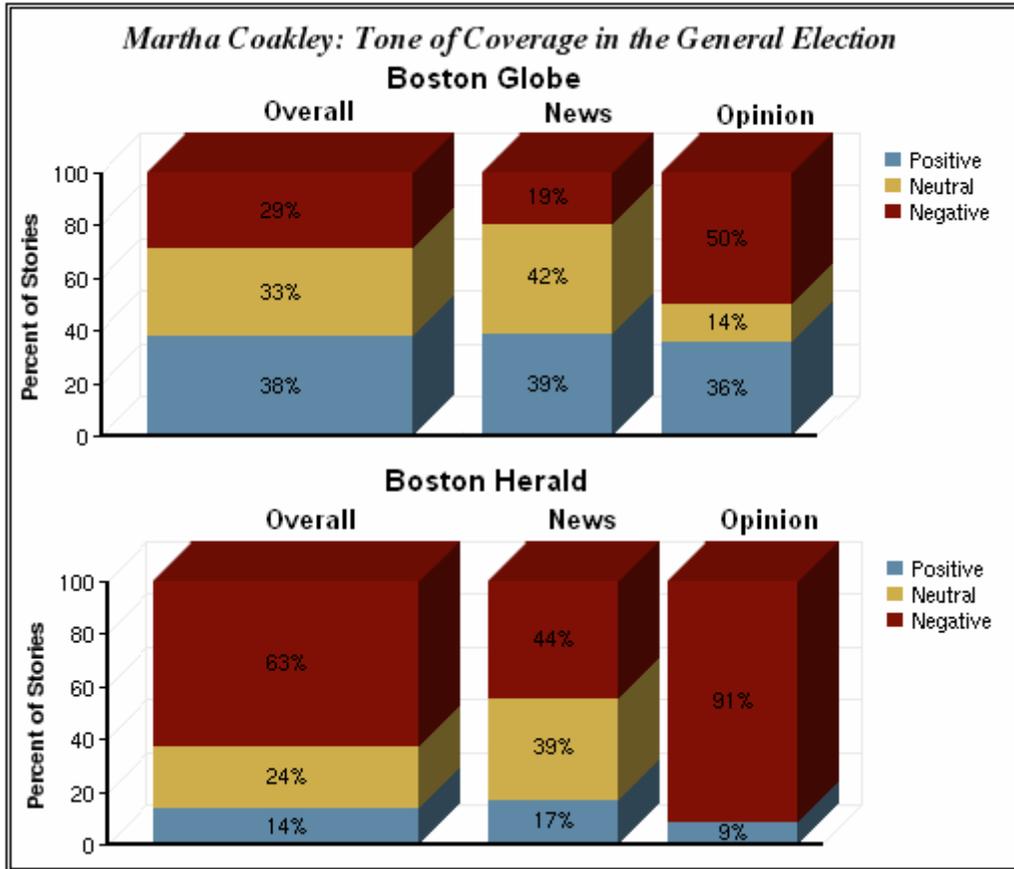
From January 6-19, the Herald’s coverage was much more positive for Brown than it was for Coakley. For Brown, 43% of the stories were positive, 17% negative and 40% neutral, compared with 14% positive for Coakley, 63% negative and 24% neutral.



The Globe, on the other hand, was more positive for Coakley (38% positive) than Brown (26%), while both candidates received the same amount of negative stories at 29%. Another 33% of the Globe stories about Coakley were neutral, compared with 45% neutral for Brown.

Some of the differences in tone for the papers can be explained by the opinion and editorial pages. The op-eds and editorials in the Globe about Coakley were more negative than positive (36% positive, 50% negative). But she still fared better on those pages than Brown (0% positive, 77% negative). The opinion pieces in the Herald were more supportive of Brown (47% positive, 37% negative, compared with 9% positive, 91% negative for Coakley).

But it was the news reporting that accounted for most of the differences between the papers.



For the Globe, both Coakley (39%) and Brown (38%) received about the same amount of positive news reports, although Coakley generated more negative stories (19%) than Brown (7%).

In the Herald, however, the straight news reporting was far more favorable to Brown (41% positive, 6% negative) than to Coakley (17% positive, 44% negative). That dramatic disparity may reflect to some extent the tabloid tradition of inserting more voice and advocacy in the news pages.

Herald columnist Margery Eagan described some of the motivation behind those differences when she appeared on CNN’s “Reliable Sources” on January 24.

“I would say my paper was pretty much cheerleading for Scott Brown,” Eagan told host Howard Kurtz. “We’re the conservative paper in town, and the Globe, I think, was...evenhanded somewhat, but I think that they were definitely cheerleading for Martha Coakley, absolutely. They’re the liberal paper in town. That’s the way it always is.”

Tone Differences in the Primary Campaign

The Globe and Herald also provided different portraits of the candidates during the primary campaign from September 1-December 8. And to some degree, both papers' coverage was in line with the choices their editorial boards would make about the candidates.

The Herald, for instance, would end up endorsing Michael Capuano in the Democratic primary, and his overall coverage in the paper was noticeably less negative than in the Globe, and more neutral. While 35% of the stories about Capuano were positive in both papers, only 19% of Herald stories about him were clearly negative, while 33% were clearly negative in the Globe.

That pattern was even truer of coverage of Alan Khazei, the candidate that the Globe endorsed. Fully 55% of stories about him in the Globe were positive in tone, and only 3% were negative. In the Herald, by contrast, stories were less than half as likely to be positive (23%), while 54% were mixed, and 23% were negative.

Meanwhile, Pagliuca didn't fare particularly well in either paper, but the Herald's coverage (21% positive and 41% negative) was less flattering toward the wealthy candidate. The tone was considerably more mixed in the Globe, where positive stories narrowly outweighed negative ones 33% to 29%.

There were also significant differences in the papers' treatment of the Democrat who won the primary handily. More than half (52%) of all of the Globe's primary stories about Coakley were positive, compared with only 30% in Herald. And the Herald ran a substantially higher percentage of negative stories (38%) about her than the Globe did (23%).

There is perhaps some irony in how the papers covered the eventual senator, Scott Brown, in the primaries. That is, when they covered him, which was not very often at that point.

Even so, the Globe's primary coverage of the Republican was more favorable (59% positive and 6% negative) than the Herald's (38% positive and 13% negative). But that trend was certainly reversed during the final two weeks of the general election.

Massachusetts Senate Race Methodology

The sample for this study was made up of stories related to the Massachusetts Senate race collected from the LexisNexis database that were published from September 1-December 8, 2009 and January 6-19, 2010.

Sample Design

The sample included all stories about the Senate race available on LexisNexis from four outlets.

Boston Globe
Boston Herald
New York Times
Associated Press

Story Inclusion:

PEJ conducted extensive searches in the LexisNexis database for each outlet in order to gather all of the relevant articles. Stories were collected using a two-step process.

First, broad search terms were used to retrieve a large amount of stories that may have been about the Senate race. The determination was made that it was better to use broader search terms that would result in a larger group of stories to sort through than more detailed search terms that might have resulted in the accidental exclusion of relevant stories.

For the two Boston newspapers, all stories that included the word “Senate” from the dates included in the study were collected. For the two national outlets, the terms “Senate” and “Massachusetts” were used.

In addition, another search was conducted for all four outlets that included the names of all of the prominent candidates who were running (or considered running). This was done to make sure that any stories that focused on a candidate but did not mention the word “Senate” would not have been missed.

Second, members of PEJ’s staff went through each story that was retrieved to determine if it was about the Senate race. A story was considered to be about the race if 50% or more of the text was focused on the campaign. All other stories that were not about the race were then discarded.

This resulted in a sample of 557 stories.

Since the subject of the study was solely the campaign for the Massachusetts Senate seat, stories about the temporary replacement for the position and the rules that governed the process were not included in the sample.

Coding Variables

In addition to housekeeping variables (such as date, source and dateline), each story was coded for the following variables:

- **Story Format** measures the type and origin of stories
- **Big Story** tracks the narrative storylines that were frequently covered throughout the sample period
- **Topic** captures the general subject matter of the story
- **Frame** captures the narrative technique the journalist used to tell the story
- **Figure Presence** determines whether a person was included in 25% or more of a given story
 - Presence was tracked for the following people:
 - Michael Capuano (D)
 - Martha Coakley (D)
 - Alan Khazei (D)
 - Stephen Pagliuca (D)
 - Scott Brown (R)
 - William Coleman (I)
 - Joseph L. Kennedy (I)
 - Jack E. Robinson (R)
 - Stephen Lynch (D)
 - Andrew Card (R)
 - Curt Schilling
 - Ed O'Reilly (D)
 - Joe P. Kennedy II (D)
 - Vicki Kennedy (D)
- **Tone** measures whether a story is constructed in a way, via use of quotes, assertions or innuendo, that results in positive, neutral or negative coverage for a given candidate
 - Tone was tracked for the following candidates:
 - Michael Capuano (D)
 - Martha Coakley (D)
 - Alan Khazei (D)
 - Stephen Pagliuca (D)
 - Scott Brown (R)
 - Jack E. Robinson (R)

Coding for Tone

In coding for tone, PEJ used an established technique to determine whether a story is positive, neutral or negative in coverage for candidates who are present in 25% or more of the story. The unit of measure was the story.

While reading a story, coders tallied up all the comments that have either a negative or positive tone to the reporting. Direct and indirect quotes were counted along with assertions made by journalists themselves.

In order for a story to be coded as either “positive” or “negative,” it must have either 1.5 times the amount of positive comments to negative comments, or 1.5 times the amount of negative comments to positive comments (with an exception for 2 to 3, which is coded as “neutral”). If the headline or lead has a positive or negative tone, it was counted twice into the total value. The first three paragraphs or first four sentences, whichever came first, were also counted twice for tone .

Any story where the ratio of positive to negative comments was less than 1.5 to 1 was considered a “neutral” story.

Coding Team & Process for the Additional Coding

A team of four of PEJ’s experienced coders worked with a coding administrator to complete the coding for this study.

Intercoder testing was conducted for all of the variables used in the study. Each coder was given the same 23 randomly selected stories to make up the intercoder sample.

The percent agreement for the key variables was as follows:

- Format: 88%
- Big Story: 88%
- Topic: 80%
- Frame: 80%
- Presence (all figures combined): 96%
- Tone (all candidates combined): 89%

Topline
Hiding in Plain Sight, From Kennedy to Brown:
Press Coverage of the 2010 Massachusetts Senate Special Election
The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

Number of Stories Per Outlet		
Source	Primary Sept. 1-Dec. 8, 2009	General Jan. 6-19, 2010
NY Times	10	17
Boston Globe	204	59
Boston Herald	125	78
AP	23	41
Total	362	195

Story Topic				
Topic	Primary Sept. 1-Dec. 8, 2009		General Jan. 6-19, 2010	
	# of Stories	% of Stories	# of Stories	% of Stories
Political Topics	244	67.4%	135	69.2
Personal Topics	26	7.2	3	1.5
Domestic Policy	45	12.4	31	15.9
Foreign Policy	4	1.1	0	0
Public Record	34	9.4	12	6.2
Other	9	2.5	14	7.2
Total	362	100	195	100

Frame of News Coverage				
Frame	Primary Sept. 1-Dec. 8, 2009		General Jan. 6-19, 2010	
	# of Stories	% of Stories	# of Stories	% of Stories
Calendar/Process	4	1.1%	2	1.0%
Future Implications	1	0.3	15	7.7
Historical Outlook	9	2.5	1	0.5
Battleground/Conflict	1	0.3	3	1.5
Performance	39	10.8	14	7.2
Policy Explored/Explained	32	8.8	8	4.1
Official Reaction	2	0.6	0	0
Reality Check	3	0.8	2	1.0
Tactics and Strategy	216	59.7	111	56.9
Wrongdoing Exposed	22	6.1	2	1.0
Other	33	9.1	37	19.0
Total	362	100	195	100

Amount of News Coverage Percent of Stories Where Each Candidate is a Significant Presence Primary, Sept. 1-Dec. 8, 2009	
Candidate	% of Stories
Martha Coakley	50.6%
Michael Capuano	43.6
Stephen Pagliuca	35.4
Alan Khazei	27.6
Scott Brown	7.7
Jack E. Robinson	1.4
Joe L. Kennedy (L)	0.3

N = 362

Amount of News Coverage Percent of Stories Where Each Candidate is a Significant Presence General Election, Jan. 6-19, 2010	
Candidate	% of Stories
Martha Coakley	76.9%
Scott Brown	67.7
Joe L. Kennedy (L)	1.5

N = 195

Tone of Coverage for Each Candidate by Type of Story Primary, Sept. 1-Dec. 8, 2009							
Candidate	Tone	Straight news		Opinion		Total	
		# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%
Coakley (D)	Positive	56	45.5%	27	45.0%	83	45.4%
	Neutral	40	32.5	11	18.3	51	27.9
	Negative	27	22.0	22	36.7	49	26.8
	n/a	133		46		179	
Brown (R)	Positive	10	47.6%	5	71.4%	15	53.6%
	Neutral	10	47.6	1	14.3	11	39.3
	Negative	1	4.8	1	14.3	2	7.1
	n/a	235		99		334	
Capuano (D)	Positive	44	41.1%	13	25.5%	57	36.1%
	Neutral	46	43.0	12	23.5	58	36.7
	Negative	17	15.9	26	51.0	43	27.2
	n/a	149		55		204	
Khazei (D)	Positive	27	41.5%	20	57.1%	47	47.0%
	Neutral	36	55.4	9	25.7	45	45.0
	Negative	2	3.1	6	17.1	8	8.0
	n/a	191		71		262	
Pagliuca (D)	Positive	28	32.6%	10	23.8%	38	29.7%
	Neutral	41	47.7	8	19.0	49	38.3
	Negative	17	19.8	24	57.1	41	32.0
	n/a	170		64		234	
Robinson (R)	Positive	0	0%	1	50.0%	1	20.0%
	Neutral	3	100	0	0	3	60.0
	Negative	0	0	1	50.0	1	20
	n/a	253		104		357	

“n/a” indicates that a candidate was not in at least 25% of the story and was not given a tone for that story.

Tone of Coverage for Each Candidate by Type of Story General Election, Jan. 6-19, 2010							
Candidate	Tone	Straight news		Opinion		Total	
		# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%
Coakley (D)	Positive	33	29.7%	7	17.9%	40	26.7%
	Neutral	44	39.6	3	7.7	47	31.3
	Negative	34	30.6	29	74.4	63	42.0
	n/a	32		13		45	
Brown (R)	Positive	46	46.9%	9	26.5%	55	41.7%
	Neutral	48%	49.0	8	23.5	56	42.4
	Negative	4	4.1	17	50.0	21	15.9
	n/a	45		18		63	
Kennedy (L)	Positive	2	66.7%	0		2	66.7%
	Neutral	1	33.3%	0		1	33.3%
	Negative	0	0	0		0	0
	n/a	140		52		192	

“n/a” indicates that a candidate was not in at least 25% of the story and was not given a tone for that story.

Tone for Each Candidate by Story Topic
Primary, Sept. 1-Dec. 8, 2009

		Political Topics		Personal Topics		Domestic Policy		Foreign Policy		Public Record		Other	
Candidate	Tone	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%
Coakley (D)	Positive	66	55.5%	9	56.3%	6	20.7%	0	0%	1	8.3%	1	20.0%
	Neutral	29	24.4	4	25.0	11	37.9	1	50.0	3	25.0	3	60.0
	Negative	24	20.2	3	18.8	12	41.4	1	50.0	8	66.7	1	20.0
	n/a	125		10		16		2		22		4	
Brown (R)	Positive	12	63.2%	1	33.3%	0	0%	0		1	100%	1	50.0%
	Neutral	6	31.6	2	66.7	3	100	0		0	0	0	0
	Negative	1	5.3	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	1	50.0
	n/a	225		23		42		4		33		7	
Capuano (D)	Positive	46	41.4%	5	45.5%	3	13.6%	1	50.0%	2	22.2%	0	0%
	Neutral	35	31.5	3	27.3	14	63.6	1	50.0	2	22.2	3	100
	Negative	30	27.0	3	27.3	5	22.7	0	0	5	55.6	0	0
	n/a	133		15		23		2		25		6	
Khazei (D)	Positive	36	48.0%	3	42.9%	4	36.4%	1	50.0%	3	100%	0	0%
	Neutral	32	42.7	4	57.1	6	54.5	1	50.0	0	0	2	100
	Negative	7	9.3	0	0	1	9.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	n/a	169		19		34		2		31		7	
Pagliuca (D)	Positive	29	33.3%	2	25.0%	2	11.8%	0	0%	3	27.3%	2	50.0%
	Neutral	31	35.6	5	62.5	11	64.7	1	100	0	0	1	25.0
	Negative	27	31.0	1	12.5	4	23.5	0	0	8	72.7	1	25.0
	n/a	157		18		28		3		23		5	
Robinson (R)	Positive	1	25.0%	0		0	0%	0		0		0	
	Neutral	2	50.0	0		1	100	0		0		0	
	Negative	1	25.0	0		0	0	0		0		0	
	n/a	240		26		44		4		34		9	

Tone for Each Candidate by Story Topic General Election, Jan. 6-19, 2010									
Candidate	Tone	Political Topics		Personal Topics		Domestic Policy		Public Record	
		# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%	# of Stories	%
Coakley (D)	Positive	32	28.6%	1	100.0%	5	25.0%	2	28.6%
	Neutral	32	28.6	0	0	7	35.0	2	28.6
	Negative	48	42.9%	0	0	8	40.0	3	42.9
	n/a	23		2		11		5	
Brown (R)	Positive	42	45.7%	2	66.7%	6	33.3%	0	0%
	Neutral	36	39.1	0	0	8	44.4	5	71.4
	Negative	14	15.2	1	33.3	4	22.2	2	28.6
	n/a	43		0		13		5	
Kennedy (L)	Positive	2	66.7%	0		0		0	
	Neutral	1	33.3	0		0		0	
	Negative	0	0	0		0		0	
	n/a	132		3		31		12	