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THE INVISIBLE PRIMARY—INVISIBLE NO LONGER:

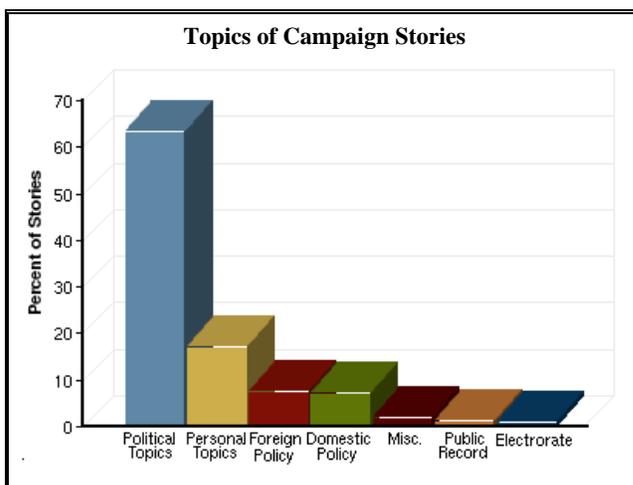
A First Look at Coverage of the 2008 Presidential Campaign

In the early months of the 2008 presidential campaign, the media had already winnowed the race to mostly five candidates and offered Americans relatively little information about their records or what they would do if elected, according to a comprehensive new study of the election coverage across the media.

The press also gave some candidates measurably more favorable coverage than others. Democrat Barack Obama, the junior Senator from Illinois, enjoyed by far the most positive treatment of the major candidates during the first five months of the year—followed closely by Fred Thompson, the actor who at the time was only considering running. Arizona Senator John McCain received the most negative coverage—much worse than his main GOP rivals.

Tone of Coverage		
Percent of All Stories		
	Positive	Negative
Hillary Clinton	26.9	37.8
Barack Obama	46.7	15.8
Rudy Giuliani	27.8	37.0
John McCain	12.4	47.9

Meanwhile, the tone of coverage of the two party front runners, New York Senator Hillary Clinton and former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, was virtually identical, and more negative than positive, according to the study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.



In all, 63% of the campaign stories focused on political and tactical aspects of the campaign. That is nearly four times the number of stories about the personal backgrounds of the candidates (17%) or the candidates' ideas and policy proposals (15%). And just 1% of stories examined the candidates' records or past public performance, the study found.

The press' focus on fundraising, tactics and polling is even more evident if one looks at how stories were framed rather than the topic of the

story. Just 12% of stories examined were presented in a way that explained how citizens might be affected by the election, while nearly nine-out-of-ten stories (86%) focused on matters that largely impacted only the parties and the candidates. Those numbers, incidentally, match almost exactly the campaign-centric orientation of coverage found on the eve of the primaries eight years ago.

All of these findings seem to be at sharp variance with what the public says it wants from campaign reporting. A new poll by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press conducted for this report finds that about eight-in-ten of Americans say they want more coverage of the candidates' stances on issues, and majorities want more on the record and personal background, and backing of the candidates, more about lesser-known candidates and more about debates.¹

What Topics the Public Wants Covered		
	<u>More</u>	<u>Less</u>
Candidates' position on issues	77%	17
Candidate debates	57%	32
Candidates' personal backgrounds and experiences	55%	36
The candidates who are not front runners	55%	37
Sources of candidates' campaign money	55%	35
Which candidate in leading in the latest polls	42%	45

*Source: Pew Research Center for People and the Press
September 28 – October 1, 2007*

These are just some of the key findings of the study, which examined 1,742 campaign stories that appeared from January through May in 48 different news outlets in print, online, network TV, cable and radio, including talk shows. The study was designed and produced jointly by PEJ, a non-partisan, non-political institute that is part of the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., and the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, which is part of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Among other findings from the PEJ-Shorenstein study:

- Just five candidates have been the focus of more than half of all the coverage. Hillary Clinton received the most (17% of stories), though she can thank the overwhelming and largely negative attention of conservative talk radio hosts for much of the edge in total volume. Barack Obama was next (14%), with Republicans Giuliani, McCain, and Romney measurably behind (9% and 7% and 5% respectively). As for the rest of the pack, Elizabeth Edwards, a candidate spouse, received more attention than 10 of them, and nearly as much as her husband.
- Democrats generally got more coverage than Republicans, (49% of stories vs. 31%.) One reason was that major Democratic candidates began announcing their candidacies a month earlier than key Republicans, but that alone does not fully explain the discrepancy.
- Overall, Democrats also have received more positive coverage than Republicans (35% of stories vs. 26%), while Republicans received more negative coverage

¹ "Modest Interest in 2008 Campaign News." Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. October 23, 2007.

than Democrats (35% vs. 26%). For both parties, a plurality of stories, 39%, were neutral or balanced.

- Most of that difference in tone, however, can be attributed to the friendly coverage of Obama (47% positive) and the critical coverage of McCain (just 12% positive.) When those two candidates are removed from the field, the tone of coverage for the two parties is virtually identical.
- There were also distinct coverage differences in different media. Newspapers were more positive than other media about Democrats and more citizen-oriented in framing stories. Talk radio was more negative about almost every candidate than any other outlet. Network television was more focused than other media on the personal backgrounds of candidates. For all sectors, however, strategy and horse race were front and center.

The findings about who got the most favorable coverage and the focus on horse race in many ways reinforce each other. Obama the first candidate of color to be a major White House contender, performed better in polling and fundraising than expected in these early months. McCain, in contrast, was a former presumed front runner who fared far worse in the polls and in fundraising than anticipated.

Even coverage of issues and candidate background was often cast through a political lens, frequently in the form of exploring the potential vulnerabilities of key candidates. For Clinton, this strategic focus translated into more coverage of her evolving stances on the Iraq War, something that created strains with elements of her party's more liberal base. For Giuliani it resulted in coverage of his position on abortion and his marriage history, two areas that raise questions about his chances with the conservative base of his party. For Romney it meant more coverage of his religion as a member of the Mormon Church.

The Early Start, the Public and the Press

This election is unprecedented in terms of its early start and how much early coverage it received. By February 2007, nearly 11 months before any citizen would cast a primary vote or gather for a caucus, the race became one of the biggest stories in the news. This coverage reflected the candidates' early and heavy fundraising, earlier-than-ever announcements, and states trying to move up their primaries, caucuses and conventions in the election year calendar. For the first five months of 2007, the campaign was the second-most covered news story of any in the press. It lagged behind only the debate over the war in Iraq, according to the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index (www.journalism.org). News about the 2008 campaign accounted for 7.6% of the space in newspapers and websites and airtime on TV and radio included in the Index.

What political scientists used to call the “Invisible Primary” of endorsements, fundraising and organizational work, in other words, is invisible no longer.

That early start, however, has posed something of a challenge for the press. According to survey data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, fewer than a quarter of Americans were closely following the election during the period examined here, January through May 2007.² That is high by historical standards, nearly double the level of interest found at similar periods during the 2004 and 2000 presidential elections. Still, it represents relatively limited public attention and presents a conundrum for journalists.

Percentage of People Following Campaign News		
	Very Closely	Fairly Closely
September 14-17, 2007	22%	31
May 18-21, 2007	18%	31
January 26-29, 2007	24%	33
<i>Previous Campaigns</i>		
September, 2003	17%	25
May, 2003	8%	19
January, 2003	14%	28
September, 1999	15%	31
June, 1999	11%	25
January, 1999	N/A	N/A
<i>Source: Pew Research Center for People and the Press September 28 – October 1, 2007</i>		

The question for the press is this: How to cover a campaign so early, when so many candidates are competing in both parties so early, but only a limited number of citizens are paying close attention and there is still a long way to go until voting day?

Does focusing on the game aspects of the campaign—political tactics and strategy—make the coverage more exciting and draw more people in to the news? Or does the “game frame” appeal to a narrower news audience?

Most citizens, whether they are following the campaign closely or not, have some clear ideas of the kind of coverage they prefer. In a new poll produced for this report by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, nearly eight-in-ten Americans (77%) say they want more coverage of “the candidates’ positions on issues” than they are getting. Just 17% say they want less coverage of candidates’ positions.

Smaller majorities also said they want to see more stories about second-tier candidates (55%), about debates (57%) and about sources of campaign money (55%). And another 55% was interested in more coverage of the personal backgrounds and experiences of the candidates.

The public is more divided over stories about the where the candidates stand in the polls, the so-called horse race (42% want more stories about this topic, while 45% want less). These figures are similar to those from earlier elections.

Those results, taken together with the findings of the PEJ-Shorenstein study of coverage, suggest the press and the public are not on the same page when it comes to priorities in campaign coverage. This disparity also indicates there is room for the press

² Based on results from the *News Interest Index*, a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The News Interest Index has measured public interest in news about candidates for the 2008 presidential election on a weekly basis throughout 2007.

to calibrate its coverage differently to make it more useful and possibly more interesting to citizens.

The public is also not that happy with the press coverage. A majority of Americans (53%) in September said the coverage has been only fair or poor, while 41% rate it as good or excellent, according to another Pew Research Center survey.³

What the Study Examined

By analyzing the news of the campaign from January to May, we can see what kind of coverage the American media think the public wants and needs. The PEJ-Shorenstein study looked at five basic aspects of the stories.

First, we identified what each story was about, *topic*. Next, we identified the *primary figure* the story was focused around. Was it a particular candidate, a group of candidates, or others? Third, we examined who was affected by what the story was about, *impact*. Was it citizens? Politicians? Interest groups? Or a combination?

In addition to these measurements, the study also noted two other features for each story.

We considered what initiated the story, its *trigger*: Was it something a candidate said or did? Something from a campaign surrogate? An outsider? Or was the story initiated by journalistic enterprise?

Finally, the study measured the *tone* of each story. Within its frame, was the story predominantly positive, negative or neutral about the candidates or their electoral prospects? In order to fall into the positive or negative category, two-thirds or more of the assertions in a story had to fall clearly on one side of that line or the other.

Election Topics

From the start, the press has tended to produce stories about one candidate at a time, rather than ones that compare candidates or examine broad themes. Fully eight out of 10 stories in the first five months focused mostly on a single candidate. The other 20% of stories concerned comparisons of candidates, electoral issues, the electorate and the rest.

The majority of all stories (63%) were primarily about the “game” aspects of the campaign—topics such as who is winning, who is losing, their fundraising, and how a candidate is performing on the stump. Of these topics, the lion’s share (50% overall) was

³ “Modest Interest in 2008 Campaign News.” Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. October 23, 2007.

tactical or horse race—that is polls, strategy and candidate “performance.” The next biggest political concern was campaign fundraising, which made up 7% of all stories.

After internal political matters, the second-biggest grouping of topics (17% of the stories) focused on the personal background of the candidates—their families, marriages, biographies, and religion. The biggest share of these stories, 9%, looked at the marriage and romantic relationships of the candidates and the personal health of candidates and their spouses. This obviously was driven in March by the announcement by Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of Democratic candidate John Edwards, that she had a recurrence of breast cancer. And 2% of the stories were about candidate religion, principally that of Republican Mitt Romney, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Topics of Campaign Stories	
Percent of All Stories	
Political Topics	63.4
Strategy and Polls	50.0
Fundraising	7.3
Other Political Topics	6.1
Personal Topics	17.3
Marriage/Relationships	3.7
Personal Health	5.1
Religion	2.1
Other Personal Topics	6.4
Domestic Policy	7.2
Abortion	2.9
Other Domestic Policy Issues	4.3
Foreign Policy Issues	7.5
Iraq War	6.3
Other Foreign Policy Issues	1.2
Public Record	1.4
Electorate	1.1
Miscellaneous	2.0

The policy proposals and ideas of the candidates constituted 15% of all stories examined—a slightly smaller percentage than the personal qualities of the candidates. This policy discussion was fairly evenly split between foreign (8%) and domestic policy (7%). Of the issues, the war was the biggest of all (6%). That was followed by abortion (3%), though much of this coverage focused on Republicans and particularly Giuliani, whose position on that subject does not fit squarely into what has become the tradition in the Republican Party platform.

Only roughly 1% of the stories were about the candidates’ public records.

Political advertising made up only 1% of the coverage, since most candidates had not yet gotten their ad campaigns going this early in the race. Almost all of the ad stories in the early phase were about an ad that was not created by a candidate, but was an independent Internet attack ad produced on YouTube by an anonymous user. The ad portrayed Hillary Clinton as part of the political Old Guard and promoted the candidacy of Barack Obama. All but one of the stories about advertising from January to May involved this one spot.

A major issue for campaign insiders is not the candidates themselves but the campaign calendar, including states moving the dates for their primaries earlier and earlier in the 2008 year—possibly into December 2007. Yet in spite of the enormous impact of the electoral calendar on voters and outcome, the subject got only minor coverage (2% of the stories in the first months of the campaign).

While every campaign seems to bring complaints of excessive media emphasis on strategy over issues, these topic breakdowns in the early stages of the 2008 cycle are

somewhat more oriented to the candidates' political concerns than those found at later stages in past election cycles.

In the 2000 election, a [PEJ study](#) of the pre-primary phase of that race, conducted in December and January 1999-2000, found just over half (54%) of the stories were about political matters, while a quarter (24%) focused on the candidates' policy and ideas, and 11% related to personal qualities. And similarly in 2004, a [PEJ study](#) of campaign themes surrounding the fall debates found that 55% of stories were framed around candidate strategy, fundraising, performance and polls.⁴ Even earlier, a year-long study of the 1992 presidential campaign, conducted under the auspices of the Shorenstein Center, found that "issues get shorter shrift in all media when the horse race is most exciting (in the early primaries and the last month of the campaign)."⁵

Topics by Party

So far in 2007, tactics, polling and fundraising dominated coverage of both parties (Democrats at 59%, Republicans at 65%).

A closer look at the topic breakdowns reveals a marked difference between the coverage of Democrats and Republicans, particularly with regard to personal and policy issues. The coverage of Democrats was more personal. The coverage of Republicans was more about ideas.

Election Topics by Party		
Percent of All Stories		
	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Political Topics	58.6	64.9
Personal Topics	24.3	12.5
Domestic Policy	5.2	12.1
Foreign Policy	7.2	7.5
Public Record	1.3	2.1
The Electorate	0.9	0.7
Miscellaneous	2.6	0.2

Roughly a quarter (24%) of the stories devoted to Democrats focused on personal topics, compared with only 13% of the coverage of Republican candidates.

Policy stories, by contrast, made up much more of the coverage of Republicans (20%) than they did for Democrats (12%).

Heavy coverage of Elizabeth Edwards' illness accounts for part, but hardly all of the difference between Democratic and Republican candidates' personal coverage. It also may be that the perceived points of contrast among Democrats in the early phases had

⁴ The 2004 PEJ study examined theme-based stories, rather than all topics of election coverage. Even here, in a narrowed range of stories, politics accounted for more than half of the coverage. Another study that focused on the primary campaign season was of network evening television coverage in 2004 conducted by Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter. Their work showed an even higher percentage, 77%, of the primary season election stories were focused on horse race issues and only 18% were focused on policy issues. Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter. 2007. *The Nightly News Nightmare: Television's Coverage of U.S. Presidential Elections, 1988-2004*. 2d ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

⁵ Marion R. Just, Ann N. Crigler, Dean E. Alger, Timothy E. Cook, Montague Kern, and Darrell M. West 1996, *Crosstalk: Citizens, Candidates and the Media in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996.

more to do with biography—including the candidates’ gender, race, and marriages—whereas the differences among Republicans may have been sharper over policy—particularly on such issues as immigration and abortion.

Impact

The question of whether voters are well served by coverage is not strictly a matter of what the story is ostensibly about. Any topic may be relevant to helping voters discern differences among candidates. How candidates run their campaigns, for instance, may be a proxy for how they would run the country.

To probe further into this, the PEJ-Shorenstein study tried to isolate whether the information in stories was relevant or not to helping people decide how to vote. One way of doing this is to note who was primarily affected or impacted by the information the story was talking about. We called this measurement impact.

Did the information in the story mostly refer to how candidates might govern, i.e., what they believe in, their values, management style, personality and other similar matters? Or was it about matters that impact the candidates’ or parties’ chances of election? Or did the story deal with both the governance and electoral chances?

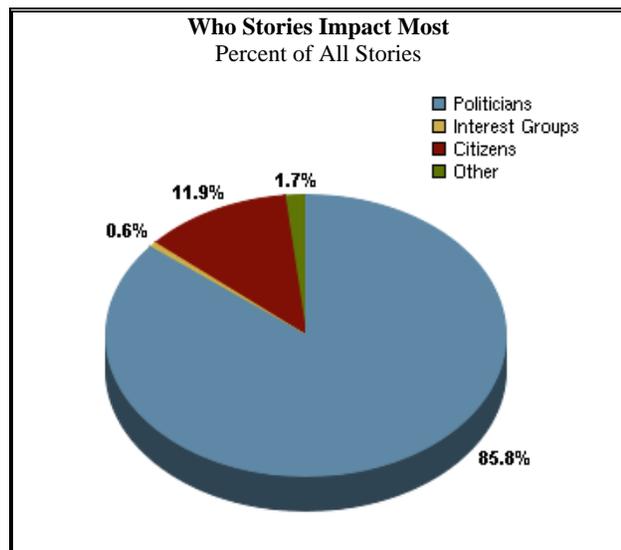
A story about tactics and strategy might be produced in such a way that tells a good deal about a candidate, his or her leadership or decision-making style. A story that simply outlines the numbers in a new poll, in contrast, would have to be described as impacting mainly the candidate and his or her campaign. If any useful information for citizens could be inferred concerning substance rather than strategy, the story coding defaulted toward impact on citizens.

The “impact” analysis showed that the coverage was tilted even more toward strategy than analysis of the topic of the stories.

In the end, just 12% of stories primarily impacted ordinary citizens, for instance, by telling potential voters how a candidate might lead if elected.

By contrast, 86% of the stories were produced in a way that largely focused on how the politicians’ chances of election would be affected.

This focus on political matters varied little by media. The most citizen-oriented coverage came from



newspapers (about 18% compared to 79% oriented toward politicians). The least citizen-oriented coverage was found in network TV (9% vs. 89%). Online, cable, and radio were all somewhere in the middle.

There is a familiar pattern here. In a [PEJ study](#) of the same question in the early 2000 presidential contest, the numbers were remarkably similar, 13% of stories impacted citizens and 82% were about the impact on candidates, the campaigns and the parties. Studies of later periods in the campaign found slightly more citizen focused coverage, though not dramatically so.⁶

These numbers suggest that coverage becomes more citizen-oriented as the election draws closer. It remains to be seen whether that might happen sooner in a campaign that started earlier. So far, the coverage is as focused as usual, if not more so, on what critics call the inside baseball of politics.

It is also important to note that projections of candidate viability and electability are important pieces of information for primary voters, compared with general election voters. In primary elections with several competing candidates, many citizens may not want to “waste” their votes on candidates who have no chance for the nomination or who are likely to lose the general election.

The Competition for Exposure

For individual candidates, and to some extent even for parties, another key question of the campaign is who is winning the race for exposure—or what political professionals sometimes call “free media.” It is free, in the sense that advertising exposure must be paid for, while press coverage is not.⁷

Which candidates and which parties are winning the derby for press exposure?

In the first five months of the campaign, the media found Democrats more newsworthy than Republicans. From January through May 2007, nearly half of 2008

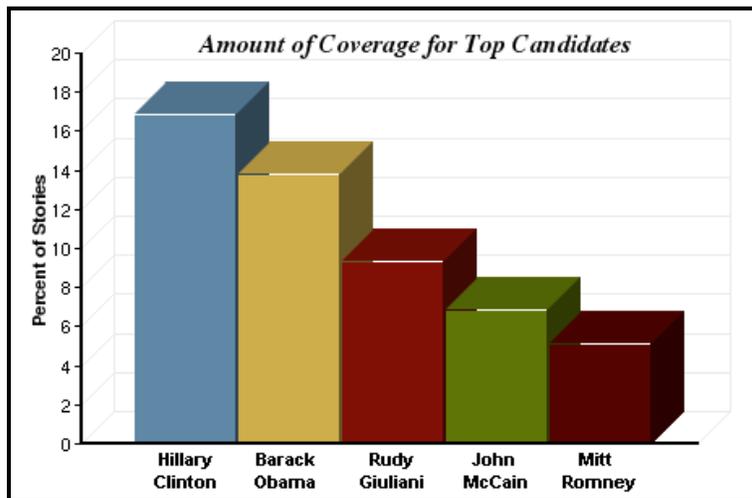
⁶ [“In The Public Interest: A content study of early coverage of the 2000 election campaign,”](#) December 1999 and January 2000. The study found 13% of the stories impacted citizens by giving them useful information about governance, and 82% impacted the chances of the candidates, the parties, and the campaigns. Later in that race, in the final weeks of the 2000 general election phase, the numbers in another PEJ study were different, though not dramatically so. In that later study of this period, [“The Debate Effect: How the Press covered the Pivotal Period,”](#) slightly more than a quarter of stories (27%) impacted citizens’ information needs and 64% focused on the candidates’ or parties. A third PEJ campaign report, [“The Last Lap: How the press covered the final stages of the campaign,”](#) issued in the closing weeks of the 2004 race between Bush and John Kerry found that 20% of the stories contained information that related to citizens’ information needs, while 73% were oriented to how the candidates would be affected.

⁷ Some political consultants over time, perhaps to suggest that they deserved credit for press coverage, began to call the press the “earned media.”

election stories, 49%, focused on Democratic candidates, while less than a third, 31%, focused on Republicans. More than half of this difference can be accounted for by the fact that Democrats started announcing their campaigns a month earlier than Republicans. It is worth noting, however, that the gap existed in other months as well, and also was reflected in all the media platforms studied, including some, such as talk radio and Fox News, that argue they are counterbalancing liberal bias in the media. In three of different news sectors—morning network shows, evening network news, and talk radio—the ratio of Democratic to Republican was nearly 2 to 1.

That statistic alone does not fully describe the press’ focus. Of the 18 candidates running, even in the early months of the race, the media were concerned with only a handful of contenders.

Five candidates—two Democrats and three Republicans—were the focus of more than half of the coverage (52%). These included New York Senator Hillary Clinton and Illinois Senator Barack Obama among the Democrats and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Arizona Senator John McCain, and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney in the Republican field.⁸



While Hillary Clinton led in the derby for press exposure (she was the primary subject in 17% of all campaign stories), the largely antagonistic attention of conservative talk radio accounted for

most of that edge. Clinton was the focus of nearly a third of all the campaign segments among the conservative talkers studied (the three most popular conservative radio voices, Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Michael Savage). Clinton is not nearly as a popular subject among liberal radio talk show hosts.

The second-most covered candidate, Democratic rival Barack Obama (14% of stories), got a boost in that coverage from being the No. 1 focus of all the candidates from network evening news.

Two Republicans were next in media exposure. Giuliani led among Republicans with 9% of the stories, followed by McCain at 7% and Romney at 5%.

⁸ During our study time, the total number of candidates was 19. Four have since dropped out: Tom Vilsack left in February and was included in the study. James Gilmore, Tommy Thompson and more recently Sam Brownback dropped out after the span of our study, and Fred Thompson formally joined the race.

They were followed by former Senators John Edwards (4%) and Fred Thompson (3%), whose level of coverage relative to their party rivals probably puts them in what is best considered a second tier. Interestingly, Thompson, the lobbyist, actor and former Tennessee Senator, enjoyed this level of coverage (and name recognition in polling) even though he did not actually enter the race until September.⁹

The rest of the candidates would have to be considered not second-tier but third, at least in media attention. None received more than 2% of the coverage.

Put another way, of the more than 1,700 campaign stories examined from January to May, Tom Tancredo, Sam Brownback, Ron Paul and Mike Huckabee each were the focus of fewer than a dozen stories. The second tier Democrats fared only slightly better. There were five stories about Chris Dodd, 28 about Bill Richardson, one about Dennis Kucinich, and 41 about Joe Biden. For most, their coverage peaked the day of their announcement and went downhill from there.

How dominant were Clinton and Obama as newsmakers? Together, these two candidates commanded essentially the same amount of coverage as all the of the GOP hopefuls combined.

And there is some evidence the level coverage does have an impact on public awareness. A Pew Research Center survey from September finds that Clinton and Obama are far better recognized than their Republican counterparts. Fully 78% of Americans could name Hillary Clinton as a candidate, and 62% could name Obama. On the GOP side, 45% could name Giuliani as a candidate, while 30% could name Romney, 27% Thompson and 24% John McCain. Exposure in the press, in other words, may be vital to name recognition, which in turn influences polling and fundraising.

Tone

The volume of coverage is one thing. But in politics, not all coverage is equal, even if they spell your name right. What was the tone of the coverage each candidate received?

While Hillary Clinton may have gotten the most press, she did not get the most favorable. That distinction, among major candidates, went to Barack Obama.

On the other end of the ledger, Republican John McCain, the once possible GOP front runner, generated by a wide margin the most negative coverage of any serious contender.

⁹ The same ranking of candidates, incidentally, holds true if instead of number of stories, we look at the percent of all time or words devoted to each candidate. Eighteen percent of the total news coverage of the campaign was devoted to Clinton, 14% to Obama, 10% to Giuliani and 7% to McCain.

Interestingly, the two front runners in national polls in each party received nearly identical coverage when it came to overall tone.

To evaluate tone, the study examined every assertion that offered some assessment of a candidate’s chances at winning or their potential effectiveness in office if they were elected and tallied them by story. For a story to be considered positive or negative, two thirds of all the assertions had to be explicitly positive or negative in tone or the story would be considered balanced.

It is important to note that the largest percentage of stories (39%) were balanced or neutral in tone. Another 32% were positive. And 30% were negative.

Those numbers are almost identical to those found in the 2004 PEJ study surrounding the fall debates, in which 37% of the stories carried a neutral tone while 38% were negative and 26% were positive.

How did individual candidates fare?

If the press tries to treat the leaders in a race with greater skepticism—or feels a responsibility to scrub those contenders harder—there is some evidence to support that here. The two front runners in national polls both received somewhat more negative coverage than positive. For Hillary Clinton, 27% of the stories were clearly positive, 38% were negative and 35% were balanced or neutral. For Rudy Giuliani, 28% were positive, 37% negative, and 35% neutral.

Tone of Coverage for Top Candidates				
Percent of All Stories				
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Number of Stories</u>
Democratic Candidates				
Hillary Clinton	26.9	35.4	37.8	294
Barack Obama	46.7	37.5	15.8	240
John Edwards	31.0	33.8	35.2	71
Republican Candidates				
Rudy Giuliani	27.8	35.2	37.0	162
John McCain	12.4	39.7	47.9	121
Mitt Romney	34.1	35.2	30.7	88

And if there is any sense that the press likes candidates who make a race more competitive, the data from the early months of the campaign offer support for that view, too. In this case, this candidate was Obama, the freshman Senator from Illinois. Obama enjoyed the best run of coverage in the early campaign, though the trajectory over time was gradually downward. Taken together, nearly half (47%) of all stories focused on Obama were positive. That is roughly three times the percentage that were negative (16%) and exceeds the 38% of stories that were neutral in tone.

Only one other candidate did nearly so well—then Republican demi-candidate Fred Thompson. Like Obama, he offered the possibility of a wild card figure whose entry might reshuffle the dynamics of the race in new ways. In all, 46% about Thompson carried a clearly positive tone, while more than half (51%) were neutral. Almost none, just 4%, was negative. That stands out as the most pronounced gap (13-to-one) of

positive to negative stories of any major candidate. One obvious question is how that might have changed now that he has declared himself as one of the pack.

One argument about press coverage is that it tends to reinforce and therefore magnify any phenomenon it observes. A candidate on a downward spiral may find that pattern harder to change if caught in the media klieg lights. While the coverage of John McCain was not as intense as others, it did stand out for its negative cast. From January through May, close to half (48%) of the stories about McCain were clearly negative in tone—the highest of any major candidate. That was four times the stories with a clearly positive tone (12%). Four-in-ten were neutral. Even Fox News, which treated all the other major Republican candidates to more positive than negative coverage, made an exception of McCain. On Fox, McCain the stories examined were 20% positive, 45% neutral and 35% negative. In the first phase of the campaign, in other words, McCain tended to be the mirror image of Obama.

Mitt Romney, on the other hand, had the more evenly balanced and positive coverage than either McCain or Giuliani—34% of stories were positive, 35% were neutral and 31% were negative. John Edwards’ coverage was also pretty evenly split among the three categories.

Tone of Coverage for 3rd Tier Candidates				
Percent of All Stories				
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Number of Stories</u>
3 rd Tier Democrats	25.6%	46.2	28.2	78
3 rd Tier republicans*	38.9%	48.9	12.2	90

**includes Fred Thompson*

After these seven—the top five and the two candidates in the middle--the remaining candidates taken as a group tended to get treated more tenderly.

The only candidates in this group to receive decidedly more negative coverage than positive were Joe Biden (46% negative vs. 10% positive and 44% neutral) and Tom Tancredo, who was the subject of just seven stories, none of them was clearly positive in tone.

Tone for Democrats vs. Republicans

Taking all the presidential hopefuls together, the press overall has been more positive about Democratic candidates and more negative about Republicans. In the stories mainly about one of the Democratic candidates, the largest percentage was neutral (39%), but more than a third of stories (35%) were positive, while slightly more than a quarter (26%) carried a clearly negative tone.

For Republicans, the numbers were basically reversed. Again the same number as for Democrats (39%) were neutral, but more than a third (35%) were negative vs. 26% positive.

In other words, not only did the Republicans receive less coverage overall, the attention they did get tended to be more negative than that of Democrats. And in some specific media genres, the difference is particularly striking.

Why is this? Does it suggest some not-so-subtle enthusiasm by a liberal press for Democratic candidates? Those critics who see a continuing liberal preference in the media may cite this as evidence of that presumption.

There are, however, other explanations.

The most notable is the fact that, if the coverage of Obama and McCain are eliminated, the distinction in tone of coverage between the two parties' candidates disappears.

Another factor influencing the tone of coverage for Republican candidates could be the perceived weaknesses in the chances for nomination or election by each of the leading Republican candidates. While Giuliani, for example, has shown strength in opinion polls, many observers inside and outside the Republican Party consider his chances complicated by opposition from religious conservatives. Likewise, McCain was known to have displeased many in his own party for his bi-partisan sponsorship of campaign finance reform and immigration reform. And Mitt Romney's relative inexperience on the national stage and switch on the abortion issue made observers skeptical of his credibility.

Third, the tone of the coverage may also mirror the fact that Republican voters in polls express greater dissatisfaction with their candidate pool than do Democrats.¹⁰

All that said, the discrepancy in tone between the parties is a factor to be watched as the race continues.

The Candidates

Hillary Clinton – the headline maker

Immediately following her Jan. 20 online announcement of her candidacy, Hillary Clinton embarked on a more conventional media blitz that included a series of network TV interviews. With that, coverage of the 2008 election effectively kicked into high gear at an unprecedented early stage of the campaign. And for the first five months of the year, the former First Lady, now Senator, was the campaign's leading media attraction.

¹⁰The Pew Research Center for People and the Press "['Clinton Seen as 'Tough' and 'Smart' -- Giuliani as 'Energetic': Voter Impressions of Leading Candidates](#)," September 2007. The survey found that 64% of Democratic voters' impression of Democratic candidates was excellent/good, while 49% of Republican voters' impression of Republican candidates was excellent/good.

The New York Senator probably offered more media story lines than any other candidate: A former eight-year occupant of the White House trying to balance her own candidacy with her husband’s looming legacy; the first woman making a serious bid for the Oval Office; the immediate front runner in her party’s national polls; and someone with a reputation as a controversial and even polarizing figure in her own right. That mixed grab bag of narratives helps in part to explain the mixed tone of the stories (38% negative, 27% positive, and 35% neutral).

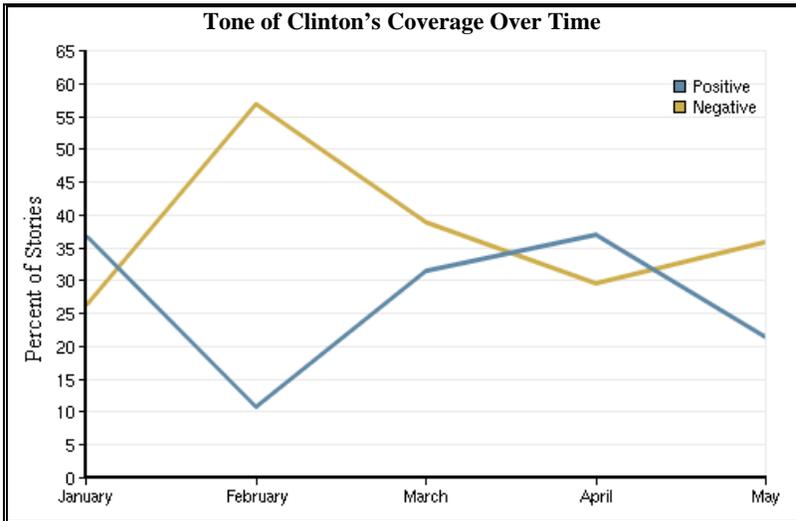
Her front-runner status was the primary fascination of the press early on. Fully 56% of Clinton stories were about polls, tactics and performance on the stump in the first five months. Fewer stories than the norm (14% vs. 17% overall) were about her personal background, however, this number that suggests journalists may have felt much of this was already known. As for her ideas for where she would take the country, only one received a significant amount of attention—her position on the war in Iraq (10% of stories), a percentage higher than election coverage overall devoted to the war. The dynamic here may well be that journalists examining a front runner tend to examine possible weakness, in this case the fact that Clinton at first supported the war and changed her position over time.

	<u>Clinton</u>	<u>All Coverage</u>
Political Topics	68.0	63.4
Strategy and Polls	55.8	50.0
Personal Topics	13.6	17.3
Marriage/relationships	6.1	3.7
Gender	2.0	0.7
Domestic Policy	5.4	7.2
Foreign Policy	9.9	7.5
Iraq War	9.9	6.3
Public Record	1.7	1.4
Electorate	0.7	1.1
Miscellaneous	0.7	2.0

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The tone of Clinton coverage varied a good deal by medium. Newspapers, for example, treated her more favorably (giving her roughly twice the percentage of positive stories as elsewhere).

And a good deal of her negative coverage can be attributed to a media platform that has been taking on the Clinton family since they moved into the White House in 1993. Nearly 20% of the nearly 300 Clinton stories examined in this report aired on



conservative talk radio, a genre that many observers believe found its voice and primary target after Bill Clinton’s 1992 election. In this campaign, conservative talkers in the early months have a new target. Nearly nine-out-of-ten Clinton segments in conservative talk (86%) were clearly negative in tone. The enmity of some of those hosts toward the New York Senator is so

pronounced that both Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity have on occasion lauded her Democratic rival Barack Obama, with his chief virtue apparently being that he is not Hillary Clinton.

The trajectory of Clinton’s coverage over time followed something of a roller coaster route. Her announcement in January helped make that a largely positive month. Coverage became notably more negative in February. It improved somewhat in March, but it was not until April that the positive again outweighed the negative. Then it slumped again in May.

One factor that remained constant throughout the first five months of the year—and it would help explain the continuing focus on Clinton but not the up and down tone—was her status as front runner in the polls. A track of Gallup polls from January through May shows her as the consistent leader in the national Democratic polls, most often registering in the 30-40% range. As the election season wore on, and Clinton began to build on her lead, some stories even began focusing on the “I-word,” (inevitable).

Rudolph Giuliani – front runner facing doubters

There are a number of striking similarities in the campaign dynamic and coverage of the two New York candidates in this race. (Clinton and Giuliani were ticketed to face each other in the 2000 New York Senate race when prostate cancer forced Giuliani out of the campaign.) Like Clinton, the former New York mayor has been his party’s leader in the polls from the start. He has also been the GOP’s top newsmaker (9% of all stories). And he, too, has received more negative coverage than positive and in much the same proportion as Clinton (37% negative, 28% positive and 35% neutral).

If Clinton has faced questions about her likeability as a general election candidate, Giuliani confronts a continuing issue in his quest during the primaries: Is he too socially liberal for the GOP base? Can toughness on terrorism convince conservatives to overlook other disagreements with him?

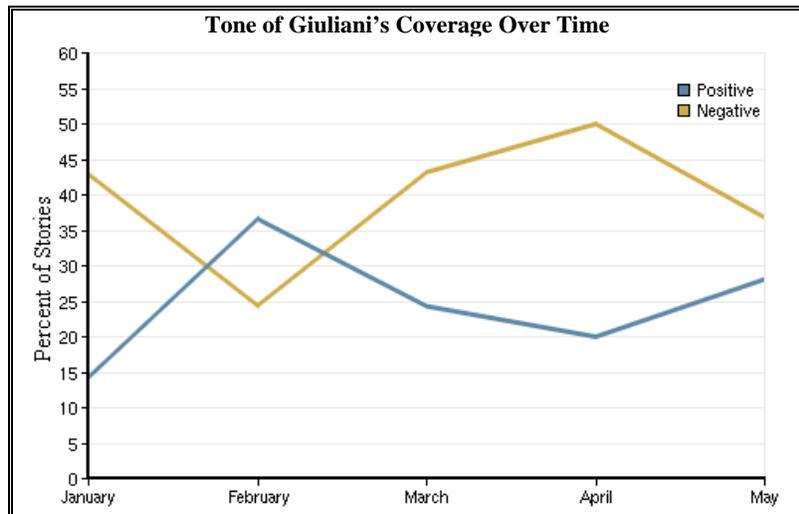
Topics of Rudy Giuliani’s Coverage		
Percent of All Stories		
	Giuliani	All Coverage
Political Topics	53.7	63.4
Strategy and Polls	47.5	50.0
Personal Topics	11.1	17.3
Personal Finances	1.9	0.7
Domestic Policy	22.2	7.2
Abortion	19.1	2.9
Foreign Policy	7.4	7.5
War on Terror	6.2	0.9
Public Record	3.1	1.4
Electorate	1.9	1.1
Miscellaneous	0.6	2.0

In the early phases of the campaign, these issues made up a notable portion of Giuliani coverage. All told, his ideas on domestic policy made up 22% of Giuliani stories, far more than the 7% norm. Almost all of that (19%) was about Giuliani’s perceived biggest electoral weakness in the primaries, abortion.

The tone of coverage of Giuliani fluctuated, but the only month in which he actually enjoyed more positive than negative press (37% to 24%) was in February, when he officially announced his candidacy. After that, the tone steadily dropped, picking up

again in May. Throughout the five months, however, the tone remained more negative than not.

But the negative tilt to the coverage differed by medium. Front-page coverage of Giuliani in the newspapers studied tended to be more negative than anything else (six out of 12), thanks in part to rough coverage from his hometown paper, *The New York Times*. The same was true on network evening newscasts (six negative pieces out of 14).



There was better news for Giuliani on the Fox News Channel where positive stories dominated over negative. (Eight out of 18 were positive, while three were negative). But perhaps indicative of the conservative qualms about Giuliani's more socially moderate views, on conservative talk radio, nine out of the 16 segments were negative, while just four were positive.

One reason why a non-announced candidate like Fred Thompson attracted significant media attention in the first five months—and why there was also flurry of press interest in a Newt Gingrich candidacy—was a dynamic that emerged in the early phases of this campaign. Many Republicans were uneasy with their choices. Thus, the idea of Giuliani as a shaky front runner has been a consistent story line.

Barack Obama—The Rising and Fading Star?

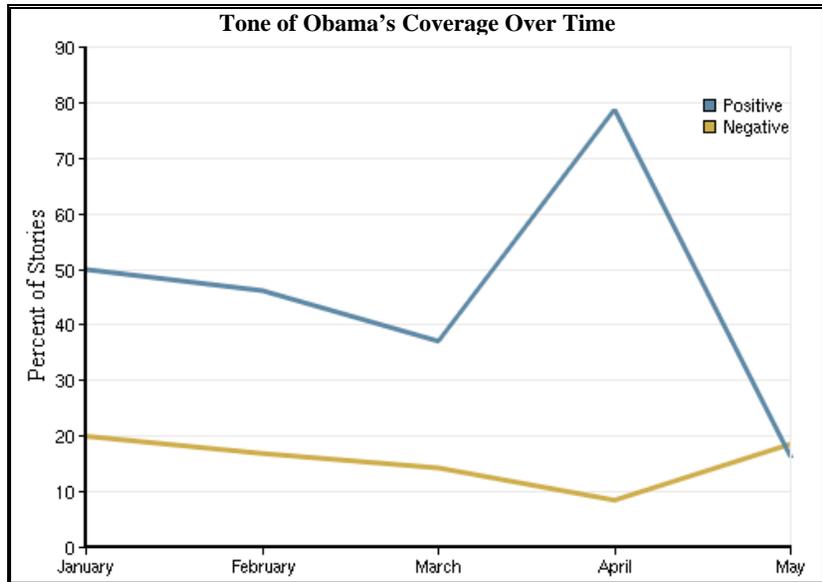
Barack Obama made his introductory mark on the national political scene with a compelling and original speech at the 2004 Democratic Convention in Chicago. When he arrived in Washington as a freshman Senator from Illinois, speculation about his running for President struck some observers as an act of impudence and others as an echo of John Kennedy, another young Senator who jumped over his elders to run for the White House. And when he began making trips to Iowa and New Hampshire, journalists marveled at a charisma that some said echoed not only John Kennedy, but even more so his brother Robert.

That star appeal was evident in the press coverage of Obama in the first five months of the year. With 47% of the stories clearly offering a favorable tone about his candidacy, he was the media darling among major contenders. In all, he was three times more likely to get positive coverage as negative, and nearly twice as likely to get

favorable stories as Clinton was. He was the only prominent candidate among the Democrats whose coverage was more favorable than neutral (38%).

The treatment, if one looks more closely, was even more favorable in some of the most important media of all. Obama enjoyed particularly favorable coverage from three media in particular—newspapers (70% positive stories), network morning news (58% positive), and network evening news (55%). Only in conservative talk radio was the coverage of Obama more negative than not.

For all that good news, however, the trajectory over time of Obama coverage suggests a more complicated story. While the coverage tilted 30 points toward the positive in January and February, it jumped to a 70-point positive differential in April. But by May, there were signs of trouble. The coverage had become far more neutral, with positive stories and negative more equally divided.



Do the data offer any empirical hint as to why he enjoyed the largest percentage of clearly promising stories? One reason may be that twice as many stories as the norm (15% vs. 7% overall) were about fundraising, an area where Obama exceeded expectations. Fewer stories than the norm (38% vs. 50% generally) were about his standing in the race—where reporters might have focused on his inability to gain much ground on Clinton. The level of coverage of Obama's personal biography—one of the strongest selling points of his campaign—was roughly on par with candidates generally.

Topics of Barack Obama's Coverage		
	Obama	All Coverage
Political Topics	57.1	63.4
Strategy and	38.3	50.0
Polls		
Fundraising	15.0	7.3
Personal Topics	17.9	17.3
Race	8.8	1.9
Domestic Policy	6.3	7.2
Foreign Policy	8.3	7.5
Public Record	1.3	1.4
Electorate	1.7	1.1
Miscellaneous	7.5	2.0

The level of coverage of Obama's personal biography—one of the strongest selling points of his campaign—was roughly on par with candidates generally.

By one other yardstick, Obama and his campaign were enjoying another advantage some campaigns might envy. They initiated fully 65% of all the stories that focused on him, substantially more than the 46% overall. That suggests that the candidate may be enjoying somewhat greater control of his coverage than other candidates, even though his campaign, according to private comments made to us by

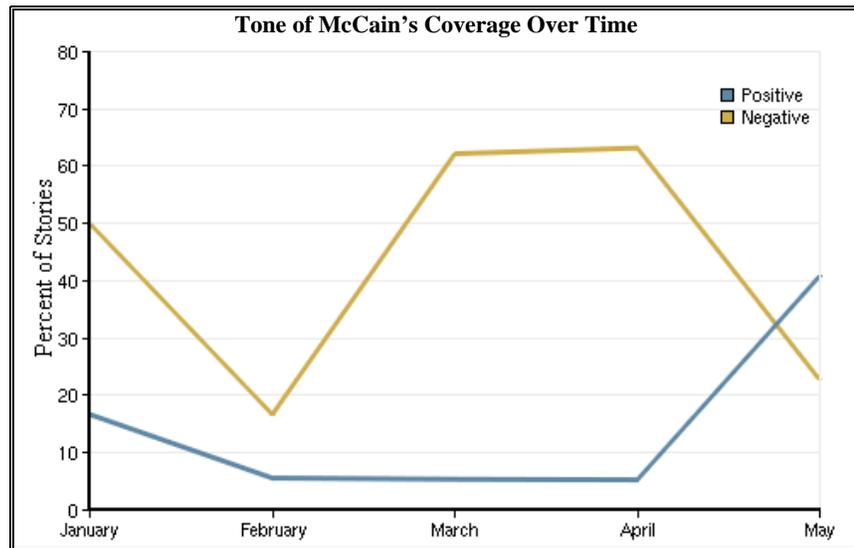
some political reporters, is not reputed to be as disciplined or organizationally nimble as Clinton's.

John McCain –bearing the brunt of bad news

If the senior Senator from Arizona was considered by some observers to be the likely Republican frontrunner when the race began, he quickly ran into difficulties with fundraising, disappointing poll numbers and significant staff turnover. That all helped make McCain a newsworthy candidate. But the tenor of the coverage, particularly in the early months of the campaign, was overwhelmingly negative, far more so than for any other major candidate.

In volume of coverage, McCain (at 7%) trailed the two leading Democrats, Clinton and Obama, by a considerable margin. But for a candidate whose campaign was foundering, he received almost as much coverage as the Republican front runner in the national polls (Giuliani) and more than the leader in Iowa (Romney). McCain as a disappointment was almost as big a story as Giuliani was as a surprise frontrunner.

That may explain the most striking feature of McCain's coverage, its negative tone. From January through May, stories about McCain were four times more likely to bear bad news than to be flattering. In all,



close to half of all stories produced about the Senator and his campaign (48%) were clearly negative. Only 12% registered as positive in tone. (Four in 10 of the McCain stories were neutral.)

Why was McCain on the receiving end of so much unfavorable press? In a campaign dominated by coverage of strategy and tactics, there are some clues. Fully 60% of his coverage, for example, concerned his worse-than-expected standing in the polls, compared with 50% generally. And 51% of those McCain horse race stories were clearly negative in tone.

Typical of this coverage was a March 8page-one story in the Wall Street Journal warning, in the first sentence, that "Sen. John McCain is facing unexpectedly formidable challenges despite courting the party faithful during his seven-year wait on deck for a shot at the White House."

“A new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll shows the Arizona Senator trailing Rudy Giuliani by more than 20 percentage points—and encountering doubts in the party about his age and steadfast support for the Iraq war,” the story continued.

The only month in which McCain’s coverage got more positive was May, when he was able to showcase some of his strengths in two GOP debates. Then, his favorable coverage jumped from 5% in April to 41% in May. But since early coverage of McCain was quite consistent across most media sectors, the story of a candidate in strategic trouble was a dominant message about him.

Topics of John McCain’s Coverage		
	Percent of Stories	
	<u>McCain</u>	<u>All Coverage</u>
Political Topics	64.5	63.4
Personal Topics	4.1	17.3
Domestic Policy	11.6	7.2
Immigration	4.1	0.7
Foreign Policy	16.5	7.5
Iraq War	14.9	6.3
Public Record	2.5	1.4
Electorate	0.8	1.1
Miscellaneous	0	2.0

What other topics was the press looking at with McCain? His controversial position on Iraq—supportive of a military buildup—got more coverage (15%) than candidates’ generally did for the ideas about the war (6%). But his heroic biography, including his story as a former Vietnam-era prisoner of war and third generation soldier, got less coverage than the overall (4% vs. 17% generally).

The list of topics the press focused on about McCain, in other words, tended toward the controversial and the difficult rather than the flattering.

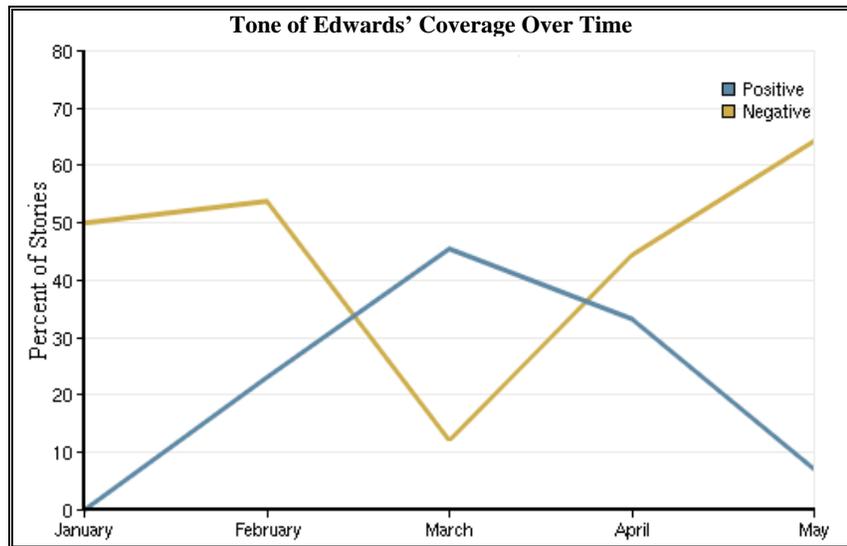
John Edwards – The Husband and, Oh, Candidate, Too

Now in his second presidential campaign, John Edwards—the Democrats’ 2004 vice-presidential nominee—has had real trouble competing for media attention with the two celebrity candidates who have also been No. 1 and No. 2 in the polls, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. The two sitting Senators were presented as locked in a two-way race. In most stories the primary focus was either Clinton or Obama (294 and 240 stories) and the secondary focus was also evenly split between Clinton and Obama (148 to 147). Edwards was way behind with only 71 primary and 49 secondary mentions.

As the major figure in only 4% of the campaign stories in the first five months of the year, Edwards ended up in the middle tier of candidates in terms of coverage. But even that number is in some ways deceptive. Were it not for the month of March, when Edwards’ wife Elizabeth announced that her breast cancer had recurred, the former North Carolina Senator would have been in the third tier of candidate coverage in the outlets studied. That lack of media attention came despite the fact that Edwards had been leading, for much of this time, in the polls in Iowa, and that he has consistently polled in the double digits in the national Gallup surveys.

While the tone of Edwards’ coverage was split (31% positive, 34% neutral, 35% negative), and thus more positive than Clinton’s and less positive than Obama’s, that is only part of the story.

The coverage began badly for him, with very little coverage in January, as his rivals were gearing up. And when the press did take more notice in February, the coverage was mostly negative (54%). He was largely invisible again in April. And in May, when he became a focus of attention again, 64% of the stories about him were negative and only 7% were favorable.



Elizabeth Edward's illness made a measurable difference in how he was treated. March, when she announced her cancer's return, was the only month of substantial media attention in which John Edwards' favorable coverage outweighed his negative (45% vs. 12%). Elizabeth Edwards, in turn, got even more coverage than he did that month and none of it was negative.

Edwards' coverage also varied noticeably by medium. On cable, negative stories outweighed positive by 2-to-1, thanks entirely to prime-time cable programming, both on Fox and MSNBC. It was evenly split in newspapers.

By one measure, Edwards might have seemed more in control of his coverage than most other candidates. He or his campaign initiated most of the of the press coverage (56%), which was higher than the norm (46%).

	Edwards	All Coverage
Political Topics	35.2	63.4
Personal Topics	42.3	17.3
Personal Health	31.0	5.1
Domestic Policy	14.1	7.2
Foreign Policy	7.0	7.5
Public Record	0	1.4
Electorate	1.4	1.1
Miscellaneous	0	2.0

To some degree, the focus on Edwards may have been, if not where he would have liked, at least on topics that may have worked for him. Not surprisingly, far more coverage of Edwards was about his family's health than was true for candidates overall (31% vs. 5%). And more coverage was about his ideas about domestic policy (14% vs. 7% generally), particularly his populism on taxes, health care and other social issues.

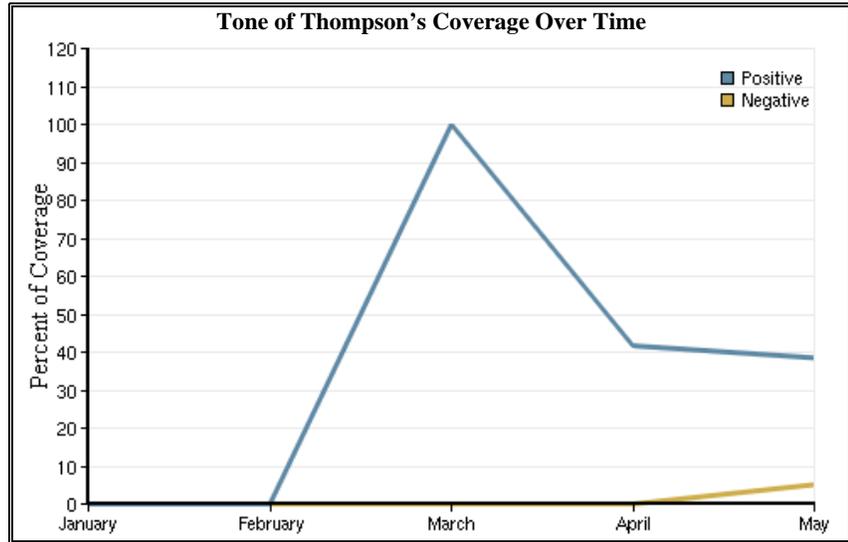
Fred Thompson—The Once and Future Politician

If the press is sometimes accused of preferring celebrity over politics in its news agenda, the candidacy of Fred Thompson is the perfect union. The former prosecutor turned U.S. Senator turned actor played no-nonsense District Attorney Arthur Branch on NBC’s “Law and Order” series for the last six years.

When he began hinting in March that he might run for president, communications lawyers predicted that TV stations would have to take reruns of the program with Thompson off the air. But the press began covering with favorable anticipation about the effect the actor might have on changing the dynamics of an unsettled GOP field.

“The betting money shows Thompson with a real shot right now...with only Rudy Giuliani really ahead of him,” declared MSNBC’s Chris Matthews on a show back in late May, long before the ex-Senator was an official candidate. “Does Thompson have the right appeal for the Republican base? It looks like he does.”

By the time the first five months of the year were over, three things stood out about Thompson’s coverage. The first was how positive it was. Like Obama, nearly half the stories about him (46%) carried a clearly positive tone, and more than half were neutral (51%). Almost none, just 4%, was negative.



The second feature of the coverage is that it was media driven. More than half of all the stories (54%) were initiated by the press, roughly double the norm. If other candidates were trying to figure out ways to drive coverage about them by staging events or staking out dramatic positions, Thompson, the candidate-in-waiting, had no such burden.

	<u>Thomson</u>	<u>All Coverage</u>
Political Topics	84.2	63.4
Personal Topics	12.3	17.3
Personal Health	10.5	5.1
Domestic Policy	3.5	7.2
Foreign Policy	0	7.5
Public Record	0	1.4
Electorate	0	1.1
Miscellaneous	0	2.0

The third feature of the Thompson story is that almost all of the coverage (84%) was about his impact on the race. His ideas, his policy positions, even his biography and record, received negligible coverage. This may have suited for Thompson just fine. [A study](#) of his website in these early days, for instance,

found that he was the only candidate whose site did not feature a section on his ideas or policy positions.

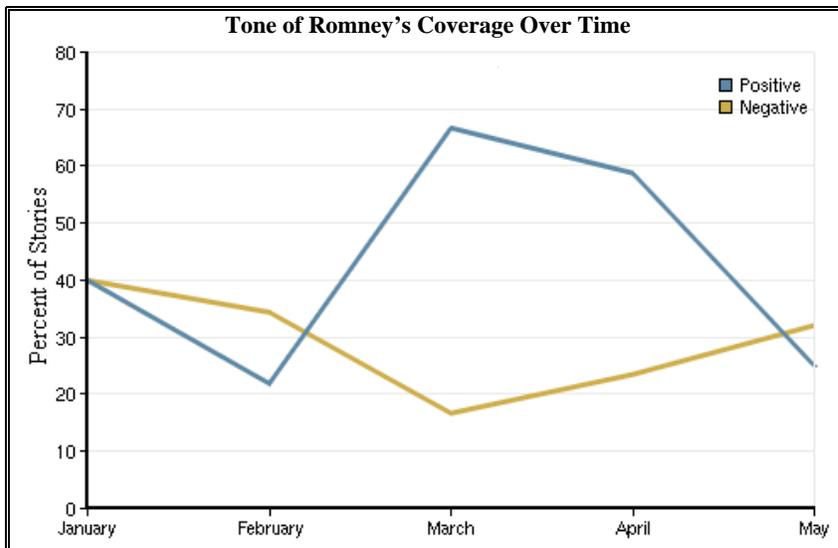
This may also have helped explain why his coverage was so positive. Thompson in these months was the candidate people were waiting for. Some Republicans wondered if another former actor was the eagerly awaited 2008 version of Ronald Reagan. But little about anything else was reported about him.

It would come later, after September, that journalists would begin to wonder if he was really as conservative as advertised, a poor or rusty performer on the stump, or lacked the fire in the belly. In a report filed only two days after Thompson announced, ABC's Jake Tapper cited questions about "his work ethic," and whether "the 65 year-old will have the energy for the rigorous road to Pennsylvania Avenue." In the Senate, Tapper noted, "Thompson was not known as a workhorse."

But the nature of that coverage is the subject of further study.

Mitt Romney – the third man

Largely a mystery man when he entered the Republican presidential field, Mitt Romney's campaign strategy and tactics seems to have impressed the media, even as the press raised questions about his policies, his record, and even his religion.



That dichotomy may go a long way toward explaining coverage that is the most evenly balanced of all the major GOP candidates—34% was positive, 35% was neutral and 31% was negative. And though he trails Giuliani and McCain in the amount of coverage generated, Romney has (at 5% of

the coverage) even this early managed to distance himself from the second-tier of Republican hopefuls who were virtually ignored by the media in the first five months of the year.

Helping to bolster that positive press was the perception that the former Massachusetts governor has run a strategically smart campaign. While he has trailed substantially in the national GOP polls, Romney's emphasis on and stronger showing in

the two early and crucial caucus/primary states of Iowa and New Hampshire have put him in competitive position to potentially emerge as a major candidate.

Thus coverage of Romney’s fortunes in the “horse race” (polls, tactics and performance on the stump), which accounted for 40% of Romney’s stories, and his fundraising skill (13% of his stories) helped created a flattering portrait of a candidate probably doing better than expected. Fully half of these stories (52%) had a positive tone for Romney, more than twice the number (24%) that were negative.

When the fundraising totals for the first quarter of 2007 were reported in early April, for example, Romney’s had collected \$20 million, easily outdistancing his Republican rivals and earning a front-page New York Times headline: “Romney leads G.O.P. in Money, Tapping Wall St. and Mormons.”

It was when the media got around to the other subjects that things became more difficult. Only 8% of the stories about Romney’s personal background, including his membership in the Mormon Church, were positive, while more than a third (36%) were clearly negative in tone. (In a recent Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Poll, 62% of the respondents said their religion is “very different” from the Mormon faith.)

Topics of Mitt Romney’s Coverage		
Percent of All Stories		
	Romney	All Coverage
Political Topics	55.7	63.4
Strategy and Polls	39.8	50.0
Fundraising	12.5	7.3
Personal Topics	28.4	17.3
Religion	22.7	2.1
Domestic Policy	9.1	7.2
Abortion	6.8	2.9
Foreign Policy	3.4	7.5
Public Record	3.4	1.4
Electorate	0	1.1
Miscellaneous	0	2.0

Romney has also had to battle the perception that he is a “flip-flopper,” a man who governed as a moderate chief executive of Massachusetts, but has now tacked to the right in the Republican primary fight. Like both Giuliani and McCain, Romney still must convince many conservatives he is an acceptable candidate.

Over time, after a slow start in February, Romney’s coverage got more positive in March and April, but then became more negative in May. That month, coverage of him increased to its second highest level, behind only February. But his performance in debates, while not panned, failed to dazzle the journalists who score such events. In the early phases of this campaign, Romney the man seemed less intriguing to the press than Romney’s chances in the race.

Announcement and tone

Some might also suspect that candidates get their best coverage around their announcement, when all is still ahead and anything is possible. That was not the case.

Only two of the top candidates enjoyed announcements where their positive coverage clearly outweighed their negative—Clinton and Giuliani. For two others, Obama and Romney, relative newcomers to national politics, the coverage the week

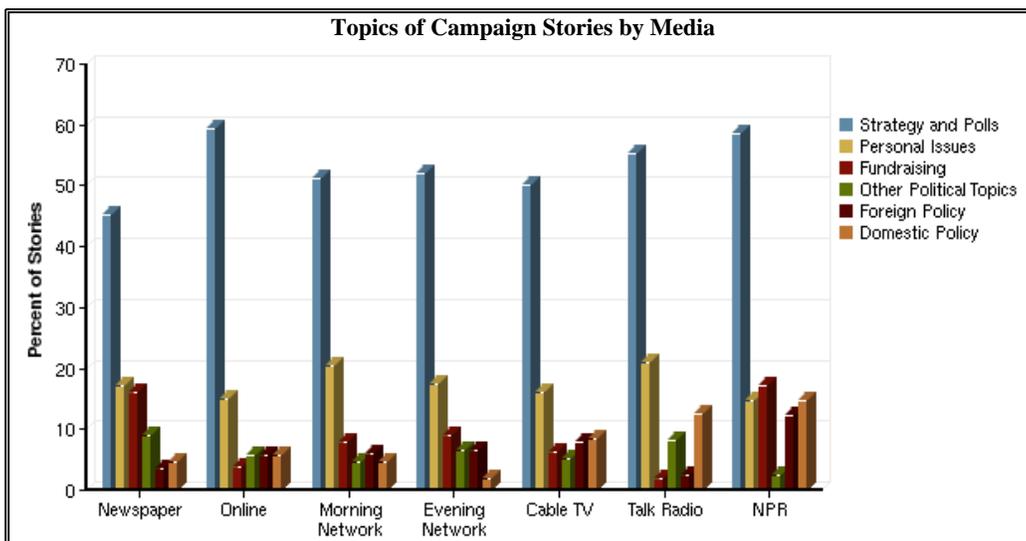
following their announcements was more divided. And one candidate, McCain suffered more negative than positive coverage the week his campaign officially began.

One other candidate suffered from almost no good news the week he announced—Joe Biden. That media flop is easy to understand. Biden stepped on his announcement by making remarks about Barack Obama that raised questions about his racial sensitivity.¹¹

Tone of Coverage of Candidate Announcements			
Percent of All Stories			
Candidate & Date	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Hillary Clinton 1/20-1/27	42.9	34.7	22.4
Barack Obama 2/10-2/17	30.8	46.2	23.1
Joe Biden 1/31-2/6	5.6	44.4	50.0
John McCain 4/25-5/2	19.0	38.1	42.9
Mitt Romney 2/13-2/20	26.9	42.3	30.8
Rudy Giuliani 2/13-2/20	37.5	62.5	0

For McCain, the numbers raise the question of what constitutes a formal announcement. McCain told talk show comedian David Letterman he would run on February 28. But he formally announced his candidacy on April 25, giving his announcement speech on that date. By then, the date measured here, trouble in the polls, in fundraising and the management of his campaign, had already begun.

Media Sectors



Did different media cover the campaign differently? Increasingly, PEJ’s New Index finds striking differences in how different media sectors approach the news. The campaign offers yet another case of this.

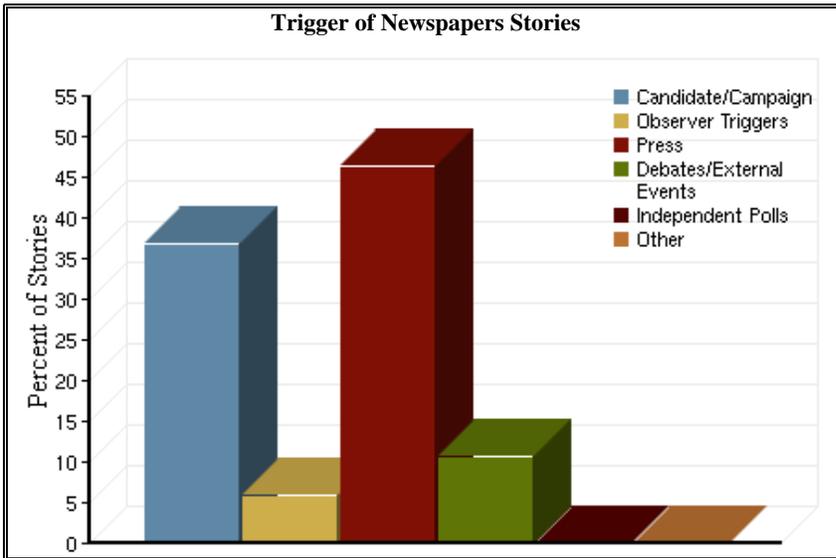
¹¹ In a statement Biden made to the New York Observer on the eve of his announcement, Biden said, "I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy," Biden said. "I mean, that's a storybook, man."

But one feature was consistent across all sectors—the focus on the horse race, polling and strategy.

Newspapers—More Enterprise and Emphasis on Governance

On the front pages of newspapers, Democrats tended to get more coverage than in other media, somewhat more positive coverage than elsewhere, and more stories tended to contain information that explained how they would be affected if that candidate were elected than was true in the press coverage overall. In addition, many more of the stories were initiated by journalists than elsewhere in the press, a fact that signals a special role for print as a source of enterprise in news.

The PEJ-Shorenstein study included 11 newspapers, examining front-page coverage.



Looking just at topic, those stories tended to be focused more on political matters and less on issues and ideas than the media overall. In all, 71% of newspaper stories concentrated on the “game,” compared with 63% overall. And 8% of front-page newspaper stories were about policy, vs. 15% generally. Newspapers were

typical of all media studied for their focus on the personal backgrounds of candidates (17%).

Whatever the topic, however, newspapers tended to frame stories more in terms of their impact on voters than did other media. Fully 18% of newspaper stories were framed around how the information might be relevant to citizens, compared with 12% in the press generally.

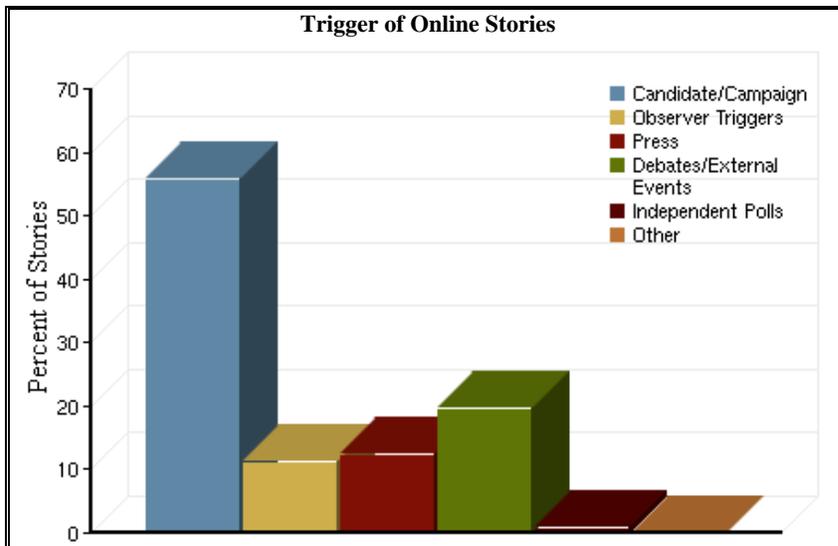
Another distinguishing characteristic of the print stories studied was tone. Democrats got much more positive coverage in the daily papers examined than they did elsewhere. Fully 59% of all stories about Democrats had a clear, positive message vs. 11% that carried a negative tone. That is roughly double the percentage of positive stories that we found in the media generally. Just under a third (30%) of the front page stories examined were neutral.

For the top tier Democrats, the positive tilt was even more the case than for Democrats in general. Obama’s front page coverage in the sample was 70% positive and 9% negative and Clinton’s was similarly 61% positive and 13% negative.

Tone of Newspaper Coverage by Party			
Percent of All Stories			
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Democrats	58.8	30.0	11.3
Republicans	26.4	34.0	39.6

Republican candidates, in contrast, were more likely to receive clearly negative stories in print than elsewhere: 40% negative vs. 26% positive and 34% neutral.

Newspapers also stood out for initiating more campaign coverage on their own. Nearly half of all front page stories were triggered by newsroom initiative rather than reacting to what the candidate or others said or did (46%). That is substantially higher



than the 28% in the media generally in the sample. A little more than a third of stories were triggered by the candidates and their campaigns (37%), compared with 46% generally.

There was also some good news for second-tier candidates in print. These candidates were able to make news in

smaller newspapers, sometimes as the secondary figure in a story, to a greater extent than we found in other media.

There was another way some of these less-heavily-covered White House aspirants got attention. They found their way into newspapers through hometown coverage. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson had this advantage in Albuquerque, for instance. So did Fred Thompson in Chattanooga. In theory, such coverage may mean more in the Internet Age than it once did. Those locally produced stories can find their way into more widely distributed environments online, whether it is the major aggregators like Google, or political aggregation sites like Real Clear Politics, or through links in blogs or elsewhere. To what extent that may be happening is harder to tell.

Online—Keeping It in Neutral

The online news sites in the PEJ-Shorenstein study were among the least likely outlets to initiate their own stories, and tended to be more neutral in their coverage, and notably less negative.

The study included five online news sites, including CNN.com, Yahoo News, Google News, MSNBC.com, and AOL news. The sample studied the top five stories each day on each site, or 106 campaign stories in total.

The topics people would find there were fairly typical, though the percentage of stories about strictly political matters was slightly higher than the norm (69% vs. 63% overall). More coverage of the polls was one reason (59% vs. 50% for the press generally), but there was less coverage of fundraising than the norm (4% vs. 7% overall).

The online news sites studied demonstrated the least enterprise of any medium studied. Just 12% of the top stories online were initiated by the press, compared with 28% of the media overall. Conversely, more of the stories were triggered by something the candidates themselves said or did, or by debates or outside matters.

It is important to note that of the five online news sites in the study, only CNN and MSNBC are part of a newsgathering operation, while Yahoo and Google are primarily news aggregators. AOL has made some efforts at news gathering, with uneven success.

Another explanation is that the web audience depends on this platform for up-to-the-minute news. Therefore these outlets are oriented toward immediacy and breaking news. In this medium, the newest event might gravitate to the top of the web page.

A focus on breaking news might also explain another difference online. The websites studied were more likely than other media to focus on the horse race. Fully 59% of stories were about strategy, momentum, polls and the race, compared with 50% in the press overall.

The news sites examined also stood out in part for the degree of neutrality. Fully 53% of top stories online were neutral, compared with 39% of the media overall. And just 15% were clearly negative in tone, vs. 30% for the media generally.

Another distinction was in who got covered. Online, Barack Obama was the most covered candidate, not Hillary Clinton. The Illinois Senator was the focus of 19% of all election stories vs. 10% for Clinton and 11% for Giuliani.

Evening News—NBC’s Election Coverage Differs from Others

Once, the evening network newscasts may have been the single most important media target for someone aspiring to the presidency. Even now, with 20 million viewers, a median audience age of roughly 60 years (a solid voting group) and an audience demographic that mirrors the population generally across party and ideology, the network evening newscasts are still an important venue.

The campaign received substantial coverage—154 stories over the course of 109 weeknights.

When it came to topic, network nightly news was more strategic and less policy oriented, than the press overall, or than its rival, cable news. Fully 68% of those stories

were about internal political matters (mostly strategy and the horse race), while 18% were about personal concerns involving the candidates (marriage, religion, health), and 10% were about issues.

	ABC	CBS	NBC
Political Topics	69.8	69.1	64.3
Personal Topics	14.0	18.2	19.6
Domestic Policy	2.3	0	3.6
Foreign Policy	9.3	7.3	7.1
Public Record	0	3.6	3.6
Electorate	2.3	0	0
Miscellaneous	2.3	1.8	1.8

Network evening news closely reflected the overall media when it came to dividing time between Democrat and Republican candidates (49% vs. 28%). While all three produced more stories about Democrats than Republicans, at the NBC Evening News the gap was smaller—just an 11 percentage point difference (41% Democrats vs. 30% Republicans) vs. roughly a 30 percentage point gap at ABC and CBS.

The tone of coverage in the 30-minute evening newscasts was much more positive toward the Democrats than Republicans. And again, among the major candidates, Obama got the best of it and McCain the worst. Of the 11 stories primarily about McCain that ran

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Democrats	39.5	43.4	17.1
Republicans	18.6	44.2	37.2

on the nightly news in the first five months of the year, not a single one carried a clearly positive tone. Six of them were clearly negative and five were neutral.

The commercial over-the-air TV networks did not focus on second tier candidates at all, except for Bill Richardson when he announced (and Joe Biden when he made controversial comments about Obama). PBS was the only network in which any other 2nd tier candidates was successful as a newsmaker.

Network Morning News—Sunrise Shows Feature Obama and Romney

Network TV news coverage in the morning was strikingly different than in the evening.¹²

To begin with, the morning shows covered the race more heavily than their evening siblings. Over the same number of minutes and days, morning news did 265 segments (about 11 hours) on the campaign, compared with 154 at the dinner hour (about five hours).

There were also distinct differences by network. The Today show aired the most campaign stories (110 stories vs. 81 on Good Morning America and 74 on CBS' Early Show).

CBS' Early Show was the most heavily focused on the horse race and other strategic matters (77% of its stories, vs. 61% on Today and 56% at GMA).

Good Morning America and Today were more likely do stories on the personal side of the race (28% of stories on GMA vs. 20% at Today and 12% on CBS).

And certain subjects proved particularly attractive to morning producers. Nearly half of the stories on GMA about personal matters, for instance, involved Elizabeth Edwards and her battle with breast cancer.

Within that time frame, the shows produced almost twice as many stories focused on Democratic candidates than on Republicans (51% vs. 27%).

PBS—More Attention to the “Other” Hopefuls

The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS stood out from the media overall and the three commercial evening newscasts in particular on several levels. First, the program gave the 2008 election much lower priority in the news, at least in the first half-hour of the newscast studied here. Not one campaign story from January through May aired among the top three stories in any PBS newscast. In contrast, on the three commercial nightly newscasts (CBS, ABC, and NBC) roughly 30% of the stories appeared in that top part of the newscast.

Second, the NewsHour stood out for the attention it devoted to lesser-known candidates. While the media overall, focused heavily on the top few candidates in each party, the first 30 minutes of the NewsHour spread coverage across a much broader group

¹² The study examined the first half hour of the three morning programs, the time when the programs are far more likely to cover traditional news than later in the broadcast, when the topic turns more to lifestyle, features, shopping and cooking.

of contenders. The only candidate to stand out from the group in total coverage was John McCain, who was the focus of 11% of the election stories.

Otherwise, top candidates Barack Obama and Rudy Giuliani were the primary figures for just a single story each, as were lesser-known candidates Chris Dodd, Joe Biden, Bill Richardson, and Tom Tancredo. (Hillary Clinton had two stories in all.)

The program also tended more than other media toward comparative summaries of multiple candidates rather than piece focused one candidate at a time. Fully 40% of the stories on the NewsHour did not highlight one particular candidate but focused on several or discussed other subjects like voting issues. Much of this may be explained by the NewsHour’s emphasis on the four debates that occurred in this time period. They accounted for 17% of the outlet’s election stories, more than any other storyline and seven percentage points more than the media overall (10%).

Tone of PBS News Coverage by Party			
Percent of All Stories			
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Democrats	8.3	66.7	25.0
Republicans	0	77.8	22.2

When it came to tone, however, the NewsHour upheld its pattern found in other research for more neutral coverage than other media.¹³ More than two-thirds of NewsHour stories were neutral towards the primary figure, regardless of party.

Cable – Republicans get their friendliest coverage

On cable, the campaign was a bigger story than in other media and was more positive toward Republicans than in any sector other than online.

Overall, according to PEJ’s News Coverage Index, the campaign made up 10% of the newshole on cable TV during the first five months of the year, compared with 8% overall.

Despite the time it had to fill, cable news did not stand out for the range of topics it covered, in its greater interest in Democrats or even much in the candidates it covered.

Tone of Cable Coverage by Party			
Percent of All Stories			
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Democrats	33.9	40.6	25.5
Republicans	28.7	40.9	30.4

What distinguished cable news more in the first five months of the year was the tone of the coverage. The positive-negative breakdown of Democrats followed roughly the same trend as the media overall (34% positive vs. 25% negative). But the tone of Republican coverage was quite different. On cable TV, stories about Republican candidates were nearly as likely to be positive as to be negative (29% positive vs. 30% negative).

¹³ For early findings about the PBS NewsHour, see the Network TV content analysis in the [“2006 Annual Report on the State of the News Media,”](#) [“The Debate Effect: How the press covered the pivotal period”](#) as well as the [2005 Annual Report on the State of the News Media.](#)

But those numbers only reflect the three major cable news channels taken together. When you look at the coverage of each one, there are significant differences in how the candidates were treated. CNN gave decidedly more negative coverage to Republican candidates; Fox was more negative towards Democrats--and more positive towards Republicans; MSNBC gave decidedly positive coverage towards both.

CNN: The CNN programming studied tended to cast a negative light on Republican candidates—by a margin of three-to-one. Four-in-ten stories (41%) were clearly negative while just 14% were positive and 46% were neutral. The network provided negative coverage of all three main candidates with McCain fairing the worst (63% negative) and Romney fairing a little better than the others only because a majority of his coverage was neutral.

It’s not that Democrats, other than Obama, fared well on CNN either. Nearly half of the Illinois Senator’s stories were positive (46%), vs. just 8% that were negative. But both Clinton and Edwards ended up with more negative than positive coverage overall. So while coverage for Democrats overall was a bit more positive than negative, that was almost all due to extremely favorable coverage for Obama.¹⁴

Fox News: The programming studied on Fox News offered a somewhat more positive picture of Republicans and more negative one of Democrats compared with other media outlets. Fox News stories about a Republican candidate were most likely to be neutral (47%), with the remainder more positive than negative (32% vs. 21% negative). The bulk of that positive coverage went to Giuliani (44% positive), while McCain still suffered from unflattering coverage (20% positive vs. 35% negative).

When it came to Democratic candidates, the picture was more negative. Again, neutral stories had a slight edge (39%), followed by 37% negative and 24% positive. And, in marked contrast from the rest of the media, coverage of Obama was twice as negative as positive: 32% negative vs. 16% positive and 52% neutral.

But any sense here that the news channel was uniformly positive about Republicans or negative about Democrats is not manifest in the data.

	Tone of Cable Coverage by Channel					
	Percent of All Stories					
	Democrats			Republicans		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
CNN	27.7%	49.1	23.2	13.5%	45.9	40.5
FOX	24.2%	38.9	36.8	32.0%	46.7	21.3
MSNBC	47.2%	34.1	18.7	37.8%	32.7	29.6

MSNBC: On MSNBC, a positive tone pervaded coverage of candidates from both parties. Nearly half (47%) of the stories about Democratic candidates were positive,

¹⁴ CNN also stood out for one other factor. Far more of its campaign stories were taped edited packages, the kind of traditional work that is even more a feature of broadcast evening news. Fully 40% of its segments were correspondent packages. On Fox, the number was 29%. MSNBC, despite its affiliation with NBC News, was the least likely to feature correspondent packages. Only 7% of its election segments were packages. Far more, 79% of all segments, were live discussions, either with staff or outside guests.

vs. 19% negative and 34% neutral. Coverage of Republican candidates was not quite as rosy but still more stories were positive (38%) than neutral (33%) or negative (30%).

But here as well, Senator McCain still came up short. Four-in-ten of his stories (39%) were negative in tone compared to only about two-in-ten (22%) that were positive.

Talk Radio—Accentuating the Negative

It may surprise no one that the 2008 presidential election was a major feature of talk radio, both conservative and liberal. From January through May, the race for the White House has accounted for 13% of the total airtime studied, making it the second-biggest story after the debate over Iraq policy (17%). Overall, conservative talk radio was far more interested in the early campaign than was liberal talk radio. Conservative talk radio aired 106 segments on the candidates, while liberal talk radio mustered a bare 29 segments.

Most of that airtime was spent dwelling on the negative. Conservatives spent the bulk of their time criticizing Democratic candidates and liberal hosts vented about Republican contenders. The candidate who received the most attention by far on talk radio was Senator Clinton. She got two or three times the attention of any other contender regardless of party. Most of the Clinton segments were carried on conservative talk radio, which covered her negatively in 86% of 50 segments. The most discussed Republican candidate on liberal talk radio, Mayor Giuliani, was treated negatively in every segment about him, but there were only eight.

What also stood out was the treatment of candidates who might be from the hosts' own political camp. Even here there was a tendency to find fault. More than half

Tone of Talk Show Coverage				
Percent of All Stories				
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>N=</u>
Conservative Talk Radio				
Hillary Clinton	2.0	12.0	86.0	50
Barack Obama	27.8	16.7	55.6	18
John Edwards	6.7	13.3	80.0	15
Rudy Giuliani	25.0	18.8	56.3	16
John McCain	50.0	0	50.0	4
Mitt Romney	66.7	0	33.3	3
Liberal Talk Radio				
Hillary Clinton	16.7	50.0	33.3	6
Barack Obama	100	0	0	4
John Edwards	100	0	0	3
Rudy Giuliani	0	0	100	8
John McCain	0	0	100	5
Mitt Romney	0	0	100	3

(56%) of the conservative talk segments about Republican Rudolph Giuliani carried a negative tone as did half of the those on conservative talk radio about John McCain. Liberal hosts were twice as likely to be negative as positive about their leading candidate, Hillary Clinton. A third (33%) of the segments about her were negative, vs. 17% that were positive and 50% neutral).

No talker was more critical than conservative host Michael Savage, who has talked about running for President himself. Only one election-related story out of the entire five-month period on his show was positive and that was a self-referential story about John McCain. Savage discussed how he had met McCain at a fight in Las Vegas, and how he offered the candidate

advice. All other coverage about liberal or conservative candidates carried a clear negative tone.

On the liberal side, Randi Rhodes was both the most partisan and the most negative toward Republicans. The one election segments spent on Democratic candidates was clearly positive while all but one the 15 segments on Republicans were critical.

NPR—Morning Edition – more time for the Democrats

Like the media overall, the first 30 minutes NPR’s Morning Edition produced more stories about Democratic candidates than Republicans (41% vs. 24%). What was different was how little negative coverage Democrats received, especially compared with all other media. Stories about a Democratic candidate were more seven times more positive than negative: 41% positive vs. 6% negative. The majority of coverage, 53% of stories, was neutral.

Tone of NPR’s Morning Edition Coverage by Party			
	Percent of All Stories		
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Democrats	41.2%	52.9	5.9
Republicans	30.0%	50.0	20.0

Looking at specific candidates, stories about Barack Obama carried a clearly positive tone two-thirds of the time. Not a single Morning Edition story was negative. Furthermore, 43% of Hillary Clinton’s

coverage was positive vs. 14% negative.

Stories about one of the Republican candidates was more evenly split in tone: 30% positive to 20% negative and 50% neutral. Similar to its public broadcasting counterpart, the NewsHour, NPR devoted more attention to lesser-known candidates. Mitt Romney, the candidate running third for the GOP nomination in most national polls, was the most covered Republican figure, tied with Mike Huckabee, a mostly unknown candidate at the time. Often considered the GOP front runner, Rudy Giuliani, only had one story devoted to him and John McCain had none.

NPR was also the one outlet where there was a marked difference between the total amount of airtime vs. total number of stories. While 24% of the campaign stories were about a Republican candidate, just 15% of the total airtime was spent on them. This suggests that stories about the Republican candidates were brief, creating an even greater gap in the total coverage of Republicans and Democrats.

Conclusion

Once again, the game of politics—rather than the ideas or even the background of the personalities—has dominated how the press has presented the race for president.

What is new in 2008 is how quickly this has begun, nearly a year before the first votes will be cast. The early start to the race, and even the large number of candidates

running, has not changed this strategic lens of the press. Simply put if one were to have imagined that this earlier beginning made the first polls even more a reflection of name recognition than they once were and thus the tactical maneuvering of the candidates less meaningful, that notion has not taken hold in the American media.

One other finding of this study is that the news media also appear to be preoccupied with the head-to-head contest of the first major African American candidate and the first serious female contender for a major party nomination on the Democratic side.

But the prospect of a dramatic ideological realignment in the GOP, in which a candidate with more moderate history on social issues is the leader in national polls in Giuliani and a formerly moderate Republican is leading in Iowa in Romney, did not similarly capture the press' imagination.

There are other factors that may have tipped the press' gaze more toward Democrats. The Republicans candidates with large war chests announced later than Democrats, and that would explain part of why Republicans received less news attention in the first five months of coverage. But it does not explain all of the difference, for even after the GOP race had begun, Democrats continued to get more exposure.

That tilt toward Democrats and elite candidates was truer of some outlets more than others. One news operation studied stands out as offering a contrast to these trends--The News Hour on PBS. It took a measurably different approach, focusing on all the candidates and offering audiences a broad look at their agendas for the country.

As for the more critical tone for Republicans, there are various possible explanations. The strategic context of the Republican candidacies did not always cast them in a positive light. On the plus side, Romney's fundraising, like Obama's, exceeded predications. The result was relatively positive coverage even though his national polling was in the single digits.

But the failure of John McCain's campaign to gain traction led to negative coverage for his candidacy.

A good deal of the negative coverage of other Republican candidates may well have resulted from press skepticism about their chances for the nomination. Giuliani continues to be regarded possibly too liberal for the social conservatives. Romney's religion and his former support for abortion rights is also a potential stumbling block with socially conservative Republicans. These perceived flaws of these and other candidates probably accounts for the positive treatment of Fred Thompson, who initially offered the prospect of filling that void on the right. That in turn was fueled by Thompson's name recognition in the polls – due in significant part to his acting career.

But if, in the early stages of the race, the 2008 presidential campaign represents a possible shift away from the Republican party of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush

and a generational struggle in both parties, neither of these more idea-oriented themes are heavily evident in the early press coverage. If American politics is changing, the style and approach of the American press does not appear to be changing with it.

Topline

By Outlet

Placement/Prominence Percent of Stories							
	Newspaper ¹⁵	Online	Morning Network	Commercial Nightly Network	Cable	Talk Radio	NPR
Lead	12.5%	19.8%	10.6%	6.5%	11.1%	16.7%	0.0%
2nd or 3rd	47.6%	29.2%	27.9%	22.1%	26.2%	33.8%	12.2%
4 th and Lower	39.9%	50.9%	61.5%	71.4%	62.6%	49.5%	87.8%

Placement/ Prominence Percent of Stories									
	Morning Network Total	ABC Morning	CBS Morning	NBC Morning	Commercial Nightly Network Total	ABC Nightly	CBS Nightly	NBC Nightly	PBS
Lead	10.6%	12.3%	10.8%	9.1%	6.5%	7.0%	3.6%	8.9%	0.0%
2nd or 3rd	27.9%	17.3%	31.1%	33.6%	22.1%	18.6%	16.4%	30.4%	0.0%
4 th and below	61.5%	70.3%	58.1%	57.3%	71.4%	74.4%	80.0%	60.7%	100%

Placement/Prominence Percent of Stories				
	Cable Total	CNN	Fox	MSNBC
Lead	11.1%	5.0%	12.8%	15.1%
2 nd or 3 rd	26.3%	17.6%	26.1%	34.3%
4 th and below fold	62.6%	77.4%	61.0%	50.6%

¹⁵ For newspapers, 2nd or 3rd story refers to all stories above the fold (except the lead) and 4th or lower refers to stories below the fold.

Primary Figure – Overall								
Percent of Stories								
	All Media	Newspapers	Online	Morning Network	Commercial Nightly Network	Cable	Talk Radio	NPR
All Democrats	49.0%	47.6%	54.7%	51.3%	49.4%	45.7%	56.7%	41.5%
Hillary Clinton	16.9%	13.7%	10.4%	17.4%	11.7%	17.5%	26.7%	17.1%
Barack Obama	13.8%	13.7%	18.9%	15.1%	14.3%	13.9%	10.5%	7.3%
John Edwards	4.1%	3.6%	4.7%	3.4%	3.9%	3.0%	8.6%	4.9%
Elizabeth Edwards	3.1%	3.0%	6.6%	6.0%	6.5%	0.8%	1.9%	4.9%
Joe Biden	2.4%	0.6%	5.7%	3.0%	2.6%	2.5%	1.0%	0.0%
Other Democrats	8.7%	13.0%	8.4%	6.4%	10.4%	8.0%	8.0%	7.3%
All Republicans	30.7%	31.5%	30.2%	26.8%	27.9%	34.2%	28.6%	24.4%
Rudy Giuliani	9.3%	7.1%	11.3%	10.9%	9.1%	9.4%	11.4%	2.4%
John McCain	6.9%	9.5%	7.5%	6.4%	7.1%	7.5%	4.3%	0.0%
Mitt Romney	5.1%	7.7%	5.7%	4.9%	2.6%	5.7%	2.9%	4.9%
Fred Thompson	3.3%	4.8%	4.7%	1.5%	3.9%	3.9%	1.9%	2.4%
Other Republicans	6.1%	2.4%	1.0%	3.1%	5.2%	7.7%	8.1%	9.8%
Other	1.0%	1.2%	1.9%	0.4%	0.6%	0.9%	2.9%	0.0%
No Primary Figure	19.3%	19.7%	13.2%	21.5%	22.1%	19.2%	11.8%	34.1%
Number of Stories	1742	168	106	265	154	722	210	41

Primary Figure - Network TV									
Percent of Stories									
	Morning Network	ABC Morning	CBS Morning	NBC Morning	Commercial Nightly Network	ABC Nightly	CBS Nightly	NBC Nightly	PBS Nightly
All Democrats	51.3%	59.3%	44.6%	50.0%	49.4%	51.1%	56.4%	41.1%	34.3%
Hillary Clinton	17.4%	21.0%	14.9%	16.4%	11.7%	14.0%	14.5%	7.1%	5.7%
Barack Obama	15.1%	17.3%	12.2%	15.5%	14.3%	14.0%	18.2%	10.7%	2.9%
John Edwards	3.4%	2.5%	1.4%	5.5%	3.9%	4.7%	7.3%	3.6%	0.0%
Elizabeth Edwards	6.0%	7.4%	5.4%	5.5%	6.5%	7.0%	3.6%	8.9%	5.7%
Joe Biden	3.0%	3.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.6%	2.3%	1.8%	3.6%	2.9%
Other Democrats	6.4%	7.4%	8.0%	4.4%	10.4%	9.2%	11.0%	10.8%	17.1%
All Republicans	26.8%	18.5%	35.1%	27.3%	27.9%	27.9%	25.5%	30.4%	25.7%
Rudy Giuliani	10.9%	8.6%	14.9%	10.0%	9.1%	11.6%	3.6%	12.5%	2.9%
John McCain	6.4%	4.9%	9.5%	5.5%	7.1%	7.0%	9.1%	5.4%	11.4%
Mitt Romney	4.9%	2.5%	4.1%	7.3%	2.6%	2.3%	3.6%	1.8%	2.9%
Fred Thompson	1.5%	1.2%	1.4%	1.8%	3.9%	4.7%	3.6%	3.6%	0.0%
Other Republicans	3.1%	1.3%	5.2%	2.7%	5.2%	2.3%	5.6%	7.1%	8.5%
Other	0.4%	1.2%	0%	0%	0.6%	0%	3.6%	1.8%	0%
No Primary Figure	21.5%	21.0%	20.3%	22.7%	22.0%	20.9%	14.5%	26.8%	40.0%
Number of Stories	265	81	74	110	154	43	55	56	35

Primary Figure - Cable				
Percent of Stories				
	Cable Total	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC
All Democrats	45.7%	46.9%	43.6%	46.4%
Hillary Clinton	17.5%	15.9%	18.8%	17.7%
Barack Obama	13.9%	15.5%	11.5%	14.3%
John Edwards	3.0%	3.3%	3.7%	2.3%
Elizabeth Edwards	0.8%	1.3%	0.5%	0.8%
Joe Biden	2.5%	2.9%	2.8%	1.9%
Other Democrats	8.0%	8.0%	6.3%	9.4%
All Republicans	34.2%	31.0%	34.4%	37.0%
Rudy Giuliani	9.4%	5.9%	8.3%	13.6%
John McCain	7.5%	6.7%	9.2%	6.8%
Mitt Romney	5.7%	7.1%	4.1%	5.7%
Fred Thompson	3.9%	2.1%	6.0%	3.8%
Other Republicans	7.7%	9.2%	6.8%	7.1%
Other	0.9%	0.8%	1.9%	0.0%
No Primary Figure	19.2%	21.3%	20.1%	16.6%
Number of Stories	722	239	218	265

Party Tone by Media																
Percent of Stories																
N = Total number of stories																
	All Media				Newspapers				Online				Morning Network Total			
	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N
Democra ts	34.8 %	38. 7	26. 5	85 3	58.8 %	30. 0	11. 3	8 0	31.0 %	53. 4	15. 5	5 8	43.4 %	39. 0	17. 6	13 6
Republic ans	26.2 %	39. 1	34. 8	53 5	26.4 %	34. 0	39. 6	5 3	34.4 %	53. 1	12. 5	3 2	26.8 %	42. 3	31. 0	71

Party Tone by Media																
Percent of Stories																
N = Total number of stories																
	Commercial Nightly Network Total				Cable Total				Talk Radio				NPR			
	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N	Pos	Ne u	Ne g	N
Democra ts	39.5 %	43. 4	17. 1	7 6	33.9 %	40. 6	25. 5	33 0	14.3 %	18. 5	67. 2	11 9	41.2 %	52. 9	5.9	1 7
Republic ans	18.6 %	44. 2	37. 2	4 3	28.7 %	40. 9	30. 4	24 7	18.3 %	11. 7	70. 0	60	30.0 %	50. 0	20. 0	1 0

Party Tone by Media - Morning Network																
Percent of Stories																
N = Total number of stories																
	Morning Network Total				ABC				CBS				NBC			
	Pos	Neu	Neg	N	Pos	Neu	Neg	N	Pos	Neu	Neg	N	Pos	Neu	Neg	N
Democrats	43.4%	39.0	17.6	136	37.5%	39.6	22.9	48	51.5%	30.3	18.2	33	43.6%	43.6	12.7	55
Republicans	26.8%	42.3	31.0	71	33.3%	40.0	26.7	55	15.4%	53.8	30.8	26	33.3%	33.3	33.3	30

Party Tone by Media – Commercial Nightly Network																
Percent of Stories																
N = Total number of stories																
	ABC Nightly				CBS Nightly				NBC Nightly				PBS Nightly			
	Pos	Neu	Neg	N												
Democrats	40.9%	40.9	18.2	22	45.2%	38.7	16.1	31	30.4%	52.2	17.4	23	8.3%	66.7	25.0	12
Republicans	16.7%	50.0	33.3	12	14.3%	42.9	42.9	14	23.5%	41.2	35.3	17	0.0%	77.8	22.2	9

Party Tone by Media – Cable																
Percent of Stories																
N = Total number of stories																
	Cable Total				CNN				Fox News				MSNBC			
	Pos	Neu	Neg	N	Pos	Neu	Neg	N	Pos	Neu	Neg	N	Pos	Neu	Neg	N
Democrats	33.9%	40.6	25.5	330	27.7%	49.1	23.2	112	24.2%	38.9	36.8	95	47.2%	34.1	18.7	123
Republicans	28.7%	40.9	30.4	247	13.5%	45.9	40.5	74	32.0%	46.7	21.3	75	37.8%	32.7	29.6	98

General Topic								
Percent of Stories								
	All Media	Newspapers	Online	Morning Network	Commercial Nightly Network	Cable	Talk Radio	NPR
Political Topics	63.4%	70.8%	68.9%	63.8%	67.5%	61.6%	55.2%	58.5%
Strategy and Polls	50.0%	45.2%	59.4%	51.3%	51.9%	50.0%	45.2%	39.0%
Fundraising	7.3%	16.1%	3.8%	7.9%	9.1%	6.4%	1.9%	17.1%
Other Political Topics	6.0%	9.1%	5.7%	4.5%	6.5%	5.2%	8.1%	2.4%
Personal Topics	17.3%	16.7%	15.1%	20.4%	17.5%	16.1%	21.0%	14.6%
Marriage Relationships	3.7%	2.4%	4.7%	4.5%	3.9%	3.9%	4.3%	2.4%
Personal Health	5.1%	2.4%	5.7%	8.7%	9.1%	2.9%	4.3%	9.8%
Religion	2.1%	1.2%	1.9%	0.8%	1.3%	3.0%	2.9%	0.0%
Other Personal Topics	6.4%	11.2%	2.8%	6.4%	3.2%	6.3%	9.5%	2.4%
Domestic Policy	7.2%	4.8%	5.7%	4.5%	1.9%	8.4%	12.4%	14.6%
Abortion	2.9%	0.6%	0.9%	3.0%	1.9%	3.9%	3.8%	2.4%
Other Domestic Policy Issues	4.3%	4.1%	4.8%	1.5%	0.0%	4.5%	8.6%	12.2%
Foreign Policy	7.5%	3.6%	5.7%	6.0%	7.8%	9.6%	6.2%	12.2%
Iraq War	6.3%	3.6%	5.7%	6.0%	6.5%	8.0%	2.4%	12.2%
Other Foreign Policy Issues	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	1.6%	3.8%	0.0%
Public Record	1.4%	1.8%	0.0%	1.1%	2.6%	1.5%	1.4%	0.0%
Electorate	1.1%	1.2%	1.9%	1.9%	0.6%	0.8%	1.9%	0.0%
Miscellaneous	2.0%	1.2%	2.8%	2.3%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	0.0%

General Topic - Network									
Percent of Stories									
	Morning Network	ABC Morning	CBS Morning	NBC Morning	Commercial Nightly Network	ABC Nightly	CBS Nightly	NBC Nightly	PBS
Political Topics	63.8%	55.6%	77.0%	60.9%	67.5%	69.8%	69.1%	64.3%	85.7%
Strategy and Polls	51.3%	43.2%	62.2%	50.0%	51.9%	53.5%	52.7%	50.0%	71.4%
Fundraising	7.9%	7.4%	8.1%	8.2%	9.1%	11.6%	9.1%	7.1%	5.7%
Other Political Topics	4.5%	4.9%	6.7%	2.7%	6.5%	4.7%	7.3%	7.1%	8.6%
Personal Topics	20.4%	28.4%	12.2%	20.0%	17.5%	14.0%	18.2%	19.6%	11.4%
Marriage Relationships	4.5%	7.4%	1.4%	4.5%	3.9%	4.7%	1.8%	5.4%	0.0%
Personal Health	8.7%	12.3%	6.8%	7.3%	9.1%	9.3%	7.3%	10.7%	5.7%
Religion	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	1.3%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Personal Topics	6.4%	8.6%	4.1%	6.4%	3.2%	0.0%	5.5%	3.6%	5.7%
Domestic Policy	4.5%	6.2%	4.1%	3.6%	1.9%	2.3%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
Abortion	3.0%	4.9%	2.7%	1.8%	1.9%	2.3%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
Other Domestic Policy Issues	1.5%	1.2%	1.4%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Foreign Policy	6.0%	4.9%	4.1%	8.2%	7.8%	9.3%	7.3%	7.1%	2.9%
Iraq War	6.0%	4.9%	4.1%	8.2%	6.5%	9.3%	5.5%	5.4%	2.9%
Other Foreign Policy Issues	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%
Public Record	1.1%	0.0%	1.4%	1.8%	2.6%	0.0%	3.6%	3.6%	0.0%
Electorate	1.9%	1.2%	0.0%	3.6%	0.6%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Miscellaneous	2.3%	3.7%	1.4%	1.8%	1.9%	2.3%	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%

General Topic - Cable				
Percent of Stories				
	Cable Total	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC
Political Topics	61.6%	53.6%	68.3%	63.4%
Strategy and Polls	50.0%	39.7%	56.4%	54.0%
Fundraising	6.4%	7.5%	4.1%	7.2%
Other Political Topics	5.3%	6.3%	7.8%	2.3%
Personal Topics	16.1%	26.4%	10.1%	11.7%
Marriage Relationships	3.9%	4.2%	2.3%	4.9%
Personal Health	2.9%	3.8%	2.8%	2.3%
Religion	3.0%	6.7%	1.4%	1.1%
Other Personal Topics	6.2%	11.7%	3.7%	3.4%
Domestic Policy	8.4%	7.1%	8.7%	9.4%
Abortion	3.9%	2.1%	5.5%	4.2%
Other Domestic Policy Issues	4.6%	5.0%	3.2%	5.3%
Foreign Policy	9.0%	6.7%	9.6%	12.1%
Iraq War	8.0%	5.4%	8.3%	10.2%
Other Foreign Policy Issues	1.5%	1.3%	1.4%	1.9%
Public Record	1.5%	2.1%	0.9%	1.5%
Electorate	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%
Miscellaneous	1.9%	3.3%	1.4%	1.1%

Impact								
Percent of Stories								
	All Media	Newspapers	Online	Morning Network	Commercial Nightly Network	Cable	Talk Radio	NPR
Citizens	11.9%	18.5%	11.3%	7.5%	10.4%	11.2%	15.4%	12.2%
Politicians	85.8%	78.6%	86.8%	90.6%	87.7%	86.8%	81.8%	87.8%
Interest Groups	0.6%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.7%	0.0%
Other	0.2%	0.6%	1.8%	1.9%	1.9%	1.4%	2.4%	0.0%

Impact - Network									
Percent of Stories									
	Morning Network	ABC Morning	CBS Morning	NBC Morning	Commercial Nightly Network	ABC Nightly	CBS Nightly	NBC Nightly	PBS
Citizens	7.5%	11.1%	1.4%	9.1%	10.4%	9.3%	7.3%	14.3%	8.6%
Politicians	90.6%	86.4%	95.9%	90.0%	87.7%	90.7%	89.1%	83.9%	82.9%
Interest Groups	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	1.9%	2.5%	2.7%	0.9%	1.9%	0.0%	3.6%	1.8%	8.6%

Impact - Cable				
	Cable Total	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC
Citizens	11.2%	9.6%	12.8%	11.3%
Politicians	86.8%	87.4%	84.9%	87.9%
Interest Groups	0.6%	0.8%	0.5%	0.4%
Others	1.4%	2.1%	1.8%	0.4%

Story Trigger Percent of Stories								
	All Media	Newspapers	Online	Morning Network	Commercial Nightly Network	Cable	Talk Radio	NPR
Candidate/Campaign	46.3%	36.9%	55.7%	54.3%	56.5%	44.2%	34.8%	41.5%
Observer Driven	9.2%	6.0%	11.3%	8.3%	11.0%	9.8%	10.5%	9.8%
Press	28.5%	46.4%	12.3%	25.3%	14.9%	30.2%	40.0%	19.5%
Debates/External Events	14.5%	10.7%	19.8%	11.7%	16.9%	13.6%	12.9%	26.8%
Independent Polls	1.1%	0.0%	0.9%	0.4%	0.0%	1.8%	1.9%	0.0%
Other	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.4%	0%	2.4%

Story Trigger - Network Percent of Stories									
	Morning Network	ABC Morning	CBS Morning	NBC Morning	Commercial Nightly Network	ABC Nightly	CBS Nightly	NBC Nightly	PBS
Candidate/Campaign	54.3%	53.1%	54.1%	55.5%	56.5%	67.4%	52.7%	51.8%	54.3%
Observer Driven	8.3%	11.1%	12.2%	3.6%	11.0%	11.6%	12.7%	8.9%	0.0%
Press	25.3%	25.9%	17.6%	30.0%	14.9%	9.3%	16.4%	17.9%	14.3%
Debates/External Events	11.7%	9.9%	14.9%	10.9%	16.9%	11.6%	16.4%	21.4%	26.6%
Independent Polls	0.4%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	2.9%

Story Trigger - Cable				
Percent of Stories				
	Cable Total	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC
Candidate/Campaign	44.2%	43.5%	45.4%	43.8%
Observer Driven	9.8%	13.8%	11.0%	5.3%
Press	30.2%	32.2%	30.3%	28.3%
Debates/External Events	13.6%	6.7%	11.5%	21.5%
Independent Polls	1.8%	2.5%	1.8%	1.1%
Others	0.4%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%

By Candidate

Placement¹⁶									
Percent of Stories									
N = Number of stories									
	Total	All Democrats	Hillary Clinton	Barack Obama	John Edwards	All Republicans	Rudy Giuliani	John McCain	Mitt Romney
Lead	11.3%	12.7%	12.6%	13.8%	9.9%	9.0%	10.5%	9.1%	8.0%
2 nd or 3 rd	29.0%	30.0%	27.6%	30.4%	32.4%	28.6%	34.0%	25.6%	28.4%
4 th and Lower	59.6%	57.3%	59.9%	55.8%	57.7%	62.4%	55.6%	65.3%	63.6%
N=	1742	853	294	240	71	535	162	121	88

Tone									
Percent of Stories									
N = Number of stories									
	Total	All Democrats	Hillary Clinton	Barack Obama	John Edwards	All Republicans	Rudy Giuliani	John McCain	Mitt Romney
Positive	25.4%	34.8%	26.9%	46.7%	31.0%	26.2%	27.8%	12.4%	34.1%
Neutral	31.3%	38.7%	35.4%	37.5%	33.8%	39.1%	35.2%	39.7%	35.2%
Negative	23.9%	26.5%	37.8%	15.8%	35.2%	34.8%	37.0%	47.9%	30.7%
N=	1742	853	294	240	71	535	162	121	88

¹⁶ For newspapers, 2nd or 3rd story refers to all stories above the fold (except the lead) and 4th or lower refers to stories below the fold.

General Topic									
Percent of Stories									
N = Number of stories									
	Total	All Democrats	Hillary Clinton	Barack Obama	John Edwards	All Republicans	Rudy Giuliani	John McCain	Mitt Romney
Political	63.4%	58.6%	68.0%	57.1%	35.2%	64.9%	53.7%	64.5%	55.7%
Personal	17.3%	24.3%	13.6%	17.9%	42.3%	12.5%	11.1%	4.1%	28.4%
Domestic Policy	7.2%	5.2%	5.4%	6.3%	14.1%	12.1%	22.2%	11.6%	9.1%
Foreign Policy	7.5%	7.2%	9.9%	8.3%	7.0%	7.5%	7.4%	16.5%	3.4%
Public Record	1.4%	1.3%	1.7%	1.3%	0.0%	2.1%	3.1%	2.5%	3.4%
Electorate	1.1%	0.9%	0.7%	1.7%	1.4%	0.7%	1.9%	0.8%	0.0%
Misc.	2.0%	2.6%	0.7%	7.5%	0.0%	0.1%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
N=	1742	853	294	240	71	535	162	121	88

Story Trigger									
Percent of Stories									
N = Number of stories									
	Total	All Democrats	Hillary Clinton	Barack Obama	John Edwards	All Republicans	Rudy Giuliani	John McCain	Mitt Romney
Candidate/Campaign	46.3%	57.4%	47.6%	64.6%	56.3%	46.0%	37.0%	63.6%	52.3%
Observer Driven	9.2%	8.9%	13.9%	4.6%	2.8%	8.6%	7.4%	4.1%	10.2%
Press	28.5%	25.0%	30.3%	23.3%	33.8%	31.4%	35.8%	22.3%	29.5%
Debates/External	14.5%	7.6%	6.5%	5.8%	7.0%	12.1%	16.7%	8.3%	6.8%
Other	1.5%	1.1%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	1.9%	3.1%	1.7%	1.1%
N=	1722	853	294	240	71	535	162	121	88

Impact									
Percent of Stories									
	Total	All Democrats	Hillary Clinton	Barack Obama	John Edwards	All Republicans	Rudy Giuliani	John McCain	Mitt Romney
Citizens	11.9%	12.3%	12.6%	12.9%	16.9%	13.1%	18.5%	14.9%	13.6%
Politicians	85.8%	86.3%	86.1%	85.8%	83.1%	85.4%	81.5%	83.5%	85.2%
Interest Groups	0.6%	0.4%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%
Other	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.9%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	7.7%	0.0%
N=	1742	853	294	240	71	535	162	121	88

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
SEPTEMBER 28 – OCTOBER 1, 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,018

Now thinking about the 2008 presidential campaign...

Q.3 In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the presidential campaign [READ]?

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	
Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 2007	6	35	32	21	6=100	
February 2-5, 2007¹⁷	11	45	32	11	1=100	(N=633)
June, 2004	10	37	34	15	4=100	
Early February, 2004	11	43	30	12	4=100	
June, 2000	7	41	38	10	4=100	
March, 2000	10	46	32	9	3=100	
February, 2000	13	50	25	7	5=100	
September, 1996	13	44	29	11	3=100	
July, 1996	7	35	42	14	2=100	
February, 1996	16	45	25	10	4=100	
September, 1992	12	45	27	11	5=100	
May, 1992	10	44	33	10	3=100	
March, 1992	12	51	28	6	3=100	
February, 1992	11	45	32	7	5=100	

Q.4 Would you like to see MORE coverage or LESS coverage of [INSERT ITEM; ROTATE]?

	<u>More coverage</u>	<u>Less coverage</u>	<u>(VOL) Same amount</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a. The candidates' personal backgrounds and experiences	55	36	6	3=100
May 24-27, 2007	54	39	4	3=100
June, 2000 ¹⁸	42	50	4	4=100
October, 1991	46	41	8	5=100
b. The candidates' positions on issues	77	17	4	2=100
May 24-27, 2007	76	19	3	2=100
June, 2000 ¹⁹	85	9	3	3=100
October, 1991	80	11	5	4=100
c. Which candidate is leading in the latest polls	42	45	9	4=100
May 24-27, 2007	42	46	6	6=100
June, 2000	44	42	6	8=100
d. The candidates who are not frontrunners	55	37	5	3=100

¹⁷ For February 2-5, 2007, the item was asked only of those following the 2008 presidential campaign 'Very' or 'fairly' closely and was part of a randomized list of news stories. The story was listed as "News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election."

¹⁸ In June, 2000 and October, 1991 the question asked about: "The candidates discussing their personal backgrounds and experiences."

¹⁹ In June, 2000 and October, 1991 the question asked about: "The candidates discussing their position on issues."

	May 24-27, 2007	54	39	4	3=100
e.	The sources of candidates' campaign money	55	35	7	3=100
	June, 2000	49	44	2	5=100
f.	The candidate debates	57	32	8	3=100
	May 24-27, 2007	57	36	5	2=100
	June, 2000 ²⁰	64	28	5	3=100
	October, 1991	58	28	9	5=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
OCTOBER 12-15, 2007 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,011

Q.3 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE ITEMS] [IF NECESSARY “Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?”]

f.	News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	13	31	26	30	*=100
	October 5-8, 2007	22	30	24	24	*=100
	September 28 – October 1, 2007	21	34	25	20	*=100
	September 21-24, 2007	24	31	22	23	*=100
	September 14-17, 2007	22	31	24	23	*=100
	September 7-10, 2007	18	34	26	22	*=100
	August 30-September 2, 2007	19	35	21	25	*=100
	August 24-27, 2007	22	28	24	26	*=100
	August 17-20, 2007	19	27	24	30	*=100
	August 10-13, 2007	23	32	21	24	*=100
	August 3-6, 2007	19	31	25	25	*=100
	July 27-30, 2007	19	32	22	26	1=100
	July 20-23, 2007	16	26	30	27	1=100
	July 13-16, 2007	17	29	27	27	*=100
	July 6-9, 2007	24	29	24	22	1=100
	June 29-July 2, 2007	20	32	25	23	*=100
	June 22-25, 2007	18	31	21	30	*=100
	June 15-18, 2007	17	32	26	25	*=100
	June 8-11, 2007	19	30	24	26	1=100
	June 1-4, 2007	16	27	32	24	1=100
	May 24-27, 2007	22	33	23	22	*=100
	May 18-21, 2007	18	31	24	27	*=100
	May 11-14, 2007	18	30	23	28	1=100
	May 4-7, 2007	23	34	21	21	1=100
	April 27-30, 2007	14	30	29	26	1=100
	April 20-23, 2007	18	28	27	27	*=100
	April 12-16, 2007	18	28	27	27	*=100
	April 5-9, 2007	25	30	26	19	*=100
	March 30-April 2, 2007	20	29	27	23	1=100
	March 23-26, 2007	20	32	22	26	*=100
	March 16-19, 2007	15	28	29	27	1=100

²⁰ In June, 2000 and October, 1991 the question asked about: “The candidates debating each other.”

March 9-12, 2007	24	30	23	23	*=100
March 2-5, 2007	19	31	26	23	1=100
February 23-26, 2007	22	33	24	21	*=100
February 16-19, 2007	18	32	22	27	1=100
February 9-12, 2007	24	30	24	21	1=100
February 2-5, 2007	24	36	22	18	*=100
January 26-29, 2007	24	33	23	20	*=100
January 19-22, 2007²¹	24	27	22	26	1=100
2004 Presidential Election					
November, 2004 (RVs)	52	36	8	4	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	46	30	12	11	1=100
August, 2004	32	38	16	14	*=100
July, 2004	29	37	18	15	1=100
April, 2004	31	33	19	16	1=100
Mid-March, 2004	35	34	18	13	*=100
Late February, 2004	24	40	23	12	1=100
Early February, 2004 ²²	29	37	20	13	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	16	30	27	26	1=100
Early January, 2004	14	32	30	23	1=100
December, 2003	16	26	27	30	1=100
November, 2003	11	26	34	28	1=100
October, 2003	12	27	28	32	1=100
September, 2003	17	25	30	27	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	12	27	27	33	1=100
May, 2003	8	19	31	41	1=100
January, 2003	14	28	29	28	1=100
2000 Presidential Election					
Early November, 2000 (RVs)	39	44	12	5	*=100
Mid-October, 2000 (RVs)	40	37	15	8	*=100
Early October, 2000 (RVs)	42	36	15	6	1=100
September, 2000	22	42	21	15	*=100
July, 2000	21	38	20	20	1=100
June, 2000	23	32	23	21	1=100
May, 2000	18	33	26	23	*=100
April, 2000	18	39	22	20	1=100
March, 2000	26	41	19	13	1=100
February, 2000	26	36	21	17	*=100
January, 2000	19	34	28	18	1=100
December, 1999	16	36	24	23	1=100
October, 1999	17	32	28	22	1=100
September, 1999	15	31	33	20	1=100
July, 1999	15	38	24	22	1=100
June, 1999	11	25	29	34	1=100
1996 Presidential Election					
November, 1996 (RVs)	34	45	15	6	*=100

²¹ January 19-22, 2007 asked about "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008."

²² From May 2003 to Early February 2004 and in March 1992, the story was listed as "The race for the Democratic nomination." In January 2003, the story was listed as "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2004." In September 2000, Early September and July 1996, and May 1992, the question asked about "the presidential election campaign." In January, March and April 1996, the story was listed as "News about the Republican presidential candidates." In August 1992, the story was listed as "News about the presidential election." In July 1992, the story was listed as "News about the presidential campaign." In January 1992, the story was listed as "News about the Democratic candidates for the presidential nomination." In 1988, the story was introduced as being from "this past year" and was listed as "News about the presidential campaign in 1988."

October, 1996	31	39	18	12	*=100
Early September, 1996	24	36	23	17	*=100
July, 1996	22	40	23	14	1=100
March, 1996	26	41	20	13	*=100
January, 1996	10	34	31	24	1=100
September, 1995	12	36	30	22	*=100
August, 1995	13	34	28	25	*=100
June, 1995	11	31	31	26	1=100
<i>1992 Presidential Election</i>					
October, 1992 (RVs)	55	36	7	2	0=100
September, 1992 (RVs)	47	36	11	6	*=100
August, 1992 (RVs)	36	51	11	2	0=100
July, 1992	20	45	26	9	*=100
May, 1992	32	44	16	8	*=100
March, 1992	35	40	16	9	*=100
January, 1992	11	25	36	27	1=100
December, 1991	10	28	32	30	*=100
<i>1988 Presidential Election</i>					
October, 1988 (RVs)	43	44	11	2	*=100
August, 1988 (RVs)	39	45	13	3	*=100
May, 1988	22	46	23	6	3=100
November, 1987	15	28	35	21	1=100
September, 1987	14	34	37	14	1=100

Methodology

This is a joint report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

PEJ and Shorenstein together designed the study, analyzed findings and wrote the report. The content analysis was conducted at PEJ by PEJ staff, with the financial support of both the Shorenstein Center and the Pew Charitable Trusts. Marion Just was the lead researcher from The Shorenstein Center.

Sample Design

The content studied is based on coverage originally analyzed for PEJ's weekly News Coverage Index (NCI) from January 1-May 31, 2007.

Each week the NCI examines the coverage from 48 different outlets in five media sectors, including newspapers, online news, network TV, cable TV, and radio. Following a rotation system, 35 outlets each weekday are studied as well as 7 newspapers each Sunday.

The media outlets examined are as follows:

Newspapers (Thirteen in all, Sun-Fri) Five large circulation newspapers, four regional major metropolitan dailies, and four smaller circulation papers. At the suggestion of our academic advisors, one paper, the New York Times, was captured every day to have one "paper of record."

NY Times every day

Code 2 out of these 4 every day

Washington Post
Los Angeles Times
USA Today
Wall Street Journal

Code 2 out of these 4 every day

The Boston Globe
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)
Austin American-Statesman
Albuquerque Journal

Code 2 out of these 4 every day

The Sun Chronicle (Boston, MA)
Star Beacon (Ashtabula, Ohio)

The Chattanooga Times Free Press
The Bakersfield Californian

Web sites (Five in all, Mon-Fri)

CNN.com
Yahoo News
MSNBC.com
Google News
AOL News

Network TV (Seven in all, Mon-Fri)

Morning shows

ABC – Good Morning America
CBS – Early Show
NBC - Today

Evening news

ABC – World News Tonight
CBS – CBS Evening News
NBC – NBC Nightly News
PBS – Newshour with Jim Lehrer

Cable TV (Fifteen in all, Mon-Fri)

Daytime code 2 out of 3 every day*

CNN
Fox News
MSNBC

*From Jan. 1 to March 16 coded from 1-1:30 p.m. EST; from March 19 on, coded from 2-2:30 p.m. EST

Nighttime CNN – code 3 out of the 4 every day

Lou Dobbs Tonight
Situation Room (7 pm)
Paula Zahn Now
Anderson Cooper 360

Nighttime Fox News – code 3 out of the 4 every day

Special Report w/ Brit Hume
Fox Report w/ Shepard Smith
O'Reilly Factor
Hannity & Colmes

Nighttime MSNBC – code 2 out of the 4 every day

Tucker (6 pm)

Hardball (7 pm)

Countdown w/ Keith Olbermann

Scarborough Country

Radio (Eight in all, Mon-Fri)

Headlines every day

ABC Radio headlines at 9am and 5pm

CBS Radio headlines at 9am and 5pm

NPR Morning Edition every day

Talk Radio

Rush Limbaugh every day

1 out of 2 additional conservatives each day

Sean Hannity

Michael Savage

1 out of 2 liberals each day

Ed Schultz

Randi Rhodes

From that content, the study included all campaign related stories:

- On the front page of newspapers
- In the entirety of commercial network evening newscasts.
- The first 30 minutes of network morning news, the PBS evening news, and all cable programs
- The top 5 stories on each website at the time of capture

The basic NCI codebook codes for topic at three different levels, and also includes date coded, Story ID number, story date, source, broadcast start time, broadcast story start timecode, headline, story word count, placement/prominence, story format, story describer, and broadcast story ending timecode. The complete [methodology](#) for the weekly NCI has further details on the coding system and inter-coder reliability.

Story Collection

For this analysis, we began by pulling all stories from January 1 – May 31, 2007 originally coded as election-campaign stories. The resulted in the following: 1,742 news stories were analyzed, including 1,468 stories (68.2 hours) of broadcast content (454 stories with 16.7 hours from network TV, 722 stories with 37.9 hours from cable, 292 stories with 13.6 hours from radio), 168 stories in newspapers, and 106 stories from news websites.

Coding Design

A coding protocol was designed for this project based on PEJ's and Professor Just's previous related studies and the particular aims of the PEJ-Shorenstein study. In addition to the existing variables in the NCI, the campaign study included a variety of variables designed to probe about the election. These included dateline, recurring campaign theme, primary figure, tone for primary figure, secondary figure, tone for secondary figure, general topic category, story trigger, and story impact.

In particular:

Dateline designates the state/city dateline of the story. Variable recurring lead designates the recurring lead, or "big story" element, if any, within each story.

Primary figure is the candidate or campaign organization, or other figure that dominates the story.

Primary figure tone reflects whether the journalist's tone is constructed in a way, via use of quotes, assertions, or innuendo, which results in positive, neutral, or negative coverage for the story's primary figure as it relates to the topic of the story. While reading or listening to a story, coders tally up all the comments that have either a negative or positive tone to the reporting. Direct and indirect quotes are counted. In order for a story either positive or negative, it must have 1.5 times the amount of positive or negative 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 should be counted twice into the total value. Also counted twice for tone are the first three paragraphs or first four sentences, whichever comes first.

Election topic measures the broad election-related topic, or what the story is about "on its face." In addition, each broad topic was also segmented into several "sub-topic" categories for further specification.

Story trigger indicates who initiated the story—the action, event or editorial decision that makes this news, thus triggering its publication.

Story impact designates the individual or group whose interests are at stake or were affected by events in the story. They could be citizens, politicians, interest groups, non-U.S. citizens, other. A story had citizen impact if it conveyed information that would be useful to voters in determining how someone would govern. At least 50% of the story had to relate directly to that group. Coders were instructed if they could infer a citizen impact to default to that category.

Coding Team & Process

Using the existing data in the Index and adding the codes for new variables, the team responsible for performing the content analysis is made up of the five trained coders, a coding administrator, and a senior research methodologist on the PEJ staff.

In coder-training, inter-coder reliability tests were conducted for all variables. For the variables derived from PEJ's weekly Index, the average level agreement was 96%. For the new variables, initial tests found levels of agreement of 80% or greater for all but two variables (election topic and story impact). For those two variables, clarifications were made to the codebook and additional training implemented. An additional test was conducted later in the process and both variables reached a level above 80% agreement. In total, testing was conducted on 5% of the sample. In addition, the coding administrator monitored coding throughout the process to ensure levels were maintained.

The specific levels of agreement for the variables in this study were as follows:

Dateline: 92%

Recurring Lead: 83%

Primary Figure: 92%

Tone for Primary Figure: 86%

Story Trigger: 83%

Story Impact: 85%

Election Topic: 83%