



NOVEMBER 2, 2012

Winning the Media Campaign 2012

Both Candidates Received More Negative than Positive Coverage in Mainstream News, but Social Media was Even Harsher

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Tom Rosenstiel, Director, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

Amy Mitchell, Deputy Director, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

Mark Jurkowitz, Associate Director, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

(202) 419-3650
1615 L St. N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
www.journalism.org

Overview

From the conventions to the eve of the final presidential debate, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney have both received more negative than positive coverage from the news media, though overall Obama has had an edge, according to a new study.

That advantage for Obama, however, disappeared after the debates began in early October and news coverage shifted in Romney's direction, mirroring the momentum change reflected in many public opinion polls, the study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism found.

Overall from August 27 through October 21, 19% of stories about Obama studied in a cross section of mainstream media were clearly favorable in tone while 30% were unfavorable and 51% mixed. This is a differential of 11 percentage points between unfavorable and favorable stories.

For Romney, 15% of the stories studied were favorable, 38% were unfavorable and 47% were mixed—a differential toward negative stories of 23 points.

Most of the advantage in coverage for Obama, however, came in September in the form of highly negative coverage for Romney. This was a period when the GOP nominee was losing ground in the polls, he was criticized for his comments about Libya, and a video surfaced in which he effectively dismissed 47% of the American public.

All that changed almost overnight after the first debate on October 3. From that day through October 21, the coverage in effect reversed. In all, 20% of stories about Romney were favorable, 30% were unfavorable, and 50% were mixed—a differential of 10 points to the negative. For Obama, 13% of stories were favorable, 36% were unfavorable, and 50% were mixed—a differential of 23 points.

Tone of Coverage Reverses After First Debate

Percent of stories with tone

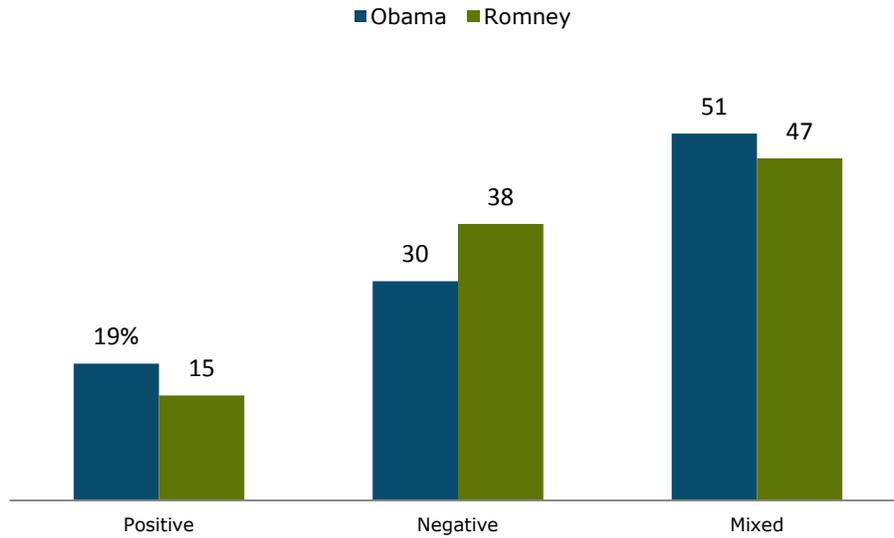
	Obama	Romney
Pre-First Debate Aug. 27-Oct. 3		
Positive	22%	11%
Mixed	51	46
Negative	27	44
Post-First Debate Oct. 4-21		
Positive	13	20
Mixed	51	50
Negative	36	30

Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Tone of Candidate Campaign Coverage Overall

Percent of stories with tone



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Throughout the eight-week period studied, a good deal of the difference in treatment of the two contenders is related to who was perceived to be ahead in the race. When horse-race stories—those focused on strategy, tactics and the polls—are taken out of the analysis, and one looks at those framed around the candidates' policy ideas, biographies and records, the distinctions in the tone of media coverage between the two nominees vanish.

Horse-Race v. Non-Horse-Race Coverage

Percent of stories with tone

	Obama	Romney
Horse-race Campaign Stories		
Positive	28%	15%
Mixed	45	39
Negative	29	45
Non-Horse-race Campaign Stories		
Positive	15	14
Mixed	53	55
Negative	32	32

Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

With horse-race stories removed, 15% of campaign stories about Obama were positive, 32% were negative and 53% were mixed. For Romney it was 14% positive, 32% negative and 55% mixed.

The portrayal of the two candidates this year in the mainstream press stands in marked contrast to what the Project found in 2008 when then Senator Barack Obama was running against Senator John McCain. In that race, Obama's coverage was almost twice as positive as it has been this year (36% vs. 19%) and more positive than negative overall (36% positive vs. 29% negative that year). McCain's coverage four years ago, by contrast, was much more negative than Romney's this year. In 2008, nearly six in 10 stories about McCain were clearly negative in nature (57%), while only 14% were positive.

One other distinction between 2008 and 2012 is how much the narrative has changed with events. There have been three distinct periods in the coverage of Obama and Romney over the eight weeks

studied, one of which favored Obama, the second of which favored Romney and a third that was closer with an advantage for the president.

From the conventions until the first debate, a period of improving polls for Obama, Romney suffered his period of the most negative coverage; just 4% of stories about him were positive while 52% were negative. Coverage of Obama during this period was fairly evenly split (20% positive vs. 24% negative). That narrative reversed sharply with the first debate. For the next two weeks, Romney saw the mixed treatment (23% positive vs. 23% negative) while Obama was caught in the critical loop, with 12% positive and 37% negative. After the second debate, coverage returned to its more general pattern, with an edge for Obama.

This treatment in the mainstream media also differs markedly from what the study finds in the newer realms of social media: Twitter, Facebook and blogs. There, the narrative about both men has been relentlessly negative and relatively unmoved by campaign events that have shifted the mainstream narrative—more a barometer of social media user mood than a reflection of candidate action. On Twitter, for instance, the conversation about the campaign has consistently been harsher for Romney than for Obama. On Facebook, the tone improved for Obama in October with the debates, despite the sense that the president had stumbled in the first one. And in the blogosphere, neither candidate has seen a sustained edge in the narrative in the eight weeks studied.

The study also reveals the degree to which the two cable channels that have built themselves around ideological programming, MSNBC and Fox, stand out from other mainstream media outlets. And MSNBC stands out the most. On that channel, 71% of the segments studied about Romney were negative in nature, compared with just 3% that were positive—a ratio of roughly 23-to-1. On Fox, 46% of the segments about Obama were negative, compared with 6% that were positive—a ratio of about 8-to-1 negative. These made them unusual among channels or outlets that identified themselves as news organizations.

The study also found a difference between the three network evening newscasts and the morning shows. Obama also fared better in the evening, Romney in the morning.

An analysis of the coverage of the vice presidential candidates, meanwhile, found that Paul Ryan received roughly a third of the amount of coverage that Sarah Palin did in 2008. But of the two vice presidential candidates this year, Ryan and Joe Biden, Ryan received much more unfavorable coverage—28% unfavorable vs. 16% for Biden.

Mainstream News Less Harsh than Social Media

Percent of stories/discussion with tone

	Obama	Romney
Mainstream		
Positive	19%	15%
Mixed	51	47
Negative	30	38
Twitter		
Positive	25	16
Mixed	31	25
Negative	45	58
Facebook		
Positive	24	23
Mixed	22	15
Negative	53	62
Blogs		
Positive	19	18
Mixed	37	36
Negative	44	46

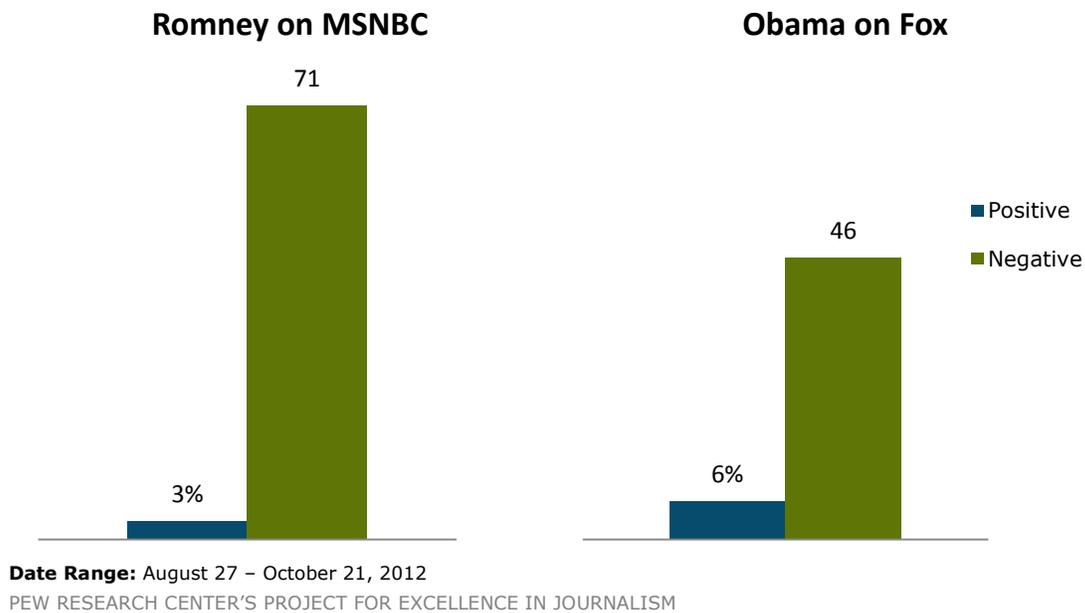
Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

These are among the findings of the content analysis of 2,457 stories from 49 outlets from August 27, the week of the Republican convention, through October 21, five days after the second presidential debate. For mainstream media, the study included the three broadcast networks, the three major cable news networks, the 12 most popular news websites, 11 newspaper front pages and news programming from PBS and NPR along with radio headlines from ABC and CBS news services. From these outlets, PEJ researchers watched, listened or read every story in the sample and counted each assertion for whether it was positive in nature about a candidate, negative in nature or neutral. For a story to be deemed to have a distinct tone, positive or negative assertions had to outnumber the other by a factor of three to two. Any story in which that was not case was coded as mixed.

Alternate Narratives on MSNBC and Fox

Percent of stories with tone



For social media, the researchers combined a mix of traditional human coding with technology from the firm Crimson Hexagon. Researchers trained the computer “monitors” to replicate their human coding according to PEJ rules. For Twitter, the sample includes the full “fire hose” of public tweets. For Facebook, the study includes a large sampling of public posts about the campaign. The study included a sample of several million blogs as well.

The study of the tone in news coverage is not an examination of media bias. Rather, it measures the overall impression the public is receiving in media about each candidate, whether the assertion is a quote from a source, a fact presented in the narrative that is determined to be favorable or unfavorable, including poll results, or is part of a journalistic analysis.

Among the findings of the study:

- **Horse race coverage is down from 2008.** Overall, 38% of the coverage coded during these two months was framed around what is typically called horse-race coverage, stories substantially concerned with the strategy and tactics of the campaign and the question of who was winning. That is down from four years ago, when 53% of the coverage studied during a similar period was focused on the horse race. Coverage of the candidate policy positions comprised the second-largest category of coverage, 22%, similar to 2008. Coverage of voter fraud laws and other political topics that largely did not involve the candidates was tied for the third-largest category at 9%, and was a subject that was almost nonexistent in the narrative four years earlier.
- **Debate coverage was more about who won than what candidates said.** During the three-week debate period studied, October 4-21, horserace coverage grew, filling nearly half of all the stories about the campaign (47%), the largest of any period in the study. In other words, rather than a window to examine the candidates' ideas at more length, the debates became a frame about campaign momentum to a greater degree than the rest of the campaign. Coverage of foreign policy during this time, by contrast, fell by roughly half to 7%, as did coverage of the personal topics about the candidates, which fell to 1%.
- **The two candidates received similar amounts of coverage.** Overall Obama was a significant figure in 69% of the stories studied during the eight weeks, while Romney was a significant figure in 61%. The difference is explained almost entirely by coverage of the Obama presidency. Roughly 9% of all stories studied involved Obama functioning as president outside the realm of the campaign. Four years ago, during a similar period in the campaign, the volume of coverage was evenly balanced between Obama and his Republican rival John McCain, who were each significant newsmakers in 62% of the campaign stories.
- **Among the issues, the economy dominated but less so than in 2008.** The economy accounted for 10% of all campaign coverage studied, down from 15% four years earlier. It still overshadowed all other policy issues. Turmoil in the Middle East, particularly the attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya, was next—at 5%. Some subjects were notable for less attention. Health care accounted for 1% of campaign coverage studied, a sign perhaps that while Romney was opposed to Obamacare, it was not an issue he pressed as much as others because of comparisons to his experience in Massachusetts. Social issues were also notable for their absence. Together, abortion and gay rights, for instance, accounted for less than 1% of the coverage. So did the war in Afghanistan and the situation in Iraq.
- **Of all the platforms studied, the tone of conversation was the most negative on Twitter.** Every week on Twitter resembled the worst week for each candidate in the mainstream press. Negative Twitter conversation about Romney exceeded positive by 42 points in the eight weeks studied.¹ For Obama, negative assertions outnumbered positive by 20 points, though it demonstrated somewhat more fluidity from week to week.

¹ For social media, tone is measured as a percentage of the total conversation. A tweet or blog post might have multiple assertions and each is tallied as percentage of the whole. For mainstream media, the Project tallies tone by stories.

- **Network news viewers received a different narrative about the candidates depending on when they watched.** Romney fared better than Obama on the network morning shows on ABC, CBS and NBC. During the 7 a.m. half hour, negative segments outnumbered positive ones by 9 points for Romney vs. 17 for Obama. In the evening, Obama fared better. His narrative was fairly evenly mixed, with positive segments outnumbering negative ones by 2 points. For Romney, negative exceeded positive by 17 points.

About This Study

A number of people at the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism worked on PEJ's "Winning the Media Campaign 2012." Director Tom Rosenstiel and associate director Mark Jurkowitz wrote the report along with senior researcher Paul Hitlin and researcher Nancy Vogt. Paul Hitlin supervised the content analysis component. Additional coding and data analysis was done by researchers Steve Adams, Monica Anderson, Heather Brown and Sovini Tan. Nancy Vogt worked on the computer coding. Katerina Matsa created the charts. Jesse Holcomb copy-edited the report. Dana Page handled communications for the project.

Tone of Mainstream Media Coverage

Overall, both candidates received more negative stories than positive ones. But for the full eight weeks studied, the gap was about half as big for Obama (11 points) as it was for Romney (23 points).

That difference disappears if horse-race coverage—stories focused on tactics, strategy and the question of who was winning—are removed from the equation. Then, negative stories about Obama outnumbered positive by 17 points and for Romney by 18 points.

Even then, however, there were differences in the press portrayal depending on the specific focus of the mainstream news coverage. In general, Romney received somewhat more advantage, or at least less negative news coverage relative to Obama, on fundraising and personal topics. Obama enjoyed some edge, if one looks at the differential between positive and negative, on policy. Beyond that, the differences were relatively minor.

Tone of Candidate Coverage by Story Type, 2012

Percent of stories with tone

	Ads & Fundraising*	Political Horse-Race	Voting Laws/ Other Pol. Topics	Public Record	Policy	Personal	Other Campaign	Non-Campaign Focus
Obama								
Positive	7%	28%	24%	19%	12%	33%	20%	2%
Mixed	64	43	48	49	52	45	62	72
Negative	30	29	28	33	36	23	18	27
Romney								
Positive	15	16	26	17	8	30	11	6
Mixed	69	39	45	47	54	56	60	75
Negative	16	45	30	37	38	14	29	19

Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

Note: Ads and Fundraising Topics category includes stories about the treatment of candidates by the press, the electoral calendar, and endorsements

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

For Obama, the tone of that horse-race coverage overall was almost equally balanced between favorable and unfavorable stories. For Romney, even with his initial post-debate bounce, the horse-race narrative has been far more negative than positive, by a factor of about than 3-to-1.

On coverage of policy issues—both foreign and domestic—the media narrative was harsh for both candidates. When domestic and foreign policy were taken together, Obama’s negative coverage exceeded positive by 3-to-1. For Romney it was almost 5-to-1.

When it came to examining the candidates’ public records, for both candidates negative coverage outweighed positive coverage by roughly 2-to-1.

This negative assessment of the candidates’ public records to some degree may reflect the campaigns’ attacks on the trail and in the advertising wars. [An August PEJ report](#) on the master character narratives of the campaign found that the most common narrative about Obama was that he had not done enough for the economy while the most prominent narrative about Romney was that he had been a vulture capitalist during his career at Bain.

The only major theme for which both candidates enjoyed more positive than negative coverage were personal stories about the two men and their families. There, Romney’s positive coverage exceeded negative coverage by about 2-to-1 while the margin was 3-to-2 for Obama.

2012 vs. 2008: A Different View of Obama

But even as the tone of Obama’s overall coverage was better than his opponent’s, much has changed in four years as the candidate of hope and change became an incumbent presiding over a sluggish economy. The media’s coverage of the late stages of Obama’s 2012 campaign was considerably less flattering than it was in 2008 when he was running against Sen. John McCain. Conversely, Romney has not experienced as much negative coverage as his predecessor did four years ago.

The starkest difference is that coverage of Obama is only about half as positive this year (19%) as it was in 2008 (36%). And while his percentage of negative coverage in 2012 (31%) is only modestly larger than four years earlier (29%), neutral coverage has grown markedly, to 50% this year compared with 35% in 2008.

The percentage of positive coverage about Romney is very similar to McCain’s four years earlier, but there is about one-third less negative coverage of the former

Massachusetts governor’s campaign. Romney has also seen considerably more neutral coverage than McCain received in 2008.

In the closing weeks of the 2008 campaign, which played out under the shadow of the Wall Street meltdown, Obama not only received much more favorable horse-race coverage than McCain, the tone of his coverage on policy issues, advertising and fundraising and his public record was far more positive than McCain’s.

That markedly more favorable coverage for Obama, nearly across the board on a range of themes, has not occurred in this campaign. Rather, Obama and Romney received similar treatment on the major campaign themes other than the horseshoe.

Amount of Coverage for Each Candidate

One other key metric of campaign coverage is the amount of media attention each candidate gets. This year Obama generated moderately more coverage this year than he did in 2008, in part because some of it was focused not on the president as a campaigner, but as the nation’s chief executive.

Tone of Candidate Campaign Coverage 2012 vs. 2008

Percent of stories with tone

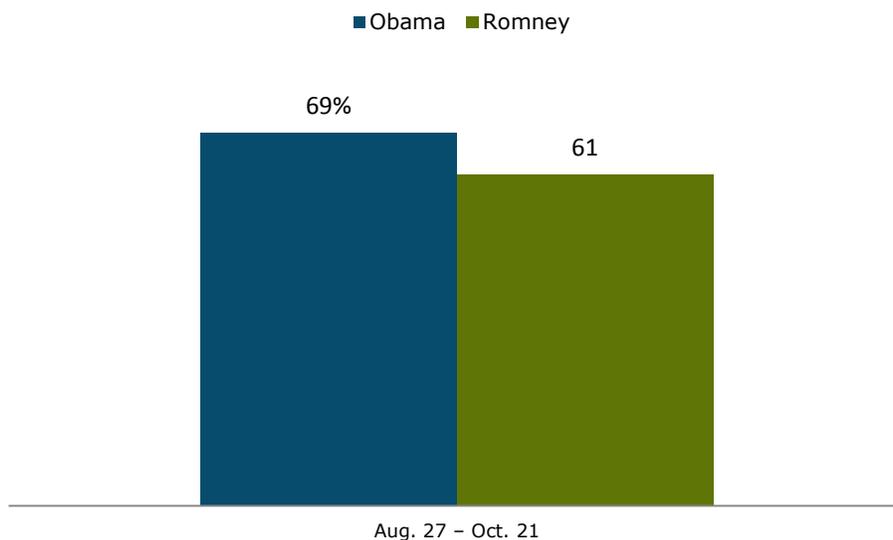
	2012 Election		2008 Election	
	Obama	Romney	Obama	McCain
Positive	19%	15%	36%	14%
Mixed	51	47	35	29
Negative	30	38	29	57

Date Range: September 8 – October 16, 2008 and August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER’S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Obama's Coverage Slightly Outpaces Romney's

Percent of campaign stories where each candidate is a significant presence



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

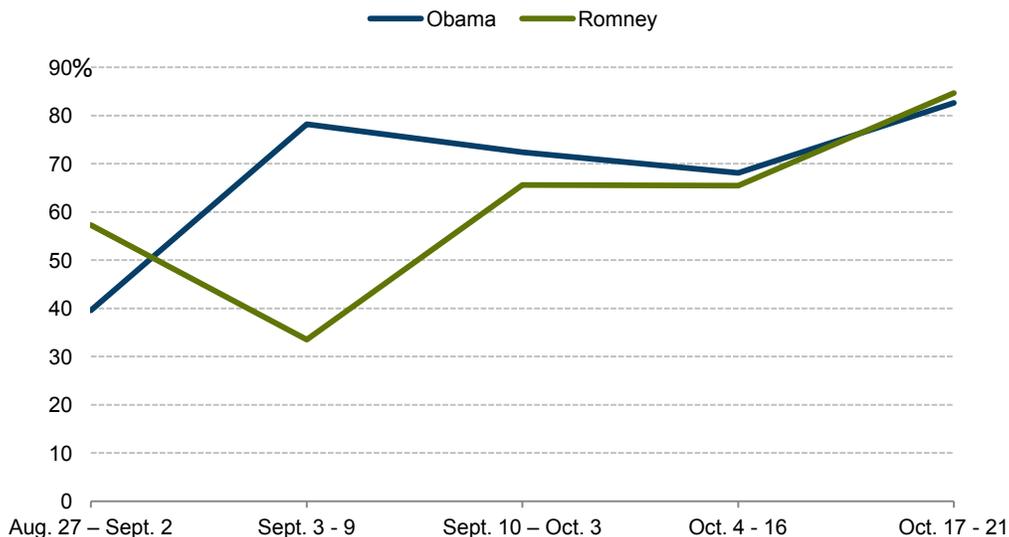
Note: A candidate is considered a significant presence if 25% or more of the story is about him

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Overall, in the eight weeks studied, Obama was a significant newsmaker in 69% of the campaign stories examined compared with 61% for Romney. In the same period in the 2008 campaign—from September 8-October 16, 2008—Obama and McCain were tied in the competition for exposure, each registering as a major newsmaker in 62% of the stories. For much of that campaign season, Obama had received more coverage than McCain. But once the financial crisis struck in mid-September, McCain took a series of dramatic steps—including suspending his campaign—that thrust him more squarely into the media spotlight.

Amount of Candidate Campaign Coverage Over Time

Percent of campaign stories where each candidate is a significant presence



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

Note: A candidate is considered a significant presence if 25% or more of the story is about him

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Starting with the week of the Democratic 2012 convention (September 3-9), Obama generated significantly more coverage than Romney in three out of the four weeks in September. Once debate season rolled around in October, that gap closed significantly, with the president maintaining only a narrow edge in coverage over his rival.

The Conventions to the Debates: Set Piece Moments Still Matter

One lesson derived from coverage of the 2012 presidential campaign is that despite being viewed as anachronistic political pageants, some traditional set piece campaign events still have the potential to dramatically reshape a presidential race by changing the mainstream media narrative.

In 2012, campaign coverage was significantly affected by several such events.

Tone of Candidate Campaign Coverage Over Time

Percent of stories with tone

	Republican Convention Aug. 27–Sept. 2	Democratic Convention Sept. 3-9	Post- Conventions Sept. 10–Oct. 3	Post-1st Pres. Debate Oct. 4-16	Post-2nd Pres Debate Oct. 17-21
Obama					
Positive	3%	35%	20%	12%	17%
Mixed	39	45	56	51	49
Negative	58	21	24	37	34
Romney					
Positive	36	9	4	23	14
Mixed	49	45	45	54	41
Negative	15	47	52	23	45

Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

That began with the conventions. Both candidates enjoyed a bounce in the mainstream narrative the week of their nominating convention. The numbers also suggest the advantage of having the second convention. Romney's convention bounce in the press ended abruptly when the Democrats met in Charlotte one week later. Obama's continued for another three weeks.

Even with his convention bounce, there were underlying doubts in the coverage about whether Romney could win. Horse-race coverage about Romney during his convention was mixed, with 20% favorable and 18% unfavorable. Obama's horse-race coverage during his convention week was twice as positive as Romney's, with 39% favorable and 13% unfavorable.

The perception that the Democratic convention—highlighted by a much-lauded speech from former President Bill Clinton—gave Obama's campaign a lift was reinforced by national surveys that showed the president expanding his narrow lead. The real bounce in coverage for Obama came not the week of his convention, but afterwards, and not from a rise in his coverage, but in spreading skepticism about Romney's chances as journalists tracked the trajectory of opinion polls. Indeed, from September 10, after the Democratic convention, until the first debate in Denver on October 3, 52% of the stories about Romney were clearly unfavorable in tone while just 4% were positive— a differential of 13-to-1. Obama's coverage during this period, by contrast, was noticeably better, with 24% unfavorable stories compared to 20% favorable, and 56% mixed or neutral.

Several significant elements appeared to be in play, in addition to the polls. Many analysts concluded the Democrats had staged a more successful event than the Republicans. "The inside, bi-partisan buzz

among long-time convention pros is how the Dems have become the party that knows how to stage these extravagant set pieces for maximum advantage, and the GOP has seemingly lost its golden touch,” a September 7 story in Politico said.

Social media participants seemed to agree. A [September 28 PEJ report](#) found that Obama’s and Clinton’s convention speeches were viewed three to four times more often on YouTube than Romney’s convention speech. The most popular GOP convention video was of an event Romney might have regretted, Clint Eastwood’s debate with an empty chair.

Then came the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens. In the first confusing hours, Romney “came under withering criticism for distorting the chain of events overseas and appearing to seek political advantage from an attack that claimed American lives,” when he attacked the administration’s handling of the situation before the full extent of the facts were known, the New York Times reported on September 12.

A week later, September 17, a video surfaced of Romney at a private fundraiser stating that the 47% of Americans who pay no income tax see themselves as victims and would never vote for him and it was not his job to worry about those people. The revelation immediately put the Romney camp on the defensive and became part of the Obama team’s advertising campaign. That week, fully 61% of Romney’s coverage was negative, the highest point of negative coverage for the eight weeks studied. His positive coverage was at 3% that week.

All this coincided with most polls showing Obama opening up a modest but solid lead of 3 to 4 points. In this difficult period for Romney, (September 10-October 3) most of the negative media narrative about him was related to his horse-race coverage. In those three-and-a-half weeks, the tone of Romney’s horserace coverage was overwhelmingly negative (69% compared with only 2% positive.) For Obama, the situation was reversed, with positive horse-race coverage exceeding negative by almost 3-to-1.

Foreign policy also jumped to its highest point as a policy concern during this period, accounting for 12% of the campaign coverage. Neither candidate benefited from the issue, however. Indeed, both candidates suffered equally in the coverage, which was 4% positive and 49% negative for Obama and 4% positive and 48% negative for Romney.

The First Debate: How Much it Changed the Narrative

The October 3 debate in Denver, which was widely viewed as an overwhelming win for Romney over a listless Obama, dramatically altered the tone of press coverage. (A Gallup survey showed that 72% of Americans thought Romney won the debate compared to only 20% for Obama.) And the campaign narratives were suddenly reversed as the debate reviews poured in and polls started moving quickly toward Romney—making the race a virtual tie.

Romney's narrative in the press changed instantly. In the days just before the debate, October 1-3, the number of favorable stories about Romney (37%) outstripped positive (6%) by 6-to-1. In the days immediately following the Denver encounter (October 4-7), the positive narrative soared to 32% while negative shrank to 23%. The following week (October 8-14), Romney's narrative was more mixed (30% negative and 22% positive), but that represented a major improvement over what had been overwhelmingly unflattering coverage before the debate. Moreover, coverage in which positive and negative stories are relatively balanced or lean slightly to the negative, tended during this period to characterize both candidates when they had momentum.

For Obama, the debate marked a dramatic shift in his narrative the other way. What had been mixed coverage turned sharply negative. Between the first and second debates, 12% of the stories about Obama were positive contrasted with 37% that were negative.

After the second debate, in which critics and the public thought Obama gave a stronger performance, his narrative rebounded somewhat (17% positive, 34% negative), back to a 17-point negative differential. Romney's media narrative slipped back, but to levels better than before (14% positive, 45% negative).

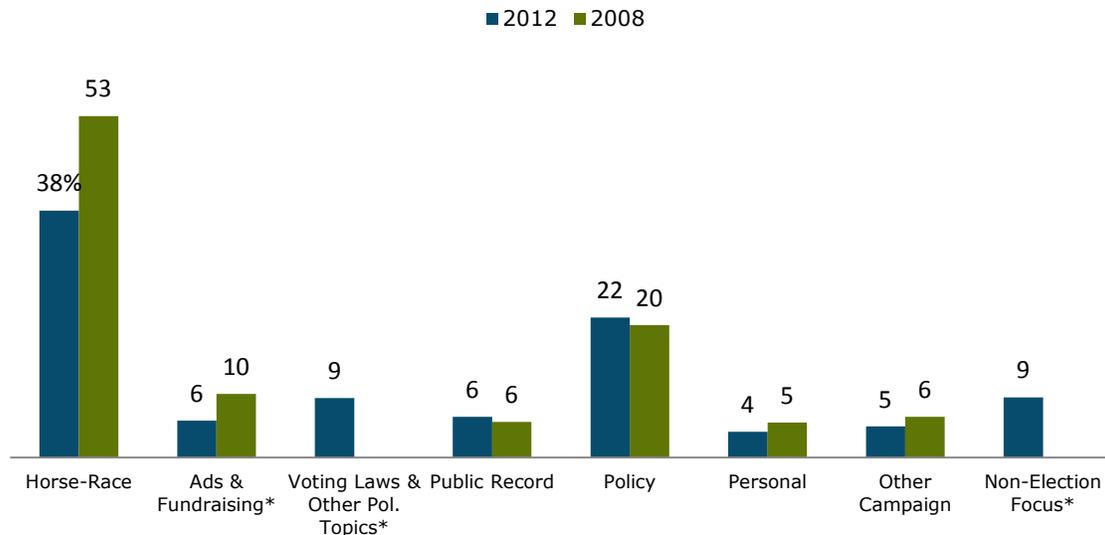
A close look at the framing of the coverage suggests that much of this new tone was affected by perceptions of how close the race had now become. From October 4-21, there was more attention to the horse-race, 47% of the coverage overall, than in any other period in the eight weeks studied. And thanks largely to his showing on October 3 and subsequent rise in the polls, Romney fared better than Obama in the horse-race narrative for those 17 days. His horse-race coverage was mixed—28% positive, 27% negative—while Obama's was far more negative (40%) than positive (17%). What had been a strength for Obama in the coverage—the perception that he seemed likely to win—had now eroded.

Frame: Which Aspects of the Race Got Attention, and Which Ones Didn't?

As was the case four years earlier, the strategic aspects of the campaign dominated coverage of the closing weeks of the 2012 presidential race. Taken together, horse-race coverage as well as advertising and fundraising stories—which includes advertising, fundraising, endorsements, and the media's coverage of themselves—combined for 44% of all the coverage examined.

Less Horse Race Coverage in 2012 than in 2008

Percent of campaign newshole



Note: The Voting Laws & Other Political Topics category was minimal in the 2008 coverage and thus not included. There was no Non-Election Focused Coverage category in 2008, because there was no incumbent. Also, Ads and Fundraising Topics category includes stories about the treatment of candidates by the press, the electoral calendar, and endorsements.

Date Range: September 8 – October 16, 2008 and August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Yet, that is down by a third from four years ago, when those two categories combined for 62% of all coverage. Most of that comes from a drop of 15 points in tactical, strategic and poll coverage. Most of the rest comes in a drop of four points in the amount of coverage about advertising, money and media.

Within the political frames, strategy, tactics, polls and critique of the candidates' performance made up the most, 38% of coverage. Advertising, money and media treatment made up 6%. Four years ago, those were 53% and just under 10% respectively.

Within the main political frame, tactics and strategy was the biggest component (23% of all campaign coverage studied). Performance critiques of the candidates were next (10%). Poll stories made up 5%.

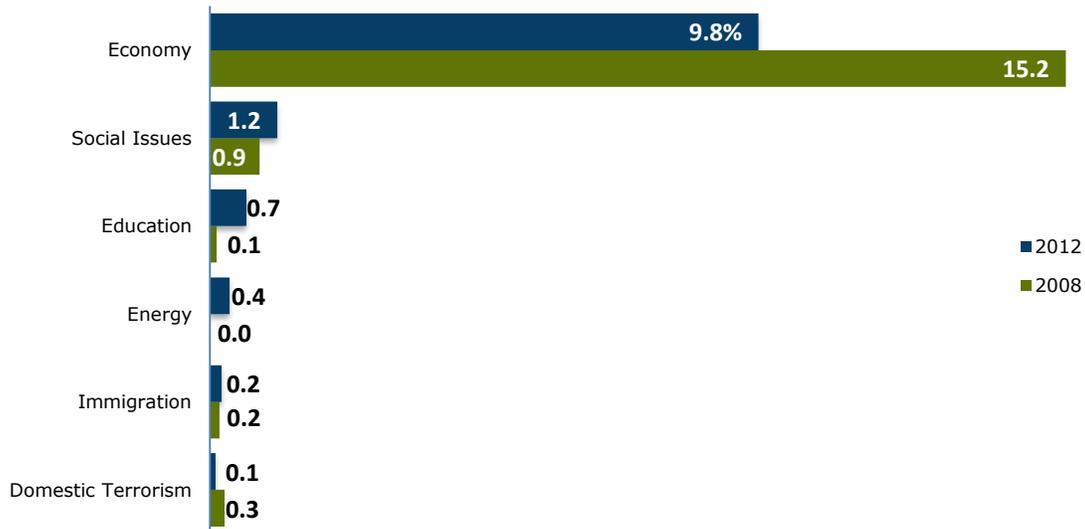
Stories focused on advertising made up less than 1% of the overall campaign coverage. Fundraising stories filled 2%. Stories about how the media were treating the candidates accounted for 3%.

With the exception of horse-race and other political coverage, there was little basic difference in the media's campaign news agenda in 2012 and 2008. This year, policy debates accounted for 22% of the overall coverage; in 2008 that figure was 20%. This year, the candidates' personal stories and public records accounted for 10% of the coverage; in 2008 that number was 11%.

In policy, domestic issues were twice as big as foreign, (14% vs. 7%) About two-thirds of that domestic coverage (10% of overall coverage) focused on one issue—the U.S. economy. That included a discussion of everything from tax policy to social security to unemployment.

Domestic Policy Issues 2012 vs. 2008

Percent of campaign newshole



Note: Some issues did not appear in 2008, and thus are not included here

Date Range: September 8 – October 16, 2008 and August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Attention to the economy crowded out almost all other domestic issues. From August 27-October 21, the hot-button health care issue accounted for only about 1% of the coverage, about the same amount of attention that was devoted to education. Issues such as energy, immigration and even terrorism (other than the attack on the Libyan consulate) combined to account for about 1% of the media narrative.

Despite the dominance of the economy as an issue in the 2012 campaign, that subject generated only about two-thirds as much coverage as it did in the later stages of the 2008 campaign. During that election, the September 15 collapse of Lehman Brothers helped trigger a financial crisis that reshaped both the focus and the strategic trajectory of that race.

Coverage of the 2012 campaign may in part be defined by what was missing from the media narrative. Although the campaign pits the first African-American president against a man who would be the first Mormon president, there was almost no discussion of the sensitive topics of either race or religion in the homestretch of the campaign.

And judging by the coverage, this campaign was notable for the lack of sustained discussion of some critical social issues. The issue of same-sex marriage (and the repeal of the Pentagon's "don't ask, don't tell" policy) was virtually non-existent. The debate over abortion policy fared little better, accounting for about 1% of the coverage.

The general lack of discussion of social issues in this campaign is similar to what occurred in 2008 when those subjects also received little attention. One notable difference, however, is the subject of race. In 2008, with the possibility of the United States electing an African-American president, the subject of race accounted for about 2% of all campaign coverage.

On the foreign policy side, one issue trumped all the others: turmoil in the Middle East, particularly the September 11 Libyan attack that killed Ambassador Stevens and triggered a major political battle, with Republicans charging that the Obama administration played down the idea it was a terrorist attack for political reasons. This aspect of foreign policy accounted for about three-quarters of all the geopolitical coverage and 5% of the campaign coverage overall.

In contrast, relations with China represented only about 1% of the campaign coverage overall. Discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the dispute once at the heart of the U.S. Mideast policy, also accounted for about 1%. The situation in Iraq was virtually non-existent in the narrative, accounting for less than 1% of the coverage.

But even at that level, Iraq still managed to generate about twice as much attention as any discussion of the war in which the U.S. is still actively engaged, the 11-year-old conflict in Afghanistan. That topic accounted for about one-fifth of 1% of all the campaign coverage studied in the final eight weeks of the campaign.

Due in large part to the upheaval unleashed in the Arab Spring of 2011, coverage of the Mideast was up dramatically over the same period four years earlier—by a factor of 5-to-1. That was the major reason why foreign policy issues in general played a larger role in the 2012 campaign narrative (7%) than they did in 2008 (2%).

In the closing weeks of the 2012 campaign, the candidates' personal stories received modest attention, accounting for 4% of the overall coverage.

Coverage of the candidates' public records, including Romney's career at Bain Capital and Obama's tenure in office, represented 6% of the overall campaign coverage from August 27-October 21.

And in the case of both personal topics and public record, most of the attention came earlier in that period, during the two convention weeks when the candidates were, in a way, reintroducing themselves to the public. But in the period from September 10-October 14, attention to both those themes diminished dramatically.

Frame of Campaign Coverage by Week

Percent of campaign newshole

	Republican Convention Aug. 27–Sept. 2	Democratic Convention Sept. 3-9	Post- Conventions Sept. 10–Oct. 3	Post-1st Pres. Debate Oct. 4-16	Post-2nd Pres. Debate Oct. 17-21
Political Horserace	33%	32%	35%	49%	44%
Advertising, Fundraising*	8	4	6	5	6
Voting Laws & Other Political Topics	22	12	5	6	6
Public Record	10	14	3	3	11
Policy	13	24	26	22	15
Personal	9	6	4	1	1
Other Campaign	3	5	4	6	7
Non-election Focused	1	2	17	7	10

Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

Note: Ads and Fundraising Topics category includes stories about the treatment of candidates by the press, the electoral calendar, and endorsements

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Another 9% of the coverage studied by PEJ included stories that prominently featured one or both of the presidential candidates, but were not primarily about the campaign itself. Most of that coverage focused on Obama's role as president. Of that, a clear majority (5% of coverage overall), involved coverage of developments in the Mideast, including the situation in Iran and the Libyan consulate attack.

Coverage of the Candidates by Media Sector and Cable Outlet

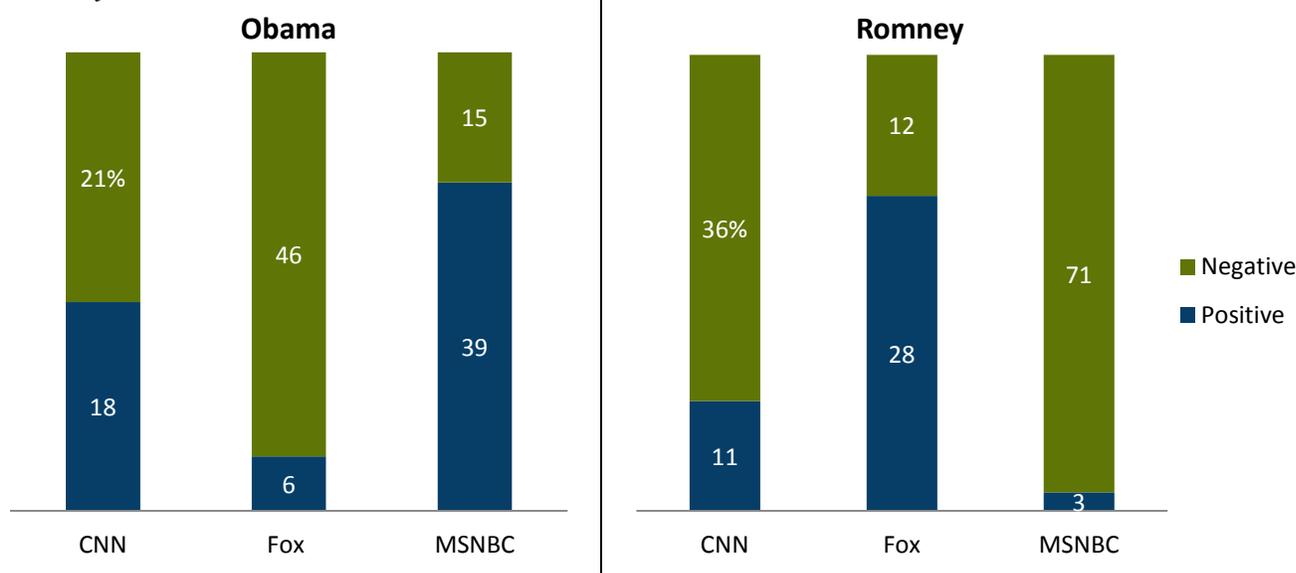
In 2008, this study documented a clear and almost mirror-image ideological divide on cable between Fox News Channel and MSNBC. Both MSNBC and Fox deviated from the rest of the media in their treatment of McCain and Obama in roughly equal measure, with MSNBC more positive about Obama and negative about McCain than the rest, and Fox the reverse.

Four years later, that divide has become even more pronounced, and is no longer quite a mirror image. MSNBC was more negative in its treatment of Romney than Fox was of Obama, though both stand out significantly from the rest of the media studied.

Both cable channels also spent more time focused on the candidate that received more negative treatment than they did on the candidate they portrayed positively—especially Fox.

Tone of Coverage on Cable News

Percent of stories with tone



Note: Mixed tone numbers are not included
Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Fox News Channel

On Fox, 28% of the stories about Romney were positive during the eight weeks studied, compared to 12% negative, a difference of 16 percentage points. That stands in significant contrast to the media studied in general here, in which negative stories about Romney exceeded positive by 23 points.

For Obama on Fox, by contrast, 6% of the stories studied were positive while 46% were negative—a difference of 40 points. That compared with an 11-point negative differential for the media in general.

One factor in this difference is that Romney received more positive than negative coverage for horse race on Fox, something that was not true in either the media generally or in any specific sectors studied.

More than a third (34%) of the horse-race coverage involving Romney on Fox was positive compared to 15% that was negative—a 2-to-1 difference.

For Obama, by contrast, 11% of the horse-race stories during these eight weeks were positive, while 46% were negative.

Fox aired more negative stories about Obama than positive on every aspect of campaign coverage. When it came to policy, 6% of the stories on Fox about Obama were positive and 51% were negative.

Fox also focused much more on Obama than on Romney. The Democratic Party nominee was a significant figure in 74% of Fox campaign stories compared with 49% for Romney.

That reflects another difference from the channel's coverage four years ago, when both candidates received more similar levels of coverage. Obama was a significant presence in 66% of Fox News' stories, compared for 59% for McCain.

MSNBC

If Fox News was a favorable environment for Romney but negative for Obama, the reverse was even more the case on MSNBC.

For Obama, 39% of his coverage on MSNBC was positive compared to 15% negative, a difference of 24 points or close to 3-to-1. That is similar but slightly less positive than in 2008 when 43% of Obama's stories on MSNBC were positive compared to 14% negative, a difference of 29 percentage points. That puts MSNBC sharply at odds with the rest of the media studied here where there was an 11-point negative differential for Obama.

Yet the bigger difference on MSNBC from the rest of the media was in the coverage of Romney. This year, of the 259 segments studied about Romney during the eight-week period, just 3% were positive in nature while 71% were negative.

Four years ago, 10% of MSNBC's coverage about McCain was positive while 73% was negative.

MSNBC was especially negative in its treatment of Romney's policy prescriptions. Fully 75% of the stories focused on Romney's policies were negative compared with 1% that were positive. For Obama, by comparison, 32% of policy stories were favorable while 18% were negative.

MSNBC also devoted more time on the Republican than on the Democrat; Romney was a significant figure in 68% of the campaign stories on MSNBC versus 53% for Obama; that made it the only outlet studied where Romney received significantly more attention than Obama. In 2008, MSNBC spent more time on McCain, but to a lesser degree; 70% of the stories were on McCain compared to 61% for Obama.

CNN

CNN stood between MSNBC and Fox in its treatment of the two candidates but Obama fared markedly better than Romney and better than in the media generally.

On CNN, 18% of the stories about Obama were positive compared to 21% negative, a mixed narrative. In Romney's case, negative stories (36%) outnumbered positive (11%) by more than 3-to-1.

However, as with the press studied overall, if one removes horse-race stories from the equation, the tone of coverage of Obama and Romney becomes more comparable. In those stories not framed around the horse race, 13% were positive for Obama compared to 24% negative while 13% were positive for Romney compared to 30% negative.

Unlike its two cable news competitors, CNN also devoted similar amounts of time to both contenders. Obama was a significant figure in 63% of the campaign stories studied compared with 59% for Romney.

The biggest change in CNN coverage of the campaign from four years ago is the number of stories with no clear positive or negative tone. In 2008, about a quarter of the stories for Obama (25%) and McCain (26%) were mixed in tone. In this campaign, the count of balanced stories has more than doubled. In 2012, fully 61% of Obama's stories were mixed compared to 53% for Romney.

Network TV: Morning vs. Evening

In the closing weeks of the campaign, viewers of commercial network news broadcasts may have gotten different perceptions of the race depending on whether they were watching the morning shows or the evening newscasts.

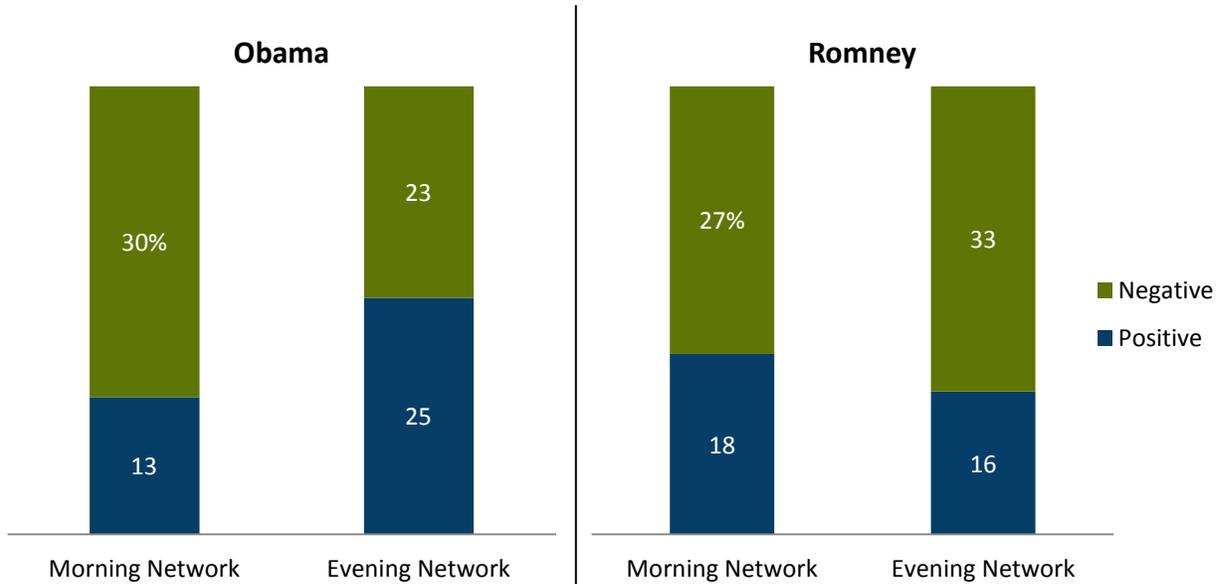
On network television, the morning shows were among the few places where Romney received better press than Obama—although his coverage was still more negative overall. In the evening, Obama fared considerably better.

During the opening half-hours of the ABC, CBS and NBC morning news programs, which include the leading news of the day, 18% of the stories regarding Romney were positive compared to 27% negative. That overall negative tone was significantly impacted by the horse-race stories. If those strategy stories are removed, Romney's coverage tipped to the favorable side, with 26% positive and 16% negative.

For Obama in the morning, 13% of his stories were positive compared to 30% negative. And that basic ratio of positive to negative stories changes only minimally if the horse-race stories are removed.

Tone of Coverage on Morning and Evening Network News

Percent of stories with tone



Note: Mixed tone numbers are not included
Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

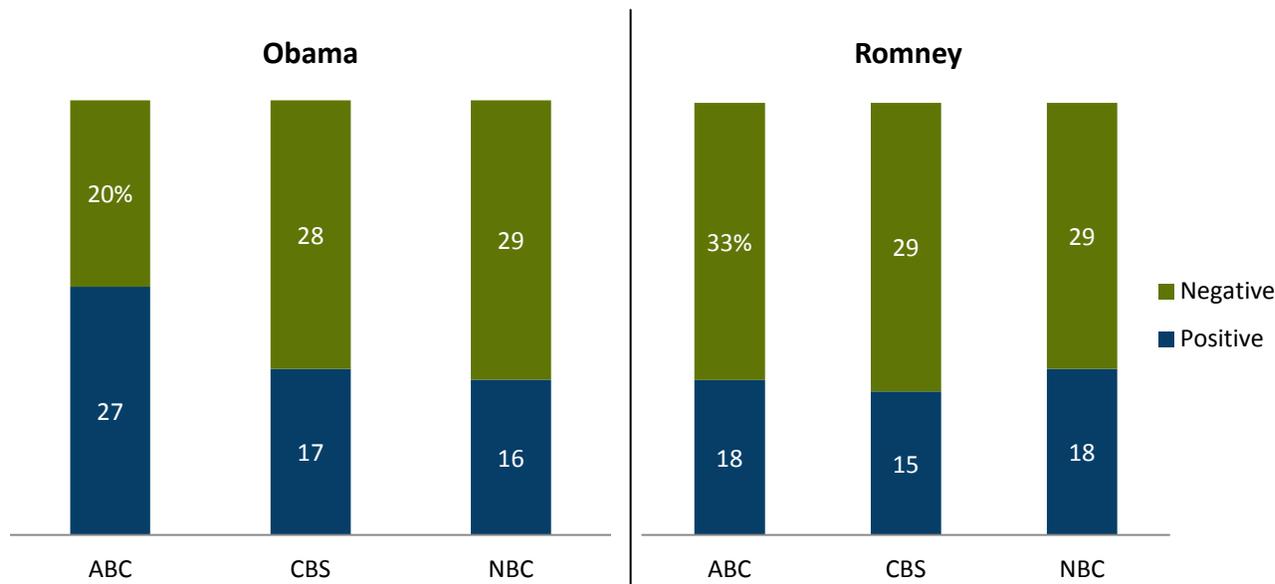
The evening newscasts on ABC, CBS and NBC, however, told quite a different story. There, the narrative about Obama was mixed, (25% of stories were positive, 23% negative) while for Romney, negative segments outnumbered positive by 2-to-1, (16% positive and 33% negative).

This advantage for Obama cannot be explained solely by the horse-race aspect either. If the strategy stories are removed, the tone of coverage for both candidates get slightly better, even though Obama's (27% positive and 17% negative) is still more positive than Romney's (17% positive and 25% negative).

The amount of time devoted to each candidate on the morning and evening shows differed modestly. In the morning shows, 77% of the stories included Obama compared to 69% for Romney. For the evening shows, however, the time devoted to each was virtually even with Obama in 67% of the stories and Romney in 64%.

Tone of Candidate Coverage on Networks Overall

Percent of stories with tone



Note: Mixed tone numbers are not included
Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

When examining overall campaign coverage (morning and evening together) for the candidates on the three commercial broadcast networks, one of the big three stands out from its rivals.

On ABC, the narrative was modestly favorable for Obama (27% positive, 20% negative) and considerably more unflattering for Romney (18% positive, 33% negative). While the tone of the ABC narrative for Romney is slightly better than in the media in general, Obama does significantly better on that network than in the press overall.

On the other two networks, the tone of campaign stories was virtually the same, and substantially negative, for both men. On CBS, the gap between Obama's negative and positive coverage was 11 points compared with 14 for Romney.

On NBC, the gap between negative and positive for Romney was 11 points while it stood at 13 points for the president.

Newspapers

For newspapers, 2012 was a very different campaign from four years earlier.

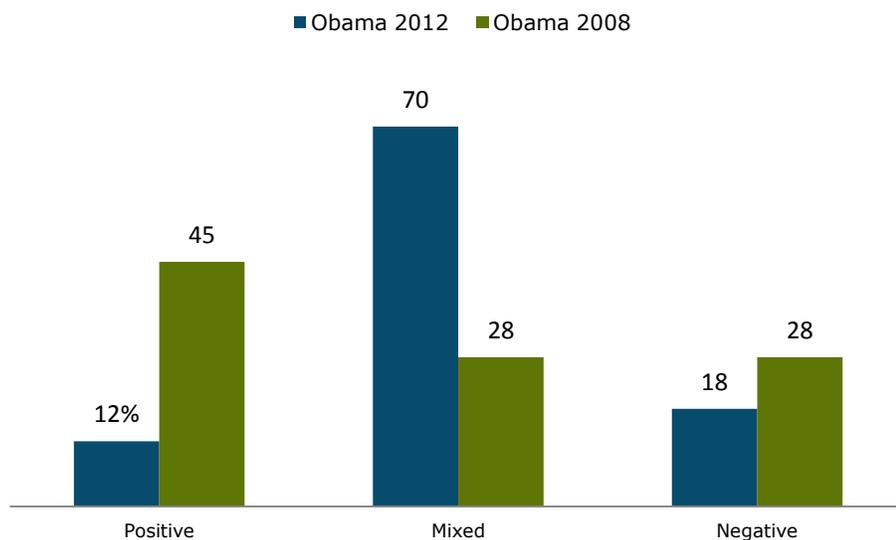
Unlike the media overall, front-page newspaper stories about the 2012 campaign offered a more favorable narrative for Romney than Obama. This year, 19% of Romney's coverage has been positive compared to 16% negative, while 12% of Obama's has been positive and 18% negative.

These numbers also represent a significant change from 2008 when Obama enjoyed a large advantage in the tone of newspaper coverage over his rival John McCain. Obama's positive coverage exceeded negative by almost 2-to-1 while McCain's negative surpassed positive by about 11-to-1.

Another major change in newspaper campaign coverage from 2008 to 2012 is the dramatic growth in the number of neutral stories published about the candidates. This year, fully 70% of Obama's stories and 66% of Romney's newspaper stories were neutral. Previously, only about a quarter of the stories about the major candidates were neutral.

Obama's Tone in Newspapers 2012 vs. 2008

Percent of stories with tone

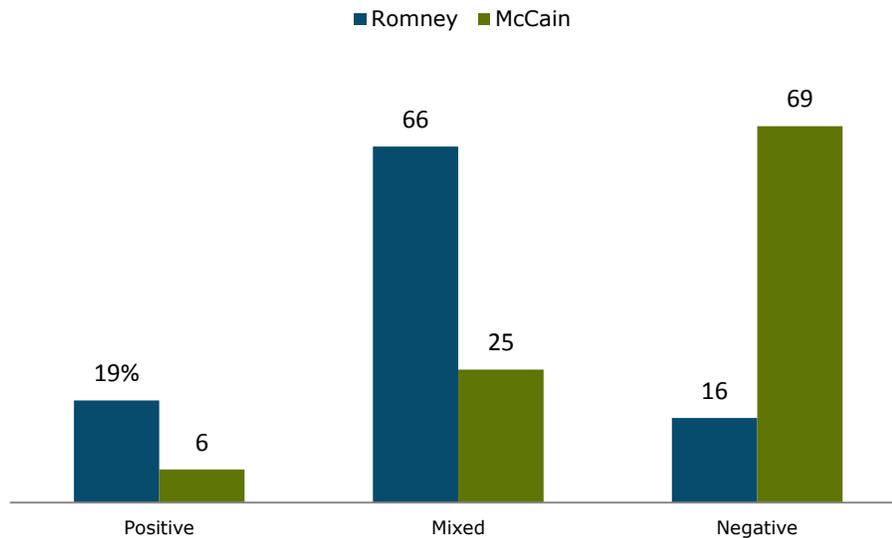


Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012 and September 8 – October 16, 2008

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Republican Candidates' Tone in Newspapers 2012 vs. 2008

Percent of stories with tone



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012 and September 8 – October 16, 2008

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

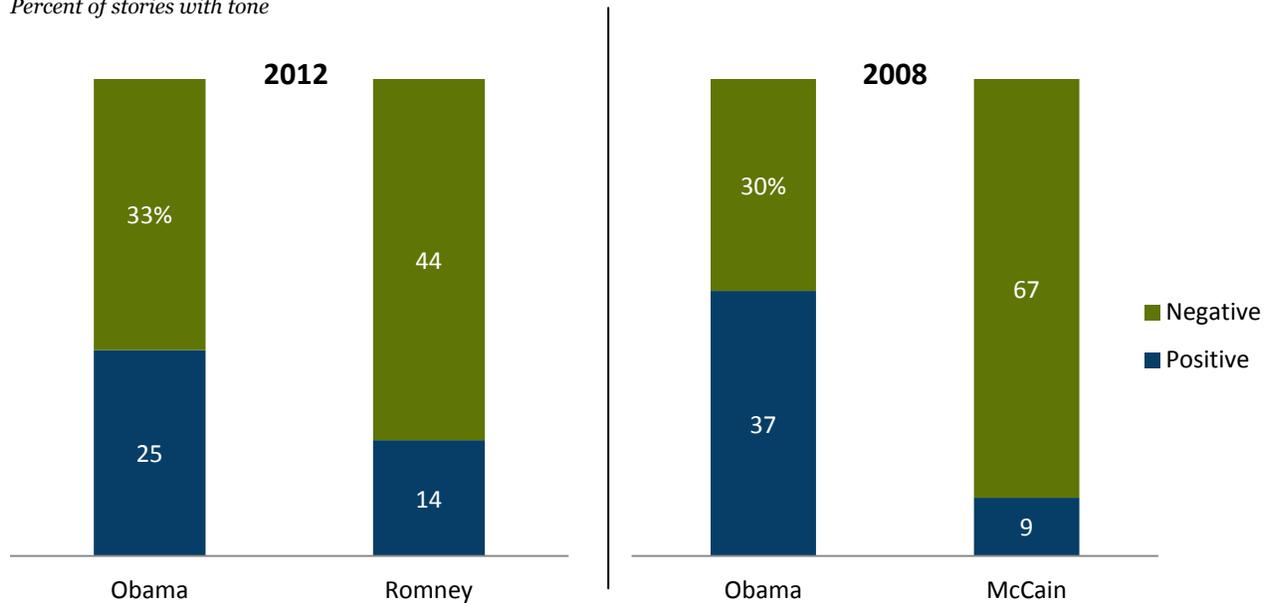
Online

The study also examined the top campaign stories each day of the eight weeks studied on the 12 most popular news websites in the United States. Virtually all of these are websites tied to legacy news organizations or are heavily engaged in aggregation of traditional news.

In the lead stories of the 12 most popular news websites studied, Obama received more favorable coverage than Romney—a difference slightly larger than that of the media overall. And as with the overall press, most of that difference is a result of the horse-race and strategy articles.

Tone of Coverage on News Websites 2012 vs. 2008

Percent of stories with tone



Note: Mixed tone numbers are not included

Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012 and September 8 – October 16, 2008

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Overall, a quarter (25%) of online stories about Obama were positive compared to 33% which were negative. For Romney, 14% were positive while 44% were negative.

However, without the ones focused on strategy and momentum, the numbers are much closer. Among those, only 13% of Obama's were positive compared with 37% negative, while 10% of Romney's were positive and 33% were negative.

The advantage Obama has seen online is significant, but not nearly as large as the one four years ago when McCain received more than seven times as many negative stories online as positive.

These numbers may reflect in part the breaking news nature of the top stories at any given moment on websites. In past studies, PEJ has found that the lead stories on websites are often those that are tied to the moment, to newest polls or daily jousting, and sometimes are less analytical than the top election story that appears the next day, even in the same publication's print edition or that evening's newscast.

The Closing Weeks of the Campaign in Social Media

The conversation about the candidates in social media from August 27-October 21 differed significantly from mainstream media coverage of the campaign. For the most part, the conversations on Twitter, Facebook and blogs about the candidates were relentlessly negative. And though the volume of social media assertions, particularly on Twitter and Facebook, swells in response to major events—such as conventions and debates—the tone of that conversation does not change accordingly. On blogs, there is somewhat more sensitivity and reactivity in tone to significant developments, but not as much as in mainstream media.

Across the three major social media platforms, neither candidate enjoyed a single week of more positive than negative conversation. Within that, Twitter users consistently treated Obama somewhat more favorably than Romney; the conversation among bloggers and on Facebook was more divided in tone between the two contenders.

Twitter

The Twitter conversation about Mitt Romney has been very tough; In each of the eight weeks studied, negative sentiment outstripped positive sentiment by anywhere from 38 to 49 points. In none of those weeks did positive Twitter assertions about Mitt Romney ever top 19%. His best week, interestingly, included the week of Democratic National Convention, when he received more positive treatment (19%) than during the week of his own convention in Tampa (17%).²

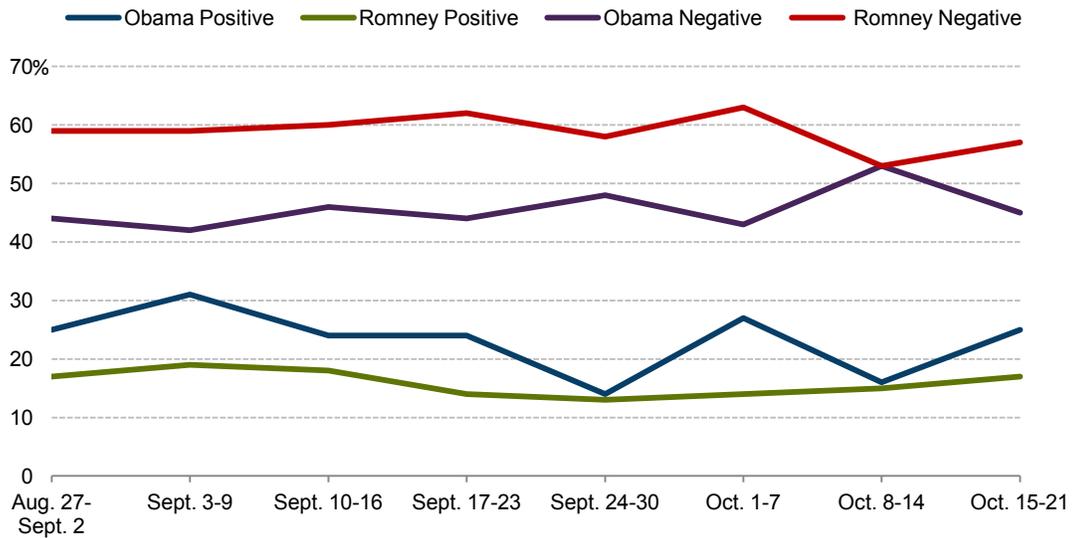
Overall percentages of positive conversation on Twitter for Romney varied only minimally from week to week: from a low of 13% (Sept 24-30) to 19% (Sept 3-9). In the last month (September 24-October 21), positive tweets about Romney have risen by one percentage point every week.

Negative Twitter sentiment for Romney made up the majority of conversation about him each week, ranging from 53% on the low end to 63% on the high. As one measure of how little the tone of the conversation in the Twitter universe seems to be swayed by real-time events, the week of September 17-23 when the now infamous 47% video was released, 62% of the conversation about Romney was negative—only marginally more negative than the conversation during the week of the Republican Convention (59%).

² The study of the conversation about the candidates in social media does not include the more refined breakdown of tone by theme of campaign coverage that was examined in the mainstream media sample.

Tone of Conversation about Candidates on Twitter

Percent of assertions



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEJ analysis using Crimson Hexagon technology

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Obama received generally more positive treatment on Twitter, although his numbers have fluctuated more widely than Romney's from week to week. In each of the weeks studied, Obama's percentage of positive tweets has been consistently higher than Romney's—by margins of anywhere between 1 to 13 points. Twitter sentiment about the president is also notably less negative than Romney's.

Between August 27 and October 21, Obama's positives have ranged from a low of 14% (September 24-30) to a high of 31% (September 3-9, the week of the Democratic convention). Unlike Romney, Obama's negatives have remained well below 50%, with only one exception (October 8-14, the week of the vice-presidential debate). Again, as an example of how Twitter users reach different conclusions than the mainstream press, the percentages of positive assertions about Obama were nearly identical during the weeks of the first two debates (27% vs. 25%) despite the fact that most polls showed that Romney won that encounter by a wide margin and Obama won the second by a more modest margin.

Facebook

An examination of the random sample of publicly available posts on Facebook finds that the narrative for both men gradually improved over the course of the eight weeks studied—even as neither man enjoyed a single week of more positive than negative coverage. But that improvement was considerably more dramatic for Obama than Romney.

Both candidates began the convention period with negative assertions on Facebook outstripping positive ones by more than 40 points. Starting in late September, Romney saw modest improvement; he enjoyed his best week (when positive exceeded negative by 32 points) from October 15-21.

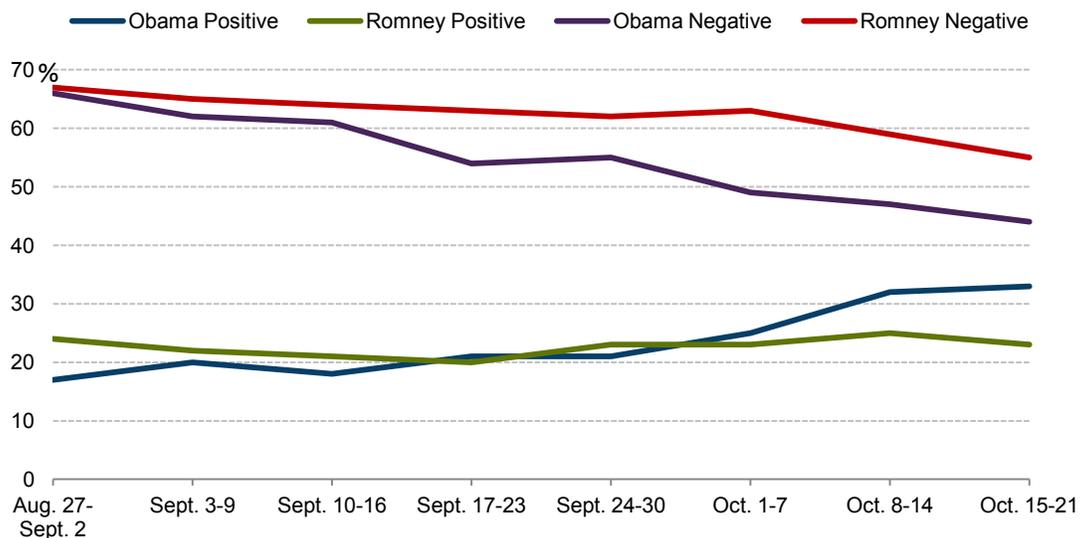
The uptick in the tone of the conversation about Obama began in mid-September and he also enjoyed his best week (with negative assertions surpassing positive by 11 points) from October 15-21.

Aside from faring better in the overall narrative in recent weeks, Obama has consistently been the subject of more of the conversation about candidates in Facebook, topping Romney in each of the eight weeks studied. By way of example, during the week of the Republican convention, there were still more Facebook assertions about Obama (83,636) than Romney (70,828). The following week, when Democrats gathered in North Carolina, the president was the subject of almost 115,000 more assertions than his challenger.

The most intense Facebook conversation about the campaign occurred during the week of the October 3 presidential debate in Denver. But here too, Obama—who was widely perceived to have lost that debate—received more attention (270,051 assertions) than Romney (242,138).

Tone of Conversation about Candidates on Facebook

Percent of assertions



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEJ analysis using Crimson Hexagon technology

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

Blogs

The overall tone of the conversation on blogs for both of the candidates was sharply negative, only just somewhat less so than on Facebook and Twitter. Over the eight weeks studied, the positive tone for

Romney ranged only between 12-22%, and Obama’s similarly ranged between 15-22%. Negative tone for both was over 40% in almost every week.

Over time, however, there were somewhat opposite trajectories for Romney and Obama. Unlike on Twitter, the first debate may have been seen on blogs as changing the dynamics of the race.

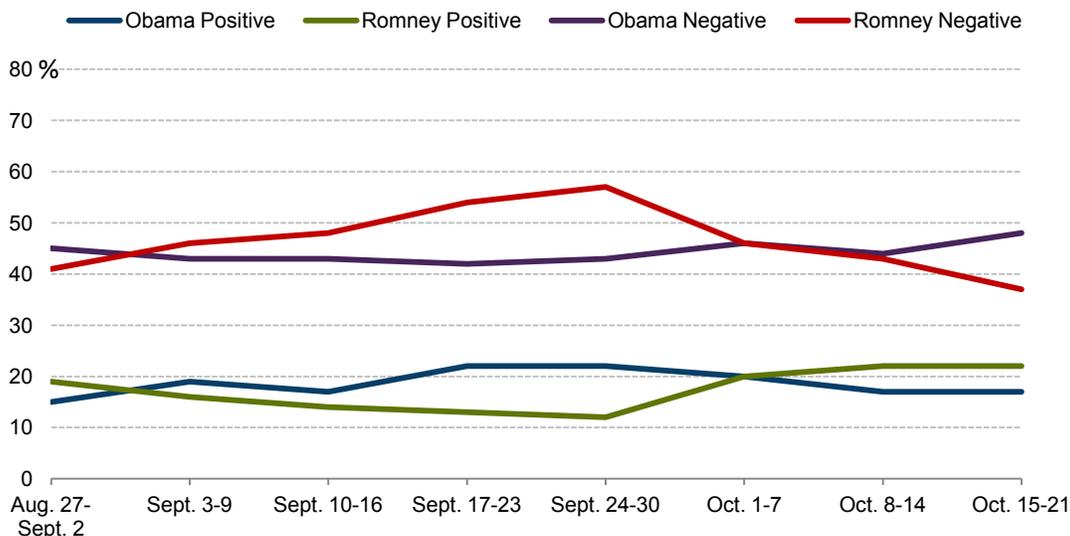
For example, the tone of the positive conversation about Romney during the first five weeks (August 27-September 30) trended steadily downward, with the gap between negative and positive coverage expanding from 22 points during the Republican convention week to 45 points in the last week of the month. But in the first three weeks of October, starting with the Denver debate, that gap narrowed considerably, reaching its smallest point (15 points) from October 15-21.

The trajectory of the conversation about Obama is less fluid and more a zigzag pattern. The gap between his negative and positive coverage was on a modest downward trend until the week of the first debate. Since then, it has grown again, so that the gap (31 points), the week of October 15-21, is back to where it was during the week of the Republican convention (30 points), the first week studied in this report.

As was the case on Facebook, blogger assertions about Obama exceeded those about Romney every week from August 27-October 21.

Tone of Conversation about Candidates in Blogs

Percent of assertions



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012
 PEJ analysis using Crimson Hexagon technology

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

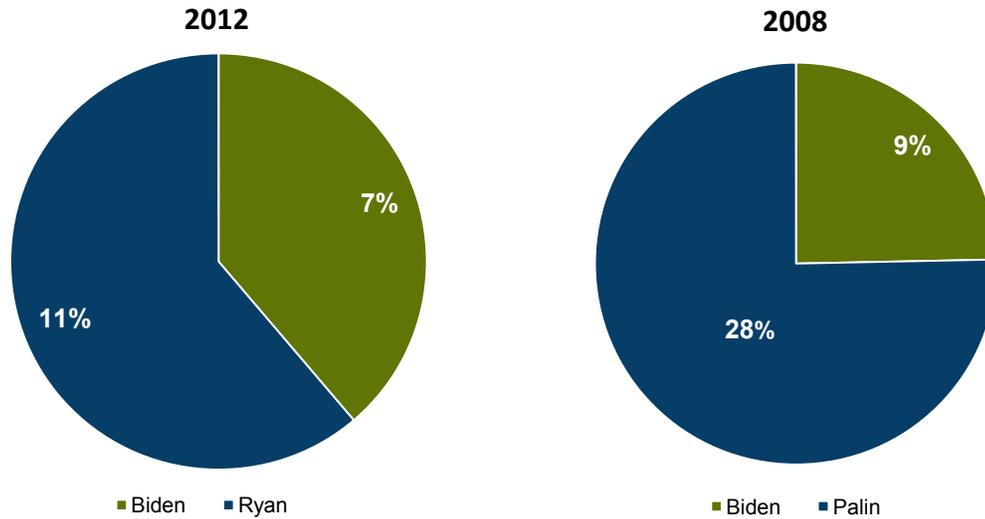
The Mainstream Media Narrative about the Vice-Presidential Candidates

The most notable aspect of coverage of the vice-presidential candidates in the 2012 campaign is that this time, Joe Biden has received about as much attention as his opponent.

In 2008, John McCain's surprise selection of largely unknown Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate, and her ability to energize the party's conservative base, triggered a torrent of coverage as the press scrambled to construct a Palin portrait. In the late stages of the 2008 race, Palin was a significant figure in 28% of the campaign stories, almost half as many as McCain (62%) and three times more than Biden (9%).

Paul Ryan Received Much Less Coverage than Sarah Palin

Percent of campaign stories where each candidate is a significant presence



Date Range: August 27 – October 21, 2012 and September 8 – October 16, 2008

Note: A candidate is considered a significant presence if 25% or more of the story is about him or her

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

In this campaign, Paul Ryan, the Wisconsin Congressman, has received more coverage than Biden, but modestly so. Ryan has been a significant figure in 11% of the stories compared with 7% for Biden. Romney's choice of Ryan, a leading force behind Republican budget thinking, was viewed by analysts as a selection that would also help fire up the conservative base. But at least in terms of the volume of coverage, he has not proven to be another Sarah Palin.

When it comes to the tone of the media narrative, the incumbent vice president has fared significantly better than his rival. From August 27-October 21, Biden's coverage was equally balanced between positive and negative while Ryan's negative coverage outstripped positive by 14 points.

While the volume of coverage for the vice-presidential hopefuls was a fraction of that for the presidential candidates, both Biden and Ryan have received somewhat more favorable coverage than the men at the top of the ticket. Negative stories about Obama exceeded positive ones by 11 points while that gap expanded to 23 points for Romney.

For Biden, that was not the case in 2008 when 25% of the stories about him were positive and 32% were negative compared with 36% that were positive and 29% negative for Obama. Palin’s coverage, while more negative overall (28% positive, 39% negative), was far better than McCain’s (14% positive, 57% negative).

As was the case in the narratives about Romney and Obama, Biden enjoyed an advantage over Ryan in the tone of the strategic horse-race coverage. In that frame, 19% of the stories about Biden were positive and 14% were negative. For Ryan, it was 17% positive and 27% negative.

The one week when the candidates found themselves squarely in the media spotlight was when they met in Danville Kentucky for an October 11 debate that was widely perceived to essentially be a draw. But in the media narrative, it was Biden who appeared to get the bounce. That week (October 8-14), 19% of the stories about him were positive, 17% were negative and 63% were neutral. Ryan faced considerably rougher treatment—11% of the stories about him were positive compared with 32% negative.

Tone of Vice-Presidential Candidates Campaign Coverage, 2012 vs. 2008

Percent of stories with tone

	2012 Election		2008 Election	
	Biden	Ryan	Biden	Palin
Positive	17%	14%	25%	28%
Mixed	68	58	43	33
Negative	16	28	32	39

Date Range: September 8 – October 16, 2008 and August 27 – October 21, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

About This Study

A number of people at the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism worked on PEJ's "Winning the Media Campaign 2012." Director Tom Rosenstiel and Associate Director Mark Jurkowitz wrote the report along with senior researcher Paul Hitlin and researcher Nancy Vogt. Paul Hitlin supervised the content analysis component. Additional coding and data analysis was done by Researchers Steve Adams, Monica Anderson, Heather Brown and Sovini Tan. Nancy Vogt worked on the computer coding. Katerina Matsa created the charts. Jesse Holcomb copy edited the report. Dana Page handles communications for the project.

Methodology

This special report by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism on media coverage of the 2012 presidential campaign uses data derived from two different methodologies. Data regarding the tone of coverage in the mainstream press were derived from the Project for Excellence in Journalism's in-house coding operation. ([Click here](#) for details on how that project, also known as PEJ's [News Coverage Index](#), is conducted.)

Data regarding the tone of conversation on social media (Twitter, Facebook and blogs) were derived from a combination of PEJ's traditional media research methods, based on long-standing rules regarding content analysis, along with computer coding software developed by [Crimson Hexagon](#). That software is able to analyze the textual content from millions of posts on social media platforms. Crimson Hexagon (CH) classifies online content by identifying statistical patterns in words.

The study is based on the aggregated data collected from August 27 through October 21, 2012. This timeframe runs from the week of the Republican National Convention through five days after the second presidential debate.

Human Coding of Mainstream Media

Sample Design

The mainstream media content was based on coverage originally captured as part of [PEJ's weekly News Coverage Index](#) (NCI).

Each week, the NCI examines the coverage from 52 outlets in five media sectors, including newspapers, online news, network TV, cable TV, and radio. Following a system of rotation, between 25 and 28 outlets each weekday are studied as well as 3 newspapers each Sunday.

For this particular study of campaign coverage, three commercial talk radio programs were excluded. In addition, broadcast stories that were 30 seconds or less were also excluded.

In total, the 49 media outlets examined for this campaign study were as follows:

Newspapers (Eleven in all)

Coded two out of these four every weekday; one on Sunday

The New York Times

Los Angeles Times

USA Today

The Wall Street Journal

Coded two out of these four every weekday; one on Sunday

The Washington Post

The Denver Post

Houston Chronicle

Orlando Sentinel

Coded one out of these three every weekday and Sunday

Traverse City Record-Eagle (MI)

The Daily Herald (WA)

The Eagle-Tribune (MA)

Web sites (Coded six of twelve each weekday)

Yahoo News

MSNBC.com

CNN.com

NYTimes.com

Google News

FoxNews.com

ABCNews.com

USAToday.com

WashingtonPost.com

LATimes.com

HuffingtonPost.com

Wall Street Journal Online

Network TV (Seven in all, Monday-Friday)

Morning shows – coded one or two every weekday

ABC – Good Morning America

CBS – Early Show

NBC – Today

Evening news – coded two of three every weekday

ABC – World News Tonight

CBS – CBS Evening News

NBC – NBC Nightly News

Coded two consecutive days, then skip one
PBS – NewsHour

Cable TV (Fifteen in all, Monday-Friday)

Daytime (2:00 to 2:30 pm) coded two out of three every weekday
CNN
Fox News
MSNBC

Nighttime CNN – coded one or two out of the four every day

Situation Room (5 pm)
Situation Room (6 pm)
Erin Burnett OutFront
Anderson Cooper 360

Nighttime Fox News – coded two out of the four every day
Special Report w/ Bret Baier
Fox Report w/ Shepard Smith
O’Reilly Factor
Hannity

Nighttime MSNBC – coded one or two out of the four every day
PoliticsNation
Hardball (7 pm)
The Rachel Maddow Show
The Ed Show

Radio (Seven in all, Monday-Friday)

NPR – Coded one of the two every weekday
Morning Edition
All Things Considered

Radio News
ABC Headlines
CBS Headlines

From that sample, the study included all campaign-related stories:

- On the front page of newspapers
- In the entirety of commercial network evening newscasts and radio headline segments
- The first 30 minutes of network morning news and all cable programs
- A 30 minute segment of NPR’s broadcasts or PBS’ NewsHour (rotated between the first and second half of the programs)
- The top 5 stories on each website at the time of capture

Click here for the full [methodology](#) regarding the News Coverage Index and the justification for the choices of outlets studied.

Sample Selection

To arrive at the sample for this particular study of campaign coverage, we gathered all relevant stories from August 27-October 21, 2012, that were either coded as campaign stories, meaning that 50% or more of the story was devoted to discussion of the ongoing presidential campaign, or included President Obama, Governor Romney, Vice President Biden or Congressman Paul Ryan in at least 25% of the story.

This process resulted in a sample of 2,457 stories. Of those, 2,257 stories focused on the presidential election while 220 focused on another topic, such as the events in Libya or the economy, but included one of the figures as a significant presence.

Note: The sample of 2,457 stories was used for all data regarding the tone of coverage for each candidate. For the few sections where the overall framing of campaign coverage is discussed in terms of newshole, the sample was made up of 2,903 stories and included talk radio stories and those 30 seconds or less.

Coding of Campaign Stories for Tone

The data in this study derived from PEJ's regular Index coding was created by a team of seven experienced coders. We have tested all of the variables derived from the regular weekly Index coding and all the variables reached a level of agreement of 80% or higher. For specific information about those tests, see the [methodology section](#) for the NCI.

The method of measuring tone was the same that had been used in previous PEJ studies, including the 2008 studies, in order to provide accurate longitudinal comparisons.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the story. Each story was coded for tone for each of the four candidates. If a candidate did not appear in at least 25% of the story, they were not considered a significant figure in the story and were therefore coded as "n/a" for not having a significant presence.

Tone Variable

The tone variable measures whether a story's tone is constructed in a way, via use of quotes, assertions, or innuendo, which results in positive, neutral, or negative coverage for the primary figure as it relates to the topic of the story. While reading or listening to a story, coders tallied up all the comments that have either a negative or positive tone to the reporting. Direct and indirect quotes were counted along with assertions made by journalists themselves.

In order for a story to be coded as either "positive" or "negative," it must have either 1.5 times the amount of positive comments to negative comments, or 1.5 times the amount of negative comments to

positive comments. If the headline or lead has a positive or negative tone, it was counted twice into the total value. Also counted twice for tone were the first three paragraphs or first four sentences, whichever came first.

Any story where the ratio of positive to negative comments was less than 1.5 to 1 was considered a "neutral" or "mixed" story.

In some previous studies, PEJ used a ratio of 2 to 1 instead of 1.5 to 1 in determining the overall tone of news stories.

The 2:1 ratio makes sets the bar even higher for a story to be coded as either positive or negative overall. Prior to the 2008 election campaign, PEJ reviewed and retested both the 2:1 ratio and the 1.5 to 1 ratio. We also consulted with academics of content analysis. First, we found only minor shifts in the overall outcome of stories. Indeed, in past content studies where we coded using both ratios, the overall relationship of positive to negative stories changed very little. The bigger difference was in an increase in mixed or neutral stories. In our pre-tests in 2007, the Project felt that the 1.5 to 1 ratio more precisely represented the overall tone of the stories. The academics consulted concurred.

Coding Process

Testing of all variables used to determine campaign stories has shown levels of agreement of 80% or higher. For specific information about those tests, see the [methodology on intercoder testing](#).

During coder training for this particular study, intercoder reliability tests were conducted for all the campaign-specific variables. There were two different intercoder tests conducted to assure reliability.

For this study, each of the seven coders were trained on the tone coding methodology and then were given the same set of 30 stories to code for tone for each of the four candidates. The rate of intercoder reliability agreement was 82%.

Coding of Social Media Using a Computer Algorithm

The sections of this report that dealt with the social media reaction to the campaign employed media research methods that combine PEJ's content analysis rules developed over more than a decade with computer coding software developed by [Crimson Hexagon](#). This report is based on separate examinations of more than 27 million tweets, 400,000 blog posts and 1.1 million Facebook posts.

Crimson Hexagon is a software platform that identifies statistical patterns in words used in online texts. Researchers enter key terms using Boolean search logic so the software can identify relevant material to analyze. PEJ draws its analysis samples from several million blogs, all public Twitter posts and a random sample of publicly available Facebook posts. Then a researcher trains the software to classify documents using examples from those collected posts. Finally, the software classifies the rest of the online content according to the patterns derived during the training.

According to Crimson Hexagon: "Our technology analyzes the entire social internet (blog posts, forum messages, Tweets, etc.) by identifying statistical patterns in the words used to express opinions on different topics." Information on the tool itself can be found at <http://www.crimsonhexagon.com/> and the in-depth methodologies can be found here <http://www.crimsonhexagon.com/products/whitepapers/>.

Crimson Hexagon measures text in the aggregate and the unit of measure is the 'statement' or assertion, not the post or Tweet. One post or Tweet can contain more than one statement if multiple ideas are expressed. The results are determined as a percentage of the overall conversation.

Monitor Creation and Training

Each individual study or query related to a set of variables is referred to as a "monitor."

The process of creating a new monitor consists of four steps. There were six monitors created for this study – three for Obama (Twitter, blogs and Facebook) and three for Romney (Twitter, blogs and Facebook).

First, PEJ researchers decide what timeframe and universe of content to examine. The timeframe for this study was August 27-October 21, 2012. PEJ only includes English-language content.

Second, the researchers enter key terms using Boolean search logic so the software can identify the universe of posts to analyze. For each of these monitors, the Boolean search terms simply consisted of the candidate's last name ("Obama" or "Romney").

Next, researchers define categories appropriate to the parameters of the study. For tone monitors, there are four categories: positive, neutral, negative, and irrelevant for posts that are off-topic.

Fourth, researchers "train" the CH platform to analyze content according to specific parameters they want to study. The PEJ researchers in this role have gone through in-depth training at two different levels. They are professional content analysts fully versed in PEJ's existing content analysis operation and methodology. They then undergo specific training on the CH platform including multiple rounds of reliability testing.

The monitor training itself is done with a random selection of posts collected by the technology. One at a time, the software displays posts and a human coder determines which category each example best fits into. In categorizing the content, PEJ staff follows coding rules created over the many years that PEJ has been content analyzing the news media. If an example does not fit easily into a category, that specific post is skipped. The goal of this training is to feed the software with clear examples for every category.

For each new monitor, human coders categorize at least 250 distinct posts. Typically, each individual category includes 20 or more posts before the training is complete. To validate the training, PEJ has conducted numerous intercoder reliability tests (see below) and the training of every monitor is examined by a second coder in order to discover errors.

The training process consists of researchers showing the algorithm stories in their entirety that are unambiguous in tone. Once the training is complete, the algorithm analyzes content at the assertion level, to ensure that the meaning is similarly unambiguous. This makes it possible to analyze and proportion content that contains assertions of differing tone. This classification is done by applying statistical word patterns derived from posts categorized by human coders during the training process.

The monitors are then reviewed by a second coder to ensure there is agreement. Any questionable posts are removed from the sample.

Ongoing Monitors

In the analysis of campaign coverage, PEJ uses CH to study a given period of time, and then expands the monitor for additional time going forward. In order to accomplish this, researchers first create a monitor for the original timeframe according to the method described above.

Because the tenor and content of online conversation can change over time, additional training is necessary when the timeframe gets extended. Since the specific conversation about candidates evolves all the time, the CH monitor must be trained to understand how newer posts fit into the larger categories.

Each week, researchers remove any documents which are more than three weeks old. For example, for the monitor the week of October 15-21, 2012, there will be no documents from before September 30. This ensures that older storylines no longer playing in the news cycle will be removed and the algorithm will be working with only the newest material.

Second, each week trainers add more stories to the training sample to ensure that the changes in the storyline are accurately reflected in the algorithm. PEJ researchers add, at a minimum, 10 new training documents to each category. This results in many categories receiving much more than the 10 new documents. On average, researchers will add roughly 60 new training documents each week.

How the Algorithm Works

To understand how the software recognizes and uses patterns of words to interpret texts, consider a simplified example regarding an examination of the tone of coverage regarding Mitt Romney. As a result of the example stories categorized by a human coder during the training, the CH monitor might recognize that portions of a story with the words "Romney," "poll" and "increase" near each other are likely positive for Romney. However, a section that includes the words "Romney," "losing" and "women" is likely to be negative for Romney.

Unlike most human coding, CH monitors do not measure each story as a unit, but examine the entire discussion in the aggregate. To do that, the algorithm breaks up all relevant texts into subsections. Rather than dividing each story, paragraph, sentence or word, CH treats the "assertion" as the unit of measurement. Thus, posts are divided up by the computer algorithm. If 40% of a post fits into one category, and 60% fits into another, the software will divide the text accordingly. Consequently, the results are not expressed in percent of newshole or percent of posts. Instead, the results are the percent

of assertions out of the entire body of stories identified by the original Boolean search terms. We refer to the entire collection of assertions as the "conversation."

Testing and Validity

Extensive testing by Crimson Hexagon has demonstrated that the tool is 97% reliable, that is, in 97% of cases analyzed, the technology's coding has been shown to match human coding. PEJ spent more than 12 months testing CH, and our own tests comparing coding by humans and the software came up with similar results.

In addition to validity tests of the platform itself, PEJ conducted separate examinations of human intercoder reliability to show that the training process for complex concepts is replicable. The first test had five researchers each code the same 30 stories which resulted in an agreement of 85%.

A second test had each of the five researchers build their own separate monitors to see how the results compared. This test involved not only testing coder agreement, but also how the algorithm handles various examinations of the same content when different human trainers are working on the same subject. The five separate monitors came up with results that were within 85% of each other.

Unlike polling data, the results from the CH tool do not have a sampling margin of error since there is no sampling involved. For the algorithmic tool, reliability tested at 97% meets the highest standards of academic rigor.

Topline
Winning the Media Campaign 2012
Obama's Post Convention Edge in News Coverage Gives Way to Romney's Debate Surge

Project for Excellence in Journalism

Amount of News Coverage						
Percent of Campaign Stories Where Each Candidate is a Significant Presence						
Candidate	Overall	Republican Convention	Democratic Convention	Post Conventions	Post 1 st Pres. Debate	Post 2 nd Pres Debate
	Aug. 27 – Oct. 21	Aug. 27 – Sept. 2	Sept. 3 - 9	Sept. 10 – Oct. 3	Oct. 4 - 16	Oct. 17 - 21
Obama	68.7%	39.6%	78.2%	72.4%	68.1%	82.6%
Biden	6.9	.6	4.5	1.3	21.1	2.6
Romney	61.1	57.3	33.5	65.6	65.5	84.7
Ryan	10.9	16.5	7.2	5.1	20.8	3.7

N=2,457 campaign stories

A candidate is considered a significant presence if 25% or more of the story is about him or her.

Tone of News Coverage by Time Period
August 27 – October 21, 2012

		Overall		Republican Convention		Democratic Convention		Post Conventions		Post 1 st Pres. Debate		Post 2 nd Pres Debate	
		Aug. 27 – Oct. 21		Aug. 27 – Sept. 2		Sept. 3 - 9		Sept. 10 – Oct. 3		Oct. 4 - 16		Oct. 17 - 21	
Candidate	Tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone
Obama	positive	320	18.9%	4	3.2%	102	34.6%	135	19.9%	52	12.0%	27	17.2%
	neutral	857	50.7	49	38.6	132	44.8	378	55.8	221	51.2	77	49.0
	negative	512	30.3	74	58.3	61	20.7	165	24.3	159	36.8	53	33.8
	n/a	768		194		81		258		202		33	
Biden	positive	28	16.5%	0	0%	6	35.3%	0	0%	22	16.4%	0	0%
	neutral	115	67.6	2	100	11	64.7	11	91.7	86	64.2	5	100
	negative	27	15.9	0	0	0	0	1	8.3	26	19.4	0	0
	n/a	2287		319		359		924		500		185	
Romney	positive	218	14.5%	66	35.9%	11	8.7%	24	3.9%	95	22.9%	22	13.7%
	neutral	710	47.3	90	48.9	57	44.9	274	44.6	223	53.7	66	41.0
	negative	573	38.2	28	15.2	59	46.5	316	51.5	97	23.4	73	45.3
	n/a	956		137		249		322		219		29	
Ryan	positive	37	13.8%	20	37.7%	2	7.1%	1	2.1%	14	10.6%	0	0%
	neutral	155	57.8	25	47.2	19	67.9	25	52.1	80	60.6	6	85.7
	negative	76	28.4	8	15.1	7	25.0	22	45.8	38	28.8	1	14.3
	n/a	2189		268		348		888		502		183	
All Candidates combined	positive	603	16.6%	90	24.6%	121	25.9%	160	11.8%	183	16.4%	49	14.8%
	neutral	1837	50.6	166	45.4	219	45.9	688	50.9	610	54.8	154	46.7
	negative	1188	32.7	110	30.1	127	27.2	504	37.2	320	28.8	127	38.5

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

Frame of Campaign Coverage Percent of Campaign Newshole						
Frame	Overall	Republican Convention	Democratic Convention	Post Conventions	Post 1 st Pres. Debate	Post 2 nd Pres Debate
	Aug. 27 – Oct. 21	Aug. 27 – Sept. 2	Sept. 3 - 9	Sept. 10 – Oct. 3	Oct. 4 - 16	Oct. 17 - 21
Political Horserace	38.1%	32.6%	32.0%	35.2%	48.8%	43.5%
Advertising, Fundraising*	5.7	7.8	4.3	5.9	4.9	6.3
Voting Laws and Other Political Topics	9.2	22.4	12.2	4.9	6.4	5.7
Public Record	6.3	10.0	14.0	2.6	2.9	10.5
Policy	21.6	13.3	23.6	25.6	21.7	15.3
Personal	4.0	9.4	6.3	3.5	1.3	0.8
Other Campaign	4.8	3.0	5.0	4.4	5.8	7.2
Non-election Focused	9.3	1.1	1.6	16.9	7.3	9.7

N=2,903 campaign stories

*Also includes stories about the treatment of candidates by the press, the electoral calendar, and endorsements.

**Tone of Coverage for Each Candidate by Frame
Percent of Stories August 27 – October 21, 2012**

		Political Horserace		Advertising, Fundraising*		Voting Laws and Other Political Topics		Public Record		Policy	
Candidate	Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone
Obama	positive	199	28.3%	5	6.8%	21	23.6%	15	18.8%	52	11.8%
	neutral	298	42.5	47	63.5	43	48.3	39	48.8	230	52.0
	negative	205	29.2	22	29.7	25	28.1	26	32.5	160	36.2
	n/a	243		42		137		41		153	
Biden	positive	19	18.6%	0	0%	2	25.0%	0	0%	5	15.6%
	neutral	69	67.6	2	50.0	5	62.5	6	100	20	62.5
	negative	14	13.7	2	50.0	1	12.5	0	0	7	21.9
	n/a	843		112		218		115		563	
Romney	positive	115	15.5%	11	14.9%	20	25.6%	10	16.7%	31	7.7%
	neutral	292	39.4	51	68.9	35	44.9	28	46.7	218	54.2
	negative	335	45.1	12	16.2	23	29.5	22	36.7	153	38.1
	n/a	203		42		148		61		193	
Ryan	positive	24	17.1%	0	0%	4	30.8%	4	19.0%	4	5.3%
	neutral	78	55.7	3	60.0	7	53.8	11	52.4	48	63.2
	negative	38	27.1	2	40.0	2	15.4	6	28.6	24	31.6
	n/a	805		111		213		100		519	

*Also includes stories about the treatment by the press, electoral calendar and endorsements.

**Tone of Coverage for Each Candidate by Frame
Percent of Stories August 27 – October 21, 2012**

		Personal		Other Campaign		Non-election Focused	
Candidate	Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone	# of Stories	% of Stories with Tone
Obama	positive	13	32.5%	11	20.0%	4	1.9%
	neutral	18	45	34	61.8	148	71.5
	negative	9	22.5	10	18.2	55	26.6
	n/a	76		63		13	
Biden	positive	2	40.0%	0	0%	0	0%
	neutral	3	60.0	3	75.0	7	77.8
	negative	0	0	1	25.0	2	22.2
	n/a	111		114		211	
Romney	positive	25	29.8%	5	11.1%	1	6.3%
	neutral	47	56	27	60.0	12	75.0
	negative	12	14.3	13	28.9	3	18.8
	n/a	32		73		204	
Ryan	positive	1	11.1%	0	0%	0	0%
	neutral	6	66.7	0	0	2	66.7
	negative	2	22.2	1	100	1	33.3
	n/a	107		117		217	

Amount of News Coverage by Outlet
Percent of Campaign Stories Where Each Candidate was a Significant Presence
 August 27- October 21, 2012

Candidate	All Media	Newspapers	Online	Network Morning TV	Network Evening TV	Network Total (ABC, NBC, and CBS)	ABC total	NBC total	CBS Total
Obama	68.7%	75.8%	74.3%	77.3%	66.7%	71.5%	62.7%	75.4%	75.0%
Biden	6.9	4.5	4.9	11.9	9.1	10.4	10.2	9.0	11.6
Romney	61.1	48.5	67.5	68.6	63.9	66.1	64.4	67.2	66.6
Ryan	10.9	7.6	7.9	16.2	9.6	12.6	12.7	16.4	9.8

Amount of News Coverage by Outlet
Percent of Campaign Stories Where Each Candidate was a Significant Presence

August 27- October 21, 2012

Candidate	Cable Total	Cable Daytime	Cable Evening	CNN Total	MSNBC total	Fox News Total	Radio (Excluding Talk)
Obama	64.6%	63.9%	65.0%	63.1%	52.8%	73.7%	64.8%
Biden	6.8	5.3	7.3	7.4	6.6	6.6	6.3
Romney	57.4	57.5	57.2	59.0	68.0	49.1	64.1
Ryan	11.2	7.0	12.7	12.2	14.7	8.3	12.0

N=2,457 campaign stories

A candidate is considered a significant presence if 25% or more of the story is about him or her.

Tone of Campaign Coverage by Outlet
Percent of Campaign Stories with a Tone
 August 27- October 21, 2012

		Overall		Newspapers		Online		Network Morning TV		Network Evening TV		Network Total (ABC, NBC, and CBS)		ABC total		NBC total		CBS Total	
Candidate	Tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone
Obama	positive	320	18.9%	6	12.0%	79	24.8%	19	13.3%	37	25.3%	56	19.4%	20	27.0%	15	16.3%	21	17.1%
	neutral	857	50.7	35	70.0	135	42.5	81	56.6	76	52.1	157	54.3	39	52.7	50	54.3	68	55.3
	negative	512	30.3	9	18.0	104	32.7	43	30.1	33	22.6	76	26.3	15	20.3	27	29.3	34	27.6
Biden	positive	28	16.5%	1	33.3%	4	19.0	2	9.1%	1	5.0%	3	7.1%	0	0%	0	0%	3	15.8%
	neutral	115	67.6	2	66.7	14	66.7	16	72.7	16	80.0	32	76.2	10	83.3	11	100	11	57.9
	negative	27	15.9	0	0	3	14.3	4	18.2	3	15.0	7	16.7	2	16.7	0	0	5	26.3
Romney	positive	218	14.5%	6	18.8%	41	14.2	23	18.1%	22	15.6%	45	16.8%	14	18.4%	15	18.3%	16	14.5%
	neutral	710	47.3	21	65.6	120	41.5	70	55.1	72	51.1	142	53.0	37	48.7	43	52.4	62	56.4
	negative	573	38.2	5	15.6	128	44.3	34	28.6	47	33.3	81	30.2	25	32.9	24	29.3	32	29.1
Ryan	positive	37	13.8%	2	40.0%	8	23.5	5	16.7%	0	0%	5	9.6%	2	13.3%	1	5.0%	2	11.8%
	neutral	155	57.8	2	40.0	17	50.0	22	73.3	16	72.7	38	73.1	9	60.0	17	85.0	12	70.6
	negative	76	28.4	1	20.0	9	26.5	3	10.0	6	27.3	9	17.3	4	26.7	2	10.0	3	17.6

Stories where a candidate was not a significant presence were excluded from this table.

Tone of Campaign Coverage by Outlet
Percent of Campaign Stories with a Tone
 August 27- October 21, 2012

		Cable Total		Cable Daytime		Cable Evening		CNN Total		MSNBC total		Fox News Total		Radio (Excluding Talk)	
Candidate	Tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone	# of stories	% of stories with tone
Obama	positive	70	22.1%	37	16.9%	96	17.1%	35	17.8%	78	38.6%	25	6.2%	12	13.0%
	neutral	138	43.5	124	56.6	274	48.7	120	60.9	93	46.0	192	47.9	64	69.6
	negative	109	34.4	58	26.5	193	34.3	42	21.3	31	15.3	184	45.9	16	17.4
Biden	positive	11	29.7%	3	16.7%	15	23.8%	1	4.3%	12	48.0%	5	13.9%	0	0%
	neutral	13	35.1	14	77.8	34	54.0	20	87.0	13	52.0	18	50.0	9	100
	negative	13	35.1	1	5.6	14	22.2	2	8.7	0	0	13	36.1	0	0
Romney	positive	40	12.6%	28	14.3%	74	14.9%	21	11.4%	9	3.5%	74	27.7%	5	5.5%
	neutral	120	37.9	93	47.4	221	44.6	97	52.7	67	25.9	160	59.9	56	61.5%
	negative	157	49.5	75	38.3	200	40.4	66	35.9	183	70.7	33	12.4	30	33.0
Ryan	positive	8	11.8%	2	8.3%	10	9.1%	3	7.9%	2	3.6%	9	20.0%	1	5.9%
	neutral	24	35.3	13	54.2	61	55.5	27	71.1	15	26.8	33	73.3	14	82.4
	negative	36	52.9	9	37.5	39	35.5	8	21.1	39	69.6	3	6.7	2	11.8

Stories where a candidate was not a significant presence were excluded from this table.

Tone of Campaign Conversation on Twitter
Percent of Assertions
 August 27- October 21, 2012

Week	Romney					Obama				
	# of Assertions	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Pos/Neg Difference	# of Assertions	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Pos/Neg Difference
Aug. 27-Sept. 2	1,975,872	17%	24%	59%	-42	1,958,298	25%	31%	44%	-19
Sept. 3-9	2,058,428	19	22	59	-40	4,922,960	31	28	42	-11
Sept. 10-16	1,420,505	18	22	60	-42	2,300,885	24	31	46	-22
Sept. 17-23	2,286,187	14	24	62	-48	1,997,394	24	32	44	-20
Sept. 24-30	1,345,043	13	30	58	-45	1,905,182	14	39	48	-34
Oct. 1-7	6,298,973	14	24	63	-49	5,842,339	27	30	43	-16
Oct. 8-14	2,214,698	15	31	53	-38	2,287,323	16	31	53	-37
Oct. 15-21	6,235,926	17	26	57	-40	5,730,656	25	30	45	-20
Total	23,835,632	16	25	58	-42	26,945,037	25	31	45	-20

Tone of Campaign Conversation on Facebook

Percent of Assertions

August 27- October 21, 2012

Week	Romney					Obama				
	# of Assertions	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Pos/Neg Difference	# of Assertions	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Pos/Neg Difference
Aug. 27-Sept. 2	70,828	24%	9%	67%	-43	83,636	17%	17%	66%	-49
Sept. 3-9	51,762	22	13	65	-43	166,724	20	18	62	-42
Sept. 10-16	39,415	21	14	64	-43	81,320	18	21	61	-43
Sept. 17-23	87,562	20	17	63	-43	110,844	21	25	54	-33
Sept. 24-30	63,590	23	14	62	-39	116,295	21	24	55	-34
Oct. 1-7	242,138	23	14	63	-40	270,051	25	25	49	-24
Oct. 8-14	84,440	25	16	59	-34	115,191	32	21	47	-15
Oct. 15-21	124,902	23	22	55	-32	151,058	33	23	44	-11
Total	764,547	23	15	62	-39	1,095,119	24	22	53	-29

Tone of Campaign Conversation on Blogs

Percent of Assertions

August 27- October 21, 2012

Week	Romney					Obama				
	# of Assertions	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Pos/Neg Difference	# of Assertions	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Pos/Neg Difference
Aug. 27-Sept. 2	35,973	19%	40%	41%	-22	43,414	15%	40%	45%	-30
Sept. 3-9	28,669	16	38	46	-30	56,634	19	38	43	-24
Sept. 10-16	26,593	14	38	48	-34	50,069	17	41	43	-26
Sept. 17-23	36,201	13	32	54	-41	46,004	22	36	42	-20
Sept. 24-30	29,308	12	31	57	-45	47,991	22	34	43	-21
Oct. 1-7	42,746	20	34	46	-26	58,143	20	34	46	-26
Oct. 8-14	36,377	22	35	43	-21	51,907	17	38	44	-27
Oct. 15-21	43,875	22	40	37	-15	56,475	17	35	48	-31
Total	279,742	18	36	46	-28	410,637	19	37	44	-25