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Election Study Finds Media Hit Hillary Hardest

Obama, Huckabee Fare Best; FOX Is Most Balanced (not a typo)

TV election news has been hardest on Hillary Clinton this fall, while Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee have been the biggest media favorites, according to a new study by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)** at **George Mason University**. The study also found that Fox NewsChannel's evening news show provided more balanced coverage than its counterparts on the broadcast networks.

These results are from CMPA's 2008 ElectionNewsWatch Project. They are based on a scientific content analysis of all 481 election news stories (15 hours 40 minutes of airtime) that aired on the flagship evening news shows on ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX (the first 30 minutes of "Special Report with Brit Hume") from October 1 through December 15, 2007.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

Hillary Pilloried? On-air evaluations of Hillary Clinton were nearly 3 to 2 negative (42% positive vs. 58% negative comments), while evaluations of her closest competitor Barack Obama was better than 3 to 2 positive (61% positive vs. 39% negative). John Edwards attracted much less coverage, but his evaluations were 2 to 1 positive (67% positive vs. 33% negative). Sen. Clinton was evaluated more often than all her Democratic opponents combined.

Examples: "Critics say her best known Senate vote, on Iraq, was driven by politics, not by principle." – Andrea Mitchell, NBC

"She was widely blamed for a health care policy so secretive and complex it died at birth." – Major Garrett, FOX

"I've been inspired [by Obama] to believe that a new vision is possible for America." – Oprah Winfrey, FOX

It's All About Hillary: Four of the ten most heavily covered candidate-related issues concerned Ms. Clinton:

#1. Clinton campaign's strategy and tactics, 47 stories;
#7. Her electability, 18 stories;
#8. Her alleged policy flip flops, 14 stories;
#9. Her honesty/integrity, 12 stories.

Other hotly debated candidate issues included:
- #2. Barack Obama's strategy/tactics, 46 stories;
- #3. John Edwards' strategy/tactics, 24 stories;
- #4. Mitt Romney's religion, 20 stories;
- #5. Romney's strategy/tactics.

Huckabee Leads GOP: Among Republicans, Mike Huckabee fared best with evenly balanced coverage – 50% positive and 50% negative evaluations by reporters and sources. Fred Thompson came next with 44% positive comments, followed by Mitt Romney with 40% positive, Rudy Giuliani with 39% positive, and John McCain with 33% positive.

Examples: "He [Huckabee] seems very real, very authentic. It's hard not to like him, and you can't say that about some of the other Republican candidates." – Bob Schieffer, CBS

"What he [Romney] talked about was a complete repudiation of any notion of separation of church and state…" – Sally Quinn, ABC

"Rudy [Giuliani] would be a great candidate if he was pro-life, but… that is an issue we can't overcome. It's a huge handicap for him." – voter, FOX

Who's Fair and Balanced?:   Fox News Channel's coverage was more balanced toward both parties than the broadcast networks were. On FOX, evaluations of all Democratic candidates combined were split almost evenly – 51% positive vs. 49% negative, as were all evaluations of GOP candidates – 49% positive vs. 51% negative, producing a perfectly balanced 50-50 split for all candidates of both parties.

On the three broadcast networks, opinion on Democratic candidates split 47% positive vs. 53% negative, while evaluations of Republicans were more negative – 40% positive vs. 60% negative. For both parties combined, network evaluations were almost 3 to 2 negative in tone, i.e. 41% positive vs. 59% negative.

Policy Debate: The campaign coverage has been relatively issue oriented -- 188 stories dealt with policy issues, 191 with campaign strategy and tactics, 162 on the candidates' standings in the horse race, and 122 on heir personal backgrounds. (A story could cover more than one of these topics.) The most frequently debated policy issues were #1. Illegal immigration, 32 stories; #2 Iraq, 22 stories; #3 Electoral reforms, 18 stories; #4 Abortion, 13 stories; #5 Iran, 12 stories.

Methodology
The Center for Media and Public Affairs is a media research organization that uses scientific content analysis to study news and entertainment media content. CMPA is affiliated with the George Mason University, where CMPA President Dr. S. Robert Lichter is Professor of Communications.

CMPA has monitored every presidential election since 1988 using the same methodology, in which trained coders tally all mentions of candidates and issues and all evaluations of candidates. We report the evaluations by non-partisan sources, excluding comments by the candidates and campaigns about each other, because research shows that non-partisan sources have the most influence on public opinion, and they are also more subject to the discretion of reporters. However, we maintain data files on partisan evaluations as well.