

**THE DEBATE EFFECT:  
How the Press Covered the Pivotal Period of the 2004 Presidential Campaign**

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 A.M. WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 27,  
(OKAY FOR WEDNESDAY AM PAPERS)

In the closing weeks of the 2004 presidential race, the period dominated by the debates, President George W. Bush has suffered strikingly more negative press coverage than challenger John Kerry, according to a new study released today by the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

More than half of all Bush stories studied were decidedly negative in tone.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, only a quarter of all Kerry stories were clearly negative.

This is the mirror image of what happened four years ago, when then-Governor Bush benefited from coverage in the closing weeks, particularly from the debates, enjoying twice as many positive stories than his rival Vice President Gore.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the percentage of negative Bush coverage is almost identical to the level of negative Gore coverage four years ago.

In both cases, the penchant of the press to focus on internal campaign matters like tactics, strategy, candidate performance and horse race, seem to be a major factor driving the tone of the coverage. This year the President was battered in the coverage particularly for his performance in the first two debates.

There is a difference this year from 2000, however. Kerry coverage has been markedly less negative—and somewhat more positive—than either Bush or Gore received during a similar phase in the 2000 race.

The tactical and performance oriented focus of the press has had another effect as well. The coverage this year has been even less likely than four years ago to describe how campaign events directly affected voters—explaining, for example, the possible implications on citizens of a candidate’s policy proposal.

The study this year also included a new component, blogs, examining five of the most popular. Because they are such a distinct universe, they are not included in any of the overall figures about topic, tone or the rest. However, the examination of blogs reveals that they are conspicuously similar to the mainstream press in what they covered, the tone of that coverage and even in the angle writers took. These findings that seem to challenge the idea that the blogosphere is changing the kind of media messages people have access to. Rather than an entirely new citizen-oriented media, what blogs may be

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<sup>1</sup> When calculating Tone, coders must quantify all the pertinent text that is positive for the Dominant Candidate, as well as all pertinent text that is negative for the Dominant Candidate. Additional weight is given to text within the headline of the story. In any case where the ratio between positive:negative equals or exceeds 2:1, the story is coded as positive tone for the Dominant Figure. Likewise, when the ratio between positive:negative equals or exceeds 1:2 the story is coded as negative tone for the Dominant Figure. All other stories are coded as neutral. In this study, stories determined to be straight news accounts were not coded for Tone.

<sup>2</sup> PEJ conducted a similar study in the final weeks of the 2000 campaign. Please see, “The Last Lap: How the Press Covered the Final Stages of the Presidential Campaign,” October 31, 2000, [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).

doing, this suggests, is furthering the growth of opinion news, but in an even more one-sided form than the cable talk shows.

These are some of the key conclusions of a major new study of press coverage in newspapers, television and on the Internet during the two key weeks ending October 14.

**Winners and Losers**

Overall, 59% of Bush dominated stories were clearly negative in nature--meaning they contained statements that were at least two-to-one critical of the President. That is a nearly exact mirror image of the 56% of decidedly negative Gore stories four years ago.

The only difference is that just 25% of Kerry stories were decidedly negative. In 2000, when Bush received more favorable coverage, nearly half of Bush stories during the debate phase still carried a decidedly negative cast.

When it came to positive coverage, just over a third (34%) of Kerry-dominated stories was clearly favorable, while only 14% of stories about the President were. Bush's numbers here are again almost identical to Gore's in 2000.

As for Kerry, once again his positive numbers are higher than how Bush fared four years ago, when the then-Texas governor enjoyed 24% percent positive stories.

<b>Tone of Media Coverage of Bush and Kerry</b>			
	<b>All Stories</b>	<b>Bush Stories</b>	<b>Kerry Stories</b>
<i>Positive</i>	26%	14%	34%
<i>Neutral</i>	37	27	41
<i>Negative</i>	38	59	25
* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.			

<b>Tone of Media Coverage of Bush and Gore in 2000</b>			
	<b>All Stories</b>	<b>Gore Stories</b>	<b>Bush Stories</b>
<i>Positive</i>	18%	13%	24%
<i>Neutral</i>	31	31	27
<i>Negative</i>	51	56	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100	100
Source: Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The Last Lap," October 31, 2000.			

The study's findings may add fuel to speculation, depending on the outcome of the election, of the influence of debates, the media, and claims of press bias toward Kerry.

Whatever the case, the study reinforces the sense that the press, at least the political press, has become highly interpretative and even judgmental in its approach.

The study, designed and written by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and coded for the Project by researchers at Princeton Survey Research Associates, examined 817 stories from 13 publications, and cable and

network programs from October 1 through 14, 2004, on the eve of the first debate and the day following the last one. Included were: four newspapers—The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Miami Herald, The Columbus Dispatch; seven network news programs—the three evening news programs, three morning shows and PBS' Newshour; two cable programs: CNN's News Night with Aaron Brown and Fox News with Britt Hume. In addition to the main sample, five blogs were examined: Eschaton, Andrew Sullivan, Instapundit, Talking Points and The Note.

Among other key findings:

- Political coverage has become highly interpretative. Only 14% of stories simply recounted events in a straightforward factual manner. The great majority were more thematic. Of these, about a quarter were positive (25%), the rest evenly split between neutral and negative.
- Far from a new kind of citizen journalism, the most popular blogs echoed the mainstream media and took a markedly “inside baseball” approach to assessing the debates (70%). In the contentious vice-presidential debate, not a single posting dealt with policy matters.
- An even smaller percentage of stories than four years ago made clear how campaign news affected or connected to citizens (only 20%). Debate stories were even less likely to be connected to citizens (8%).
- Despite what many consider striking contrasts offered by the two candidates over policy, just over one in ten stories (13%) were framed around explaining issues, be it Iraq, the war on terror, taxes, the economy, jobs, stem cell research, health care or any of the other range of foreign and domestic matters. Of those, Iraq dominated.
- The News Hour with Jim Lehrer on PBS stands out among both television and newspapers both for being more neutral in tone than other news outlets and more oriented to the explaining policy proposals than most television programs.

The findings are also influenced by this year’s peculiar calendar. The combination of a late Republican convention, a late Labor Day, an early Election Day, and four debates over two-weeks, compressed everything. Before the implication of one event could be digested, the candidates and the press were already focused on the next. The debate phase then framed virtually everything about the period we are in now, the final two weeks.

The debates represented a moment when voters could hear the candidates at some length directly and indeed were perceived to have changed voters’ attitudes about the candidates and their policies.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the compressed calendar may have reinforced the tendency of the press to ignore the policy aspects of the debates and highlight instead the tactics, particularly to see the debates as performances (43%), and as a reflection of campaign strategy (10%). This was particularly true of the first two debates.

### **Impact on Voters**

Among other things, the study looked at stories to determine who they predominantly impacted by the way stories were put together. Who was affected by the events described? When events were analyzed, were the implications related to citizens, the politicians, the parties, interest groups or others?

During the two weeks studied, the vast majority of stories, 73%, were produced in a way largely oriented to how politicians would be affected. Only 20% were written in a way that predominantly explained the impact on citizens--for example by describing the

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<sup>3</sup> CBS News Poll, “Uncommitted Voters Pick Kerry,” October 13, 2004.

implications on citizens of the candidates' policy proposals. This number is down from 27% four years ago.

These findings may be discouraging to those who have worked for that last decade to make political coverage more voter oriented. The effort to redirect political coverage more toward the concerns of citizens apparently has not significantly influenced the way coverage is constructed. The trend, rather, seems to be moving in the opposite direction.

### The Major Stories

The study, our third of the campaign, focused particularly on those stories that were recurring or major themes during the two weeks studied. Out of more than 800 stories studied, we found 15 recurring themes.

The debates were theme No. 1 during the period (40% of stories). Domestic issues such as health care or the economy made up 11%, as did stories about battleground states and other voting issues. Iraq accounted for 9%.

When it came to the treatment of those themes—how journalists developed their stories about them—the coverage became even more tactical and insider oriented. As found in most studies of political coverage, the coverage overwhelmingly focused around the internal politics of campaigning.

Again, just 13% of stories were framed around explaining the policy proposals of the candidates or their differences in approach, be it Iraq, the war on terror, taxes, the economy, jobs, stem cell research, health care or any of the other range of foreign and domestic matters.

This, curiously, is almost identical to the percentage we found four years ago. This suggests some habitual or reflexive pattern in the press behavior, a kind of threshold over how policy oriented their coverage will be. Clearly, issues play a different role in a campaign during a war on terror than they did in 2000. While both candidates insist our politics have forever changed, our political journalism in some fundamental way has not.

Instead, the politics of campaigning still dominates what the press covers, accounting, overall, for more than half of the coverage (55%). The bulk of this (19% of stories) assessed how one or both of the candidates performed and the tactics and strategies of the campaigns (12%). The rest was a mix of horse race, the veracity of the campaign and other inside issues.

<b>How the Media Framed the Campaign</b>	
<b>All Stories</b>	
Political Internals	55%
Straight News	14
Policy	13
“Meta” Issues	9
Candidate Fitness	7
Media Fitness	1
Other	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### The Debates

In the coverage of the debates, this inside politics approach chosen by the press stands out even more. Nearly eight out of ten stories (79%) assessing the debates focused on political matters rather than where the candidates differed on issues, where they proposed to take the country or questions of character, record or veracity.

The majority of this pre-and-post debate analysis (43%) was framed around the candidates' performance, particularly President Bush's. Another 10% was framed as tactics and strategy.

One change that stands out this year is that 7% of stories focused around the veracity of the candidates during the debates—truth squadding their rhetoric. This is up from 3% four years ago.

Only 4% of the debate stories explained policy differences between the two candidates.

Another 9% of debate coverage amounted to straight news accounts outlining what happened and what candidates said, without any particular analytical or narrative theme.

The result of all this is that the vast majority of debate stories were written in a way that mostly described how the debates were likely to impact Bush or Kerry rather than how they might govern the country and how that might affect citizens.

As an example, a Miami Herald story on October 8 was devoted to outlining how different events in the news added “new ammunition” for Kerry in his upcoming debate with the President.

In all, fully 91% of debate stories were produced in ways that largely impacted politicians. This is up from 74% four years ago.

Meanwhile, as noted above, only 8% of debate stories were written in ways that made clear how these events might impact Americans. That is roughly half as many as four years ago.

Some may argue that focusing on impact of debates on the politicians is appropriate given that historically these events imply high risk for candidates who perform poorly. Others, however, may note that debates are also moments when voters are known to pay more attention, and get a clearer sense of a candidate’s positions and proposals. This year the debates generated higher audiences than four years ago.<sup>4</sup>

### **Positive Versus Negative**

Once again, we saw in the coverage a tendency on the part of the news media toward negativity, although slightly less than four years ago.

Only 14% of stories were produced as straight news accounts of events, though even some of those had a clear tone. Of the rest, which had a clear thematic or narrative approach, 38% contained at least twice as many negative statements about the candidates as positive ones. Just 26% were clearly positive.

The press was even more negative when covering policy (55%) and the candidates’ characters (47%) than when covering political internal matters such as horse race (36%).

The tendency toward negative tone stands out because it suggests the press is prone to act as an enabler, accomplice or conduit for negative campaigning.

The irony, at least from the standpoint of making coverage appealing to readers and viewers, is that most citizens claim they are sick and tired of negative politics. Apparently journalists, like politicians, either believe that despite what citizens say, negative politics works and thus the attack lines are important news. Or perhaps at minimum journalists themselves simply can’t resist the attack lines.

For a story to be considered anything but neutral, the positive or negative statements within it must outnumber each other by at least two-to-one. For example, in a story assessing how a candidate performed in a debate, there would have to be six clearly

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<sup>4</sup> Lynn Elber, “Final debate pulls second largest audience,” The Associated Press, October 14, 2004.

negative statements about the candidate's performance for every three positive ones for the story to be considered negative in tone.

### **Bush versus Kerry**

What also stands out most in looking at tone is the marked discrepancy between Kerry and Bush. Why have Kerry stories during these critical weeks been more positive and less negative than anything either Bush or Gore saw four years ago, while Bush's mirror what Gore received?

Is it because Kerry performance in the debates was decidedly superior to Bush's four years ago? This is something that cannot be measured objectively. No doubt different observers will attribute the tone of the coverage to different factors depending on their personal attitude toward the press and the candidates. Some will likely suspect the press is liberal and biased in favor of Kerry. Others who are not fond of the President will likely believe that Kerry outshined Bush this year much more decisively than Bush did Gore in 2000. Answering this is beyond the scope of this study and would require a larger examination of tone throughout the campaign.

As the debates began to dominate coverage, journalists tended to write more stories that looked at the two candidates comparatively, rather than writing stories that were predominantly about Bush or Kerry alone. These comparative stories eventually made up 57% of all the coverage.

Still, even in the comparative stories, the President tended not to fare as well as Kerry. These stories were twice as likely to be positive for Kerry as for Bush (11% versus 5% respectively). Conversely, they were more than twice as likely to be negative for Bush as for Kerry (12% versus 3% respectively.) Twenty-one percent were negative towards both. Another 37% of these stories were neutral, about the same as coverage overall.

A few other differences in the candidates' coverage are worth noting as well. Aside from the debates, Kerry-dominated stories tended to be about media and entertainment affairs such as the airing of the controversial film, *Stolen Honor* (18%), domestic affairs (13%) and day-to-day campaigning (13%).

Bush stories were more about Iraq (23%) and domestic issues (13%).

The amount of coverage about each of the candidates was fairly equal (20% were primarily about Kerry, 18% mostly about Bush and the rest were a mix) but clearly the treatment was not.

### **Differences by Medium**

There are also some differences in tone between different media. Newspapers were the most negative medium by a sizable margin. Fully 46% of newspaper stories carried a two-to-one negative cast, compared with 28% for network news and 30% for the two cable shows studied.

Even starker differences emerged in the treatment of different candidates.

Newspapers were the harshest in their tone about Bush. Fully 68% of Bush stories were overwhelmingly negative, while network news was the least negative toward the President (33%).

Network news was also the least negative toward Kerry (11%).

When it came to positive coverage, the networks overall were the most likely to produce sunnier Kerry stories. Cable, entirely due to the two weeks of Brit Hume programs studied, was the most likely to produce stories with a positive tone toward Bush.

While these samples of a single program are small, just two week's worth, Hume's show was also just as likely to produce positive stories about Kerry as was CNN's Aaron Brown, but much less likely than newspapers or network news.

Some other differences by medium also stood out.

Newspapers tended to cover the race through a policy lens somewhat more than television, though still not much (16% in print versus 10% on TV).

Newspapers also tended to view the race somewhat less through political internals such as tactics and candidate performance than television (43% in print versus 73% on network news and 65% on cable).

### The Internet

The study also reviewed stories over the two weeks from the three most popular websites for news—CNN.com, MSNBC, and Yahoo, according to NielsenNet ratings.

Of these 236, it is clear that wire copy dominates the content. Between the Associated Press (41%) and Reuters (9%), half of all stories from these sites are accounted for.

Only one out of every ten stories is written by a bylined staff journalist; another 5% are credited to a combination of staff and wire services. The remaining stories are presented as in-house wire stories (21%), or are drawn from a variety of other wire services (14%).

The dependence on wire, however, is not equal among the three sites. Both CNN.com and MSNBC are connected to full-scale newsgathering organizations. In the case of CNN.com, this is reflected in the

	ALL INTERNET	CNN.COM	MSNBC	YAHOO
Staff/Byline	9%	6%	28%	1%
In-House Wire	21	55	9	0
Combo	5	2	17	0
AP Wire	41	34	19	59
Reuters	9	3	5	17
Other Wire	<u>15</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>
	100	100	100	100

large percentage of stories produced by staffers reworking wire copy (55%). For MSNBC, staff bylines are attached to more than a quarter (28%) of all stories.

While both of those sites show a heavy dependence on Reuters and AP (37% CNN and 25% MSNBC), they also make frequent use of their own staff, either reworking copy from others or producing their own unbylined material. In particular, more than half (55%) of the stories on CNN.com were non-bylined but attributed to CNN staff.

Yahoo is not a newsgathering organization in the traditional sense. Rather, it repackages news for presentation to the online reader. Three-quarters of the stories from

the Yahoo site originated from either the A.P. or Reuters (76%). Staff bylines are essentially non-existent within the Yahoo environment. Instead, Yahoo draws upon a variety of additional wire services for content (23%).

Given this repetition, the Internet sites were not coded on the detailed variables of topic, tone, frame or impact and are not included in the totals. Instead, this quantification is provided as a point of information regarding the 2004 Presidential campaign and internet-based news sites.

### Newspapers

Looking specifically at print, newspapers tended to cover a wider range of themes than other media studied.

The debates made up 34% of the stories, while domestic issues made up another 12%, as did coverage of battleground states and voter issues. On network television, by contrast, debates made up nearly half of all stories during the two weeks, while on the signature cable newscasts, they made even slightly more.

<b>Major Story Themes in Newspapers</b>			
	<b>Total NP's</b>	<b>National NP's</b>	<b>Regional NPs</b>
Iraq/Terror	9%	9%	9%
Other Foreign Policy	4	3	4
Domestic Issues	12	11	13
Battleground/Voter Issues	12	10	16
Cand. Momentum/Stump	9	8	9
Debates	34	36	29
<i>1<sup>st</sup></i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>2<sup>nd</sup></i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>3<sup>rd</sup></i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>VP</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8</i>
Media/Entertainment	8	7	10
Advertising	3	4	1
VP's/1 <sup>st</sup> Lady	3	3	3
General Musings	4	5	2
Other	4	5	2

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Even with this broader range of themes, however, newspapers—like other media—still framed the news largely through a tactical, insider lens.

Fully 43% of all stories focused on these internal political matters, though this was the lowest of any medium studied. Only 16% of the stories focused on the



candidates' policy proposals or ideas. Another 17% were straight news accounts, describing events in such a way that no particular thematic focus predominated.

<b>How Newspapers Framed the Race</b>			
	<b>All NP's</b>	<b>National NPs</b>	<b>Regional NPs</b>
Political Internals	43%	47%	34%
Straight News	17	13	28
Policy	16	16	15
"Meta" Issues	12	12	13
Candidate Fitness	11	12	8
Media Fitness	1	1	1
Other/NA	0	0	1

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

As in other media, the focus on campaign internals was especially pronounced when it came to coverage of the debates. A mere 1% of the stories in newspapers focused on the candidates' policy proposals, while 84% of the stories were focused around campaign internals—who won, who lost, the impact on strategy and assessments of candidate performance. Twelve percent were straight news accounts.

### **Who Newspaper Stories Impacted**

Given this insider approach, even

more than four years ago, newspapers were writing for politicians over citizens. Roughly two-thirds (67%) of all stories are developed in a way that primarily impacts politicians, an eight percentage point increase over 2000. Citizens, on the other hand, were primarily impacted in just a quarter of the stories (26%), down from 32% in 2000. Interest groups accounted for another 6%.

<b>Who Newspaper Stories Impacted</b>			
	<b>All NP's</b>	<b>National NPs</b>	<b>Regional NPs</b>
Citizens	26%	24%	31%
Politicians	67	68	64
Interest Groups	6	6	5
Other/NA	1	2	0

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Despite these drops, newspapers remained the medium most likely to write stories in ways that primarily focused on the impact on citizens.

Regional papers, incidentally, were slightly more geared toward citizens, but not by much.

### **Coverage and Tone**

Newspapers tended toward negativity more than any media studied. Newspaper coverage overall was more than twice as likely to be negative as positive in tone. Close to half of all stories (46%) were clearly critical of the candidates, while only 21% were positive. Roughly a third, 34% were neutral.

<b>Tone of Newspaper Coverage (including Editorials/Op-Eds)</b>			
	<b>All NP's</b>	<b>National NPs</b>	<b>Regional NPs</b>
<i>Positive</i>	20%	19%	23%
<i>Neutral</i>	35	35	34
<i>Negative</i>	46	45	43

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

This held steady across national and regional papers.

These figures are roughly comparable to the similar study of coverage four years ago, when 53% of newspaper stories negative, 19% positive and 28% neutral.

Interestingly, news coverage in newspapers was just as likely to be overwhelmingly interpretative toward one

side or the other as were op-eds and editorials. The numbers, indeed, are almost identical, with only a third of news columns or editorials being neutral.

These findings are likely only to fuel growing concerns among journalists and the public about interpretiveness and even bias in the news columns. A survey released just

A mid-October survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found a higher percentage of voters than four years ago feel that the press coverage has been unfair to one campaign or the other.<sup>5</sup>

The story selection during the critical period studied was evenly divided between the Bush and Kerry tickets--20% largely about Bush, and an equal amount largely focused on Kerry. The majority of stories, 56%, were about both candidates.

<b>Who Was Covered in Newspapers (including Editorials/Op-Eds)</b>			
	<b>Total NP's</b>	<b>National NP's</b>	<b>Regional NPs</b>
<b>Bush</b>	20%	19%	24%
<b>Kerry</b>	20	22	18
<b>Both</b>	56	57	53
<b>Other</b>	4	2	5
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

But, that is where equality comes to an end.

President Bush's newspaper coverage was more than twice as likely to be negative than his opponent's. Nearly seven-out-of-ten stories principally about Bush (68%) were critical in tone. That is more than double than the 26% of Kerry stories that were negative.

Only 9% of Bush newspaper stories were positive. Meanwhile, while three times

as many, 29% of stories about Kerry, were positive.

Some might imagine that this sharply critical tone toward Bush would be coming largely on the opinion pages, in so-called op-ed columns and editorials. Not so. When all op-eds and editorials are removed, and the study looks only at reportage, the numbers hardly change at all. The news coverage was just as negative, and harsh about the President, as the column and editorializing.

So what does account for this negativity?

One possible explanation may lie in the topics newspapers wrote on for each candidate. The largest number of Bush stories (22%) concerned the debates, a subject most observers felt did not go favorably for the President. Next came Iraq (20%) and domestic issues (16%).

Stories mostly centered around Kerry, on the other hand, were more likely to be about Kerry on the stump (14%) and the role of the media (18%), particularly the brouhaha over Kerry documentaries (both the positive documentary, "Going Up River," and Sinclair Broadcasting's intention to air

<b>Tone of Newspaper Coverage of Kerry and Bush (including Editorials/Op-Eds)</b>		
	<b>Kerry</b>	<b>Bush</b>
<i>Positive</i>	29%	9%
<i>Neutral</i>	45	23
<i>Negative</i>	26	68
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100

<b>Dominant Theme in Candidate-Focused Stories All Newspapers</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Kerry</b>	<b>Bush</b>
Political Internals	43%	26%	38%
Straight News	17	28	18
Policy Explained	16	18	15
Meta Issues	12	6	4
Candidate Fitness	11	19	22
Media Fitness	1	1	1
Other	0	1	1
*Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.			

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "Voters Impressed with Campaign," survey conducted October 15 to October 19, 2004, released October 25, 2004, (1,568 adults across the nation).

an anti-Kerry documentary, “Stolen Honor”).

Newspapers also tended to frame stories about the two candidates a little differently, which may have been a factor. A higher percentage of Kerry stories had no particular thematic focus but largely described events of the day. Fully 28% of Kerry stories were these “straight news” accounts, compared with 18% for Bush.

Bush coverage was more clearly thematic, with discussion of tactics, strategy and candidate performance standing out. Fully 38% of Bush-dominated stories focused on these matters, versus 26% for Kerry stories. Beyond that, the focus of coverage of the two candidates was quite similar.

**NETWORK TELEVISION**

Unlike newspaper coverage, which was heavily negative and much more so about Bush than Kerry, network news gave viewers the more positive light on the candidates. Nearly four-in-ten stories (38%) carried a positive tone about one or both of the candidates. Just 28% were negative and 34% were neutral.

The positive tilt came more from the morning shows than evening. Forty-four percent of morning show coverage was positive versus just 24% that was negative. The evening news, on the other hand, was pretty evenly split among positive (32%), negative (33%) and neutral (36%)

	All Network	Network AM	Network PM
<i>Positive</i>	38%	44%	32%
<i>Neutral</i>	34	32	36
<i>Negative</i>	28	24	33

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

As in newspapers, the coverage was pretty evenly divided between the two candidates with 18% primarily about Kerry, 14% primarily about Bush and most, 68%, about both.

	All Network	Network AM	Network PM
<b>Bush</b>	14%	10%	18%
<b>Kerry</b>	18	14	23
<b>Both</b>	68	76	59
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

However, Bush still got the worst of it. Stories primarily about the President were more than three times as likely to be negative than were stories mostly about Kerry (52% Bush versus 17% Kerry).

Negative Bush stories also outweighed positive ones. Only 15% of Bush stories on TV cast him in a clearly positive light. The largest number, 33%, were neutral.

Kerry fared far better. Indeed, his coverage was more than twice as likely to be positive during this period as negative. Fully 57% of stories primarily about Kerry were positive and another 26% were neutral.

Most of the network TV stories were not solely about Bush or Kerry but discussed both candidates. While these stories tended to be more neutral than stories about primarily one candidate or the other, even here there was a pattern of Kerry coming out better. In all, 11% of these stories were clearly negative about Bush, versus 4% for Kerry. Likewise, 16% were positive about Kerry, versus just 7% about Bush.

	<b>Kerry</b>	<b>Bush</b>
<i>Positive</i>	57%	15%
<i>Neutral</i>	26	33
<i>Negative</i>	17	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Are there clear explanations for the more positive tone on the networks than in print? Some might guess the compression of television has something to do with it: it is hard to fit multiple sources into a minute-long TV story that would tilt things one way or the other. But lack of time may not explain it. For one, stories were just as likely to be neutral in TV as in print. Second, both the 30 minute evening news programs and the longer two-hour morning shows were equally positive in tone. The preponderance of TV stories, as in print, focused on candidate performance, tactics and horse race as well. For whatever reason, network TV news found more than others to report that was positive.

### **Major TV Story Themes**

During these two weeks in October, the story was clearly the debates, but the morning shows weighed in more heavily on them than did the evening newscasts. In all, 59% percent of morning show election coverage during these two weeks concerned the debates, compared with 33% of evening. There is some logic to this since the debates took place at 9 P.M. ET, after the evening news. So it was still relatively fresh news at 7 a.m. then next morning but much more stale by 6 P.M.

What else made it into the evening news election line up? Domestic issues accounted for 18% of the coverage and Iraq for another 10%. One reason, perhaps, is that by the next evening, in the compression of these final weeks, there was something new to report—the candidate on the stump the day after the debate.

	<b>All Network News</b>	<b>Network Morning News</b>	<b>Network Evening News</b>
Iraq/Terror	9%	7%	10%
Other Foreign Policy	*	0	1
Domestic Issues	13	8	18
Battleground/Voter Issues	11	6	16
Cand. Momentum/Stump	15	12	18
Debates	47	59	33
1 <sup>st</sup>	12	15	9
2 <sup>nd</sup>	9	10	7
3 <sup>rd</sup>	15	17	12
VP	12	17	6
Media/Entertainment	5	6	3
Advertising	*	0	1
VP's/1 <sup>st</sup> Lady	*	1	0
General Musings	0	0	0
Other	1	2	0
* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.			

### How Network News Framed the Race and Who Those Stories Impacted

Network news stood out for focusing even more on inside baseball than most other media studied. In all, the vast majority of network stories were focused around the candidate’s performance, campaign tactics and horserace (73% overall).

As might be expected from the heavy tendency to report on political internals, network news has moved even more in the direction of reporting on matters that effected politicians over citizens. The vast majority of the coverage, 83% of all stories, primarily impacted politicians—nearly a 20% increase over 2000. Just 10% mostly impacted citizens.

	All Network	Network AM	Network PM
Political Internals	73%	69%	77%
Straight News	11	18	4
Policy	7	7	7
“Meta” Issues	5	1	10
Candidate Fitness	4	4	3
Media Fitness	*	1	0

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

### CABLE NEWS

To get a sense of how cable news might differ from network news, the study captured the closest either CNN or Fox News comes to offering a signature evening newscast. For Fox this was Britt Hume’s program, Fox News with Britt Hume. For CNN it was News Night with Aaron Brown.

Although the sample of two programs over two weeks is small, there were some strong distinctions between them worth noting. Even during these two weeks, dominated by debates, the topic choice of the two was quite different. Aaron Brown’s News Night mirrored more of what other news outlets did, with the debates far outweighing any other topic. Brit Hume’s program on Fox News, on the other hand, was much less debate focused. Instead, more of its coverage was about Iraq and the candidates’ daily campaigning and momentum.

Part of the may be due to the timing of the two programs. CNN’s News Night airs late, 10 P.M. ET, and overlapped with the debates while Fox News airs at 6 p.m., hours before the debates took place.

The two programs also differed in how they framed stories. This, too, could be partly explained by their topic choices. The vast majority of Aaron Brown stories were framed around political internals, mostly candidate performance. Brit Hume, while still framing more stories around politics than anything else, was more likely than any other outlet, except for PBS, to frame stories around policy. They also offered more of a focus on larger issues such the nature of the electorate and of politics today.

	All Network	Network AM	Network PM
Citizens	10%	8%	12%
Politicians	83	87	79
Interest Groups	4	2	7
Other/NA	2	3	1

\* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

When it came to Kerry versus Bush, the programs were pretty evenly divided in the amount of coverage about each. And when it came to tone, they both looked much more like PBS than like network news or newspapers. Fox News was almost evenly divided among positive, neutral and negative stories. News Night was more neutral in tone, with an even balance between positive and negative.

This apparent neutrality, though, can be deceiving. First, the sample is very small. In the 10 days studied, Brown did just 43 stories in all—and just seven were mostly Kerry and seven were mostly Bush. Hume aired 60—18 Kerry and 14 Bush.

Second, within this small sample, not a single CNN story was both dominated by and positive for President Bush, while the bulk of Fox's positive stories favored Bush and their negative stories concerned Kerry.

As in other media, most of the stories on these two cable programs were comparative—that is they were about both candidates rather than one or the other. In these, as in their candidate specific stories, Brown's show was mostly neutral in tone while Hume's was more evenly distributed across positive, negative and neutral.

These differences are striking, but since the sample is small, something on a larger scale is required to probe the differences between the two channels more generally or even the two programs.

## **THE NEWSHOUR**

PBS's nightly newscast makes a point of positioning itself as a different kind of news program than those offered on the networks and cable. The study found that in the last weeks of campaign there were indeed some significant differences in the approach of NewsHour compared with its rivals.

The most significant difference may have come in the way stories were framed. Nearly a quarter (23%) of the stories on the broadcast delved into the substance of the policies the two candidates put forward and attempted to explain them. That is more than twice that of any other outlet except for Fox News.

In almost all cases (94%), the coverage looked at both candidates comparatively. Of that comparative coverage, 59% was neutral (versus 39% on TV overall). The remaining coverage was evenly split between positive and negative.

This more neutral tone may have arisen from the kinds of stories the NewsHour did. The newscast was much more likely to do stories about the candidates "on the stump" and less likely to do stories about polling and momentum.

One other area where the Newshour stood out was in producing stories that discussed events in a way that mostly impacted citizens. More than a quarter of the show's stories (26%) fell into this category, compared, for instance, with 13% of the TV programs overall. The NewsHour's stories, however, were still primarily focused on the impact on politicians, nearly seven times out of ten.

## **THE BLOGOSPHERE**

In addition to the main study, we looked at the coverage of the newest animal in the campaign 2004 news media – political blogs. We examined postings from five prominent blogs over the course of the two weeks to see how they reflected the coverage of the mainstream media. In all, 521 postings were coded.

Overall, the blogs seemed tuned into many of the same areas as the mainstream press, though often with a different spin attached. The coverage in the time we examined was largely about the debates and, within that, about the performance of each candidate.

The study tracked four personal blogs, selected from the top-ten blogs according to Truth Laid Bear's Blogosphere Ecosystem, which ranks blogs according to the number of links received per day (a measure of their influence on the political blogging community as a whole); they are also among the most-viewed political blogs, each averaging more than 100,000 visits per day. These four blogs were selected for a mix of ideology and approach. In addition, the study examined ABC News' daily blog, "The Note," to study a political blog by a mainstream news organization.

**The Note:** The ABC News Political unit's free version of the Washington Hotline is not really a blog in the common use of the word. It is set up as a summary of political news from around the country that began as an internal memo before debuting as a blog in January of 2002. It has less politicizing or opinionating and instead tries to explain where the political coverage and political thinking is headed. It is a popular example of how a mainstream media operation approaches blogging.

**Eschaton:** As of October, this left-leaning opinion journal run by Duncan Black, an economist based in Philadelphia, had the most traffic of all the blogs we studied. Launched in April 2002, it is overtly liberal and seems to relish the chance to jump into the fray. Entries are often responses to allegations put forward by the right. It seems more reactive than other blogs, following the to and fro of the campaign and also giving voice to other smaller blogs.

**Andrew Sullivan:** The former editor of the New Republic, Sullivan was already a well-known opinion-journalist when he launched his blog in October of 2000. Though once editor of a historically Democrat-leaning magazine, Sullivan has long been a jumble of potentially conflicting ideas and positions. He might be described as a pro-gay rights Catholic conservative. As a blogger, he was a strong supporter of the war and President Bush during the first term, though he soured on how the Administration handled post-war Iraq and split with the President on the Gay Rights Amendment. Sullivan writes often about being gay himself. After waiting, he reluctantly endorsed Kerry's candidacy for President.

**Talking Points:** Unlike Sullivan, Joshua Micha Marshall, former Washington editor of the left-leaning American Prospect, was a relatively unknown figure when he launched his blog in November of 2000. While liberal in viewpoint, Marshall does more than add pure opinion to the blogging universe, his thoughts are often backed by reporting or interviews. His success on the Internet has since become a model of how to turn blogging into a career.

**Instapundit:** University of Tennessee law professor, Glenn Reynolds, who created the blog in August of 2001, uses it primarily as a way of passing along links and stories from others. When he does offer his own voice, it leans to the right. Another blogging

success story, his web gig has led to weekly column in the UK-based Guardian, providing a conservative blogger voice.

We began coding the blogs at 10:30 Thursday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, just as the first debate came to a close and coded through October 14th. We analyzed each individual posting along the following lines:

1. Whether the content originated from the blogger or from an outside source
2. The topic
3. The focus or approach the writer took to the topic
4. The ultimate message about either candidate, if there was one.

### Blogs Overall

First we examined the topics on which the blogs were writing. Overall, they hit on many of the same themes as the mainstream press. Four-in-ten statements were about the debates—most of them assessments which came in “real time,” minutes or even seconds after a candidate said or did something at the podium.

The next largest topic, musings about Iraq—mostly President Bush’s policies and actions there—accounted for 11% of the postings as did the momentum of one candidate or the other. Analysis of the mainstream media and voters and battleground states each made up 10%. The amount of coverage on voter issues was roughly the same as in the mainstream press, suggesting that the blogs may not live up to the image of being more connected to their readers.

<b>How the Blogs Framed the Campaign</b>	
	<b>All Posts</b>
Political Internals	50%
Policy	15
Candidate Fitness	13
Media Fitness	11
“Meta” Issues	9
Other	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

This comparability with the topic agenda of the mainstream media raises some interesting implications. While our selection of blogs is limited to those that get heavy traffic, this sample at least suggests that the blogs and the mainstream press may be fascinated by similar subjects.

Next we asked what the focus of those topics was: Did they have to do with policy? With the candidate’s fitness for office? With political internals like performance or tactics? Or did they focus on the media?

Looking first at the debate-related postings, nearly as much as in the mainstream press, the vast majority of debate postings (70%) were focused on inside politics (79% in the mainstream press overall). These were mostly evaluations of a candidate’s performance (57%) though a smaller portion, 10%, looked at tactics and strategy of the debate. Another 13% dealt with the candidate’s personal fitness for office in such areas as personal values, honesty, ethical record and management style. A mere 6% of all debate-related postings focused on policies of one candidate or the other.

This too, has interesting implications. The snapshot suggests that during major news events at least, the blogs approach is even more similar to the mainstream press than many think. The blogs may not be changing the media agenda as much as adding more pointed, personal and frankly blunt voices. Blogs, in other words, may represent to a further crossfire-ization of the political dialogue.

Looking at the assessment of each debate separately, the first encounter, focused on foreign policy, was the least tied to policy of any kind. Just 6% of the postings—three



in all—focused on what the candidates actually said about policy. Instead, 57% of the postings evaluated one or both of the candidate’s performances. Another 13% dealt with whether the candidate was fit for office.

Assessments of the second, town-hall style debate were even more tilted toward assessing performance—three quarters of all postings. Policy evaluations picked up, to 9%, and impressions of the candidates’ fitness for office declined by almost half to 7%.

The final debate saw more tactical assessments (20%)—largely evaluations of Senator Kerry’s reference to Dick Cheney’s openly gay daughter. But again, candidate performance still dominated (46%) with policy trailing far behind (10%). Analysis of the job of the press was least likely here—amounting to just 2% of all postings versus 7% in the first two debates.

The contentious vice-Presidential debate did not have a single story largely evaluating the event based on policy. A majority, 57%, was about performance, another 22% covered fitness for office and 12% examined tactics and strategy.

What about the postings not related to the debates? Were they more tied to policy? Postings specifically about Iraq did tend to draw on policy (64%)—namely President Bush’s policies there. But postings on domestic affairs were divided more evenly among policy (30%), inside politics (28%) and the candidate’s fitness for office (24%).

In short, if the mainstream press is criticized for being too obsessed with inside baseball tactics, theater criticism and not particularly focused on the ideas of candidates, the top bloggers don’t distinguish themselves as a new kind of media in that regard. They play the game as often as most mainstream outlets<sup>6</sup>.

## Individual Blogs

Clearly each of the five blogs studied has a distinct personality. That is part of what defines a blog and creates its following. So how do these personality differences play out in terms of the content they pass along? Aside from differences in their ideology, which campaign topics did they blog on? Were their postings primarily their own voice or were they rerunning someone else’s? And did some focus more on policy or media analysis than others?

**The Note:** The Note differs from the others studied in that it is part of a mainstream media outlet. Rather than the product of one individual personality. The Note is compiled by a team of ABC staffers and is primarily quotes from outside sources rather than original content. Fully 84% of the postings are from outside sources.

Coming out just once a day, with weekends off, it is more of a political round-up than most blogs, though a sense of campaign momentum and focus of the moment can be felt in it. This comes through in the range of election topics it addressed over the two-weeks studied. Though the debates still dominated, it was the smallest percent of the bunch (32%). Some of this certainly has to do with the site not being “live” during and after the debates, when many bloggers are typing away.

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<sup>6</sup> Since all the blogs except for ABC’s The Note are openly opinionated and aligned with one candidate over the other, we will look at who won and who lost only within the specific blogs themselves.

Voting issues such as the battle ground states and voter registration accounted for a quarter of the postings—more than three times that of any of the other four blogs. Candidate momentum was prominent as well (15%) with a particular focus on third party candidates, followed by general election musings (11%) and domestic issues (10%). The question of Iraq, perhaps surprisingly, was largely absent, accounting for just 3% of all postings, less than a third that of any other blog.

The focus of The Note is politics, politics, politics. Fully two-thirds of all posting focused on the inside game (29% tactics, 15% performance, 11% horserace and 11% veracity and other issues). Broad political themes like the nature of the electorate or politics were popular focal points as well, accounting for 11% of all postings. Policy assessments, on the other hand, accounted for a mere 6%.

When it came to who won and who lost, The Note was much less inclined than others to make a judgment. Fully 64% steered clear of calling a winner or loser or even a tie, versus 38% of the blogs overall. When it did leave an impression, it was most likely to be that Bush had lost (13%). Kerry came out the winner in 7% of the postings. Bush was the winner in just 4% of the postings, and Kerry the loser in 3%. In 9% of the postings, the assessments resulted in a draw.

**Eschaton:** This overtly liberal blog offered primarily its own views. A quarter of the postings came from outside sources. Aside from the debates, which accounted for 42% of the listings, its agenda seems divided among media credibility (13%)—including the airing of “Stolen Honor,” candidate momentum (13%) and the war in Iraq (12%).

Eschaton was slightly less likely than average to focus on a candidate’s performance (20% versus 24% overall) and instead was wrapped up in the candidates’ character (25%)—primarily Bush’s. The job of the press also caught this blogger’s ire. Fully 18% of all his postings were about the failings of the press. Policy analysis, similar to The Note, was hard to find (7% of all postings).

When it comes to Bush versus Kerry, there is no doubt about Eschaton’s allegiances. Half of all postings called Bush the loser, another 10% called Kerry the winner and just 1% suggested that Kerry lost. Not a single posting suggested Bush got the better of Kerry on anything. Roughly four-in-ten postings did not call a winner or loser.

**Andrew Sullivan:** Sullivan’s postings were split roughly 70-30 between his own and pass-alongs from others. Aside from the debates, which made up close to half of the content, Sullivan took on more policy issues than any other blog studied. Iraq filled out more of his blog than any other we studied—15% of his postings—most of it about Bush’s actions there. In addition, the issue of gay marriage, which made barely a blip in any of the other blogs (never more than one posting per blog), made up 9% of his postings during these two weeks. Other domestic issues amounted to another 3% of the content. In all 27% of his blogs were policy related. Candidate momentum—the bulk of which was about Kerry gaining ground—was the topic of 10% of the postings.

The policy topics in this blog seem to have focused on the policy issue itself rather than some political aspect like the tactics behind the policy stance. A quarter of all postings focused on policy. Only Instapundit had a greater policy focus (28%).

Nevertheless, politics and candidate performance still led the pack as the focus of 52% of all his postings.

Although Sullivan often comes across as more middle of the road—or perhaps more accurately a kind of iconoclastic neoconservative—his evaluations during these two weeks clearly rooted for Kerry. First his postings were much more likely than others to call a winner or loser—90% compared with 60 to 70% for others. When a call was made, Kerry came out on top. More than a third, 36%, of the listings suggested that Bush had lost and another 34% that Kerry had won. Just 4% on the other hand, saw Bush as the winner or Kerry as the loser. Only slightly more, 11%, called it a tie.

**Talking Points:** Joshua Micha Marshall’s blog is aptly named—his talking points account for 83% of the postings—the most of any blog studied. And this reliance on formulating and presenting his own opinions rather than passing on others may have contributed to the fact that he had fewest postings of any of the blogs studied.

What did he talk about? His gambit, during these two weeks as it often is, was the media. Fully 30% of his writings were on the question of media credibility and bias—more than twice that of the other blogs. The fact that Marshall was formerly a part of the mainstream press and that his entries often contain first-hand reporting (calls and research) may make him more judgmental of their work. But some of this media focus may be attributed to several entries on his blog pertaining to a faux report Fox posted on its website on Kerry’s rally after the first debate – the report full of fake quotes caused a minor stir in the campaign. Iraq was high on his list as well with 14% of his postings. The debates, while certainly prominent, accounted for just a third of his work (versus more than 40% for all other sites except for The Note.)

Not surprisingly, then, roughly a fifth of his work (19%) emphasized the quality of the media’s work. Another 17% was written around both tactics and candidate fitness. Broad, “meta” issues such as the nature of politics today was also a popular theme—accounting for 14% here versus just 9% overall.

And who did he favor? Perhaps the more appropriate question is who he *disfavored*. Fully 58% of his logs claimed Bush as the loser. Another 8% saw Kerry as the winner. While 31% did not speak to winners or losers, just a single posting named Bush as the victor of the moment.

**Instapundit:** Glenn Reynolds offerings are in large part an effort to highlight content from others. While his postings were a fairly even mix—57% his own and 43% from others—most of his own musings link to at least one outside voice. And even during his running commentary on the debates he often second-guessed his own views. His thoughts after the first debate: “I don’t think it’ll change many minds. But I have a very consistent track record of getting this stuff wrong (I thought Carter beat Reagan....) so take my opinions with a large grain of salt.”

Debate commentary made up a larger portion of his election work than other blogs. Half of all his postings were about the debates. Otherwise, he was fairly evenly split among domestic issues (13%), Iraq (10%), and media analysis (10%).

Much of the site’s commentary dealt with “political internals” (45%), and about third of those postings concerned candidate performance. But Instapundit also stood out

for the space it gave policy. It had the most policy postings of any of the blogs studied—28% versus 15% overall.

In terms of political leanings, while he clearly came down on the side of President Bush—17% claiming him as the winner and another 21% with Kerry as the loser—he was also more even handed than others. Fully 20% of his postings called the outcome a draw between the two candidates. (40% did not address winners or losers.)

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Main Sample**

#### **Sample Design**

Thirteen media outlets—4 newspapers and 9 broadcasts—were monitored for 14 days. The monitoring period began Friday, October 1, 2004 and continued through the inclusion of Thursday, October 14, 2004.

Newspapers were selected to provide an understanding of coverage by both national press (New York Times, Washington Post) and regional publications (Columbus Dispatch, Miami Herald), representing both geographic and demographic diversity. Broadcast sources included both the flagship program and the morning news show from the three major over-the-air networks; the Newshour from Public Broadcasting; and CNN's News Night with Aaron Brown, as well as FOX's News with Brit Hume, representing content on cable all-news networks.

#### **Inclusion and Screening**

Both print and broadcast sources were monitored via the use of the NEXIS advanced search tool. Search criteria were designed to cast the widest net possible. Any appearance of the names Bush, Cheney, Kerry or Edwards in the headline or first third of the story, or any story indexed by NEXIS re: the presidential campaign was qualified and included in the original sample.

These criteria insured the inclusion of all pertinent stories; yet also produced an initial sample of several thousand articles or broadcast segments. The sample was next refined by eliminating duplicate stories, photo captions, letters to the editor and unedited transcripts of candidate debates or speeches.

Stories were then screened for agreement with the Project's inclusions rules. Stories less than 75 words long were excluded from the sample. Those stories that met the length requirement were next screened to identify cases where any designated Recurring Theme was referenced in the headline, subhead, or 3 lead paragraphs AND 1/3 or more of the text of the article was tied to any of the four major candidates or campaigns; OR any designated Recurring Theme constituted 50% or more of the story in a way that made direct reference to any of the four major candidates or campaigns.

The resulting project sample consisted of 817 stories, all of which were fully coded and are included in the final data analysis. For newspapers, there are some limited cases where NEXIS database will not deliver stories written by unaffiliated news services. However, all stories under the editorial control of these newspapers are included. All stories written by staff reporters, Op Ed pieces, and "specials to the news publication" are part of this analysis. For television, only weekday broadcasts of the pertinent shows are included, with the exception of the broadcast network evening news

programs. (Note: the October 14<sup>th</sup> stories for the CBS Early Show have not yet appeared in NEXIS, and therefore are not included in this study.) While weekend evening news shows are often preempted by sporting events, those that did appear in the Vanderbilt Television News Archives for the dates of October 2-3, and October 9-10, are included.

### **Coding Process**

Researchers worked with a detailed, standardized coding scheme. All stories were first coded for basic inventory variables—source, dateline, length, etc. Then, the project director coded for content variables -- recurring themes, dominant candidate—and intent variables—story trigger, frame, tone, and impact. In all cases, coders worked with a defined set of rules per variable. Of particular note:

**Tone: The 2 to 1 Rule:** When calculating Tone, coders must quantify all the pertinent text that is positive for the Dominant Candidate, as well as all pertinent text that is negative for the Dominant Candidate. Additional weight is given to text within the headline of the story. In any case where the ratio between positive:negative equals or exceeds 2:1, the story is coded as positive tone for the Dominant Figure. Likewise, when the ratio between positive:negative equals or exceeds 1:2 the story is coded as negative tone for the Dominant Figure. All other stories are coded as neutral. In this study, stories determined to be straight news accounts were not coded for Tone.

**Story Impact: The One-Half Rule :**When calculating Story Impact, coders identify all text that implies which individuals or group's interests are at stake/affected by the events in the story. Only if 50% or more of the text makes this connection is the story considered for impact; all other stories are coded as "No impact implied at 50% or more."

### **Intercoder Reliability**

Intercoder reliability measures the extent to which individual coders, operating independently of one another, reach the same coding decision. Tests were performed throughout the project: no systematic errors were found. As previously stated, senior project staff made all final decisions on both the content and intent variables.

### **Blogs**

The study of blog commentary on the Internet was drawn from five of the most popular and frequently updated political blogs: Andrew Sullivan's "Daily Dish," Arios' "Eschaton," Glenn Reynolds' "Instapundit," and Joshua Michael Marshall's "Talking Points Memo." The four personal blogs studied were selected from the top-ten political blogs as of October 1st according to Truth Laid Bear's Blogosphere Ecosystem (<http://www.truthlaidbear.com/ecosystem.php>), a website that ranks blogs according to the number of links received per day (a measure of their influence on the political blogging community as a whole). Among the top ten, these four blogs were selected for their range of ideology and approach. In addition, we examined "The Note," a daily blog published by ABC News's political unit, to track a mainstream news organization's approach to political blogging.

Blog content was studied from 10:30 P.M. on September 30th (that is, starting at the conclusion of the first debate) through midnight, October 14th. Individual posts (designated by a time-of-posting marker) were used as the unit of analysis. In the case of “The Note,” which is published once a day, headings created by the ABC News staff were used to divide each day’s issue into individual posts.

Postings were selected for inclusion and coded if they were substantially about the presidential campaign. Posts that simply provided a link to an external site with no explanatory information or comment by the blogger were not included. However, posts that consisted solely of excerpts from outside writers (such as quotes from another person’s blog or a newspaper article) were included within the study and coded.

The Coding Process: Researchers worked with a detailed, standardized coding scheme. All stories were first coded for basic inventory variables—source, date, time, etc. Then they were coded for content and intent variables—recurring themes, frame/focus and message. When coding for message, coders counted all assertions made by the individual blogger. In cases where the blogger simply re-ran narrative from an outside source, without any of personal comments, the assertions from the outside source were counted for message.

**FINAL TOPLINE  
PEJ CAMPAIGN 2004 PROJECT**

**Total n=817**

Note: Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

**1. SOURCE**

<u>Total %</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
56	All Newspapers	100	0
38	All Natl. Papers	69	0
18	All Regional Papers	31	0
44	All Television	0	100
14	All AM Shows	0	32
30	All PM Shows	0	68
100		100	100

<u>Total N</u>	
454	All Newspapers
311	All Natl. Papers
143	All Regional Papers
363	All Television
222	All Network
110	All Cable
<u>31</u>	All PBS
817	

**2. STORY LENGTH**

	<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
75 - 150 words	1	7
151 - 300 words	6	8
301 - 750 words	39	59
More than 750 words	<u>54</u>	<u>26</u>
	100	100

(Note: Due to rounding, not all columns will equal 100%)

### 3. PLACEMENT

	<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
Page One	19	0
National/International	43	0
Editorial/OP ED	16	0
Business	3	0
Metro/Local/Regional	4	0
Style/Life	7	0
Sunday - Week in Review	5	0
Other	4	0
Not applicable (TV)	<u>0</u>	<u>100</u>
	100	100

### 4. WIRE SERVICE

	<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
Staff Reporters/Writers	84	100
AP	3	0
Knight-Ridder	3	0
Other Newspaper or Newspaper Service	2	0
OP/ED – Non-Staff	6	-
Other Wire Service	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
	100	100

### 5. DATELINE

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
28	Washington, D.C.	27	30
14	Florida	20	6
4	Missouri	4	5
16	New York	19	30
11	Ohio	14	7
<u>27</u>	All Others	<u>16</u>	<u>22</u>
100		100	100



**6. RECURRING LEAD**

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
9	Iraq	9	10
2	Other Foreign Policy	4	1
11	Domestic Issues	12	11
11	Stump/Momentum	9	14
11	Battleground/Voter Turnout	12	10
40	Debates	34	47
7	Media/Entertainment	8	5
2	Advertising	3	*
2	VP's/1st Ladies	3	1
2	General Musings	4	1
<u>2</u>	Other	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
100		100	100

**7. DOMINANT CANDIDATE/CANDIDACY**

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
20	All Kerry	20	19
18	All Bush	20	15
61	All Kerry/Bush Interwoven	56	66
1	All Nader	2	-
-	All Candidates	1	-
100		100	100

**8. STORY TRIGGER**

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
22	All Candidate Driven	24	19
3	All Campaign Driven	4	3
8	All Observer Driven	9	6
60	All Press Driven	56	65
*	Independent Polling	*	*
6	Other	7	7
100		100	100

6

## 9. STORY FRAME/ANGLE

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
13	Policy Explained	16	10
7	Candidate Fitness	11	3
55	Political Internals	43	69
9	Meta Issues	12	6
1	Media Issues	1	1
<u>14</u>	<u>Straight News</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>9</u>
100		100	100

## 10. CANDIDATE TONE

Based on stories that are not straight news stories; n=700

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
13	Policy Explained	16	10
7	Candidate Fitness	11	3
55	Political Internals	43	69
13	Policy Explained	16	10
7	Candidate Fitness	11	3
55	Political Internals	43	69
9	Meta Issues	12	6
100		100	100

## 11. STORY IMPACT

<u>Total</u>		<u>All Newspapers</u>	<u>All Television</u>
20	Citizens	26	13
73	Politicians	67	81
5	Interest Groups	6	4
1	No Impact Implied	2	-
100		100	100