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The Japanese Challenge

Covering Competitiveness

How have the American media covered the Japanese challenge? We analyzed 597 major media stories on Japanese-American trade relations from January through July. The outlets: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News*, and the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news. The results:

*The problem? Japan. The solution? Government action:

- Only one source in 4 rates U.S. industry as competitive (p.2).
- 3 out of 4 sources called Japan's trade practices unfair (p.4).
- 4 out of 5 solutions involved protectionism (p.5).

*Most coverage rejected "protectionism" but endorsed some protection for industry (p.5).

*TV was toughest on America:

- Only TV news conceded Japan's competitive edge (p.3).
- TV news was least likely to criticize Japan (p.3).

*Business news was friendly to U.S. industry:

- Business news portrayed U.S. industry as competitive twice as often as general news (p.3).
- The *Wall Street Journal* placed the most blame on the government and least on the private sector (p.4).

BORK'S BATTLE -- The early reports applauded his judicial qualifications but condemned his ideology.

BIDEN'S BLUNDER -- The critics came down harder on his borrowing speeches than his law school plagiarism. Few foresaw the fatal blow to his campaign.

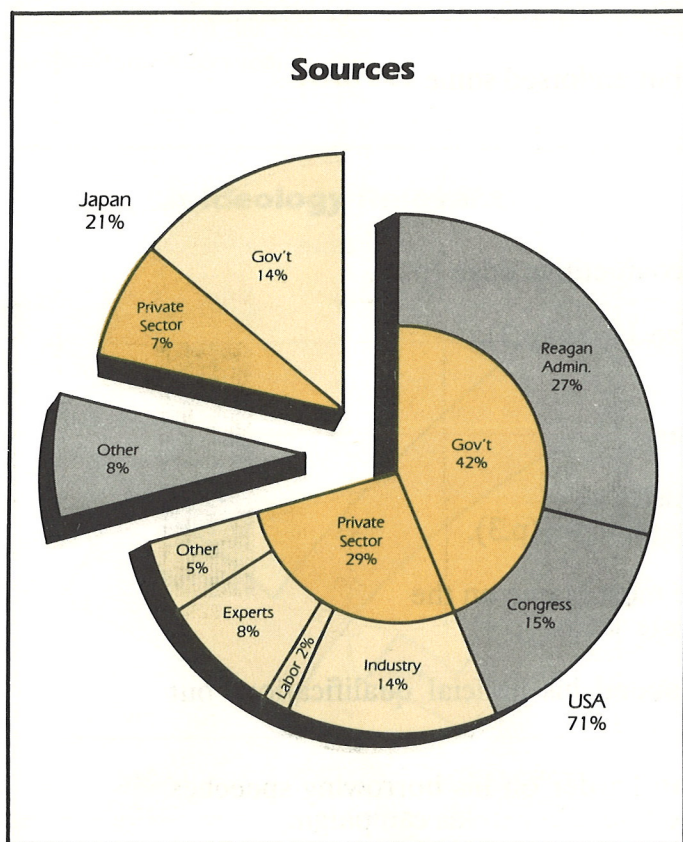
Spotlight on Trade

"Competitiveness" has emerged as a code word for our trading troubles with Japan. We monitored major media coverage of Japanese-American trade relations for six months, beginning with President Reagan's call for competitiveness in his January State of The Union speech.

Major events over this time span included Reagan's imposing sanctions and later lifting them, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's visit to Washington in time for passage of the protection-oriented Gephardt amendment, the Venice economic summit, the passage of trade bills in both houses of Congress and Toshiba's sale of military technology to the USSR.

All this activity generated nearly 3 1/2 hours of network news air time and 9,000 column-inches of national media coverage. From January 26 through July 31 we coded 597 stories:

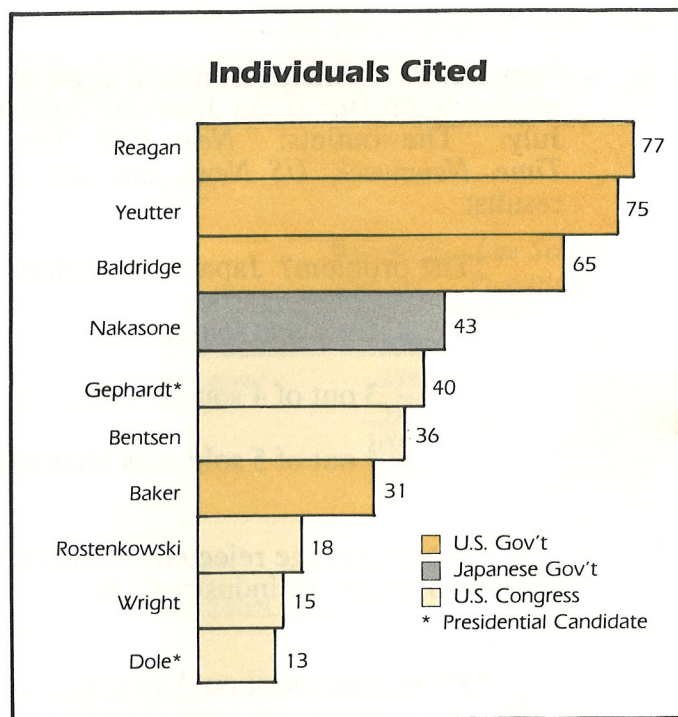
Television	128
New York Times	175
Washington Post	174
Wall Street Journal	86
News Magazines	34



Quotable Notables

Government sources predominated over private sector spokesmen among the 3,581 individuals who were quoted or cited. Seven out of 10 sources were American.

The mix of sources reflected the distinctive character of the different outlets. TV news was most heavily Presidential, citing Reagan three times as often as the print outlets did. The *Washington Post*, with the strongest Capitol Hill presence, cited Congressmen and Senators most often. The *Wall Street Journal* relied most heavily on business leaders.

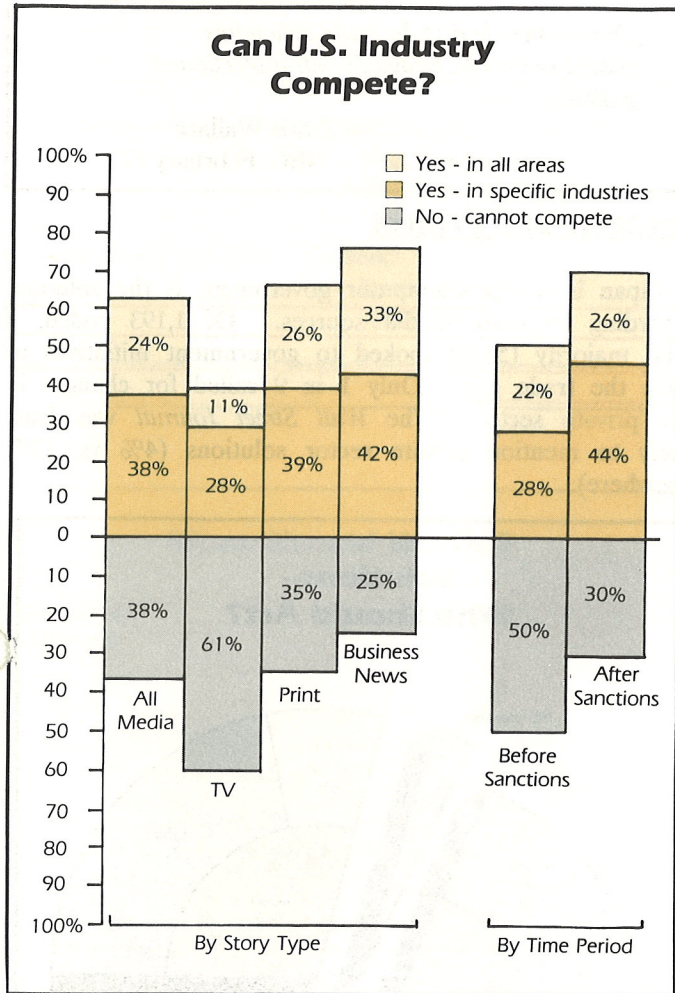


The topic was economic, but the story was political, so Reagan administration officials dominated the public stage. After the President, the most frequently cited individuals were U.S. Trade Representative Clayton Yeutter and the late Malcolm Baldrige, then Secretary of Commerce. In Congress, Democrats dominated, led by Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-MO). By contrast Prime Minister Nakasone was the only Japanese quoted regularly. All U.S. labor leaders combined made fewer appearances (17) than Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL).

Can We Compete?

The coverage raised grave doubts about American trade competitiveness. But the picture depended on where and when you got your news. Of 156 judgments coded, fewer than 1 in 4 portrayed U.S. industry as competitive with Japan. The remainder were split evenly between blanket denials of U.S. competitiveness and those mentioning both successes and failures.

Print and TV news differed dramatically in their assessments. Most TV judgments (61%) gave Japan the competitive edge, while most print judgments (65%) viewed U.S. industry as at least partly competitive. Print outlets were over twice as likely as TV to portray the U.S. on an equal footing with Japan.



Business news was much more optimistic than general news stories. Stories in the *Wall Street Journal* and the business sections of the *Times* and *Post* were twice as likely as other print stories and three times as likely as television to portray U.S. industry as fully competitive with Japan. TV was ten times as likely as the *Journal* to criticize American industry (61% to 6%). Thus, business journalists offered a more positive prognosis than their colleagues, and the business audience received a rosier picture than the general audience.

Finally, if the President's limited trade sanctions did nothing else for American industry, they improved its media coverage. Before sanctions were imposed on April 17, half the judgments called U.S. industry unfit to compete. Thereafter, negative judgments dropped to only 30%.

We are always willing to be trade partners, but never trade patsies.

- Ronald Reagan
Time, February 9

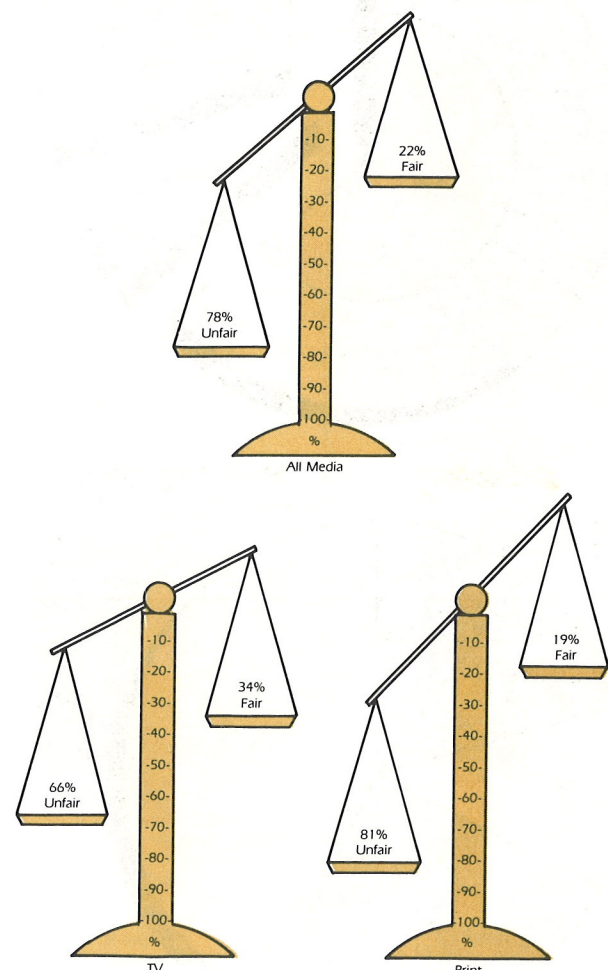
[The sanctions] are a very sore thorn sticking in a small finger.

- Yasuhiro Nakasone
New York Times, May 1

Does Japan Play Fair?

Few stories defended Japanese trade practices. Of 474 total judgments, 78% accused Japan of foul play. But TV news was almost twice as likely as print to defend Japan's behavior, and also more likely to criticize U.S. industry.

Is Japan Competing Fairly?

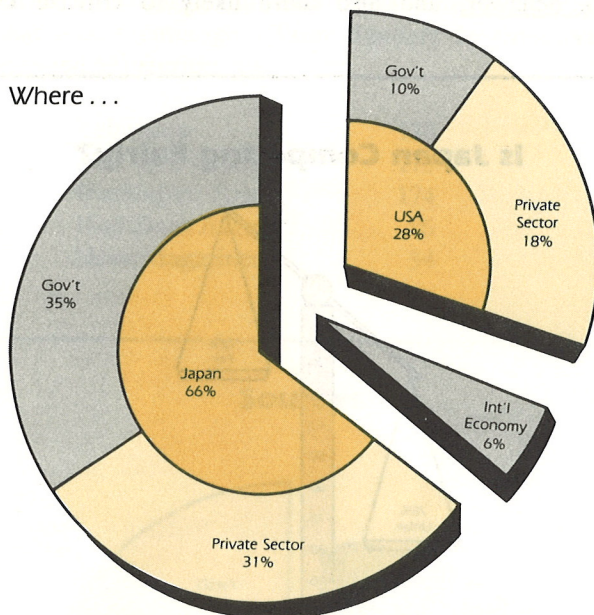


Where's the Beef?

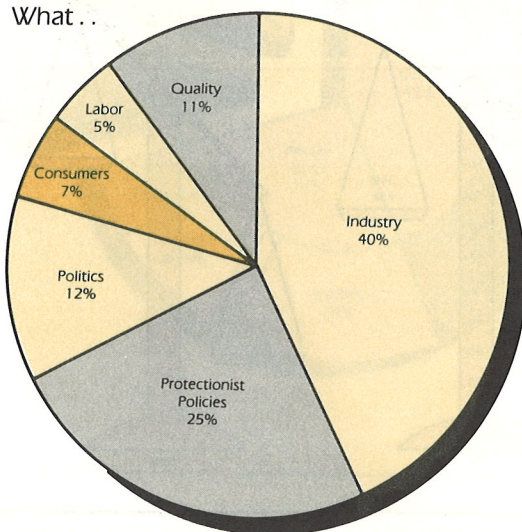
Who's responsible for the trade gap? Among 571 sources cited, 2 out of 3 blamed Japan. Fewer than 1 in 5 mentioned the American private sector, and only 1 in 10 faulted U.S. government policies. Most blame fell on Japanese industry's "dumping" practices and their government's protectionist policies. Only 1 source in 11 cited differences in the quality of goods sold.

The distinctive voice of the *Wall Street Journal* sounded once again. The *Journal* was less likely than other outlets to criticize American industry, mentioning a quality gap one-third as often as the others (4% to 12%). By contrast, the *Journal* blamed U.S. government policy twice as often as everyone else (17% vs. 8%).

Cause of Trade Problems



What ...



Not all industries can compete successfully. Those that can't will yell for protectionist measures.

- Bruce Morton
CBS, January 27

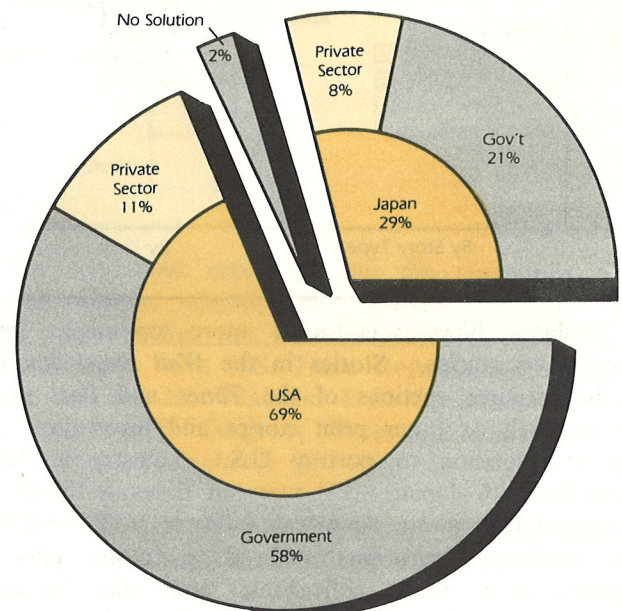
The problem is that the trade deficit has soared under Mr. Reagan's anti-protectionist policies.

- Chris Wallace
NBC, February 17

Preserve and Protect

If Japan is the problem, our government is the solution, according to most media sources. Of 1,193 coded, a solid majority (58%) looked to government initiatives to solve the trade gap. Only 1 in 9 called for changes in our private sector. The *Wall Street Journal* was least likely to mention private sector solutions (4% vs. 12% elsewhere).

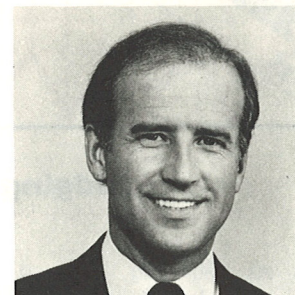
**Solutions--
Who Should Act?**



The policy debate revolved around protectionism. Broad measures such as tariffs and quotas were mentioned most frequently, but were usually rejected. By contrast, short-term or industry-specific tariffs received favorable press. Calls for changes in exchange rates or monetary policies came up far less often.



The Bork Battle



Summer is over -- let the battle begin!

- Tom Brokaw
NBC, September 8

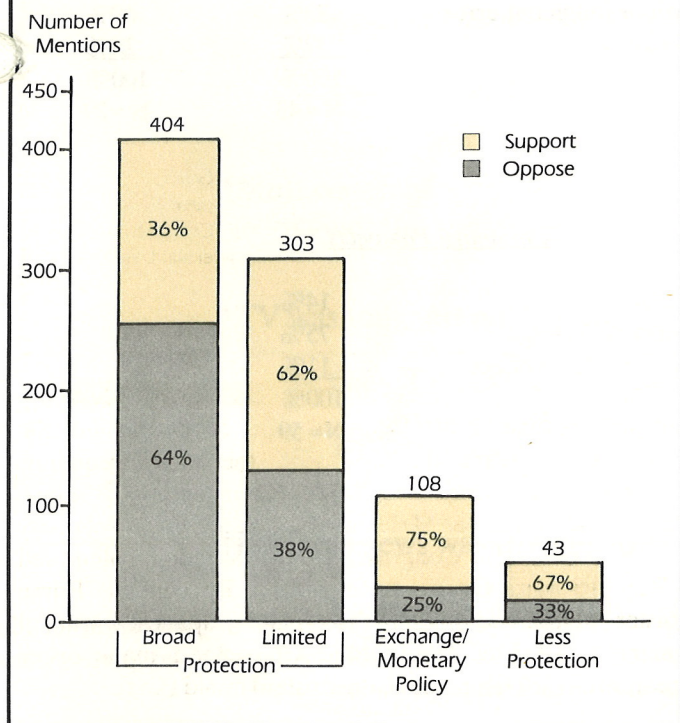
No Bork! No Bork! No Bork!

- Demonstrators
ABC, September 3

As his confirmation hearings began, media coverage of Judge Robert Bork applauded his ability but condemned his conservatism.

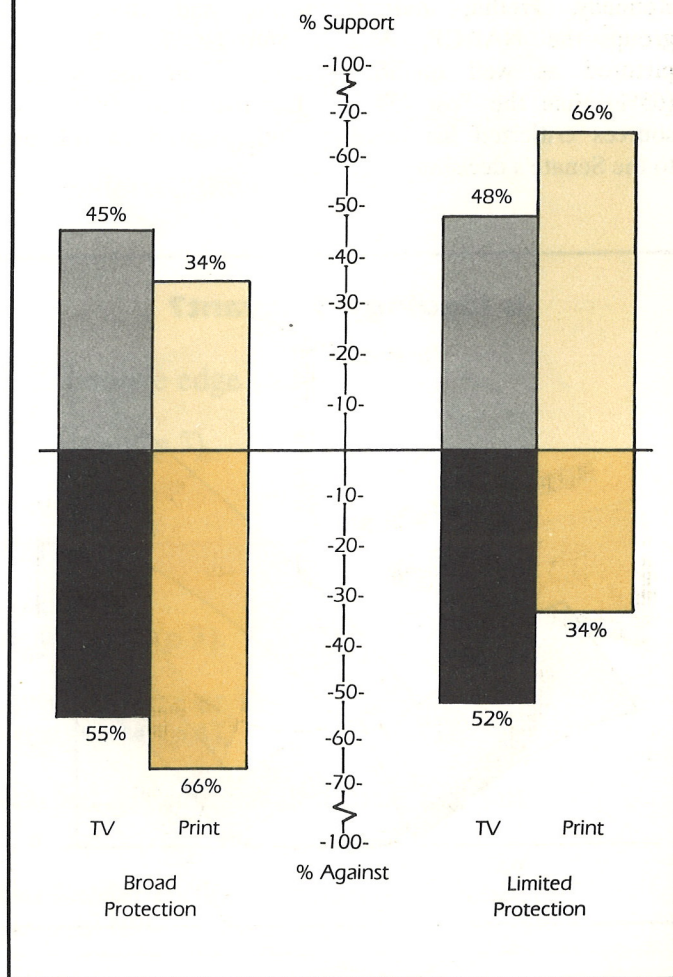
We coded all 349 sources cited in TV news and *Washington Post* stories from Bork's July 1 nomination through Labor Day. Among the most frequent sources (5 or more mentions), only President Reagan and Sen. Dole were Bork supporters. (continued page 6)

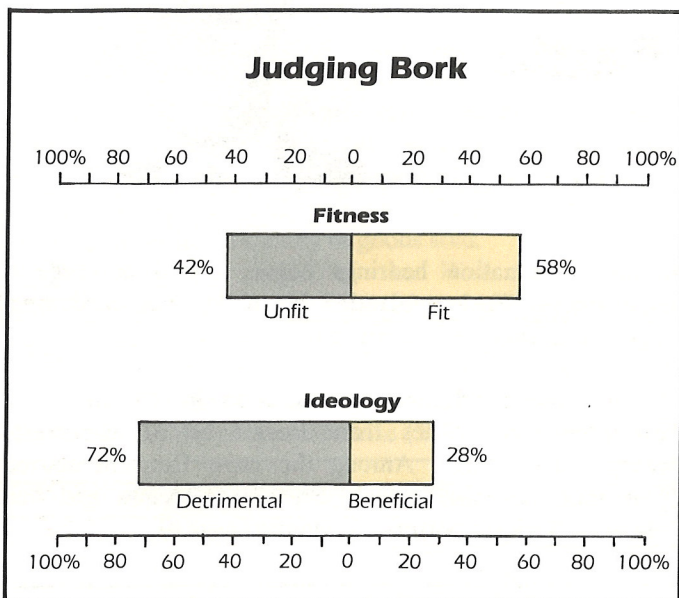
What Should We Do?



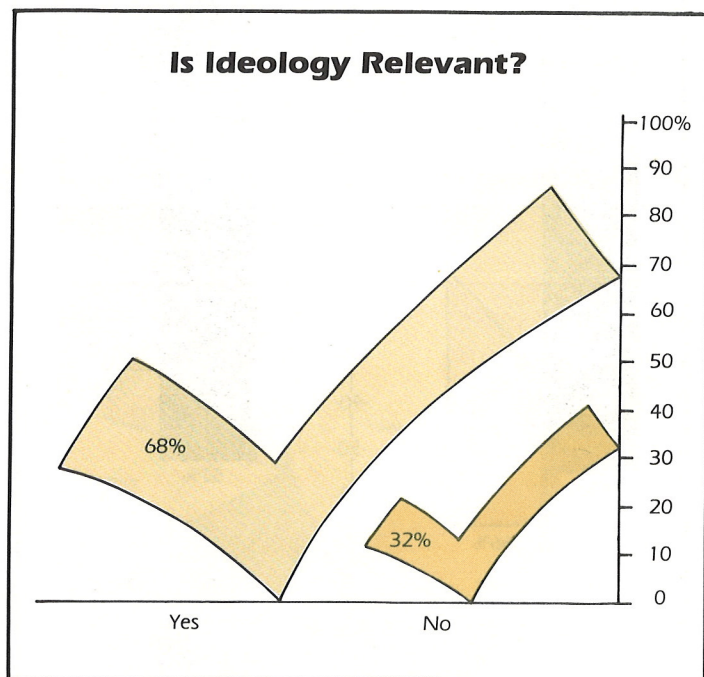
Television proved more consistent than print in covering protection measures. TV news gave slightly unfavorable coverage to both broad and limited proposals. Prestige press coverage rejected general protectionist policies by 2 to 1 while favoring more limited measures by the same margin.

Protectionism: TV vs. Print





The others were Democratic Senators Biden, Kennedy, Heflin, and Deconcini, and three activist groups--the NAACP, ACLU, and NOW. Bork was pictured as well qualified, more so at the networks (65%) than the *Post* (54%). But over two out of three sources criticized his ideology and asserted its relevance to the Senate's decision.



Bye Bye Biden

From September 12 until his withdrawal on September 23, we coded all 31 stories on the Biden affair from the *New York Times* (8), *Washington Post* (9) and TV news (14).

Sources and reporters viewed his borrowed campaign speeches as more damning than his law school plagiarism. Even so, only 30% saw the pilfered passages as evidence of a major character flaw. Excluding sources from the Biden camp, however, this number rose to 48%.

True to the horse race tradition, Biden prospects were debated more frequently than his phrasemaking. But few foresaw a fatal blow; Biden bowed out ahead of the curve.

THE VERDICT

	<u>Borrowing Speeches</u>	<u>Law School Plagiarism</u>
Serious character flaw	30%	3%
Minor judgment error	33%	69%
Irrelevant	<u>37%</u>	<u>28%</u>
	100%	100%
	N=43	N=29

Campaign Prospects

Fatal	14%
Serious Damage	75%
No long-term effect	<u>11%</u>
	100%
	N=59

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