

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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New Release

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BAD NEWS DOMINATES PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

TV news coverage of both Bush and Dukakis has turned sharply negative, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs' ongoing election '88 study. Since Labor Day, both candidates have received nearly three times as much media criticism as praise.

Researchers analyzed 294 election stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening news shows from August 19 (after the Republican convention) through September 25 (before the Presidential debate). They measured good and bad press by examining 361 clearly positive or negative evaluations of the candidates.

Sample evaluations: " Governor Dukakis...is no friend of police...he has presided over a revolving-door criminal justice system." - Boston policeman, ABC, 9/22. "Bush says he wants a kinder, gentler America, but there's nothing kind or gentle about the way he's campaigning." - Brit Hume, ABC, 9/23.

Major Findings:

- * Bush received only 33% good press, but Dukakis did even worse - only 28% good press. By comparison, during the primaries Bush received 50% and Dukakis 55% good press.
- * From August 19 through Labor Day, as the Republicans moved ahead in the polls, Bush had 44% good press coverage compared to 26% for Dukakis. Since then Bush has sunk to 26% good press, but Dukakis has risen only slightly, to 29% positive.
- * Much of the bad press was generated by the candidates' attacking each other. But even non-partisan sources quoted on the news have been 2 to 1 negative toward both candidates.
- * The coverage has focused on the issues rather than the horse race. Only 33 stories have dealt with the candidates' standings and prospects, compared to 113 stories concerned with policy issues.

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