

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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NEWS RELEASE

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NO T.V. NEWS BIAS IN CAMPAIGN '88

A new study refutes charges that 1988 television election coverage is politically biased and ignores policy issues. Democrats and Republicans received almost identical network news coverage during the primaries, the study finds, including over 200 stories that dealt extensively with policy issues.

The study was conducted by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and nonprofit media monitoring organization. Researchers analyzed 1,338 election stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts from February 1987 through the final primaries on June 7, 1988. They measured good and bad press by noting all positive and negative evaluations of the candidates. They also noted the topics mentioned in each story.

The results appear in the July/August issue of Public Opinion magazine. The author is Dr. S. Robert Lichter, co-director of the Center and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Major findings:

* Overall coverage was balanced. Democrats collectively received 56% good press compared to 54% for Republicans, based on 1823 evaluations from all sources.

* Reporters' own on-camera statements were more favorable toward the Democrats. Reporters gave 64% positive evaluations to Democratic candidates and 52% to Republicans.

* Jesse Jackson got the best press of any major candidate--74% positive. (He was topped by Bruce Babbitt, whose 89% positive rating was based on only 37 evaluations, compared to 250 for Jackson.) Worst press went to Gary Hart--only 38% positive.

* The Iran-Contra affair was the issue raised most often on television. It was followed by taxes, unemployment, and the state of the economy. Overall, economic topics accounted for 40% of all issue discussion.