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Perot Surges in TV Visibility, Good Press

Ross Perot is now receiving more TV news attention than Democrat Bill Clinton and nearly as much as President George Bush. Perot also receives mainly good press, and his prospects are portrayed as far brighter than those of his rivals, according to an ongoing study of election news conducted by the Center for Media and Public Affairs.

CMPA researchers analyzed 768 news stories on all presidential candidates on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts from January 1 through May 25. The study will continue through Election Day, November 3.

Major Findings:

***The Visible Man** Perot's share of TV news coverage increased dramatically after the Los Angeles riots. The networks ran 14 Perot stories in the month before the riots, but aired 34 Perot stories in the three weeks after the riots. In contrast, Bill Clinton was featured in only 28 stories and President Bush in 39 since the riots.

***Perot's Positive Press** On-air evaluations of Perot are running nearly 2-to-1 (64%) positive, better than either Bush or Clinton.

Examples: Positive: He's consistent, he's honest, he's diligent, he's a doer.

- Voter, ABC, 5/11

Positive: Ross Perot is an extraordinary person, and I think his extraordinariness is his ordinariness.

-Perot supporter, NBC, 5/20

Negative: Trying to pin down Perot on specifics is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall.

- Lisa Myers, NBC, 5/6

***Clinton Rising** Evaluations of Clinton have been largely positive since the New York primary (59% positive). During the primaries, Clinton's press averaged 38 percent positive.

Example: Positive: I'm going to switch over, and I'm going to go back to the Democrats and vote for Mr. Clinton.

- Voter, CBS, 5/24

***Bush Sinking** Evaluations of President Bush have been more negative in recent weeks than at any point since CMPA began tracking Bush's TV news coverage in 1987. Since the New York primary, 84 percent of on-air comments about Bush have been critical.

Example: Negative: If I had George Bush in my hands, I would choke the man to death and then I'd body slam him for an hour.

- Voter, NBC, 4/16

***Perot the Frontrunner?** Nearly nine out of ten sources (88%) commented favorably on Perot's chances or the strength of the Perot campaign. In contrast, over two out of three sources (68%) cited problems or weaknesses in the Bush campaign. Similarly, 63 percent of news sources turned thumbs down on Clinton's prospects.

According to CMPA Co-Director Dr. Robert Lichter, "TV news is presenting Perot as a visible, viable, and desirable candidate. The amazing thing about Perot's media honeymoon is that he has enjoyed such good press while running against the media."

The **Center for Media and Public Affairs** is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that conducts scientific analysis of news and entertainment media. This study appears in the May Media Monitor, the Center's monthly newsletter. Copies are available upon request.

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