

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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TV News See Gore As Winner

Study Finds Gap in Network Horse Race Coverage

WASHINGTON, DC—Despite polls showing a close race between the presidential candidates, the national network newscasts overwhelmingly portray Al Gore's prospects for victory as promising but Bush's as dim, according to the latest findings from the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)** *ELECTIONWATCH* report. The study also finds that NBC has been particularly pessimistic about George Bush's chances.

According to CMPA President Dr. S. Robert Lichter, "The networks are portraying Gore as a winner and Bush as a loser. The question is whether this will be a self-fulfilling prophecy."

ELECTIONWATCH is published weekly by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and educational organization. **CMPA's** ongoing scientific content analysis of nightly news programs on ABC, CBS and NBC measures the tone and focus of news coverage by examining all on-air statements from reporters and their news sources. This report is based on 141 stories (amounting to 247 minutes) broadcast from Labor Day to October 1.

OTHER MAJOR FINDINGS:

- ❑ Since Labor Day, 86 percent of comments on Gore's prospects have been positive, while comments on Bush's prospects have been 83 percent negative. (Example: "After a series of blows, many self-inflicted, [Bush] aides acknowledge their message has been muffled..."-Bill Whitaker, CBS, 9/17)
- ❑ The gap was greatest for the first two weeks in September when Gore's poll ratings were climbing. But even after the polls tightened, a substantial gap remained in the coverage of the candidates. During the past two weeks, 3 out of 4 comments about Gore's prospects (75%) were hopeful, while 4 out of 5 comments about Bush (81%) were gloomy.
- ❑ The gap in the portrayal of candidates was greatest on NBC, where 96 percent of comments have been pessimistic about Bush's chances and 90 percent optimistic about Gore's prospects. (Example: "Gore is surging, Bush is struggling."-Tom Brokaw, NBC, 9/7)
- ❑ Apart from evaluations of the campaign horserace, Gore continues to lead in the race for positive press. (This includes evaluations of candidates' policies, records, personal character, campaign conduct, etc.) Since Labor Day, 48 percent of evaluations about Gore were positive, while 67 percent about Bush were negative.

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This study is being done in collaboration with the Brookings Institution. Research results will be posted each week to www.cmpa.com and www.brookings.edu and will be featured the following Monday in Brookings Senior Fellow Stephen Hess's USA Today column.