

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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TV Networks Go Negative

Study Finds Bad News for Bush and Gore

WASHINGTON, DC -- Network news coverage of the presidential campaign is getting more negative as election day approaches, according to the latest report from the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)** *ELECTIONWATCH*. The study finds that NBC carries the most negative coverage of both George W. Bush and Al Gore.

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 election news measures the tone and focus of news coverage by examining on-air statements from reporters and other non-partisan news sources. This report is based on all stories broadcast from Labor Day through October 29th on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news shows.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- Since Labor Day, 64 percent of on-air evaluations have been negative or critical of George W. Bush and Al Gore. Two out of three comments (66%) have been negative so far in October, compared to three out of five (60%) in September. *Example: "The candidates' proposals were incomplete, potentially misleading and leave many questions unanswered." – accounting expert, ABC, 10/26/00*
- NBC is the bad news network, with nearly three unfavorable evaluations of the candidates for every favorable one (74% negative). By comparison, 58 percent of comments on ABC and 59 percent on CBS have been unfavorable. *Example: "Neither Al Gore nor George W. Bush will be able to deliver on their promises." – NBC (quoting BusinessWeek), 10/3/00*
- Network news has been about equally critical of both candidates – 62 percent negative toward Gore and 65 percent negative toward Bush. But Gore fared better in September (52% negative vs. 67% negative for Bush), while Bush has gotten slightly better press in October (64 % negative vs. 67% negative for Gore)
- The most unfavorable coverage concerns the way the candidates have conducted their campaigns – misleading statements, negativity, etc. For both men, 94 percent of such assessments have been negative. *Example: "Al Gore will say about anything to be elected president..." – voter, NBC, 10/5/00; "When I heard about that rat thing the first thing that came to my mind was Nixon and Watergate." – voter, CBS, 9/5/00*
- Coverage of the candidates' policies and proposals was more favorable, with 59 percent negative statements overall. Gore's positions fared slightly better (53% negative) than Bush's (61% negative).

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