

Judging Judge Roberts -- Part 1

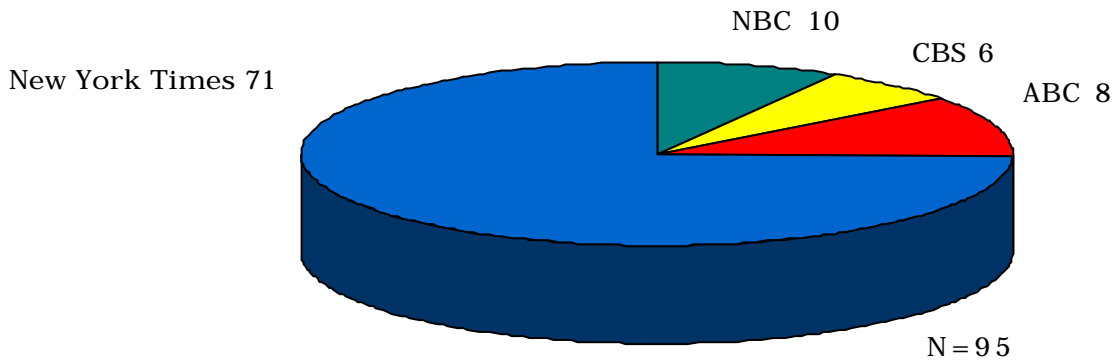
How the Media has Covered the Roberts Nomination

How did the media cover President Bush's nominee for the Supreme Court? This report examines coverage of Judge John Roberts from July 20 through August 28 on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows and in the first section of the *New York Times*. This period was prior to Judge Roberts' September 5th nomination as Chief Justice.

Major Findings:

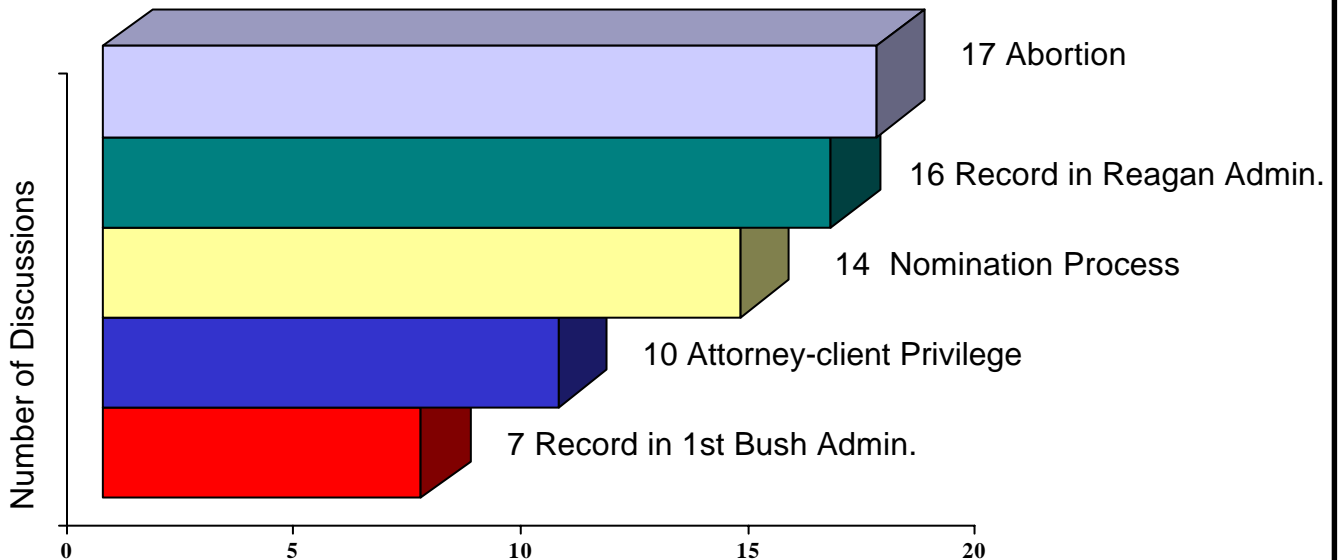
- * **Hail to His Honor** Three out of five sources favored Judge Roberts' nomination. *Page 3*
- * **Party Favorite** Many Democrats offered praise, but almost all liberals were critical. *Page 4*
- * **Roe v. Roberts?** *The abortion issue drew the heaviest coverage. Page 2*
- * **Truth in Packaging** Slight majorities wanted to know his personal views and see his government files. *Page 5*
- * **Before the Storm** Judge Robert Bork also got fairly good coverage before his Senate hearings began. *Page 3*

Number of Stories



Note: Based on the number of stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts and in Section A of the *New York Times*.

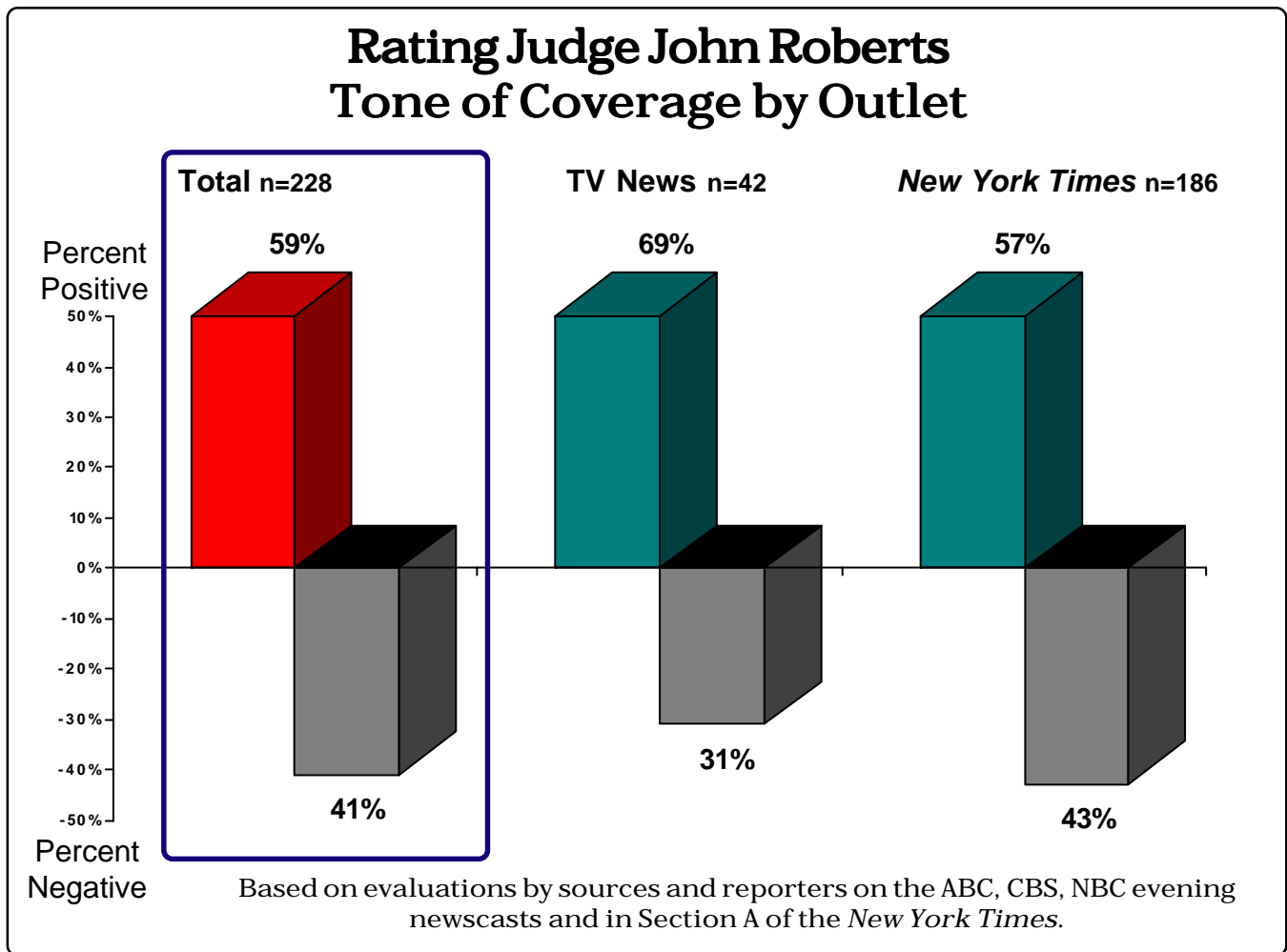
Top Topics



Based on the number of stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts and in Section A of the *New York Times*.

Note: More than one topic may be discussed within a story.

The *New York Times* has printed almost three times as many stories as the nightly network news shows have aired (71 vs. 24). Abortion rights drew the heaviest coverage (17 stories), followed closely by Judge Roberts' role in the Reagan administration (16).



Three out of five sources supported Judge John Roberts' nomination. Sources appearing on the broadcast nightly news shows rated him positively 69 percent of the time, while sources in the *New York Times* rated him positively 57 percent of the time.

However, a nominee's coverage can change rapidly during Senate confirmation hearings. Judge Robert Bork received fairly good coverage before his Senate hearings began. From his nomination on July 1 through the eve of his hearings, September 14, 1987, 50 percent of sources supported his appointment to the Court. (*Media Monitor*, Oct. 1987)

Examples:

Judge Roberts has shown keen analytical skill and a relatively light touch. Adam Liptak, *New York Times*, 7/21

NARAL Pro-Choice America denounced him as an "unsuitable choice" and a "divisive nominee with a record of seeking to impose a political agenda on the courts." *New York Times*, 7/20

Rating Judge John Roberts Tone of Coverage by Source

	Percent Positive	Percent Negative	n
Partisan*	68%	32%	69
<i>GOP</i>	95%	5%	37
<i>Democrats</i>	38%	62%	32
Nonpartisan**	55%	45%	159
<i>“Conservative”</i>	87%	13%	47
<i>“Liberal”</i>	2%	98%	61
<i>All Other</i>	88%	12%	51

***Partisan sources are identified with one of the major political parties.**

****Conservative and liberal nonpartisan sources are comprised of sources from interest groups not affiliated with either party but identified as being conservative or liberal.**

Judge Roberts' best marks came from partisan sources (68% positive vs. 32% negative.) GOP sources were nearly unanimous in their praise (95% positive.) But among Democrats, more than three out of five sources were critical of Bush's nominee. Among nonpartisan sources, those identified as ideologically liberal or conservative (often representatives of interest groups) were nearly unanimous in opposing or supporting the nomination respectively. Other nonpartisan sources were overwhelmingly (88%) positive.

Examples:

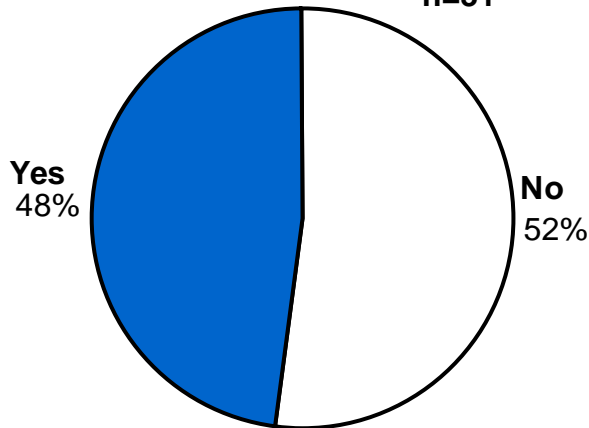
Senator Charles E. Schumer of New York... said there was “no question that Judge Roberts has outstanding credentials”... *New York Times*, 7/20

Liberal groups protested Roberts' nomination, insisting he will undermine abortion rights. Linda Douglas, ABC, 7/20

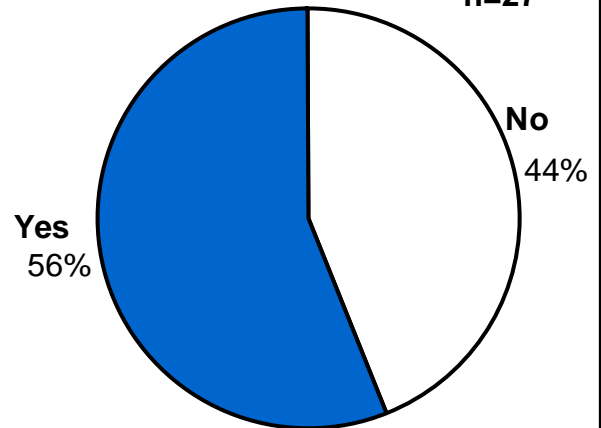
This man seems highly qualified, highly intelligent.
"Man on the street", ABC, 7/20

Advise and Consent: Areas of Debate

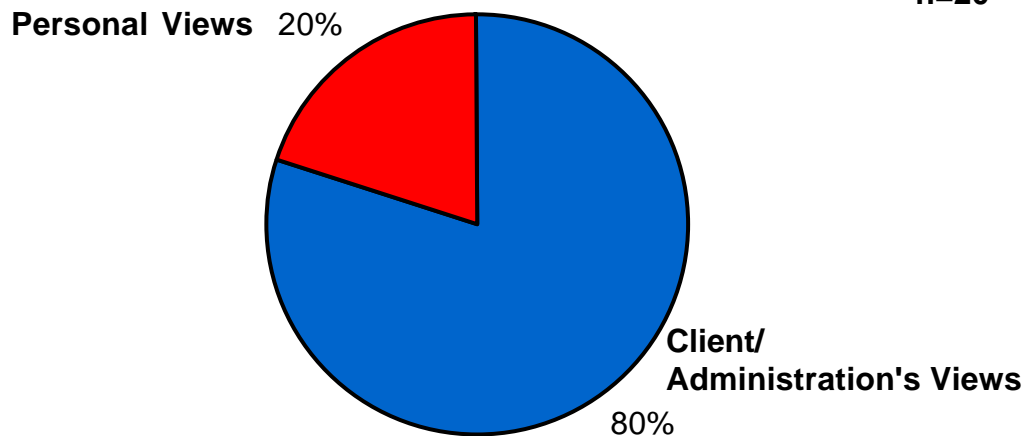
Should all government papers related to Judge Roberts' work be released?
n=31



Should Judge Roberts answer questions about his personal views or comment on potential cases?
n=27



Should positions advocated in briefs written by Judge Roberts be considered his views or those of his client?
n=20



Based on the number of viewpoints expressed on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts and in Section A of the *New York Times*.

Slight majorities agreed that Judge Roberts' government files should be released, and he should answer questions about his personal views. Most sources (80%) said that the views Judge Roberts expressed in legal briefs reflect the views of his client rather than his personal views.

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