

No Second Honeymoon

TV News Coverage of the first 100 days of George W. Bush's Second Term

How did network news cover the first 100 days of President George W. Bush's second term? And how did the coverage differ from his first term? This issue of Media Monitor reports how President Bush and his policies were depicted by the three broadcast network evening newscasts from January 20th to April 29th, 2005. In addition, our regular "Laugh Tracks" feature examines the jokes directed toward Bush and other public figures on "The Tonight Show," "The Late Show with David Letterman," "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" and "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Major Findings:

Old News

The number of stories about President Bush fell by 60% from the first 100 days of his first term. *Page 2*

Bad News

Bush's early coverage in both terms was more negative than that of other newly inaugurated presidents since Ronald Reagan. *Page 4*

Deja Vu

The tone of Bush's first 100 day coverage was 2 to 1 negative in both 2001 and 2005. *Page 3*

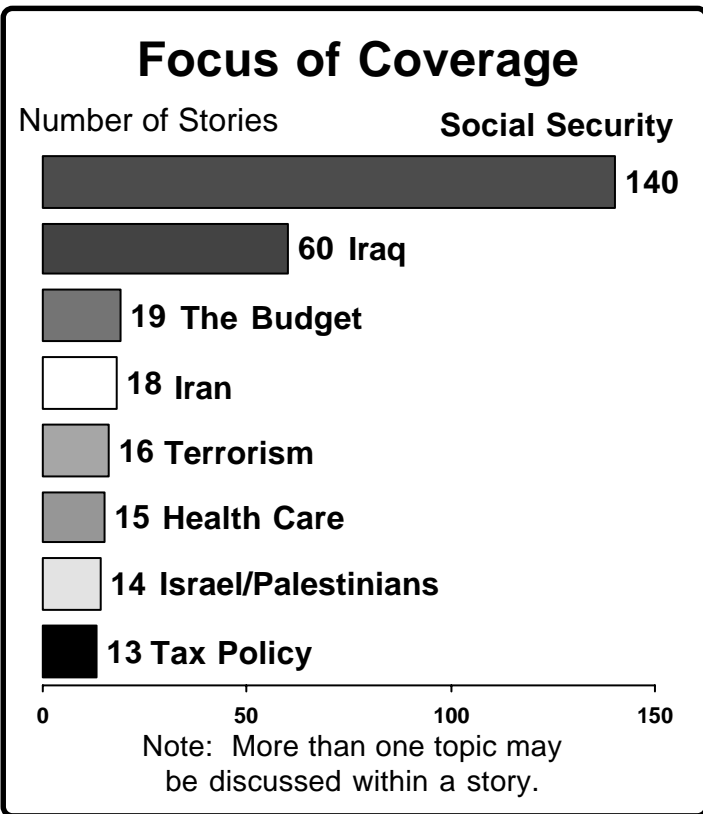
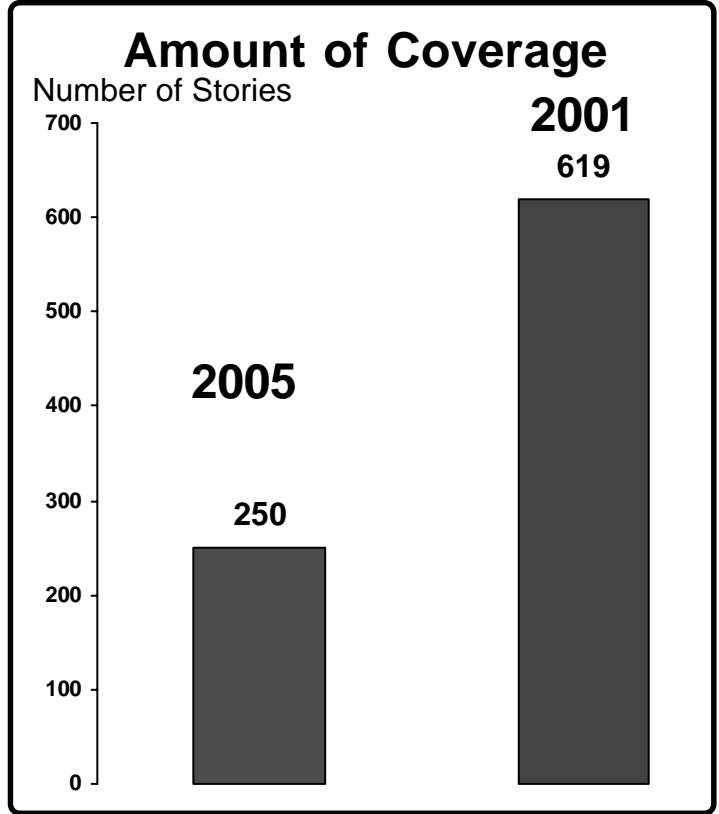
Not Bush Critics

NBC was less critical of Bush than the other networks. *Page 5*

Big Joke

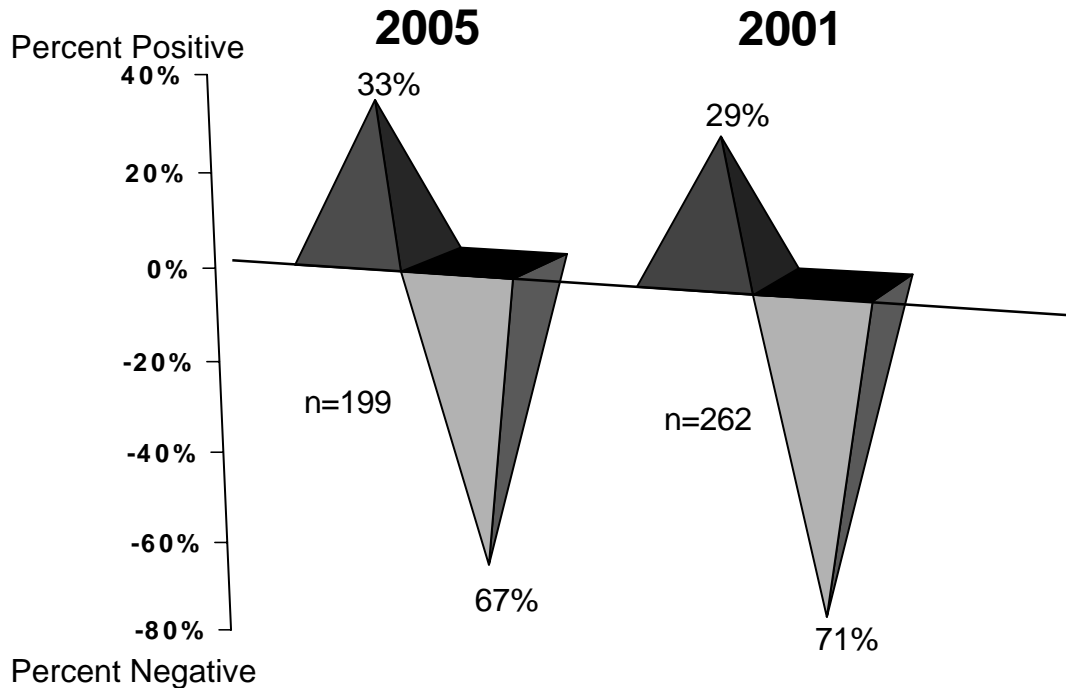
President Bush edged out Michael Jackson as the top target of TV comedians. *Page 7*

Coverage of George W. Bush fell 60 percent compared to the first 100 days of his first term, from 619 stories in 2001 to 250 in 2005. CBS and NBC featured the president the most, in 94 and 92 stories respectively. ABC trailed with 64 stories.



Bush's plans to reform Social Security were the main focus of coverage of the first 100 days (140 stories.) The next most heavily covered topic was Iraq, with less than half the number of stories (60) as Social Security. The only other foreign policy stories with more than 10 discussions all involved the Middle East or the war on terrorism.

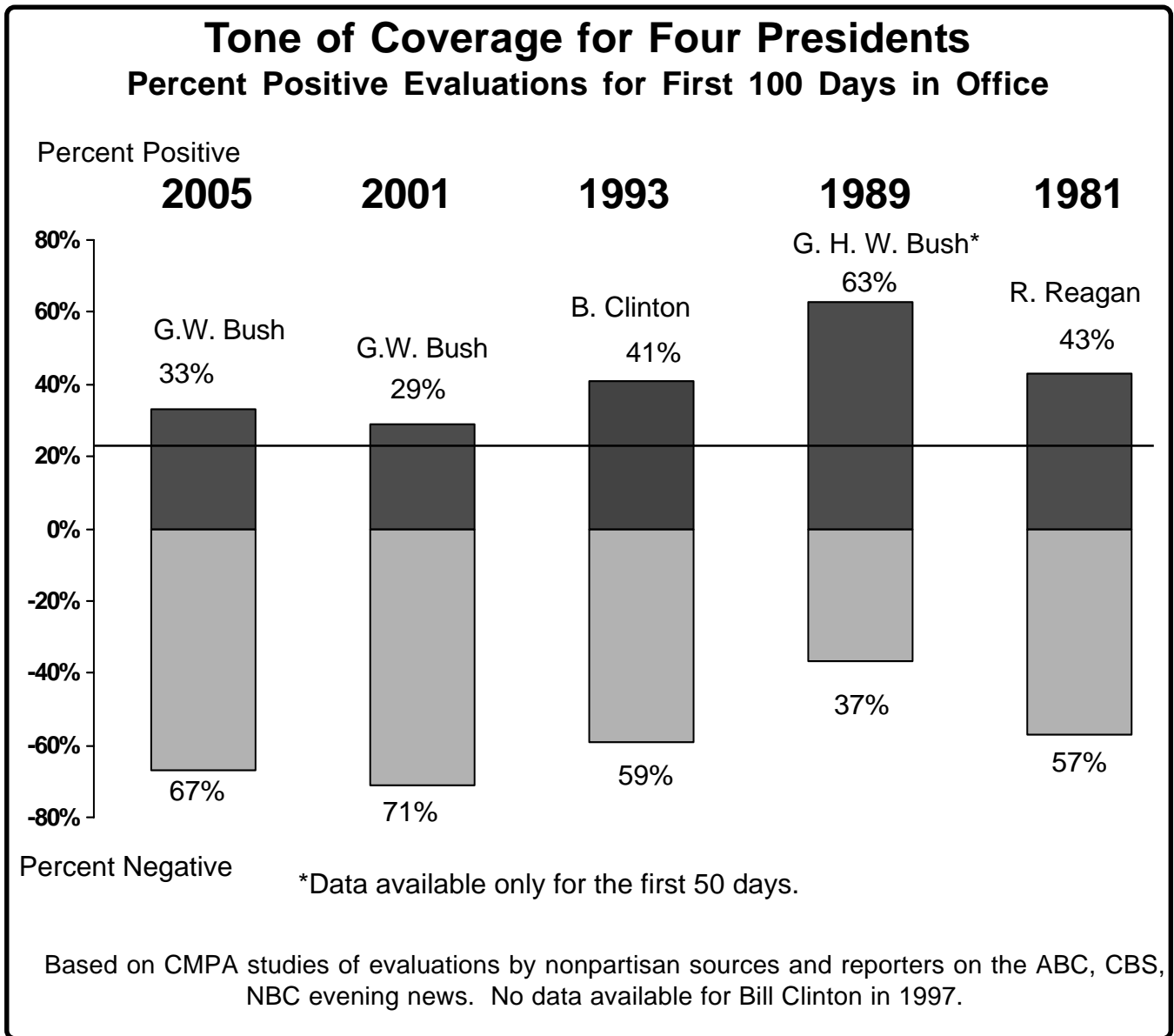
Rating the President -- Tone of Coverage



Based on evaluations by nonpartisan sources and reporters on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening news.

Evaluations of George W. Bush by nonpartisan sources* on the network nightly news during the first 100 days of his second term changed only slightly from his first term, rising to 33 percent positive (i.e. 67% negative) compared to 29 percent positive during 2001.

**Note: Our analysis excludes sources who are identified as representing one of the political parties. Research shows that nonpartisan sources have greater credibility with voters, and reporters have greater discretion in selecting them.*



While evaluations of George W. Bush's first 100 days were up slightly over his first term, his ratings remained lower than those of his predecessors.

Evaluations of George W. Bush

	Percent Positive	Percent Negative	n
Overall	33%	67%	n=199
<i>By Outlet</i>			
ABC	22%	78%	n=51
CBS	29%	71%	n=62
NBC	43%	57%	n=86
<i>By Issue</i>			
All Domestic Policies	23%	77%	n=118
<i>Social Security</i>	22%	78%	n=87
All Foreign Policy	42%	58%	n=59
<i>Iraq</i>	29%	71%	n=24
No Issue Specified	64%	36%	n=22
<i>By Time Period</i>			
1st 50 Days	38%	62%	n=152
2nd 50 Days	19%	81%	n=47

Based on evaluations by nonpartisan sources and reporters on the ABC, CBS, NBC evening news.

Nonpartisan evaluations of President Bush were twice as positive during the first 50 days of his term as they were during the second 50 days (38% vs 19% positive).

Mr. Bush received the best press on NBC, where 43 percent of nonpartisan sources gave him good ratings. On CBS and ABC, the proportion of positive comments was lower, 29 percent and 22 percent respectively.

The president fared better on foreign policy issues (42% positive overall), than on domestic issues (23% positive.) But he received only 29 percent positive comments on his handling of the war in Iraq. Most of the policy-oriented evaluations during the first 100 days were directed toward domestic issues, for which he was panned by almost four out of five sources. Paramount among these was Bush's plan for Social Security reform, which was criticized by most sources (78% negative to 22% positive.)

During his first 100 days in 2001, the most heavily evaluated issues were relations with China and the presidents's tax cut proposals. On tax policy, Bush received a slight majority of positive evaluations (53% positive to 47% negative.)

Sample Evaluations

Now, the AARP has been joined in its campaign by the youthful one million members of Rock the Vote, who also believe private accounts [social security] are too risky. *John Cochran, ABC, 2/10/05*

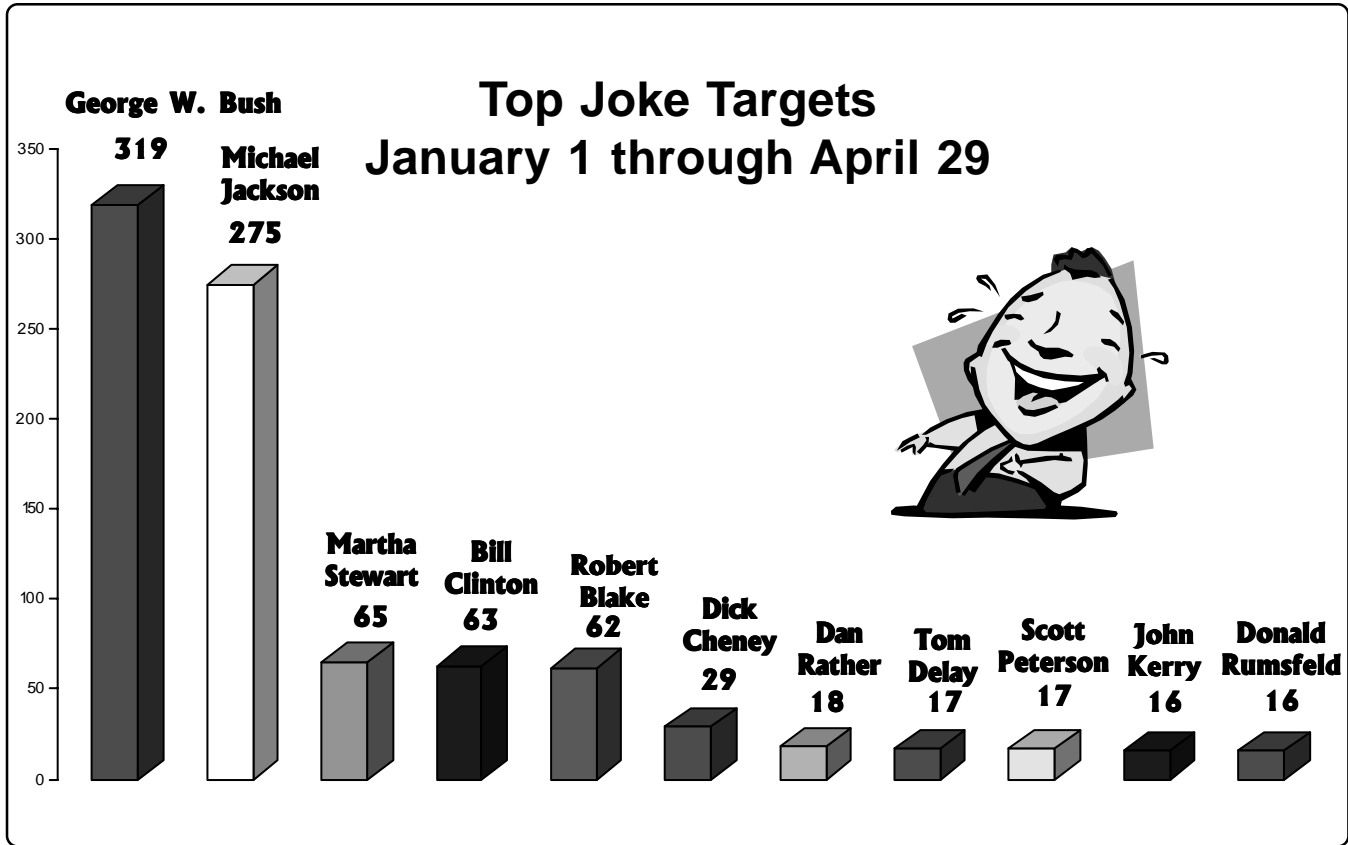
Many people mistrust his policies and think, rather than embracing Europe's way of thinking, he wants Europe to embrace his. *John Roberts, CBS, 2/23/05*

I'm in the working world, trying to make a living. Seems like he's [Bush] screwing it all up. *Georgia resident, Hazel Grooms, reacting to State of the Union Address, NBC, 2/3/05*

Perhaps no US president has ever been as unpopular here [Europe]. *Terry Moran, ABC, 2/20/05*

Without comment about how he felt taking the nation to war on such flawed assumptions, President Bush agreed it's time to go to work. John Roberts, introducing a Bush soundbite about a critical report from the Commission on Intelligence, CBS, 3/31/05

I think it was a well-crafted, well-delivered speech. *Tim Russert on Bush's second inaugural address, 1/20/05, NBC*



President Bush barely edged out pop star Michael Jackson (who was being tried on charges of molestation) as the top target of late night TV talk show monologues. But Bush was joked about 10 times as often as any other public official, with the largest number of jokes aimed at his alleged ignorance or lack of knowledge. Bill Clinton led all other political figures in the joke-a-thon, attracting about as many jokes as Martha Stewart, who was released from prison during this period, and actor Robert Blake, who was acquitted of murdering his wife. During the first 100 days of Bush's first term, Clinton actually exceeded his successor's joke total (293 jokes to 200.)

Sample Jokes

Historians this week named Warren G. Harding the dumbest president of all time. I understand President Bush is demanding a recount. *Jay Leno, 2/07/05*

President Bush's State of the Union speech was interrupted 40 times for applause. And twice to look up a word in the dictionary. *David Letterman, 2/02/05*

Today President Bush gave a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. It was entitled "Thank you for 'Marmaduke'." *Conan O'Brien, 4/04/05*

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E-mail: Mail@cmpa.com • **On the Web:** www.cmpa.com • Phone: 202-223-2942 • Fax: 202-872-4014

Editors:

Dr. S. Robert Lichter

Dr. Linda S. Lichter

Research Director:

Daniel Amundson

Political Studies Director:

Mary Carroll Willi

Research Assistants:

Matthew Curry, Tamara Scott

Production and Graphics:

Mary Carroll Willi

Director of Administration and Publications:

Keith Bundy

Media Director:

Matthew T. Felling

**Center for Media
and Public Affairs**

2100 L Street, N.W. Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20037



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