

## Quayle Hunt

### TV News Coverage of the Quayle Nomination

Did the media indulge in a feeding frenzy over the Quayle nomination? Or did the Indiana Senator get the roasting he deserved?

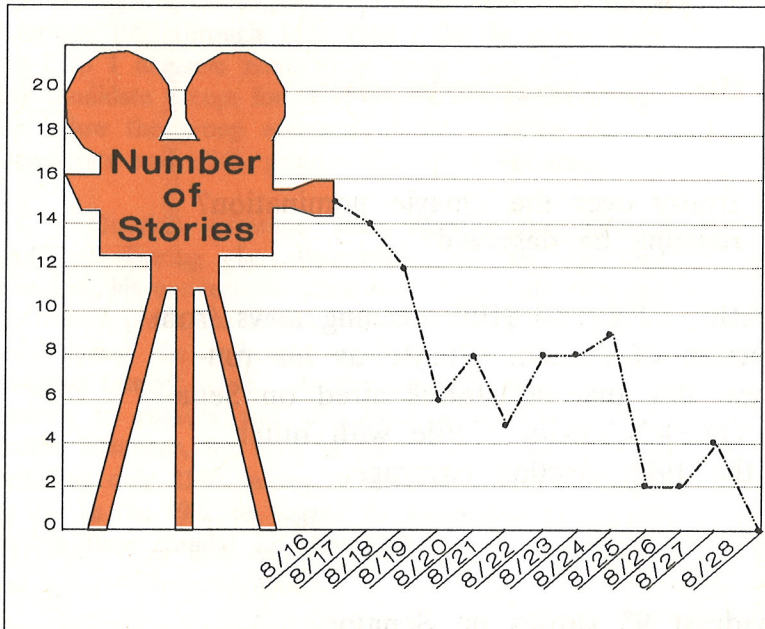
We examined all stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news from Vice-President Bush's August 16 selection of Senator Quayle as his running mate through August 28, the next day that no stories aired on Senator Quayle. We compared Senator Quayle's media profile with other findings from our ongoing study of the 1988 election coverage.

#### Major Findings:

- \*In 12 days the networks broadcast 93 stories on Senator Quayle, more than they ran on 12 of the 13 presidential candidates during the 1988 primaries. Only Bush received more coverage. (p.2)
- \*The Quayle story took up more than one-quarter of all evening news broadcasts for nearly two weeks after his nomination. (p.2)
- \*Evaluations of Senator Quayle by all sources were 60% positive. But evaluations by nonpartisan analysts were only 33% positive, worse than any candidate received during the primaries aside from Gary Hart's 21% positive rating. (p.3)
- \*Senator Quayle's military service record was by far the most common topic. But his privileged background, his relationship to lobbyist Paula Parkinson, and his good looks also came up regularly. (p.2)
- \*Senator Quayle was called a conservative 24 times in 12 days. By contrast, all Republican primary candidates combined were called conservatives only 27 times on the evening news during 18 months of campaigning. (p.4)

## In the Spotlight

George Bush announced his selection of a running mate on Tuesday, August 16, so that the story would not upstage his own acceptance speech at the Republican convention two nights later. Instead, the Dan Quayle story dominated headlines and newscasts for nearly two weeks.



## Nouvelle Quayle

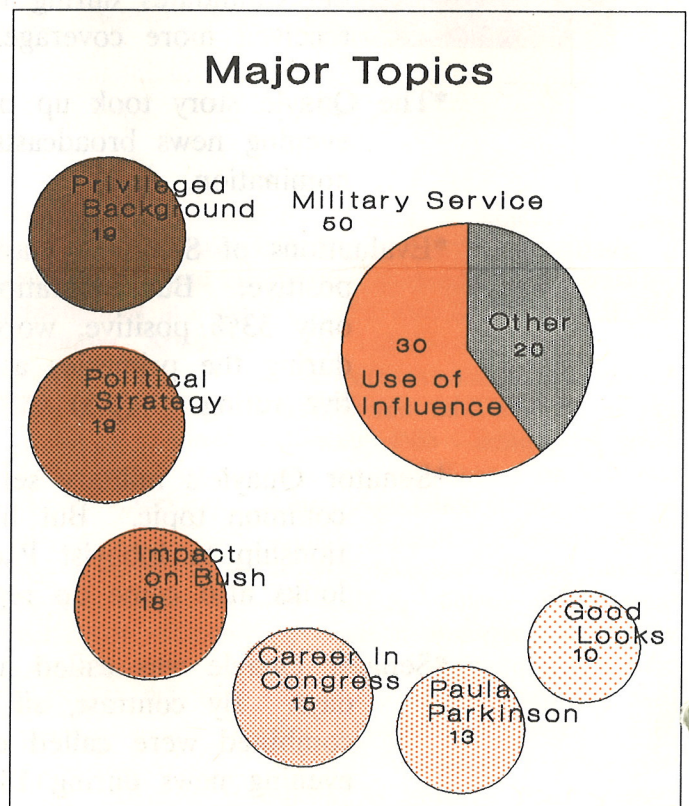
The primary focus of media attention was Senator Quayle's military service record. Fifty stories dealt with his National Guard duty. Thirty of these concerned the question of whether he had used his family's influence to get into the Guard. An additional 19 stories dealt with Quayle's privileged background, profiling either his personal or familial wealth and influence in Indiana politics.

Several other topics generated about the same levels of attention - Quayle's career on Capital Hill, the political strategy involved in his selection, and the implications for Bush and his prospects. A less traditional focus of coverage was Quayle's relationship to ex-lobbyist and *Playboy* pinup Paula Parkinson, the topic of 13 network reports. The Senator's own sex appeal was implicitly acknowledged in the 10 stories that mentioned his physical attractiveness. Six of these compared him to Robert Redford, who responded by declaring his intention to vote for Dukakis.

This range of topics shifted drastically as the story unfolded. During the convention (August 16-18), Quayle's military record was only one of several story topics. It shared equal billing with other aspects of his personal and political background, along with reports that placed his nomination in the context of

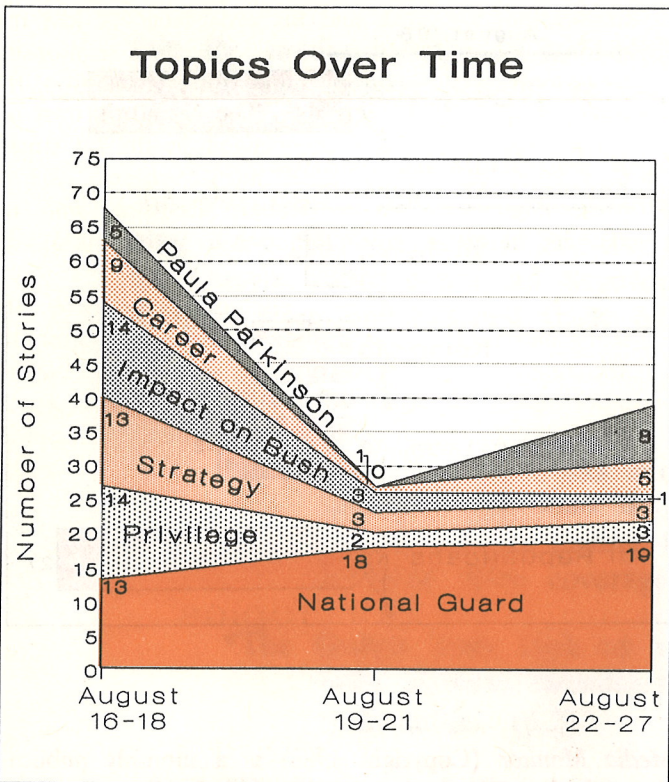
From August 16 through Saturday, August 27, we logged 93 stories on Senator Quayle on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts. (This does not include prime time convention coverage, where Quayle's coverage easily outdistanced Bush's time in the spotlight.) The cumulative airtime of 3 hours 22 minutes means that the story took up just over one-quarter of the entire newshole during that period. The coverage was heaviest on ABC (74 minutes), followed by CBS (69 minutes) and NBC (59 minutes).

The Quayle nomination dominated the newscasts during the last three nights of the Republican convention. The networks ran 41 Quayle stories those first three nights alone, an average of four to five stories per night on each network. The coverage remained heavy for almost another week, as various rumors and revelations generated an additional 44 stories in six days before tapering off. August 28 was the first night that saw no stories aired on controversies stemming from the nomination.



the 1988 horse race and Bush's decision-making procedures.

Over the following weekend (August 19-21), the National Guard controversy swept the rest of the story aside, accounting for 2 out of every 3 reports. It remained the major focus during the following week, as the field of controversy expanded to include allegations of resume puffery and dirty dancing with Ms. Parkinson. By the weekend of August 27-28, however, the story shifted from the scandal mode to more typical campaign trail reportage. There was apparently no smoking gun at the end of the Quayle hunt.

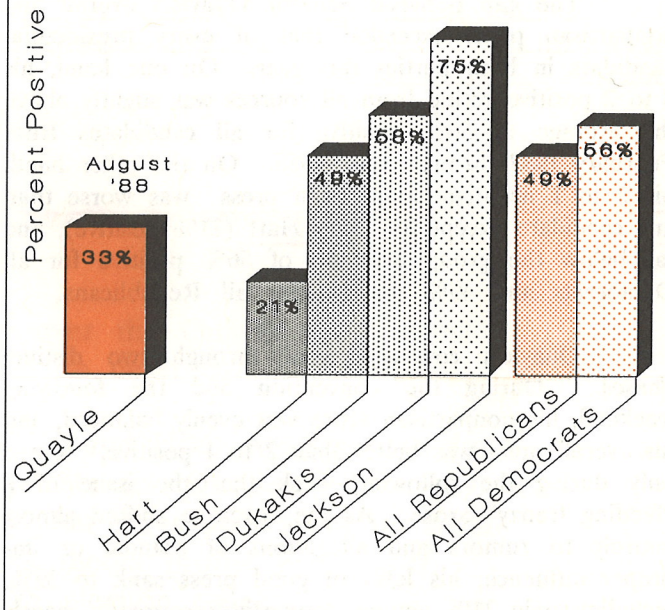


### Who Says?

Evaluations of Senator Quayle varied sharply according to the source who was quoted. Overall he received fairly good press - 60% positive assessments of his desirability as a candidate and potential president. Most of those positive notices, however, came from Republicans (including Senator Quayle defending himself). Scholarly studies of media "spin" in presidential elections usually exclude partisan sources (those identified with a political party) because they have the least credibility and impact on viewers' opinions. Among nonpartisan sources, Quayle's evaluations nosedived to only 33% positive, including 35% positive among reporters who ventured on-camera opinions. Both sets of figures were virtually identical on all the networks.

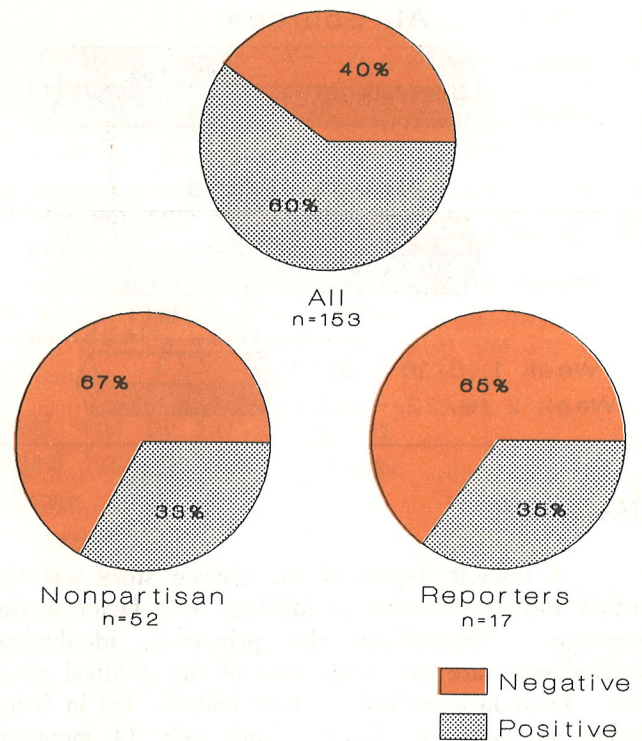
### Good Press - Comparisons

February '87 - June '88



Thus, on CBS, President Reagan was quoted in praise of Quayle as "a fine man and well qualified," while NBC interviewed a Vietnam veteran who derided

### Evaluations by Source

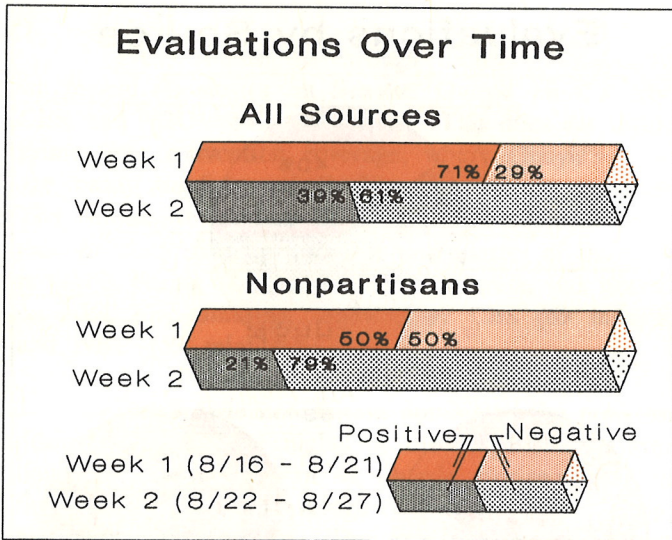
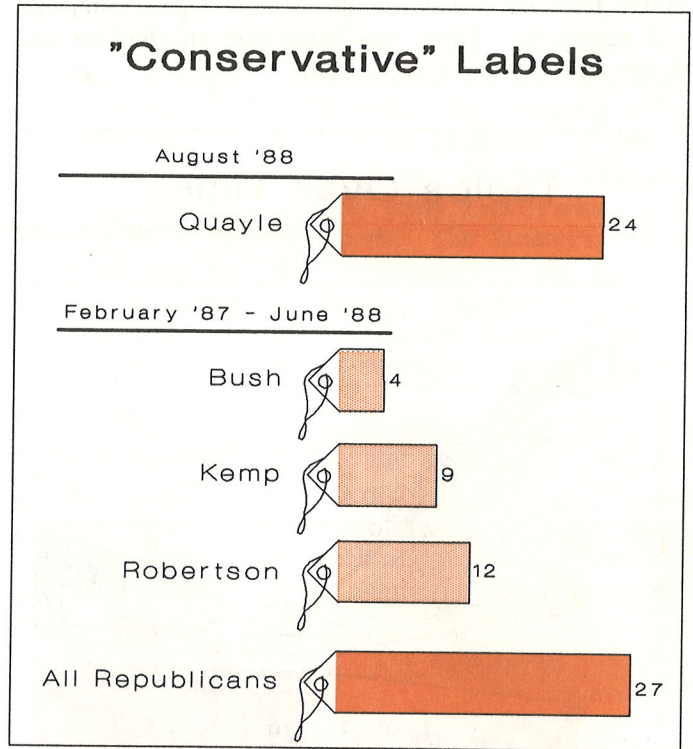


his National Guard service as "no different than going to Canada," and CBS correspondent Jacqueline Adams called the nominee "a not-ready-for-prime-time player" whose "pro-defense rhetoric was almost comical."

The gap between Senator Quayle's overall and nonpartisan press exceeded that of every presidential candidate in both parties this year. On one hand, his 3 to 2 positive rating from all sources was slightly above the average of 56% positive for all candidates from February 1987 through June 1988. On the other hand, his 2 to 1 negative nonpartisan press was worse than any candidate except for Gary Hart (21% positive), and far below the group averages of 56% positive for all Democrats and 49% positive for all Republicans.

Quayle's coverage went through two distinct phases. During the convention and the following weekend, his nonpartisan score was evenly balanced, and his overall press was better than 2 to 1 positive. It was only during the following week that the issue of a "feeding frenzy" arose. As the coverage shifted almost entirely to rumors and allegations of scandal or improper influence, his level of good press sank to 39%, including only 21% among nonpartisan sources - nearly as low as the 19% we logged for Gary Hart during the Donna Rice scandal in May 1987.

apiece on the network evening news from February 1987 through June 1988. Pat Robertson was tagged most often as "right" or "conservative", with only 12 mentions in nearly a year and a half. In only 12 days, by contrast, Quayle was described as a conservative 24 times, nearly equaling the 27 total mentions for all Republican candidates in 1987 and early 1988.



## Mr. Right

A notable aspect of the Quayle story was the media's sudden discovery of ideology as a factor in the campaign. Throughout the primaries, ideological labelling was rare on either side of the political spectrum. Jesse Jackson and Michael Dukakis led in being labeled as "left" or "liberal" with only 14 mentions

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