

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

2101 L Street, N.W. • Suite 405 • Washington, D.C. 20037 • (202) 223-2942

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CONTACT: TONI MANN

Clinton Bests Bush on TV News

Democratic nominees Bill Clinton and Al Gore are receiving nearly twice as favorable TV news coverage as their Republican opponents George Bush and Dan Quayle, according to a new study by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**. But the same study finds that the news frequently portrays voters as dissatisfied with their choice of candidates.

These are the latest findings from CMPA's ongoing scientific content analysis of TV election news. During the first seven months of 1992, researchers tallied 2,798 evaluations of candidates for national office by sources who appeared on 1,366 election stories broadcast on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows, with cumulative airtime of 42 hours 24 minutes. (These include 895 judgments of Bush and 789 evaluations of Clinton.)

Major Findings:

*During July, evaluations of the Clinton-Gore ticket were nearly 2-to-1 positive (64% to 36%) while ratings of the Bush-Quayle ticket were almost 2-to-1 negative (37% positive). The best press went to Gore (81% positive), followed by Clinton (60%), Bush (38%) and Quayle (25%).

Examples:

Bush-

"Instead of all the talk of dumping Quayle, we ought to be talking about Dan Quayle dumping George Bush."

-conservative activist, CBS, 7/30

"Once they get into office, their opinions always change. I mean, Bush is what, the education president? That's a crock of (bleep)."

-voter, CBS, 7/19

Clinton-

"He's one of the best people I've ever worked with in public life."

-Michael Dukakis, ABC, 7/12

(more)

“The best candidate since Kennedy”
-Mario Cuomo, CBS, 7/12

Gore-
“One of the most universally recognized, most able, intelligent, informed members of Congress.”
-Rep. Tom Foley, NBC, 7/9

Quayle-
“Four more years of a heartbeat away from Quayle is ridiculous.”
-voter, CBS, 7/15

*Both presidential candidates have received more positive coverage since the primaries ended. During primary season, evaluations were only 41% positive toward Clinton and 22% positive toward Bush. Since then a majority (56%) of sources have praised Clinton, while Bush’s ratings have risen to 34% positive.

*Nonetheless, voters are frequently portrayed as dissatisfied with their choices for president. Out of 140 stories that have raised this issue, only five (4%) have concluded that voters are happy with the available candidates.

Example:

“The problem is that nobody’s happy with any of the candidates, so they don’t know what to do, they’re frustrated...”
-voter, CBS, 7/19

The **Center for Media and Public Affairs** is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that conducts scientific analysis of news and entertainment media.

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