

# CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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## TV Has Bad News For Gore

### Study Finds Networks Turn More Negative on V.P.

WASHINGTON, DC – Network news coverage of Al Gore turned sharply negative after the first presidential debate, according to the latest report from the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) ElectionWatch**. The study finds a similar downward trend in on-air predictions of Gore's election prospects, while assessments of Bush's chances have soared.

*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 15<sup>th</sup> on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news shows.

#### MAJOR FINDINGS:

**Gore's Press Goes South** – Al Gore received about evenly balanced evaluations (48% positive vs. 52% negative) on network news throughout September, while evaluations of George Bush ran 2 to 1 (67% negative). Since October 2, however, Gore's on-air evaluations have been slightly worse than Bush's - 68% negative for Gore vs. 66% negative for Bush. *Example: "On education, experts say Gore is wrong in describing his own plan." (Tom Brokaw, NBC, 10/12)*

**Horse Race of a Different Color** – During September, on-air assessments of Gore's election prospects were positive by a 6 to 1 margin (86% to 14%), while Bush's were negative by a 5 to 1 margin (83% to 17%). Since then a majority of Gore's horse race assessments have been negative, while a majority (59%) of comments on Bush's prospects have been positive. *Example: "[Gore has suffered] another stumble in what has become a campaign struggling to regain its stride." (Terry Moran, ABC, 10/12)*

**What Campaign?** – Coverage of fighting and terrorism in the Middle East drove down last week's campaign news to its lowest level since Labor Day – only 48 minutes of airtime, just over 2 minutes per network per night. Overall, coverage is running 9 percent below 1996 levels (385 min. vs. 425 min.).

**What Issues?** – The policy issues receiving the heaviest coverage this fall are health care (25 stories), the economy (24), energy (16), education (7), and foreign policy (7). But these are far outpaced by coverage of campaign strategy and tactics – 61 stories on Bush's strategy and 59 on Gore's.

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This study is being done in collaboration with the Brookings Institution. Research results will be posted each week to [www.cmpa.com](http://www.cmpa.com) and [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu) and will be featured the following Monday in Brookings Senior Fellow Stephen Hess's USA Today column.