

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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PBS Bests Networks in Election News

Study Finds “NewsHour” Most Positive, Substantive, Balanced

WASHINGTON, DC—PBS coverage of the major party candidates is more positive and balanced than on the three network evening newscasts, according to the latest findings from the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) ELECTIONWATCH** report. The study also finds that the PBS “NewsHour” devoted more airtime to the campaign than all three commercial networks combined, and PBS focused more heavily on substantive issues, while the networks stressed the horse race.

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 their news sources. This report is based on all stories broadcast from Labor Day through October 1 on the ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS evening news shows. This project being done in collaboration with The Brookings Institution.

OTHER MAJOR FINDINGS:

Good News for Bush—From Labor Day through October 1, nearly two-thirds of George Bush’s evaluations on PBS were positive (65 % positive, 35 % negative), while two-thirds of his evaluations on the commercial networks were critical (67 % negative, 33 % positive). *Example: “I like [Bush’s] issues, and the fact that he’s for children and education.”—Florida retiree, PBS, Sept. 29th*

Good News for Gore—During the same period, comments about Al Gore on PBS were positive by a margin of almost three to one (72 % positive versus 28 % negative), while a majority of comments on the networks were negative (48 % positive versus 52 % negative). *Example: “[Gore] deserves a lot of credit for moving beyond this old stereotype of Democrats as fiscally irresponsible”—Robert Kuttner, PBS Sept 7th*

Network Negativism—For both networks combined, comments on the commercial networks were nearly twice as critical (60% negative) as on PBS (31% negative). *Example: “Neither Al Gore nor George W. Bush will be able to deliver on their promises.” BusinessWeek, quoted on NBC, Oct 3rd*

More News for Both—PBS devoted 60 percent more airtime to the campaign than all three networks combined (394 minutes versus 247 minutes). The “NewsHour” averaged 14 minutes of election news per night compared to only 3 minutes per night on each commercial network.

More Substance—Nearly three-quarters (73 %) of all stories on PBS contained discussions of the candidates’ records or issue positions, compared to just half (50 %) on the networks. Conversely, the networks gave over twice as much coverage to the horse race as PBS did, by a margin of 62 percent of all stories to only 27 percent.

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