

November 1, 2004

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Study: Kerry Gets Best Press Ever

WASHINGTON, DC—John Kerry is getting the most favorable network news coverage of any presidential candidate in the past quarter century, according to **the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)** at George Mason University, in a study of television election news since 1980. CMPA also reports that George W. Bush's coverage is highly negative this year, but doesn't approach the record for bad press held by Ronald Reagan.

This report is based on a scientific content analysis of sound bites by sources and reporters that praised or criticized the presidential candidates on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news from Labor Day through Election Day. The 2004 study covers 828 sound bites from Sept 7 through October 22. It is being conducted jointly by CMPA and Media Tenor. The 1988-2000 studies were done by **CMPA** and the 1984 and 1980 studies by George Washington University researchers, all using the same method of counting evaluative statements in election stories.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

Crazy for Kerry: John Kerry's total of 58 percent positive evaluations (and 42% negative) since Labor Day is the best press any general election candidate has received since 1980. George W. Bush has only 36 percent positive evaluations (and 64% negative) in the same period. In the 2000 general election evaluations of both Bush and Al Gore were about 2 to 1 negative.

Kerry's October Surprise: Bolstered by good reviews of his debate performances, Kerry received a record-breaking 77 percent positive evaluations during October, compared to 34 percent positive for Bush.

Positive Press Not A Predictor: Until this year, record-holder was Walter Mondale with 56 percent positive evaluations in 1984. The worst press went to Ronald Reagan, who received only nine percent positive (91% negative) evaluations that year. But incumbents don't always get bad press. Bill Clinton received 50 percent positive evaluations in 1996, compared to only 33 percent (67% negative) for Bob Dole.

Dems Get the Breaks: In the past seven elections since 1980, the Democratic candidate has gotten significantly better press in four - Kerry, Clinton in 1992 and 1996, and Mondale in 1984; the Republican has fared better in one - George H.W. Bush over Dukakis in 1988; and two have been about even -- Bush vs. Gore in 2000 and Carter vs. Reagan in 1980.

Negativity Reigns: The coverage has been mainly negative toward both parties. Ten out of the fourteen major party candidates have received over 60 percent negative evaluations, including all seven Republican candidates.