



Chapter 6

How Television Covers the Presidential Nomination Process

Stephen J. Farnsworth* and S. Robert Lichter

Thanks to Bill Mayer and to the staffs of the Center for Media and Public Affairs and of Media Tenor, especially Dan Amundson, for their assistance with this project. Thanks also to George Mason University, which provided support for this chapter. All errors remain the authors' responsibility.



INTRODUCTION



Few political institutions have been criticized as frequently and as vehemently as the mass media. Politicians of all parties and all ideological stripes regularly rail against the media's role in the political process, reserving their harshest judgments for media coverage of national elections. While their complaints might be self-serving, they are often supported by scholarly studies of media performance, critiques by in-house media analysts, and even by the *mea culpas* of reporters and editors.

While media and elections scholars often focus on how journalists cover the general elections, their concerns about news content are at least as relevant to primary campaigns. Citizens depend most heavily on the media during the presidential nomination process, a time when most candidates are not well-known, when the selection process often takes place quickly, and when voters cannot use partisanship as a cue to choose among competitors from the same political party.¹

Researchers have identified four key problems with mainstream news coverage of campaigns and elections: (1) there is not enough coverage of the campaigns; (2) the coverage is misdirected, focusing on the horse race rather than on how

AUQ: Some Notes citation are missing and sequence is not properly please check



the candidates would address important issues if elected; (3) the coverage is not fairly allocated among the candidates; (4) the tone of news coverage is unfair, as reporters treat some candidates more harshly than others.²

To assess these issues, this chapter analyzes network television's coverage of recent presidential nomination campaigns. Although more and more citizens are frustrated with newspaper and television coverage of campaigns and are turning to online sources, in 2008 far more people relied on traditional media outlets than on cyberspace for their campaign news. Indeed, television news continues to be the most significant news outlet for voters. In a poll conducted just after the 2008 election, the Pew Research Center found that 68 percent of those surveyed named television as one of their two major sources for news about the presidential campaign, as compared to 36 percent who relied on the Internet, 33 percent who named newspapers as a leading information source, and 16 percent who turned to radio.³ Surveys confirm that large majorities of the voting public, particularly in the high-turnout older age groups, rely on conventional media sources for most of their campaign information.⁴ Moreover, a significant amount of the cable and online news now obtained in the United States originates from traditional media outlets, either via their online operations or by being referenced by bloggers and other Internet voices. Finally, examining network television allows us to make effective over-time comparisons, whereas both the Internet and cable television have become key public media sources only recently. Our study period covers the six presidential election cycles from the 1988 through the 2008 campaigns.

We examine media content through the technique of content analysis, in which specially trained coders analyze each campaign news story appearing on every evening newscast of ABC, CBS, and NBC. In order to make the process as objective and as reliable as possible we break each news story into segments, roughly corresponding to individual sound bites, which can be coded on such dimensions as length, topic, and tone. Most of the statements that air on television news are relatively straightforward comments that can be classified reliably in terms of our coding system. For example, an unnamed voter told ABC during the 2008 campaign that presidential candidate Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) "has shown that he can work both sides of the table to help this country," a comment coded as a positive statement aimed at McCain. For all variables discussed in this chapter, intercoder reliability—the extent to which one coder agreed with a second coder looking at the same news segment—exceeded 90 percent.⁵

We examine key concerns about news content during two phases of the nomination campaign. We start with the "preseason"—the year before the primary elections, when most candidates officially declare their candidacies and start raising money and making regular treks to Iowa and New Hampshire, the homes of the first presidential caucuses and first primary, respectively. We also

examine the primary campaign season itself. During a nomination process that usually lasts about ten to twelve weeks—a period considerably shorter than a single college semester—the two major parties formally select their presidential nominees.⁶ In presidential election cycles prior to 2008, the competitive phase of the primary season generally lasted from January 1 until the first or second week of March of the presidential election year. In 2008, however, the timetable began earlier, as the Iowa caucuses were held on January 3 and the New Hampshire primary on January 8. Therefore, we set December 16, 2007 as the effective start of the competitive nomination phase for the 2008 cycle.

AMOUNT OF COVERAGE: PRESEASON AND PRIMARY

The 2008 campaign was the first presidential election cycle since 1952 in which neither a sitting president nor vice president was competing for a presidential nomination. As a result, the amount of news coverage of the hard-fought 2008 nominating contests was likely to be quite large. Add the first viable African-American and female presidential candidates to the mix, and you have the makings of a record-breaking primary season. And so it was, as shown in Table 6.1. For the 2008 “preseason” (January 1 through December 15, 2007), the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC broadcast 651 stories on the upcoming Democratic and Republican presidential nomination contests. Those stories included a total of 1,336 minutes—more than 22 hours—of campaign news.

The 2007 coverage was more than three times as heavy as in 2003, when only the Democrats had a nomination contest, and more than double the coverage in 1999, the last time both parties had a competitive nomination campaign. The 2007 coverage also exceeded that of 1995 by a significant margin. In 1995 and 2003, incumbent presidents Bill Clinton (D) and George W. Bush (R) were effectively unopposed for renomination.⁷ Of the three preseason campaigns besides 2007 that included nomination contests in both major parties—the preseason campaigns of 1987, 1991, and 1999—none featured even half as many campaign stories as did the most recent contest.

Table 6.1. Amount of Coverage: Preseason Presidential Campaign News

	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007
Number of Stories	379	211	485	294	187	651
Minutes per Day	2.1	1.1	2.3	1.2	1.1	3.8
Total Time (Minutes)	683	383	842	420	320	1336
Contested	D,R	D,R	R	D,R	D	D,R

Note: Preseason coverage includes evening network news stories for 2007 from Jan. to Dec. 15, 2007, from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 1991-2003; Feb. 1 through Dec. 31, 1987

In addition to the precedent-setting nature of the candidates, the media's focus on the campaign may also reflect the relatively stable international environment in 2007. Although the U.S. military continued to be engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, coverage of those efforts was light compared to the media's initial attention to the 2003 war and subsequent occupation of Iraq.⁸ The second lowest amount of preseason campaign coverage in the period covered by our study occurred in 1991, the year of the first Gulf War. The 211 stories and 383 minutes of election news airtime during 1991 represent less than half the preseason coverage of 1995.⁹ The year with the third lowest amount of preseason coverage, 1999, also was marked by military action—the U.S. and NATO bombing campaign against Serbia over the occupation of Kosovo.¹⁰ However, the downward trend in preseason election coverage (with the exception of 2007) cannot be wholly attributed to competition for the news agenda from international crises. The Iran-contra scandal, which broke in November 1986, did not push campaign news off the air during 1987. That year ranked third behind 2007 and 1995 in amount of preseason news coverage.

In most years, television really tunes in only when the nomination process is in full swing. As shown in Table 6.2, all six election cycles show a massive increase in the amount of coverage once the preseason jockeying ended and the primary season began in earnest. In the most competitive phase of the 2008 primary season for both parties, from December 16, 2007 through March 22, 2008, the networks set a new record for campaign attention. The 932 stories and 1,710 minutes (28.5 hours) on these three 30-minute newscasts were far higher than the totals for the five previous cycles.

Because the 2008 period of news content analyzed here is roughly one month longer than the previous years—the Iowa caucuses were earlier and the active nomination contest lasted longer in 2008—the best comparative measure in Table 6.2 is the number of minutes of campaign news per day. Even by this measure, 2008 was exceptional. The 17.6 minutes per day total for all three networks is more than 40 seconds a day more than the

Table 6.2. Amount of Coverage: Presidential Primary Campaign News

	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Number of Stories	597	370	699	550	356	932
Minutes per Day	13.3	10.7	16.9	13.4	11.2	17.6
Total Time (Minutes)	1,126	738	1,202	882	684	1,710
Contested	D,R	D,R	R	D,R	D	D,R

Note: Primary news coverage includes evening network news stories during the most competitive phase of the nomination contest for all years: December 16, 2007 through March 22, 2008, from Jan. 1 until Super Tuesday in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 (March 2, 2004; March 7, 2000; March 12, 1996 and March 10, 1992. The 1988 data is from Jan. 1 through the Illinois Primary on March 15, 1988.

16.9 minutes per day in 1996, which ranked second in amount of coverage. The 2000 and 1992 contests, both of which featured nomination competitions for both major parties, ranked third and fourth. The intense, hard-fought Obama-Clinton contest helps explain the high level of news and public interest in the 2008 campaign. Once the other Democratic contenders were effectively eliminated after the New Hampshire Primary, it was clear that the Democrats would go where no major party had gone before: nominating someone other than a white male for president.

How much network television coverage of the presidential primaries is optimal? The answer depends on the circumstances. One would expect that when both major parties have competitive nomination struggles, the coverage would be heavier than in years when only one party has a real contest. Yet we found no relationship between the number of competitive nomination campaigns and the amount of coverage. The two one-party cycles were second (1995–6) and last (2003–4) in amount of campaign news coverage during the primaries and the preseason. The clearest pattern is that of a downward trend over time in the amount of coverage, with a sharp uptick in 2008. Whether that uptick is a one-time result of the precedent-setting nature of the Obama and Clinton campaigns or a renewed interest by network news in politics will only become apparent after the 2012 race has run its course.

ISSUE COVERAGE VERSUS THE HORSE RACE

Though some political scientists have recently argued otherwise, the conventional view of media coverage is that its usefulness depends on whether it focuses on matters of substance or ignores public policy in favor of campaign hoopla, ephemeral campaign trail controversies, and the horse race. Reporters frequently vow that they will improve future campaign coverage by making it more substantive, but research shows that they have rarely kept that promise.¹² With polls being released daily in the weeks before pivotal contests like New Hampshire, every day can be a poll-reporting day for correspondents who are tempted to provide horse-race journalism.¹³ Table 6.3 shows that horse-race coverage has been dominant in the last three primary campaign cycles: 71 percent of the primary coverage in 2008 focused on the horse race, just slightly below the 78 percent we recorded in 2000 and 77 percent in 2004.¹⁴ The 1988 nomination contest was the least oriented toward the daily rankings of the candidates, with 49 percent horse-race coverage. The 1992 and 1996 primaries were also far better than 2000, 2004, and 2008 in this regard.¹⁵ Thus, even in the best of times, roughly half the campaign news provides little information to help voters learn what the

Table 6.3. Horse-Race Coverage in Presidential Primary Campaign News

	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Horse-Race	49	55	56	78	77	71
Policy Issues	16	72	44	22	18	14
Contested	D,R	D,R	R	D,R	D	D,R

*Stories can include a horse-race or policy focus (or neither focus); numbers therefore do not sum to 100 percent.

Note: Primary news coverage includes evening network news stories during the most competitive phase of the nomination contest for all years: December 16, 2007 through March 22, 2008, from Jan. 1 until Super Tuesday in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 (March 2, 2004; March 7, 2000; March 12, 1996 and March 10, 1992. The 1988 data is from Jan. 1 through the Illinois Primary on March 15, 1988.

candidates would do if elected. In the worst of times, issue coverage loses to horse-race journalism by a four-to-one margin.¹⁶

The relative absence of issue coverage is particularly troubling during the fast-moving primary campaigns. Such contests often involve several viable but little-known contenders. The differences among candidates of the same party are likely to be far more subtle than differences between candidates of opposing parties. This increases the value of news reports examining the candidates' issue positions during the early primaries. Frequently, supporters of a losing candidate, like those backing Senators Joe Biden (D-DE) and Chris Dodd (D-CT) in 2008, had only a few days to find an alternative champion after their first choice withdrew from the race following a poor showing in Iowa.¹⁷

American Research Group's tracking polls of likely New Hampshire primary voters demonstrate the volatility of the primary season. In 2004, for example, Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor, led in the first 16 of the 22 tracking polls the group conducted before the primary. Dean often was ahead of Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, the eventual nominee, by double-digit margins. Kerry was ahead only in the final six tracking polls, all conducted at least in part after his Iowa caucuses victory.¹⁸ Surveys in New Hampshire in 1992, 2000, and 2008 also demonstrate rapidly changing multi-candidate contests.¹⁹

While this volatile political environment may encourage reporters to cover the horse race aggressively, they do so by shortchanging voters interested in learning where these relatively unknown governors, legislators, and activists would take the country were they to be elected.²⁰ Indeed, a heavy diet of horse-race coverage encourages citizens to discount issues when they evaluate candidates.²¹ This agenda-setting pattern appears to be the case even in New Hampshire, where voters pride themselves on the face-to-face meetings with candidates that are alleged to dominate the state's primary. Research has demonstrated the influence of both media agenda setting and face-to-face "retail politics" for explaining a person's vote choice in the Granite State.²²

FAIRNESS (OR NOT) IN AMOUNT AND TONE OF NEWS COVERAGE OF CANDIDATES

The media can reward or punish candidates in two different ways: by the amount of news coverage a candidate receives and by the tone of that coverage. Since most candidates are relatively unknown nationally, their greatest challenge is to build name recognition. If a candidate does not have much money, and most campaigns do not until they start doing well in the polls, news coverage (known by campaigns as “free media”) is the best way to become better known.²³ Greater amounts of news coverage can increase one’s name recognition, which can translate into improved poll standings and greater support from financial contributors. These factors can lead to greater media coverage, as reporters start to view the candidate as a more serious contender.²⁴ Indeed, the rush to raise huge sums of money during the preseason is often referred to as the “money primary.”

The accelerated nomination process of recent years, accompanied by reduced amounts of campaign news coverage, can work against candidates who do not start out as front-runners.²⁵ Despite the rise of insurgent campaigns like former Governor Howard Dean (D-VT) in 2004, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and former Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) in 2000, and television commentator Pat Buchanan (R) in 1996, establishment-backed candidates with greater name recognition usually became the nominees.²⁶ Obama is a mixed case: though Hillary Clinton initially received more support from Democratic party leaders and office holders, Obama also had a substantial amount of elite support, including, for example, the coveted endorsement of Edward Kennedy.

Past studies of news coverage of nominations suggest that a form of journalistic triage takes place well before the first votes are cast in Iowa and New Hampshire.²⁷ Robinson and Sheehan in particular found that for purposes of allocating scarce media resources, candidates are categorized as “hopeless,” “plausible,” and “likely.” The “likely” nominees, also known as front-runners, get a lot of coverage by virtue of their status as favorites. In the middle category are the “plausible” candidates, who get some coverage, but not as much as “likely” nominees. If these mid-range campaigners exceed expectations, though, they may suddenly receive a lot more media attention and even become “likely” nominees themselves. Then there are the “hopeless” candidates, who get little news coverage unless their campaigns show some signs of life—which probably won’t happen since reporters are ignoring them.

The 2007 coverage of the upcoming Democratic nomination struggle was substantial, but it favored the already well-known candidates like Clinton, who was well ahead in most preseason polls. On the GOP side, the principal

Table 6.4. Tone of Preseason: Presidential News by Candidate (percent positive)

(a)

1999 Democrats	1999		
	Full Year	Jan–June	July–Dec
Al Gore	45% n=78	42% n=12	45.5% n=66
Bill Bradley	50% n=36	* n=4	53% n=32
All Democratic Candidates	48% n=119	37.5% n=16	49.5% n=103
1999 GOP	Full Year	Jan - June	July - Dec
George W. Bush	68% n=94	88% n=34	57% n=60
John McCain	57% n=30	* n=6	58% n=24
Elizabeth Dole	57% n=21	75% n=12	* n=9
Pat Buchanan	* n=3	* n=0	* n=3
Steve Forbes	* n=6	* n=2	* n=4
All Republican Candidates	64% n=155	78% n=55	56% n=100

*Less than 10 evaluations, too few for meaningful analysis

Note: Based on the number of evaluations by nonpartisan sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news.

(b)

	2003 Full Year	
	% Positive	N
Howard Dean	67%	n=12
Wesley Clark	*	n=5
John Kerry	*	n=1
John Edwards	*	n=4
Al Sharpton	*	n=2
All Democratic Candidates	65%	n=31

(c)

	2007			
	% Pos. Full Year	Number Full Year	Jan–June % Pos/(N)	July–Dec % Pos/(N)
Barack Obama	63%	n=101	48% n=27	69% n=74
Hillary Clinton	45%	n=170	56% n=52	42% n=118
John Edwards	71%	n=34	80% n=15	63% n=19
Joseph Biden		* n=9	* n=3	* n=6
All Democratic Candidates	54%	N=324	52% n=100	55% n=224
John McCain	51%	n=49	* n=6	56% n=43
Rudy Giuliani	36%	n=121	35% n=20	36% n=101
Mike Huckabee	53%	n=67	-----	52% n=67
Mitt Romney	29%	n=56	38% n=8	27% n=48
Fred Thompson	30%	n=46	* n=1	29% n=45
Ron Paul	100%	n=10	-----	100% n=10
Sam Brownback		* n=5	* n=3	* n=2
All Republican Candidates	39%	N=372	38%/(39)	39%/(333)

target of media coverage was preseason front-runner Rudy Giuliani, the mayor of New York City at the time of the 2001 terrorist attacks. While many candidates spent the entire year (and more) before the contests wooing donors and the citizens of Iowa and New Hampshire, reporters spent little time on-air discussing these activities for candidates who were below the top tier.²⁸

Table 6.4 shows that the old Robinson and Sheehan (1983) typology of candidate viability, first used to explain differences in candidate coverage in 1980, remains an effective model for understanding news coverage dynamics. (Following in the footsteps of this pioneering work, we also limit our calculations of tone of coverage to sources not identified as partisan, making them more credible to many voters than those with clear partisan identities). In the 2008 Democratic primary preseason, when Hillary Clinton seemed to be the clear front-runner, she received substantially more coverage than any other Democratic candidate. Among the 324 tonal evaluations of all Democratic candidates, a majority (170) were directed at the former First Lady and then US Senator from New York. Plausible nominee Obama was the subject of 101 evaluations, while John Edwards, a former U.S. Senator from North Carolina and the Democratic Party's 2004 vice presidential nominee, finished third. All the other Democratic candidates were in single digits.

The story was much the same for the GOP candidates, with Giuliani, who led in the early polls, getting much of the attention. Of the 372 tonal evaluations during 2007 for the Republican candidates, roughly one-third (121) focused on the former New York City mayor. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, a favorite of the Christian conservative voters who are highly influential in GOP nomination politics, placed second with 67 tonal evaluations. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, another plausible nominee who also polled well in the early going, ranked third with 56 tonal evaluations, followed by McCain and Fred Thompson, a former Senator from Tennessee and an actor best known for his role in the television drama *Law & Order*.

Turning to the tone of preseason coverage, we see first of all that the Democratic candidates fared far better the Republican field in 2007, with 54 percent positive coverage versus 39 percent positive coverage, respectively. Although he received less coverage than his two major rivals, Edwards had the most positive news reports, with positive evaluations 71 percent of the time. Obama was in the middle, and front-runner Clinton had the most negative notices of the three leading Democratic candidates.

For the Republicans, the most positive evaluations were also reserved for the lagging candidates. Huckabee, with 53 percent positive coverage, and McCain, with 51 percent positive coverage, both outpaced Giuliani, whose heavy coverage was also heavily negative (only 36 percent positive evaluations).

As discussed above, there was far less coverage of the candidates during 2003 than in other preseason campaign periods that we studied. In 2003 only

Howard Dean received enough evaluations to allow us to measure the tone of his coverage in Table 6.4 (and his twelve evaluations for the full year are barely above our ten-evaluation minimum). Most of Dean's substantive evaluations, and his most positive coverage, came in December 2003, after he received the endorsement of former Vice President Al Gore, the party's nominee four years earlier.²⁹ While Kerry, Edwards, and the rest did not receive many evaluations, the other candidates collectively were treated more favorably than Dean, with coverage that was 78 percent positive in tone.

In the 1999 preseason, the last time both parties had contested nominations before 2007, the same compensatory patterns emerged. Early favorites Gore and Bush both had more than twice as many substantive evaluations as any of their rivals. Both these preseason favorites were doing well both in the preference polls and with their party's donors. In a September 1999 Gallup poll, for example, Bush was favored by 62 percent of Republican Party identifiers, while Gore had the support of 63 percent of Democratic identifiers.³⁰

Table 6.4 also demonstrates the extent to which the reporters distinguish the "plausible" from the "hopeless" candidates when it comes to evaluating candidates during the preseason.³¹ Obama's advantage over Edwards in the preference polls (though both trailed Clinton) was roughly replicated by his clear advantage in the number of substantive nonpartisan evaluations and the tone of that coverage.³² Polls in late 2007 showed a five-person race on the GOP side, and the candidates not on that list were largely ignored.³³ As in previous elections, the front-runners in 2007 suffered from more intense media scrutiny, while candidates behind in the polls sometimes obtained "compensatory coverage," reporting that was more positive in tone than that of the front-runner.³⁴

Finally, Table 6.4 shows that news coverage accelerates as the election year approaches. More than two-thirds of the evaluations of Democratic and Republican candidates took place during the final six months of 2007. In effect, much of the testing of the campaign waters and early organizing takes place away from the television cameras, even for the front-runners. It is a chance for a nascent presidential campaign to get organized before reporters decide whether to talk about it on the evening news.

Primary Season News: The Democratic Candidates

Once Obama emerged as the key rival to Hillary Clinton and then as the likely Democratic nominee, both the volume and the tone of his coverage increased. Obama's coverage during the entire, exceptionally long 2008 primary season (measured here as the period from December 16, 2007 through Hillary Clinton's withdrawal from the race on June 7, 2008) was 64 percent positive. As shown in Table 6.5, that figure is slightly behind the

tone of coverage for John Edwards, who dropped out relatively early in 2008. But Obama fared considerably better in the media than Hillary Clinton, who received 45 percent positive coverage during that same lengthy campaign period. Reporters who had hyped Hillary Clinton's "likely" nomination in 2007 were forced to explain why that prediction did not come to pass. Former front-runners often face harsh media attention when their campaigns fail to meet journalistic expectations. Even so, her coverage was only slightly more negative than positive during the 2008 primary season.

Table 6.5. Primary Election News: The Democratic Candidates 1992–2008

1992	Tone of Coverage (% positive) +	Number of Stories *
Bill Clinton	37%	292
Paul Tsongas	56%	105
Bob Kerrey	52%	31
Tom Harkin	52%	28
Jerry Brown	82%	108
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	50%	
1996		
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	NA	
2000		
Bill Bradley	62%	107
Al Gore	40%	110
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	50%	
2004		
John Kerry	81%	160
Howard Dean	48%	86
John Edwards	96%	62
Wesley Clark	63%	33
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	75%	
2008		
Barack Obama	64%	926
Hillary Clinton	45%	698
John Edwards	67%	78
Joe Biden	100%	7
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	56%	

* From January 1 through the eve of Super Tuesday Primaries on March 2, 2004; March 7, 2000; and March 10, 1992. 2008 data cover from Dec. 16, 2007 through the end of the primaries on June 7, 2008.

Note: Based on the number of stories extensively discussing one or more candidates on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news. Extensive discussions were any discussion of a candidate lasting more than 20 seconds.

+ Note: Based on the number of evaluations by nonpartisan sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news. Only candidates with 10 or more evaluations are reported individually.

Although there was far less coverage of the Democratic nomination campaign in 2004, the coverage that year was more positive in tone. John Edwards, who finished second to John Kerry in 2004, fared particularly well, with an astonishing 96 percent positive news coverage; Kerry received 81 percent positive press; and former general Wesley Clark's coverage was 63 percent positive. The tone of Kerry's coverage during the primary period was more than twice as positive as that of the two previous Democratic nominees examined here (Gore in 2000 and Bill Clinton in 1992) and exceeded the Obama coverage in 2008. Journalists who had largely discounted Kerry in the 2003 preseason subsequently explained his sudden rise to the top of the Democratic field by broadcasting a steady stream of positive assessments from political operatives, academics, and ordinary voters.³⁸

The outlier in 2004 was clearly Howard Dean, the only one of the four major candidates that year to suffer from mostly negative primary season coverage. The easiest way for reporters to explain why Dean did so much worse than expected was to pile on the negative assessments after the votes were counted.³⁹ Much of that negativity related to the aftershocks of the famous "Dean scream" after he finished third in Iowa—just eight days before the New Hampshire primary.⁴⁰ Dean's exhortations to his supporters, endlessly retelevized, were thought by some to illustrate a temperament that made him unsuitable for the high-pressure job of being president. In his defense, Dean claims that the media created an inaccurate image of that moment because of the noise-canceling microphone used onstage.⁴¹

As the 2004 race illustrates, nominees routinely get the most attention from the media, but the tone of their coverage is generally less positive than that of their leading rivals. Bill Clinton, the 1992 Democratic nominee, had by far the largest amount of media attention that year. Former Sen. Paul Tsongas (D-MA), who won the New Hampshire primary but slumped in the contests that followed, received more positive treatment from journalists but less attention. In fact, all four of Clinton's major rivals were treated more positively than was Clinton: former California Governor Jerry Brown (D), Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-NE), Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), and Tsongas all enjoyed far more positive press than the eventual 1992 nominee.³⁵ The tone of Bill Clinton's nonpartisan evaluations was only 37 percent positive (i.e. 63 percent negative), the worst of any of the Democratic candidates examined in Table 6.5. The rule of thumb is that reporters are roughest when they think their coverage matters and gentlest when they think it doesn't.

Compensatory coverage also seemed to be the norm for the Democrats in 2000, when the sitting vice president received 40 percent positive evaluations on his way to the nomination. Long-shot candidate Bill Bradley

received 62 percent positive evaluations, but it did him little good, for he lost every caucus and primary that year.³⁷

Primary Season News: The Republican Candidates

On the Republican side, as shown in Table 6.6, the most positive evaluations were received by former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and eventual nominee John McCain

Table 6.6. Primary Election News: The Republican Candidates 1992–2008

	<i>Tone of Coverage + (% positive)</i>	<i>Number of Stories *</i>
1992		
George H. W. Bush	24%	279
Pat Buchanan	34%	110
<i>Republican Candidates</i>		27%
1996		
Pat Buchanan	43%	283
Steve Forbes	36%	249
Bob Dole	44%	386
Lamar Alexander	39%	173
Richard Lugar	88%	28
Phil Gramm	67%	90
Bob Dornan	0%	12
<i>Republican Candidates</i>	43%	
2000		
John McCain	63%	244
George W. Bush	53%	251
<i>Republican Candidates</i>	59%	
2004 n/a		
2008		
John McCain	43%	511
Mike Huckabee	58%	158
Mitt Romney	44%	171
Rudy Giuliani	16%	70
<i>Republican Candidates</i>	48%	

*Through the eve of Super Tuesday Primaries on March 7, 2000; March 12, 1996 and March 10, 1992. 2008 data cover from Dec. 16, 2007 through the end of the primaries on June 7, 2008.

Note: Based on the number of stories extensively discussing one or more candidates on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news. Extensive discussions were any discussion of a candidate lasting more than 20 seconds.

+ Based on the number of evaluations by nonpartisan sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news. Only candidates with 10 or more evaluations are reported individually.

received almost identical and slightly negative coverage. The harshest news coverage was reserved for the candidate who failed to meet the media's projected odds: the fast-falling campaign of Rudy Giuliani. His coverage, only 16 percent positive during the campaign season, is one of the worst measured over the past four competitive GOP nomination contests. Only Congressman Bob Dornan (R-CA), an unsuccessful candidate in 1996, received more negative assessments.

In 2000, the GOP's most recent competitive nomination struggle before 2008, John McCain clearly benefited from his spectacular rise against the favored George W. Bush. McCain had more positive evaluations than Bush during the primary period, in sharp contrast to the Texas governor's coverage advantages during the preseason. For a front-runner, though, Bush was not treated particularly badly during the nomination phase—his 2000 evaluations (53 percent positive) were more positive than Bob Dole received on his way to becoming the 1996 nominee (44 percent positive) or than George H.W. Bush got in 1992 (24 percent positive).

In 1996, television commentator Pat Buchanan, like McCain in 2000, defeated Bob Dole, the party's front-runner and eventual nominee, in New Hampshire. Along with that upset came a great deal of media attention. Of all the Republican candidates that year, Buchanan had the largest number of evaluations and coverage roughly as positive as Dole received. Steve Forbes, a wealthy publisher who has never held elective office, received substantially more negative treatment on television, much of it because he pumped tens of millions of dollars of his own money into his campaign.⁴²

There was very little media coverage of the party's other competitors in 1996, including just a handful of stories on Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), and Rep. Bob Dornan (R-CA). These candidates were all designated "hopeless" under the media triage system. Some could at least console themselves with their largely favorable evaluations when the media did focus on them. Leading congressional figures, like Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Sen. Phil Gramm (R-TX), who led the Senate Banking Committee, were treated quite well. Dornan, a less influential member of Congress, was treated extraordinarily negatively (0 percent positive coverage) when he wasn't being ignored. The lack of attention these lesser candidates received corresponded to the lack of public support for their campaigns.⁴³

CHANGES IN TONE DURING THE PRIMARY SEASON

There are distinct trends in the amount of attention devoted to individual candidates, as well as in the tone of coverage, over the course of the

Table 6.7. Tone of Primary Season Campaign News Coverage by Time and Candidate

2000 Democrats	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>pre-Iowa</i> 1/1–1/24	<i>Iowa to NH</i> 1/25–1/31	<i>NH-Super Tue</i> 2/1–3/6
Al Gore	42% n=36	55% n=11	31% n=13	42% n=12
Bill Bradley	62% n=39	69% n=13	33% n=12	62% n=14
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	52% n=75	63% n=24	32% n=25	62% n=26
2000 Republicans				
George W. Bush	53% n=105	60% n=15	* n=5	51% n=85
John McCain	64% n=135	* n=5	58% n=12	65% n=118
<i>Republican Candidates</i>	59% n=240	55% n=20	65% n=17	59% n=203
2004 Democrats				
	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>pre-Iowa</i> 1/1–1/18	<i>Iowa to NH</i> 1/19–1/26	<i>NH-Super Tue</i> 1/27–3/1
Howard Dean	48% n=52	52% n=25	33% n=15	58% n=12
John Kerry	81% n=84	77% n=14	89% n=28	71% n=42
John Edwards	96% n=45	100% n=22	* n=9	93% n=14
Wesley Clark	63% n=16	* n=0	69% n=13	* n=3
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	74% n=197	78% n=64	74% n=77	72% n=71
2008 Democrats				
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Pre-NH</i> 12/16/07 –01/07/08	<i>NH to SC</i> 1/8–1/25	<i>SC to Super Tuesday</i> 1/26–2/5
Barack Obama	88% n=138	90% n=49	74% n=38	96% n=51
Hillary Clinton	53% n=98	61% n=33	46% n=48	59% n=17
John Edwards	67% n=12	* n=9	* n=3	* n=0
Joseph Biden	* n=1	* n=1	* n=0	* n=0
<i>Democratic Candidates</i>	66% n=294	77% n=98	53% n=110	72% n=86
2008 Republicans				
John McCain	48% n=122	97% n=35	47% n=19	24% n=68
Mike Huckabee	60% n=63	54% n=35	70% n=27	* n=1
Mitt Romney	51% n=51	41% n=27	67% n=9	60% n=15
Rudy Giuliani	16% n=19	13% n=15	* n=3	* n=1
Ron Paul	* n=7	* n=2	* n=5	* n=0
Fred Thompson	* n=2	* n=1	* n=1	* n=0
<i>Republican Candidates</i>	48% n=277	55% n=123	62% n=66	28% n=88

*Less than 10 evaluations, too few for meaningful analysis

Note: Based on the number of evaluations of major candidates by nonpartisan sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news from January 1 of the election year until the eve of the Super Tuesday Primaries (March 1, 2004 and March 6, 2000), the contests that effectively determined the nominees for these nominations. 2008 data cover from Dec. 16, 2007 through the eve of the Super Tuesday primaries on February 5, 2008. Major candidates are defined as those with at least 15 nonpartisan evaluations during the primary campaign period.

brief primary season. For purposes of Table 6.7, we have divided the primary season into three periods. For 2008, the periods run from December 16, 2007 through the New Hampshire primary (January 8, 2008); from New Hampshire through the South Carolina primary; and from South Carolina through Super Tuesday (February 5). In most other years, the periods run from the start of the season through Iowa; from Iowa to New Hampshire; and from New Hampshire to Super Tuesday. (For precise details, see Table 6.7.)

In 2008 Obama, Clinton, McCain, and Romney were the only candidates with enough evaluations to establish measures of tone for all three periods.⁴⁵ The tone for Obama was consistently very upbeat: 90 percent positive before the New Hampshire Primary, 74 percent positive between that primary and the one in South Carolina, and 96 percent positive after Obama's win in the South Carolina contest. Clinton's coverage lagged behind Obama's but was still relatively positive leading up to the New Hampshire primary that temporarily revived her fortunes.⁴⁶ On the Republican side, McCain's coverage was also very positive leading up to the 2008 New Hampshire primary, a state where he decisively beat George W. Bush eight years earlier. After McCain's 2008 New Hampshire victory established him as the front-runner, both Huckabee and Romney enjoyed more positive coverage than McCain. Perhaps journalists treated Romney and Huckabee well because of a vested interest in keeping the nomination process interesting. After all, once the nominee is determined, these national reporters must leave the excitement of the campaign trail to go back to covering the daily slog of legislation mired in Capitol Hill committees.⁴⁷

Throughout these recent nomination struggles, television seemed unable to focus on more than two or three candidates at a time. In 2008, this limitation particularly hurt John Edwards, who did not receive nearly the amount of media attention enjoyed by Clinton and Obama. Although Edwards finished second to Obama in Iowa (and ahead of Hillary Clinton), he received no real bump in media attention. Of course, given his extramarital affair and the eventual scandal it caused, Democrats might consider themselves fortunate Edwards did not get more media attention.⁴⁸

The volume of network news evaluations of the Democratic candidates in 2000 was far more consistent across the primary period than it was in 2004 or 2008. Bill Bradley and Al Gore received roughly equal numbers of evaluations in all three primary campaign periods. But there were considerable differences in tone, with Bradley treated far more positively before Iowa and after New Hampshire than he was during the week between the two earliest contests. Although Gore's coverage was consistently more negative than Bradley's, the middle period also contained the most

negative Gore evaluations. Bradley's generous coverage in the final primary period appears to be another example of compensatory coverage for a trailing candidate.

Reporters spent much more time evaluating the Republican candidates that year. The 240 evaluations of McCain and Bush during the 2000 primary season were three times the number of evaluations provided the two Democratic candidates. Indeed, reporters also seem to have trouble dealing with more than one party nomination at a time—and McCain's solid victory over Bush in New Hampshire in 2000 made that contest far more interesting to reporters that winter.⁴⁹ McCain's decision to concentrate on New Hampshire and not campaign in Iowa limited his coverage in the weeks before the first test of 2000. There were very few evaluations of McCain before Iowa, few evaluations of either Bush or McCain before New Hampshire, and many, many evaluations of both men following McCain's upset victory in the Granite State.

Part of the explanation for the media's gentle treatment of the Arizona senator throughout the primary season stems from McCain's aggressive courting of the media, a crucial component of his political style throughout his career.⁵⁰ McCain was unusually accessible to the media for a presidential candidate during the 2000 primaries, and that accessibility translated into greater amounts of coverage for his underdog campaign.⁵¹ Reporters are often kind to candidates who are willing to talk to them, particularly in the unscripted way typical of the Arizona senator holding court on his campaign bus that year.⁵² In addition, McCain's five years as a North Vietnamese prisoner during the Vietnam War also probably reduced the criticism the Navy veteran faced from reporters.

Another part of the explanation for McCain's positive treatment in 2000 can be found in the results from New Hampshire—he did the unexpected and beat Bush by a surprisingly large margin. Better-than-expected performances draw reporters to campaigns like flies to honey. But good relations with reporters and a win in New Hampshire were not enough for McCain to overcome Bush's advantages in fund-raising, elite endorsements, and the support Bush received from many key GOP constituencies.⁵³

Conclusion

Our findings contain several lessons for presidential candidates concerning their nomination campaign coverage. First, television does little to reverse a painful reality of modern presidential nominations: If a candidate does not start out as a front-runner, he or she is probably not going to be the nominee.

Candidates at or near the top in fund-raising and in the early polls receive the bulk of media and public attention. That makes the early front-runners nearly unstoppable. While they do not generally get the most positive coverage, the coverage likely nominees receive is usually not that much worse than their main rivals.

If you can't be the front-runner, the best advice for a presidential aspirant is to be like Barack Obama. Outsider candidates who energize the party's base get very favorable coverage, particularly when they dethrone a presumptive nominee, as Obama did in 2008. The nature of Obama's historic campaign as the first African-American major party nominee created a favorable media climate that lasted well beyond the nomination stage, through the general election and even into his first years in office.⁵⁴

More generally, the Obama example offers this key piece of campaign and media advice for non-front-runners: Do better than expected in the early contests. Huckabee and Obama in Iowa in 2008, Kerry in Iowa and New Hampshire in 2004, and McCain in New Hampshire in 2000 all surged far beyond their preseason expectations, and each received very positive coverage from reporters trying to explain the rise of candidates they had previously ignored. While the kind media coverage did not win the nomination for either Huckabee in 2008 or McCain in 2000, positive news reports may have been a tie-breaker in the closely fought Obama-Clinton struggle of 2008.

While the nomination process itself has favored current or former governors (who often find it easier to spend significant amounts of time in Iowa and New Hampshire), the media coverage tends to be kinder to senators. Perhaps the Washington-based reporters who cover the campaigns know the Washington-based senators better than the governors who toil in the relative obscurity (as seen from inside the Washington Beltway) of Montpelier, Little Rock, or Austin.

As shown in Table 6.5, four of the five most positively treated Democratic candidates since 1992 were senators—Edwards and Obama in 2008 and Edwards and Kerry in 2004. A similar pattern is found in Table 6.6, where the three most positively treated Republican candidates—Lugar and Gramm in 1996 and McCain in 2000—were also senators. If media tone determined nominations, senators would win most of the time. But nominations usually go to governors, not to the Washington insiders who get treated so well by their fellow Washington insiders reporting on the evening news.

Candidates pushing a pet cause should expect to be ignored by the news media, unless they are very wealthy. In 1996 Steve Forbes promoted his flat tax proposal through an expensive barrage of television ads.⁵⁵ Forbes' willingness to spend tens of millions of dollars of his own money made him a

serious contender and generated news coverage and improved poll numbers. But the coverage was often negative, as reporters frequently focused on the billionaire publisher's attempts to buy the GOP nomination, and Forbes' campaign faded in the face of Dole's string of primary successes.

A popular message offered by a viable candidate can help generate media coverage, as it did for Obama, whose campaign was focused on the mantra of "change."⁵⁶ Four years earlier, Dean's harsh criticism of the Bush administration's war in Iraq likewise propelled him to the front ranks of the Democrats, at a time when U.S. problems in Iraq were intensifying.⁵⁷ Dean's focus on the Iraq war also offered an important way for the former governor to separate himself from four key 2004 rivals—Kerry, Edwards, Lieberman, and Gephardt—who all voted for military action and continued to trip over the subject of Iraq during the campaign.⁵⁸

After their 2004 general election defeat, Democrats debated many plans to limit the importance of Iowa and New Hampshire in 2008. They sought to reduce the influence of those two states by adding South Carolina, which has a relatively large African-American population, and Nevada, with an above-average Latino population, to the list of early caucus and primary states. But this change, like other campaign calendar redesigns of the past, did little to curb the influence of the first primary and the first caucus. If anything, the pressure toward front-loading the nomination process over the past several decades has increased the influence of those two small and demographically unrepresentative states. Further campaign season compression may take place in 2012, as states continue to jostle for a position as early in the process as possible. One other likely consequence of the concentrated nomination calendar for 2012 will be to increase the influence of the news media. Candidates will have less time to campaign in any one state and will be forced to rely even more on "wholesale" media-oriented politics and campaign contributions to finance large advertising appeals.

While we cannot predict whether the increased amount of preseason and primary campaign season coverage of 2008 will be replicated in 2012, the mass media's tendency to focus its attention primarily on the most popular candidates seems likely to continue regardless of the precise number of candidates on the Republican side in 2012. Despite some grumbling by liberals who expected more, Obama is likely to face no serious opposition on his way to renomination. His fund-raising prowess alone should be sufficient to deter all but the most reckless would-be Democratic challengers.⁶⁰

With a sizable field of contenders in 2012, Republican candidates will be competing all the more aggressively for limited mainstream media coverage. Previous multi-candidate fields encouraged the use of media triage to allocate air time, which leads to the now-familiar pattern of focusing on front-runners

and major contenders with the largest poll numbers and the greatest fund-raising success. Candidates who are further back in the field will be tempted to try to repeat the outsider strategy employed with great success by Obama in 2008 and with some initial success by Howard Dean in 2004. The former Vermont governor's fortunes rose dramatically during the last half of 2003 thanks to an aggressive online strategy for fund-raising and building his support base. By the turn of 2004, Dean seemed to be the likely nominee, until he stumbled in Iowa and New Hampshire.⁶¹

The lesson non-front-runners may take from all this is, if you can't beat the traditional media, campaign through the new media. The online news environment, without the tight time restrictions of network news, seems far more accessible to secondary candidates, particularly those farthest back in the pack.⁶² This online-focused approach should be especially effective at reaching and mobilizing young adults, who are more comfortable than their elders with computers. While young adults tend to be more Democratic than Republican in their loyalties, the GOP needs these young activists to increase its chances of success in November 2012.⁶³

This time, however, an outsider-oriented candidate seeking to follow Obama's example will not have the same head start online. Front-runners, serious challengers, and dark horses will all try to use the Internet aggressively to compensate for limited network television attention, to raise money, and to expand their support base. The question is whether anyone on the Republican side can duplicate Obama's online success, now that several candidates are courting voters early and aggressively in cyberspace. Indeed, one of the more interesting competitions in 2011 and 2012 may take place among the media outlets seeking to capture the attention of the voting public during the next round of America's volatile presidential nomination campaigns.

NOTES

1. Andrew E. Busch, "The Reemergence of the Iowa Caucuses: A New Trend, An Aberration, or a Useful Reminder?" in *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2008*, ed. William G. Mayer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); James W. Ceaser, *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, "The Invisible Primary in Presidential Nominations, 1980–2004," in *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2008*, William G. Mayer, ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter, "The 2004 New Hampshire Democratic Primary and Network News," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 11 (2006) :53–63; James I. Lingle, *Representation and Presidential Primaries: The Democratic Party in the Post-Reform Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood,

1981); William G. Mayer, "The Basic Dynamics of the Contemporary Nomination Process: An Expanded View," in *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2004*, ed. William G. Mayer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Tom Rosenstiel, *Strange Bedfellows: How Television and the Presidential Candidates Changed American Politics, 1992* (New York: Hyperion, 1994).

2. See, among many other works, Kiku Adatto, "Sound Bite Democracy," Research Paper, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, June 1990; Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2009); Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Timothy E. Cook, *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Kenneth Dautrich and Thomas H. Hartley, *How The News Media Fail American Voters: Causes, Consequences & Remedies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Richard Davis and Diana Owen, *New Media and American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare: Media Coverage of U.S. Presidential Elections, 1988–2008* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2009); Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Matthew Robert Kerbel, *Edited for Television: CNN, ABC and American Presidential Elections* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998); Regina G. Lawrence, "Defining Events: Problem Definition in the Media Arena," in *Politics, Discourse, and American Society: New Agendas*, ed. Roderick P. Hart and Bartholomew H. Sparrow (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); S. Robert Lichter and Richard E. Noyes, *Good Intentions Make Bad News: Why Americans Hate Campaign Journalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995); Diana Owen, *Media Messages in American Presidential Elections* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991); Diana Owen, "Media Mayhem: Performance of the Press in Election 2000," in *Overtime: The Election 2000 Thriller*, ed. Larry Sabato (New York: Longman, 2002); Diana Owen, "The Campaign and the Media," in *The American Elections of 2008*, ed. Janet Box-Steffensmeier and Steven E. Schier (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); Larry J. Sabato, Mark Stencel, and S. Robert Lichter, *Peep Show: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); and Philip Seib, *Going Live: Getting the News Right in a Real-Time, Online World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

3. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. "High Marks for the Campaign, A High Bar for Obama," report issued November 13, 2008, www.people-press.org (accessed November 13, 2008).

4. David T.Z. Mindich, *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News* (New York: Oxford University Press 2005); and Pew, "High Marks for the Campaign."

5. For further information on our coding system, consult Farnsworth and Lichter, *Nightly News Nightmare*, chap. 1 and appendix A.

6. In most recent nomination struggles, the nominees have effectively clinched the nomination during a group of primaries known as "Super Tuesday," which in recent election cycles has taken place during February or early March. The 2008 Democratic contest was the first time a presidential nomination contest lasted beyond Super Tuesday since 1988, when eventual Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis did not emerge as the clear nominee until the New York primary on April 19, 1988. While the modern primary-dominant nomination system (put in place after the divisive Democratic convention of 1968) does not always produce a quick winner, it has been over three decades since either party has opened a convention uncertain about who will be selected as its nominee. See James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Epic Journey: The 2008 Election and American Politics*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), William G. Mayer and Andrew E. Busch, *The Front-Loading Problem in Presidential Nominations* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2004); Mayer, "Basic Dynamics of the Contemporary Nomination Process"; and Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*.

7. To state this more precisely, no sitting or former governor, Member of Congress, or member of a presidential cabinet, nor any other candidate polling in the double digits in any nationally recognized poll, challenged these two presidents for renomination.

8. Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter, *The Mediated Presidency: Television News and Presidential Governance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 90–91.

9. Foreign news coverage in 1991, a year marked by the first Persian Gulf War as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union, represented 34 percent of all network news coverage, second only to the 43 percent of news coverage relating to international matters in 2003, the year a U.S.-led coalition invaded and then occupied Iraq. See Farnsworth and Lichter, *Mediated Presidency*, 90–91.

10. Farnsworth and Lichter, *Mediated Presidency*, 99.

11. Overall, 33 percent of stories on the network evening newscasts during 2004 deal with foreign policy matters, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs.

12. Jonathan Alter, "Go Ahead, Blame the Media." *Newsweek*, Nov. 2, 1992; Austin Ranney, *Channels of Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Timothy J. Russert, "For '92, The Networks Have to Do Better," *New York Times*, March 4, 1990; Farnsworth and Lichter, *Nightly News Nightmare*; Kerbel, *Edited for Television*; Owen, "Media Mayhem."

13. The fact that the polls can be very volatile during the primary season does not seem to discourage media coverage of the horse race. See Andrew E. Smith, "The Perils of Polling in New Hampshire," in *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2004*, ed. William G. Mayer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Farnsworth and Lichter, "2004 New Hampshire Democratic Primary."

14. Farnsworth and Lichter, *Nightly News Nightmare*, 50.
15. Farnsworth and Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare*, 50.
16. This observation relates only to primary season news coverage. We did not code for horse-race coverage during the preseason.
17. Both Dodd and Biden, who eventually became vice president, withdrew from the nomination contest following their failure to finish in the top three in the Iowa caucuses on January 3. The New Hampshire Primary was held on January 8, five days later.
18. Farnsworth and Lichter, "2004 New Hampshire Democratic Primary," 57.
19. For the Democrats in 2008, Hillary Clinton led Obama before her third-place showing in Iowa, Obama then surged and overtook Clinton in New Hampshire surveys in the days that followed, but Clinton ended up winning the Granite State primary narrowly. For the Republicans, McCain, who defeated eventual nominee George W. Bush in the 2000 New Hampshire Primary, was a far more consistent favorite of the state's GOP primary voters from late 2007 through the day of the primary. Ceaser, Busch, and Pitney, *Epic Journey*.
20. Evidence suggests that despite citizen complaints about the lack of substance in campaign coverage, there is nevertheless a thriving market for horse-race news content. Shanto Iyengar, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn, "Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horserace sells." *Journal of Politics* 66 (2004): 157–75.
21. Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Patterson, *Out of Order*.
22. For network news effects on New Hampshire voters in recent primaries, see Farnsworth and Lichter, "The 2004 New Hampshire Democratic Primary"; and Farnsworth and Lichter, "The 2000 New Hampshire Democratic Primary." For discussions of retail politics and whether it remains a key part of the New Hampshire Primary, see Tami Buhr, "What Voters Know about the Candidates and How They Learn It: The 1996 New Hampshire Republican Primary as a Case Study," in *In Pursuit of the White House 2000: How We Choose our Presidential Nominees*, ed. William G. Mayer (New York: Chatham House/Seven Bridges, 2001); Dayton Duncan, *Grass Roots: One Year in the Life of the New Hampshire Presidential Primary* (New York: Viking, 1991); and Dante J. Scala, *Stormy Weather: The New Hampshire Primary and Presidential Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
23. Mayer, "Basic Dynamics."
24. Mayer, "Basic Dynamics."
25. Mayer and Busch, *Front-Loading Problem in Presidential Nominations*.
26. Burden, "Nominations."
27. The "triage" model of distinguishing candidates for purposes of allocating media coverage was presented by Robinson and Sheehan, *Over the Wire*, 75–82.
28. Ceaser, Busch and Pitney, *Epic Journey*.
29. "Dean Trails in Race for Positive Press," news release, Center for Media and Public Affairs, January 16, 2004, available at www.cmpa.com (accessed on January 6, 2006).
30. William G. Mayer, "The presidential nominations," in *The Elections of 2000: Reports and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald M. Pomper (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 2001), 18–21.

31. Robinson and Sheehan, *Over the Wire*.

32. In the last *USA Today*/Gallup poll taken during 2007, Hillary Clinton was favored by 45 percent of those Democrats expressing a preference, as compared to 27 percent for Obama and 15 percent for Edwards. Howard L. Reiter, "The Nominating Process," in *Winning the Presidency 2008*, ed. William J. Crotty. (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009).

33. In the last *USA Today*/Gallup poll taken during 2007, Giuliani was favored by 27 percent of those Republicans expressing a preference, as compared to 16 percent for Huckabee and 14 percent each for McCain, Romney, and Thompson. Reiter, "Nominating Process."

34. Robinson and Sheehan, *Over the Wire*.

35. Farnsworth and Lichter, "No Small Town Poll: Public Attention to Network Coverage of the 1992 New Hampshire Primary," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 4 (1999): 51–61.

36. Ross K. Baker, "Sorting Out and Suiting Up: The Presidential Nominations," in *The Election of 1992: Reports and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald M. Pomper. (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1993); James Ceaser and Andrew Busch, *Upside Down and Inside Out: The 1992 Elections and American Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

37. Although the 2000 New Hampshire primary was relatively close (Gore won by a 50 percent to 46 percent margin), the Vice President received at least 54 percent of the vote in every other primary during the time that Bradley remained an active candidate. Mayer, "Presidential Nominations," 21–28.

38. The most positive media treatment of all can sometimes be delivered to candidates who do better than expected, observed Robinson and Sheehan in *Over the Wire*. Patterson, in *Out of Order*, observed this same pattern of media favoritism to the surprisingly successful. Given his come-from-way-behind nomination victory in 2004, Kerry certainly qualifies as a candidate who did far better than expected. See Burden, "Nominations." The same thing occurred in 2008, when Obama defeated the well-funded Clinton family political operation on his way to the White House.

39. "By the time Gore endorsed him in mid-December [2003], Dean seemed unbeatable. If momentum exists in contemporary presidential nomination campaigns, Dean had it." Burden, "Nominations," 26.

40. Burden, "Nominations"; Farnsworth and Lichter, *Nightly News Nightmare*; Joe Trippi, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, the Internet, and the Overthrow of Everything* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

41. John Eggerton, "Howard Dean: Scream Never Happened." *Broadcasting & Cable*, June 14, 2004.

42. Anthony Corrado, "Financing the 1996 Elections," in *The Elections of 1996: Reports and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald M. Pomper (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1997).

43. Lugar, Gramm, and Dornan all failed to break into double digits in the WMUR/Dartmouth College polls of New Hampshire voters leading up to the 1996 campaign season. In fact, Gramm didn't even make it to the primary, withdrawing early as a

result of his poor prospects. William G. Mayer, "The Presidential Nominations," in *The Elections of 1996: Reports and Interpretations* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997), 42–46.

44. On February 5, 2008, the so-called Super Duper Tuesday involved primaries in sixteen states and caucuses in eight others, by the far largest single-day list of contests in primary history. Obama's strong showing on that day might have ended the contest had not the Clinton political operation been as committed and as well-financed as it was. See Arthur C. Paulson, "The Invisible Primary Becomes Visible," in *Winning the Presidency, 2008*, ed. William J. Crotty (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009); and Ceaser, Busch, and Pitney, *Epic Journey*. In 2004, nine states held Democratic presidential primaries on Super Tuesday (March 2), including some of the nation's largest: California, New York, Ohio, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Maryland. Burden, "Nominations," 31. Eleven states held Democratic primaries on Super Tuesday four years earlier, March 7, 2000, including all of the major states named for Super Tuesday 2004. Mayer, "Presidential Nominations," 32.

45. Our content analysis system did not record the specific nomination event referred to in individual reports. But a review of the taped newscasts indicates that most of the campaign news stories before Iowa were about Iowa, most of the stories between the first caucuses and the first primary were about New Hampshire, and most of the stories after New Hampshire were about the next rounds of nomination contests leading up to Super Tuesday.

46. Indeed, many recent nominees in competitive nomination struggles lost at least one of the two pivotal contests: Barack Obama in 2008 lost New Hampshire, John McCain in 2008 lost Iowa, George W. Bush in 2000 lost New Hampshire, Bob Dole in 1996 lost New Hampshire, and Bill Clinton in 1992 lost both Iowa and New Hampshire.

47. This potential journalistic motivation is discussed in several campaign studies, including Tom Rosenstiel, *Strange Bedfellows*; David Shribman, "Only a Lunatic Would Do This Kind of Work," in *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2004*, ed. William G. Mayer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

49. McCain upset Bush by a 49 percent to 30 percent margin in New Hampshire, while Bradley's hoped-for upset of Gore failed by a 50 percent to 46 percent margin. Mayer, "Presidential Nominations," 32–36.

50. James Ceaser and Andrew Busch, *The Perfect Tie: The True Story of the 2000 Presidential Election* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Elizabeth Drew, *Citizen McCain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002); and Mayer, "Presidential Nominations."

51. For a comparison of the media strategies of the candidates, see Scala, *Stormy Weather*, especially chap. 7.

52. Scala, *Stormy Weather*, chap. 7.

53. Mayer, "Presidential Nominations."

54. Farnsworth and Lichter, *Nightly News Nightmare*; Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter, "Network News Coverage of New Presidents, 1981–2009," paper delivered at the annual meeting of American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2010.

55. Darrell M. West, *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952–2004* (Washington: CQ Press, 2005).

56. Ceaser, Busch, and Pitney, *Long Journey*.

57. Michael Dimock, “Bush and Public Opinion,” in *Considering the Bush Presidency*, ed. Gary Gregg II and Mark J. Rozell (New York: Oxford, 2004); James Ceaser and Andrew Busch, *Red over Blue* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Douglas Kellner, *From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Dana Milbank and Walter Pincus, “Cheney Defends U.S. Actions in Bid to Revive Public Support,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 2003; Farnsworth and Lichter, *Mediated Presidency*.

58. Nina Easton, et al., “On the Trail of Kerry’s Failed Dream,” *Boston Globe*, Sunday Magazine, November 14, 2004; Burden, “Nominations.”

59. Several influential Republicans have decided to pass on running in 2012, including Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, and Mike Huckabee, a prominent 2008 candidate and former governor of Arkansas. Others committed early to running, including Mitt Romney and Tim Pawlenty, former governor of Minnesota. Still others remained on the sidelines longer than most candidates in previous election cycles. See, among others, Dan Balz, “Texas’ Rick Perry Weighing a 2012 Candidacy,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 2011; Richard Perez-Pena, “Christie Keeps Saying No to a Presidential Race, but Republicans Keep Calling,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2011; Jim Rutenberg and Kate Zernike, “Palin, Amid Criticism, Stays in Electronic Comfort Zone,” *New York Times*, January 10, 2011.

60. Strategic politicians prefer to run when their chances of nomination are greatest, which often means not campaigning against an incumbent president or vice president. See Marc J. Hetherington and William J. Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America* (Washington: CQ Press, 2007); and Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

61. Burden, “Nominations.”

62. Farnsworth and Lichter, *Nightly News Nightmare*; Owen, “Campaign and the Media”; and Trippi, *Revolution Will Not Be Televised*.

63. Paul Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rhode, *Change and Continuity in the 2008 Elections* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010).

64. Stephen E. Frantzich, “E-politics and the 2008 Campaign,” in *Winning the Presidency 2008*, ed. William J. Crotty (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009); and Owen, “Campaign and the Media.” At the start of 2004, Dean was ahead in the polls in both New Hampshire and Iowa. Had those contests been roughly two weeks earlier, Dean probably would have emerged victorious in both, and that would have made it nearly impossible for other candidates to have caught him in the fast-moving nomination process. Burden, “Nominations.”