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## The Mass Media's Coverage of Political Campaigns

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THE MASS MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
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University of Northern Iowa  
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## **I. Abstract**

This study explores the media's coverage of political campaigns focusing particularly on the differences in the amount of issue coverage used by different media outlets. By analyzing the transcripts of five media outlets (The New York Times, the NBC Nightly News, The O'Reilly Factor, The Rachel Maddow Show, and Anderson Cooper 360) I was able to compare and contrast the differences in types of media coverage as well as explore the reasons for those differences. I ran an independent samples T-test in order to find any statistical significance in the data. My study found that there were significant differences among the media outlets in the type of coverage each had. Some of the correlations to those differences were partisanship, length of story, percentage of political stories, and the type and length of the references or sound bites within the story.

## Introduction

The media affect the everyday lives of almost everyone in the United States. It is the main way a person receives information about what is going on in a person's town, country, and around the world. Despite agreement on the media's role in spreading information, there is some disagreement about the effects the media have on people's views. Most political science scholars understand that the media play an important role in conveying information to the average voter but there is disagreement about how well the media do their job. Patterson (1993) argues that the media are essential in the presidential nomination process. As he says

“Once upon a time, the press played an important role in the nomination of presidential candidates. Now its function is always a key one. The news media do not entirely determine who will win the nomination, but no candidate can succeed without the press. The road to nomination now runs through newsrooms.” (33)

There is no doubt Patterson is at least partially correct. The media play a big role in determining a political nomination through the many different ways they influence what people think about.

The media have a lot of control defining what news is and how it is reported. Every media outlet can decide which news stories it wants to run and the length of each story. In politics, there is controversy over what is newsworthy and how much coverage each event or issue should receive. Many scholars agree politics is not necessarily covered the way it should be. Past studies have shown a majority of campaign coverage focuses more on the “horse race” aspect of politics than the real issues (Patterson, 1993). Horse race coverage is a type of coverage that treats politics like a game focusing on who is winning and losing and the strategy being used by each candidate. This type of coverage is not very informative because it does not leave room

for real issue coverage. Since the media control viewers' access to campaigns it can be hard for candidates to portray the messages they want sent to the public. This is harmful to the American public because electorate is not being properly educated.

The television news media in particular are important to study because they are the most influential. According to Gunther and Mughan (2000) "television is by far the most heavily censored and manipulated of the communications media, [and] most people trust television more than any other medium as an objective and impartial source of information." It is easy for the television media to manipulate the information they have in order to leave false impressions on viewers. This can happen in several ways. Some examples would be over-sensationalizing stories or showing a controversial sound bite without allowing for context or rebuttal. Despite the television media's ability to manipulate, it still remains one of the most popular and most trusted forms of media.

The television news landscape is changing, though. Since the birth of twenty-four hour news networks there are more and more political "talk shows" such as *Anderson Cooper 360* and *The O'Reilly Factor*, and they are becoming more and more popular. A Gallup poll from 2008 shows that forty percent of people say they watch the cable news shows daily rather than the thirty four percent that say they watch the nightly news regularly (Morales 2008). This changing media landscape also shows the effects of narrowcasting versus broadcasting. Narrowcasting is defined as a show that is focused on a smaller more specific audience. Shows like the *NBC Nightly News* have traditionally tried to get as many viewers as possible by being objective and neutral. *NBC Nightly News* is an example of a broadcasting network. It averages over 8.5 million viewers per night (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011). Cable news shows have taken a different approach. Rather than looking for quantity they are looking

for a specific niche in cable news. The latest PEW ratings show that Fox News was up to 2,000,000 viewers during prime time. The other two major news networks had fewer viewers, CNN had about 500,000 and MSNBC had about 750,000 (Holcomb, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel 2012). Though these networks want viewers, they are more focused on faithful followers to support their message rather than the general public. This is considered narrowcasting and it has changed the way the media covers politics and news.

In this thesis I analyze five sources of news media through content analysis to determine which type of news media do the best job covering issues in political campaigns. I also look at several factors that could potentially affect issue coverage such as the length and frequency of political stories as well as the number, type, and length of references that each news source uses. This information could help demonstrate to the electorate what type of news medium is most informative, which could change how and where people get their information. This could also help our electorate become more informed.

I find that the *New York Times* has the best overall issue coverage which uses the least interpretation. The cable news show though had the next best issue coverage, especially *O'Reilly* and *Maddow*. *Anderson Cooper* had a little less issue coverage as well as a lower percentage of political stories. The *NBC Nightly News* had a very small number of political stories and most of the stories were very interpretive and used game rather than policy schema. Overall, though, the media landscape has changed significantly since Patterson studied it in 1993, the media outlets themselves have stayed pretty consistent.

## **Literature Review**

### *The Role of the Media in Voter Education*

The media have an important role to play in educating voters. The broad goal of the media should be to educate the general public about issues (Patterson 1993). They should go about doing this in several ways. First, they have a role as a watchdog or the fourth estate to make sure that the government is performing its job honestly, as well as holding politicians accountable for what they say including fact checking statements and reports. Secondly, they should act as gatekeepers by informing citizens about pressing issues, but also by not reporting on everything. Even well informed citizens do not have time to get informed about every issue going on in the world. Thirdly, journalists should try to be as unbiased as they can while still presenting the facts (Schiffer 2008).

The media can only educate voters if they have the ability to affect the public's opinion. There are several different theories about how media coverage affects public opinion. This is an important baseline for all research about the media and politics. The first theory called the Hypodermic Needle Theory, was based on the radio broadcast of War of the Worlds on Halloween night of 1938 (Wolfe 1980). When people turned on the radio and heard this broadcast they actually believed that there were aliens invading America, and they began to flee towns. This led scholars to believe the mass media equated to a hypodermic needle, and people could not help but be convinced by anything the press reported on. Later studies have shown that the panic was not as widespread as was originally claimed (Socolow 2008). This broadcast, though, did launch many studies over the next two decades concerning the effects of the media. These studies concluded that the media have at least some minimal effects on people's thoughts



(Bennett and Iyengar 2008). This can include things like controlling the amount of coverage or information people see about an issue, or how the media frame stories.

Today though, it is widely understood the media do have certain subtle effects. The current theory states the media cannot necessarily tell people what to believe or change people's minds about their strongly held beliefs. The media can, however, influence what people think about (Holbert, Garrett, and Gleason 2010). For example, the media play a role in how much coverage candidates get and whether it is positive or negative. They can also control what issues are prevalent in the race and how much information the electorate can obtain about the candidates stances on those issues (Cavanaugh 1995, 3).

This is especially true in presidential politics. There are two ways presidential candidates communicate with the public. One is through media they can control such as advertisements. In this venue, the candidates control the message, the time of day, the length, and their target audience. The primary way politicians communicate with the public though, is through media over which they have little or no control. In this form of media the specific news outlet controls the message, the time of day, the length, and the audience (Ansolabhere, Behr and Iyengar 1993, 1). This gives the media significant influence over how candidates are perceived and the amount and type of coverage each candidate receives. They can also influence name recognition which is a large determinant in voting. The candidates are not helpless, though. They are able to use manipulation techniques in order to ensure media coverage (Ansolabhere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993, 3). For example, presidents tend to make speeches in sound bites, or phrases they know will easily be shown on the evening news such as "It's the economy, stupid." Presidents also make simple noncontroversial statements so they are not criticized (Lim 2008, 54-57). Even though politicians are working to manipulate the media, the media still have a lot of power just in

the amount of coverage they give a candidate and their ability to distort what a candidate or politician has said (Ansolabhere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993, 8).

The media also plays the role of gatekeeper. To some extent, each reporter and news outlet get to define what news will be reported. They decide how much time to put into a story or whether it is newsworthy. This is a big responsibility because most people do not have access to news first hand. They have to hear or read what is going on or they will not know about it. The lack of coverage of a certain issue or candidate can hinder the electorate's ability to acquire information. Presidents in the past have actually benefited from the gatekeeping effect. For example, the general public was not aware of John F. Kennedy's handicap or mistresses, but the media were. They chose not to report on these things which aided Kennedy's popularity.

The gatekeeping effect cannot be easily altered though because of the multitude of factors which play a role. First, the reporter must be taken into account. Each reporter has certain values they bring when looking for, and reporting on a story (Bennett 2008). There are also other structural factors that must be taken into account when looking at gatekeeping. The news organization that reporters work for may have their own goals and messages as well as economic and time or space limitations (Bennett 2008). It is a lot cheaper and more time effective to use horse race coverage rather than actually spending time and money researching issues. These are factors that make it really hard to lessen or end the gatekeeping effect.

When media outlets do choose to cover stories there are several things they can do to control how people view these particular stories. There are three main things the media can do to control public opinions. They can set the agenda, prime, and frame. Agenda setting and priming involve the idea that the media can tell people what to think about. The idea of agenda setting

was introduced by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, and it says that the quantity of coverage an issue receives can tell the public how important an issue is (Sharpiro and Williams 1983). One example of this is media coverage of crime. The coverage of crime in the media has increased since the 1980s which leads people to assume the crime rate in the United States has risen (Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw 2008). It is actually the opposite. Crime has decreased significantly since the 1980s (Von Drehle and Jewler 2010). The same idea holds true with politicians. Compared to most other candidates, Ron Paul has received very little of the media's attention which resulted in a lack of information and attention by voters. Agenda setting becomes a problem when it leaves the American people over-saturated with some issues, while they have almost no information about other issues.

Priming is the idea that the amount of coverage issues get can affect how people view public figures (Domke, Shah, and Wackman 1998). The theory states that coverage of an issue can affect the weight one puts on that issue (agenda setting) which in turn affects how one evaluates a connected issue or person. The 2008 presidential election was a good example of this. The electorate in general, preferred Barack Obama on the issue of the economy and preferred John McCain on the issue of foreign policy (Saad 2008). Due to the tough economic times during the election, the media focused more on the economy than foreign policy, which may have influenced people to think more favorably of Obama.

Framing also plays an important role in the formation of public opinion. Framing can be somewhat difficult to understand because it is defined in so many ways. Scheufele (2006) summarizes the findings of the original study saying "McCombs, Shaw and Weaver suggested that not only are agenda setting and framing related, framing is, in fact, an extension of agenda setting. They used the term second level agenda-setting." In short, framing is how the media uses

a specific set of framework to help people interpret issues. For example, a story about the economy could use the framework of an important policy issue and just give facts, or the story could be put into framework of a blunder on the part of a certain politician. Depending on how the media chooses to frame this same issue may affect how people think about the issue.

There is also some new evidence that the media's current type of political coverage can actually have a very strong effect on skewing political opinions. There have been some studies that have supported the idea of the "Spiral of Silence Theory" which theorizes how human nature and the media can work together to explain changes in opinions on politicians and issues. The Spiral of Silence Theory is the idea that humans do not want to be isolated from friends and relations. In order to avoid that, they are willing to change their behavior to assure they will not be isolated (Noelle-Neumann and Petersen 2008). The theory states if people feel their ideas are popular they feel free to express them. However, if they feel their ideas are unpopular they may not (Noelle-Neumann and Petersen 2008). This does not necessarily apply to all issues though. According to an article by John Hibbing and John Alford (2004) politics is a low stakes game for most people, they don't have strong feeling either way; therefore they would not have to worry about isolation for expressing certain political views. Noelle-Neumann and Petersen (2008, 344-345) confirmed this by saying the Spiral of Silence Theory has limited effects, and the issue in question must be very controversial for this theory to hold true. Typical issues that fall under this category generally consist of issues related to moral values. They do, however, allege that in the right circumstances, the media can have a big effect, albeit only for a limited amount of time (Noelle-Neumann and Petersen 2008).

The accumulation of these effects support the theory that the media has a substantial effect on the amount and type of information an average voter receives. The media can shape

peoples' political views. Though they may not always be able to change people's opinions, they can certainly tell people what issues and people are salient, and in what context people should view these issues. There are ways for voters to get information without just absorbing what is in the news, however, it does take work and research. Politics for most people is a "low stakes game" (Hibbing and Alford 2004). The majority of the electorate has little resting on which candidate gets elected president. It will make no change to their everyday life, and therefore they will not take the time and effort to get educated about the issues.

There is some argument, however, that issue information is effective and important to voters. Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure (1972, 8-9) specifically studied the effects of commercials on voting. They found that commercials that talked about issues actually tended to be more effective than those that did not. Though this study only focused on commercials it does show evidence that the electorate does pay attention to issues and actually have some desire to be educated. If that is true, then the media does have role to fill in providing the public with information.

### *The Role of Media in Democracy*

The media do have some understanding of their importance in Democracy and do attempt to fill their role properly. Schniffer (2008, 9) lists the basic values and elements of the news profession. If all these values were adhered to the press would fill its proper role ideally. He says

“1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.

2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.

3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.

4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide forum for public criticism and compromise.”

He further goes on to argue that the basic values that most journalists and news organizations hold are consistent with the public's values (Schiffer 2008, 11). The press' main goals are consistent with most scholars' theories of ideal political coverage. The problem however is that the journalists do not fill these roles adequately for a variety of reasons. This can hinder our electorate's ability to make informed decisions which is the basis of a good democracy. Though all politics are poorly covered, the media do an especially poor job of covering presidential elections. Presidents are the main focus of the news and news sources dealing with politics (Gulati, Just, and Crigler 2008). Given the influence the press can have on public opinion it is important to evaluate how well they cover issues.

The first and most important role the media should be playing in a democracy is the role of watchdog or the fourth estate. The media are essential in a democracy because they have the ability to place checks on the government by reporting on scandals or mistakes the government makes. This gives them an important role as a liaison to hold the government accountable to the public (Patterson 1993). There are several ways the press can go about filling this role adequately. First, they should report on any political scandals or mistakes that are necessary to inform the American electorate. The American media does attempt to fill this role, however they do not succeed. They frequently over sensationalize stories and fail to check and present facts. One could even say that today's news media has a bias for scandal. A good example of this would be the *New York Times* Article by Eric Lipton (2011) which tried to make a

Congresswoman look corrupt because one bill she supported not only benefited her constituency, it benefited her husband as well. Though there was no real scandal in that case, the story was written to cause controversy.

Part of the reason the news media has a bias for scandal is because of Watergate. Tumber and Waisbord (2004) argue that even though media has always had some bias toward over-sensationalizing stories, it has gotten worse because of some of the scandals in recent history. That is not the only theory though. Schniffer (2008, 10-15) argues this bias may have more to do with ratings and other limitations on time, access, or finances. All forms of news media have this bias for scandal including the newer, news talk shows. In fact, because of political biases the news talk shows may have more of a bias toward scandal.

The idea of the watchdog and the fourth estate does not just apply to big scandals though. This job includes things as simple as fact checking. Most news outlets today do not report the actual facts. Instead they use 'he said she said' reporting. For example, a reporter may write a story in which Candidate A said "it is windy outside", and Candidate B said "there is no wind". In many cases, the reporter will not actually check to see if it is windy outside (Schiffer 2008). This is not completely the reporter's fault though. There are often institutional limitations in place that make it necessary for reporters to use this type of coverage. These include things like economic and time constraints that make it hard to present on actual issues.

Patterson (1993) makes the claim that one of the main reasons journalists do not cover issues is a difference in opinion as to what politics is. The media view politics very cynically as a way for an individual to gain power. There are several reasons for this. The first being that the media are propelled by the economy so money is a major factor in the coverage that is used.

Another factor could be previous scandals such as Watergate and Iran Contra, which have caused poor relations between the media and politicians. As a result of this, journalists are under the impression that many of the politicians are not actually going to follow through with policy promises and therefore it is not necessary for those issues to be covered. Patterson actually found that most candidates did at least try to follow through with promises they had made during campaigns though they did not always succeed (1993, 52). This distrust of politicians would most likely be true of traditional as well as non-traditional media, so news talk show's coverage would be congruent with this theory.

A large portion of the problem is that issues are more complicated than just whether or not it's windy. There is a false idea that there are two sides to every story. Journalists strive to be neutral or fair so they feel the need to cover 'both sides' of an issue even if the facts do not necessarily support both sides of the issue (Schiffer 2008, 11-12). In order to fact check and present real issues with scientifically backed information, there could be a bias toward one side or the other. This is one of the reasons it is important to study news talk shows. This explanation is consistent with shows like *NBC Nightly News* or a newspaper like the *New York Times*. This theory is not however consistent with news talk shows because these shows are not 'fair and balanced'. Bill O'Reilly is very clearly conservative where as Rachel Maddow is very clearly liberal. These cable new shows do not have to worry about being neutral and covering both sides of a story.

In traditional news media there are ways of presenting stories so as to not seem biased. One very easy way to present "facts" without actually presenting issues or fact checking is to present polls. This is known as game or horse race coverage. Often instead of presenting real issues and facts the media will present the political "game". This gives the polls a lot of influence



on the public. This is a problem because polls can be misleading especially if the reporter fails to describe things like the design of the study, the sample size, the questions, the margin of error, etc (Lavarkas and Traugott 1995, 4).

In *Out of Order* (1993, 31-37), Patterson specifically addresses the issue of horse race coverage versus issue coverage. He not only confirms in his study that there is more horse race coverage than substantive coverage, he also theorizes as to why this is the case. In the era of machine politics, the party did most of the work finding candidates to run for office and ensuring votes. Since the decline of the party machine, the media has taken the party's place and they are not well equipped to do so. John Cavanaugh also mentions this in his study "Media effects on Voters: A Panel Study of the 1992 Presidential Elections". He explains that because the media have taken over for the party as the main source of information between the candidates and the general electorate the media have the pressure of informing citizens (1995, 10). Both of the studies argue that the media are not able to do so effectively. The non-traditional media such as cable news talk shows may be better equipped to fill the gap left by the party machines because they have more time to disseminate information, and like the party machines are allowed to be biased.

Also, from the standpoint of ratings, issues tend to be less entertaining than horse race coverage (Patterson 1993, 52). This theory is a common explanation for the lack of issue coverage. Journalists would rather cover the 'horse race' than the policies because the horse race is much more exciting. Issues tend to be dry and often require in-depth explanations. Horse race coverage is much easier to understand, less time consuming, and has a competitive aspect that interests the audience. The news talk shows do, however, have more opportunity to cover the "fun" part of issues with their ability to be biased and critical of candidates.

In *Out of Order* Patterson looked specifically at the *New York Times*' front page election coverage. He put the election stories into two categories. The first was policy coverage, this type of story focused specifically on issues. Patterson said this category focused on stories "framed within the context of policy and leadership problems and issues" (1993, 74). The second category was game schema these stories were "framed in the context of strategy and electoral success" (1993, 74). This included stories that were focused on polls or framed in the context of who was winning or losing and why. He found that in the 1960s the coverage of policy issues was about equal to that of the political "game coverage". Starting in the 70s though, the amount of game coverage began to rise significantly. By the 1992 election over 80% of the coverage focused on the political game rather than actual issues and policies (Patterson 1993, 74-75).

His findings regarding the framework of election stories on the front page of the *New York Times* were similar. He looked at whether stories were framed as interpretation or description. Descriptive stories were based on facts such as what happened, who was involved etc. Interpretive stories on the other hand were stories that discussed why issues or events mattered. He found that in 1960, over 90 percent of the stories were told using descriptive framework. By the 1990s, the results were almost completely the opposite. In 1992 interpretive framework made up over 80 percent of the *New York Times*' front page campaign coverage (Patterson 1993, 82).

Patterson also studied the length of candidate statements on the front page of the *New York Times* finding that from 1960 to 1992 the length of candidate quotes was cut in half (Patterson 1993, 76). I choose to study this in a different way so my results will not be comparable to his. This information, however, does give some idea about the basic trends in the news media up to 1992.

Since Patterson wrote, the television landscape has shifted considerably. With the birth of twenty-four hour news networks there became much more narrowcasting which changed the traditional format of coverage used by most media outlets. Though the nightly news media does have more viewers on average than the cable news talk shows, there is still much more differentiation. Since Patterson did his study there have been two more twenty-four hour news networks and these have gained a significant niche in the market. Pew research found that overall, the viewership for cable news shows had risen yet again for the year, whereas the network news overall had declined (Holcomb, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel 2012).

The network news shows still have significantly more viewers than the cable news shows, but the cable news shows continue to grow. The *NBC Nightly News* is still the most popular nightly news show with over 8.3 million viewers, ABC is close behind with 7.1 million viewers, and CBS had only 5.7 million viewers (Airens 2012). The *O'Reilly Factor* had almost 3 million viewers for the eight o'clock showing, and when it was re-shown at nine it had over 1 million viewers (Knox 2012). *The Rachel Maddow Show* had over 800,000 viewers during primetime and the rerun had about 450,000 (Knox 2012). Anderson Cooper also had close to 500,000 on his first show and more than that on his second showing (Knox 2012). Part of this shift in viewers could be due to the format of coverage. Pew research center also found that the cable news shows have been changing the type of coverage that they are using (Holcomb, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel 2012). These changes that have occurred in the television media are extreme enough to affect the type of coverage that each media outlet uses, and it could significantly change the results that Patterson found in 1993.

### *Why Television Talk Shows Differ from Traditional Media*

I will be specifically analyzing news talk shows because they vary considerably with the traditional media and may not fit into the traditional framework of the theories that have been established. According to these theories, news talk shows will have less horse race coverage and more issue coverage because they have an hour long show rather than a half-hour news hour. The cable news shows are also primarily political shows there are not as many miscellaneous stories such as weather and sports to cover. They also have more time to talk about whatever political issues they want.

Cable news talks shows are also oriented toward a very different audience than traditional news outlets. There is some evidence that the people who watch cable news talk shows are more politically involved than those who do not (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010). Viewers of cable news shows also tend to be older and more highly educated than those of traditional news sources (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010). The main difference between viewers of cable news talk shows and traditional forms of media is that cable news shows' audiences tend to be more partisan. These viewers choose media outlets that reaffirm their beliefs (Morris 2007).

Another difference between the traditional and non-traditional media is the type of coverage. There is really no illusion that Fox News is actually 'Fair and Balanced' nor the MSNBC tells both sides of the story. CNN also leans a little left although to a much lesser degree than the latter. This ability to be biased could be beneficial to the coverage of issues. The biases would allow them to present the side of the issue which is actually supported by facts without feeling obligated to present 'both' sides of an issue that only has one side grounded in facts.

Cable news shows are also free to say what they like about candidates. One of the issues many news sources have to deal with is making political issues interesting because they are not nearly as exciting as the political 'game'. In the case of news talk shows there is much more time to talk about issues, but more importantly there are various ways to do so. These types of news shows are able to talk about a candidate's stance on an issue while being critical of what they said. The controversy and criticism allows for much more entertainment than traditional news coverage.

In the literature assessed, there was a substantial amount of information about substantive coverage versus horse race coverage; however, the research was not current. Most of the research by Patterson was done before 1995. The research has not been applied to non-traditional news sources such as *Anderson Cooper 360* either. According to the framework established by the theories in the literature, news talk shows should have better issue coverage because the format of their news varies significantly from the traditional forms of media like the *New York Times* or the *NBC Nightly News*.

The information gathered from this study could potentially change how we watch the news. If the goal of the news is to educate people about issues and facts, it would follow that most people would want to rely on a news outlet that would do the best job. If the theories apply to news talk shows, and the news talk show are indeed more informative, that information has the potential to change the news outlets voters rely on. It could also mean that the traditional journalistic idea of staying neutral and unbiased is not the best way to cover political issues.

I believe that though there will still be a very low amount of issue coverage, the changing landscape of the television media will allow for some change in the type of coverage used.

Patterson found in his study that the majority of coverage was “horse race” especially when he studied the television media. The newspapers he studied had a little more issue coverage but the majority of the coverage was still focused on the political game (Patterson 1993). I expect my results will be similar to those found by Patterson. I expect my findings in regard to the *Nightly News* to be consistent with Patterson’s. I do expect my findings to differ in the area of cable news shows. I believe these will have more issue coverage than is the norm for television news.

Specifically, I expect cable news shows to have the most issue coverage for several reasons. First, the cable news shows have more time to talk about what ever issues they want and can therefore spend more time on political issues. Secondly, the current type of neutral journalism is part of the reasons for lack of issue coverage and the fact that cable news shows have the ability to be biased will allow for more issue coverage. Similarly I expect the *New York Times* will have a fairly significant amount of issue coverage. The *New York Times* will also have more time than the *Nightly News* to talk about issues. They are also a newspaper so they have less need to be entertaining.

I expect that interpretive coverage will be the exact opposite. Since the cable news shows have the most time to talk about politics the majority of what they will be doing is interpreting what everything means. They also have political pundits who are regular guests on the show and who are given a lot of deference. This is probably a factor in the amount of interpretation. NBC on the other hand will have the least interpretation because they have the shortest stories and the least amount of political coverage. *The New York Times* will be in between those two because though they have a good amount of time to spend on stories but are not as focused on political pundits. They are also not as bound by the entertainment constraints that most television news shows are.

## Methodology

In order to test my hypotheses I gathered data from news coverage during December 2011. I chose to take a sample from December because there were no primaries or caucuses in December, and these events could skew the data. Since the main focus of coverage during a primary or caucus is who is winning, all the coverage would be horse race and there would be very little chance for real substantive coverage. I chose to start the 28<sup>th</sup> of November so there would be four full weeks of coverage excluding the break that the news outlets take for Christmas and New Years.

I gathered data from the sampling frame of three twenty-four hour news networks, CNN, MSNBC, and Fox. From these three networks I chose the most popular news talk shows to analyze. In order to get a basis to compare, I chose two more typical forms of media: the *New York Times* and *NBC's Nightly News with Brian Williams*. Thus, my sample allowed for comparisons among three types of news sources: newspapers, network nightly news, and cable personality shows. My five independent variables then were *The New York Times*, *NBC Nightly News*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *The Rachel Maddow Show*, and *Anderson Cooper 360*.

I read the transcripts from each show from the time period established and determined whether it was a political story, using the unit of analysis of a story. If the story was political, I used the criteria outlined in Appendix A. The sample includes 179 political stories over the course of the month (see Tables 1 & 2). The majority of the stories came from *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *The O'Reilly Factor*. *The New York Times*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Anderson Cooper 360* all had much smaller percentages of the political stories.

I used a coding sheet to set up the framework for the different independent variables I wanted to analyze (see Appendix A). This provided a framework with which to analyze several dependent variables, the first being the length of the story in words. This was just a basis to compare how in-depth the stories were in each news outlet. There was acknowledgement in the literature that time constraints on stories were one of the reasons for lack of issue coverage, so the basic length of story was important to compare. I also measured the percentage of stories that were political. The amount of time or room available to talk about issues might also be a factor.

I coded each story as to which candidate the story covered. This information is pertinent because it can show us if there is a differentiation between candidates in how much issue coverage is received. Some theories support the idea that a candidate's focus or lack thereof on certain issues can affect how much all issues or a particular issue is covered (Domke 1998). I also put each story into a category based on the party of the candidate and the number of candidates the story focused on.

I then analyzed the type of story and the framework in which it was presented. This gets directly to my question of whether issue coverage or horse race coverage is used more frequently. I put each story into one of seven categories according to the main subject of the story. For example, the topic could be a policy issue, winning or losing, a campaign controversy or blunder, or some other type of piece. Each story was then categorized on a scale from one to five, five being the most descriptive and one being the most interpretive. Then, each story was placed into a category based on the how it was framed. For example, if a story was framed in reference to a poll it was put in the strategic game category and if it was framed in the context of policy issues it was placed into the policy category. In order to clarify which categories each story should be placed in, I used some of Patterson's framework from his original study and then



defined some key terms that would fall under these categories (1993). I focused on the lead paragraph of each story as a cue to determine what type of story it was and what type of framework it relied upon.

The last dependent variable had to do with references and sound bites. The types of references a story has can affect the amount of issue coverage. For example, if reporters are interviewing an expert rather than a political pundit, more issue coverage would be expected. I also noted the length of each quotation or sound bite. This could play a big factor in the type of coverage because it is hard to really get to the substance of an issue in a five word sound bite. It is much easier to do so in a two-hundred word quotation. This information was not a factor in much of the research I had previously reviewed; however, I believe that with the news' reliance on outside sources it will be very important in the makeup of today's news coverage.

I piloted the coding criteria in December using transcripts from November. I made a few changes to the framework so that it fit more thoroughly with the media I was analyzing. I did not however, change any of my original dependent variables. After I retested the framework I finalized the coding sheet (see Appendix A). I used this same coding sheet for each form of media.

## **Findings**

### *Basic Descriptions*

I began by looking at the percentage of stories in each show that were political (See Table 1). I found that O'Reilly and Maddow had the highest percentage of political stories as compared

with all other news sources. This follows the premise that Maddow, O'Reilly, and Cooper all have more time to talk about politics because they do not have to discuss things like sports, the weather or the stock market. Their shows are political in nature and therefore they focus on the political aspect much more than the traditional forms of media. Both *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *The O'Reilly Factor* were comprised of almost 70 percent political stories. *Anderson Cooper 360 (AC360)* on the other hand, did not follow the same model as the other two talk shows. He had a fairly low percentage of total political stories as compared to the other two news talk shows at 18 percent. This was more consistent with the *New York Times* which was comprised of about 20 percent political stories, than the news talk shows with whom he was considered to be similar. *NBC Nightly News* had the lowest percentage of political stories with only about 17 percent of their stories being considered political. *The Nightly News* however always has to include stories such as weather, the stock market, and sports which leave very little time for political stories.

My sample was composed of political stories from the five media outlets (See Table 2). The number of stories varied by the amount of political coverage each media outlet had as well as the number of days that transcripts and articles could be found for each media outlet. NBC contributed about 14 percent of the total 180 stories that were coded. Though the *New York Times* is more political in nature than *NBC Nightly News*, its job is similarly broad. *The New York Times* must report on all news and so they contributed a mere 13 percent of total stories reviewed. Surprisingly, *AC360* contributed about the same number of stories as the *New York Times* with just over 13 percent of the stories reviewed in December. *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Rachel Maddow Show* however, each made up about 30 percent of the stories that were analyzed.

Next, I examined the candidates. Table 3 showed the frequency of reporting on candidates based on whether the story discussed Obama, a single Republican, multiple Republicans, a combination of Obama and Republicans, or all of the candidates. The data showed that Obama alone received 31 percent of the coverage, and in stories with Republican candidates he got 2 percent coverage. He was also included in stories that covered all candidates which made up almost 17 percent of the coverage.

Stories about a single Republican candidate made up about 39 percent of the coverage. Of these stories most focused on the front runners, especially Romney, but also the contender of the week. There was significant coverage on Gingrich during this time period because during most of this month he was seen as Romney's main contender. There was very little coverage of other Republican candidates. Ron Paul and John Huntsman in particular were ignored by the news media. Herman Cain received a fair amount of coverage because he was involved in a scandal in which it was alleged that he had an extramarital affair. Shortly after this scandal was uncovered though he dropped out and ended his campaign completely.

Another factor in the research was the length of stories. The average length of a story was about 1,148 words, but there was significant variation among stories (See Table 4). Overall, *NBC Nightly News* had the shortest stories, averaging just over 500 words per story. The other news stories tended to be longer though. *New York Times* pieces were consistently over a 1,000 words and they all tended to be similar in length. The cable news shows seemed to vary much more drastically. There were some stories as short such as Rachel Maddow's 47 word piece, and some were much longer such as the *O'Reilly Factor's* 11,172 word story. This was interesting because originally the length of the story was seen as a possible factor in the type of coverage that was

used. The variance between stories within the medium however, seems to imply that that is not a factor.

### *References and Sound Bites*

Besides analyzing the composition it was also important to factor in who was doing the speaking. There are very few stories that just involve the anchor or journalist speaking. Most involve sound bites or references from candidates, campaign workers, professionals, or pundits to analyze what is going on and what it all means. This is important, because the type of reference and length of reference can aide in forming a picture about what kind of story is being analyzed, and whether it is issue based or strategy based. In order to get an accurate picture of the references and the sound bites, the type and word length of each of the sound bites was coded. Then the results were amassed and compared among media outlets (See Table 5).

There were seven different categories of references. The first was a candidate running for the presidential nomination. The second was professional in the subject matter of the story. For example, if the story was about a legal issue a news source may interview a lawyer. The third type was political pundits. These people are often regulars on the show and they often play into the “horse race” coverage that is used by most news outlets by analyzing how each event or statement affects the campaigns or the candidates’ chances of winning or losing. The next type of reference is someone within one of the presidential campaigns. This could include a campaign manager or an organizer within a state campaign. The fifth category included government workers, politicians, and lobbyists who are not specifically in the presidential race. This could range from Congress persons currently in office to members of the executive branch. The sixth section was specifically for voters. This would include average people of voting age, who are not

necessarily prominent figures, but who could comment on the political environment and the politicians. Any reference that did not fall into one of the above categories was put into the seventh category of other.

The *New York Times* had the most references per story with six. It also had a wide variety of references. The *New York Times* averaged about one reference in each category, in each story. On average, the longest references and sound bites were given to candidates, who spoke on average about 60 words. The professionals and government workers were close behind, each given just over 40 words per story. The *New York Times* gave political pundits the least time to talk, with an average of just 10 words per reference dedicated to them.

The three cable news shows were very different from the *New York Times*, and quite similar to one another. They all averaged between 2 and 3 references per show. The majority of their references were political pundits. The pundits on *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Anderson Cooper 360* both averaged over 400 words per reference. The pundits on the *Rachel Maddow Show* only averaged just over 200 words per reference. The cable news shows also referenced candidates frequently. Though candidates were referenced almost as often as pundits, they only averaged about 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the length of sound bites.

*NBC Nightly News* differed from both the cable news shows and the *New York Times*. NBC averaged 3 references per show. Since NBC had the shortest stories of any media outlet its references were shorter as well. The longest sound bites were from candidates, who only averaged about 60 words per sound bite. The candidates also had the most sound bites, averaging about 1 per story. Voters were a close second averaging just under 1 reference per story. Even

though the voters had the next most references, pundits actually averaged more time per reference with over 20 words per sound bite.

The number of references does not necessarily indicate better or worse media coverage. The type of references and the length of each reference can help explain the composition of the story though. This correlates with the type of coverage each news outlet is using. It could also help explain the importance of different references in certain types of coverage.

### *Types of Stories*

Next, Table Six summarizes the types of stories. There are several different categories a story could be placed in. The first was strategic game. This type of story focuses specifically on a candidate's strategy. The content could range from fundraising to issue position, but the story must always be framed in a way that focuses on a candidate's strategy surrounding the event or statement that is made. This type of story was the most frequent type of story across all media outlets. Over 30 percent of all the stories analyzed fell within this category.

The second type of story is winning/losing. In many ways this was very similar to a strategic game story but focuses less on strategy and more on the interpretation of the pundit as to who is ahead and behind in the polls and why. Winning/losing stories made up about 20 percent of the total stories that were analyzed. One of the issues that arose during the research was that the first two types of stories were very similar and sometimes overlapped within one story. To combat this, the story was categorized based on the main purpose of the story. If the main purpose of the story was to analyze the strategy of a candidate, it fell under the first category. If the main point of the story was speculation about who was winning or losing, it was placed in the second category.

The third type of story is campaign dispute and controversy which focuses on blunders that the candidates or their campaigns have made. One example that occurred frequently was Herman Cain's sex scandal. These types of stories were told using the framework of a blunder. There were much less of these types of stories than of the first two. Only about 11 percent of the stories analyzed had to do with campaign disputes or blunders. These generally tended to be small things like misstatements or bad press. There were however, some bigger stories such as Herman Cain's scandal which caused him to drop out of the race. Michelle Bachmann's scandal with her campaign manager which led him to work for Ron Paul was a big story as well.

The next two categories focused on policies and issues. One type of story encompassed any issue story. It included any story that really focused or was framed in light of issues. Surprisingly this made up a large portion of the total stories with just over 28 percent of stories falling into this category. The second category dealing with issues focused on a candidate's political background. This type of issue coverage was used much less frequently, and it only made up less than three percent of the total stories.

The final two types of stories also made up a very small portion of the total stories both with less than five percent. The first type focused on the candidate's personal background. This would include a candidate's family, educational background, and previous experience outside of politics. This made up only a small percentage of stories and was generally framed as a human interest piece. The last type of story was an event or some other type of political story. There were very few of these types of stories in any of the news outlets.

Two types of stories made up the majority of the *New York Times*' coverage. The most common types of stories were strategic game (41 percent) but the *New York Times* also had a

high amount of policy issue coverage. Most of their stories fell into one of these two categories, there were very few others. In fact, the *New York Times* had the highest percentage of strategic game stories compared to the other sources. *The Rachel Maddow Show* was a close second with 33 percent, and the other three news shows were not far behind. Though this is only a plurality, and not a majority of stories, it is still a high percentage. Especially when acknowledging that even with seven different categories, still about one third of the stories fell under this category. This was expected though, because research has shown that a very high percentage of stories fall into the category of non-policy issue coverage.

The other big category of non-policy issue stories is winning/losing. *NBC Nightly News* had the highest percentage of these types of stories, at 36 percent. *The O'Reilly Factor* also had a high percentage. The other three shows had a much lower percentage. The combination of the first two categories makes up the majority of the total stories across all media outlets. *NBC Nightly News*, the *New York Times*, and *The O'Reilly Factor* specifically had a very high percentage of both of these types of stories. These 3 mediums focused a majority of their coverage on the horse race aspect of politics rather than issues. *Anderson Cooper 360* did not have a high percentage of issue based stories either. His coverage was more widely spread across each category though.

*The Rachel Maddow Show* on the other hand was the only show in which a strong plurality of her coverage focused on issues. Almost 45 percent of her stories were issue based stories. This show follows my hypothesis that the political opinion shows would have more issues based coverage. It is not however consistent with the other two cable news shows. She also had a high percentage of strategic game stories as well; they made up about 1/3 of her total stories. She had very few other types of stories on her show at all.



Since the cable news shows were very similar I chose to compare them as group to the other two outlets. First, I compared whether group one, the three cable news outlets, varied significantly from group two, *NBC Nightly News* and the *New York Times* (See Table 7). I found that when using these two categories there was no significant differences in the data. Since the *New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News* were very different descriptively though, I also chose to compare them separately.

Next I ran two tests using the *New York Times* as a comparison. The first test compared the *New York Times* to the four television news outlets summed together (See Table 7). Even with the small number of stories the *New York Times* had comparatively there was still statistical significance. I then, compared the *New York Times* to just the three cable news shows specifically. I excluded the NBC data for this specific test because it varied significantly from the three cable news outlets. In this case I found that the *New York Times* had significantly more policy coverage than the cable news shows. This reinforces the theory that the *New York Times* had the best overall coverage as compared to the other sources I analyzed.

I then switched the test and compared *NBC Nightly News* directly to the three cable news shows (See Table 7). The difference in policy framework was very close to being statistically significant at .089 confidence level, however it was not. The other categories were not even close to being statistically significant. One of the factors that played a role in the lack of statistical significance here is the low number of stories from the *NBC Nightly News*. Because there were so few stories it was hard to find statistical significance here. This is however, still worth mentioning because with a larger sample size this category would most likely have been statistically significant.

### *Interpretive and Descriptive Framework*

Another factor in issue coverage versus horse race coverage is whether the coverage is interpretive or descriptive in nature. Descriptive stories focus on the facts such as what happened, who was involved, where it took place, etc. These types of stories just inform viewers about the basic facts surrounding a certain issue or event without interpreting what it means. Interpretive stories are the opposite. The focus of these stories is interpreting why issues or events happened and why they are important. Most stories are a combination of the two, so rather than trying to force the stories to fit into mutually exclusive categories, the story was placed on a five point scale (see Table 8). Across the mediums, over 70 percent of the stories were either mainly interpretive or somewhat interpretive. Fewer than 10 percent of the total stories were descriptive in nature. *NBC Nightly News* and *The O'Reilly Factor* both had close to 70 percent of their stories categorized as mainly interpretive. The other 3 shows had below 50 percent in this category, but interpretive stories still made up a strong plurality of their coverage.

Though there were no significant differences in the amount of interpretation and description in all cases, there were several tests that were statistically significant (See Table 9). I compared the *New York Times* to the four television news outlets summed together. Even with the small number of stories the *New York Times* there was statistical significance in the policies being analyzed through interpretive or descriptive framework. The results were even more significant when I excluded the NBC data. When I compared the *New York Times* to just the three cable shows, I found that the cable news shows used significantly more interpretation than the *New York Times*. This reinforces the theory that the *New York Times* had the best overall coverage as compared to the other sources I analyzed.

This is congruent with previous theories because all the cable news shows have a lot of extra time compared with the traditional nightly news. The average story that was analyzed was over a thousand words (See Table 2). There can only be so much description of events so the fact that most of the stories were much longer implies that there must be some sort of interpretation. Previous research has shown that political news coverage tends to focus on the interpretation of events rather than the actual description. This happens for a variety of reasons including economic and social value.

The last category analyzing the make-up of stories is the framework used to interpret the stories. These fall into five categories. The first is strategic game. This would include strategic game stories as well as stories like winning and losing. The next type of framework is national policy problem. This is a framework used when news shows are discussing issues. The third type of framework is human interest pieces. These are stories are more focused on things like personal lives of candidates. If it does not fall into the first 3 categories, there is another category as well as a not applicable category. As with the previous categories the majority of stories from each medium fell into the first label of strategic game framework (See Table 10). The New York Times, however, did have a very high percentage of stories (close to 45 percent) under the label of national policy problems. The rest of the outlets though had much smaller percentages ranging from 8 percent to 25 percent. There were very few of the other 3 categories. In fact, the combination of the last 3 categories made up less than 15 percent of all the stories.

## Conclusions

There were several significant findings in my data worth analyzing. Overall, there was some statistical significance in the amount of policy coverage between sources. This supports previous research that concluded that coverage of issues varies based on the type of media outlet (Patterson 1993). This was especially true when the newspaper was compared with the television news. The *NBC Nightly News*, though is not significantly different from the cable news shows, was very close. This was probably due to the lack of stories that I analyzed through *NBC Nightly News*. With a larger sample size this could have been statistically significant.

The differences in the type of coverage were supported by several noteworthy differences in descriptions of the data. First of all, the length of story differed greatly between news outlets. The *NBC Nightly News* had by far the shortest stories, and they also had by far the least policy coverage. This supports Patterson's (1993) theory that some of the obstacles to good issue coverage were based in time constraints of the different types of media. It was also consistent with Bennett's (2008) theory that much of the poor issue coverage by media outlets was due to economic and time limitations.

Along those same lines, the percent of stories that were political in nature varied greatly by media outlet. *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *The O'Reilly Factor* had the highest percentage of political stories which probably affected the statistical significance of the data. The *New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News* both had a very small percentage of stories from December and that made it harder to find statistical significance within the data.

Some other things worth noting are the differences between the references and the sound bites. Though there was not a large amount of literature covering the differences between the

length and amount of references and sound bites, my findings seemed to point to some correlation between the type and length of the reference and the type of coverage that the particular media outlet used. The *New York Times* had the highest percent of issue coverage, and they also used the most professionals and candidates as references. *NBC Nightly News* on the other hand, had the lowest percentage of policy issues and also had very few professional references and very few candidates quoted. Though there is not necessarily a causal relationship per say, the research implies a correlation which should be studied in the future.

Another statistically significant finding was the amount of interpretation done by each media outlet. The amount of interpretation varied between news outlets and correlated with the amount of horse race or game coverage. The *New York Times* used the least interpretation overall and NBC used the most. The cable news shows were in between, they all had more interpretation than NBC but less than the *New York Times*. This is worth mentioning because it correlates to the amount of issue coverage used by the media outlets. It also supports Patterson's (1993) findings about coverage mainly focusing on interpretation rather than just facts.

After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the media still does a poor job of covering political campaigns and issues. There is however a substantial amount of variance between news outlets' coverage within that spectrum. Each medium varied in the amount of coverage they gave to issues versus candidates. Newspapers still do the best job of covering issues; however, the cable news shows are not far behind. The nightly news still does the poorest job. The electorate seems to understand this at some level because audiences for cable news shows have been growing whereas audiences for the nightly news have been dwindling (Morales 2008).

Media coverage has not been altered substantially by the changing landscape. The issue coverage by the news media today is still very similar to Patterson's study done in 1993. The new television cable news shows have added a dimension to the study though. They have a very different type of coverage from the other media outlets. In this study there were significant differences between the type of coverage between the cable news shows and the other two media outlets. There were also many differences in the amount of interpretation and description as well as the content. The length and amount of references and sound bites differed too. Newspapers still have the best overall neutral issue coverage. The cable news shows however, do have some issue coverage though it tends to be more interpretive than that of the *New York Times*.

There are several limitations to the completed study. The first is the amount of data and the unit of analysis. The data set I used was fairly small. With extra time to analyze additional shows, the data would be more accurate and may have further statistical significance. In some categories the results were close to being statistically significant. With less than two hundred stories to work with however, there were as few as 24 stories for some news outlets which decreased the likelihood of significance. Even with the limited amount of stories in my data set though, much of my data proved to be statistically significant. The constrained amount of stories is a limitation. It does not mean however, my results are necessarily inaccurate.

Although the study was constrained by a short time frame, it does still suggest a changing media landscape. In order to expand upon this study there are several things that could be done. In my study, I used the story as a unit of analysis. This is an acceptable unit of analysis, and was in fact used by Patterson (a leader in the field) in some of his work. Using the sentence or paragraph as a unit of analysis may provide more accurate results though. Many stories talk about multiple candidates, issues, and polls. So using the story as a unit of analysis required

more personal judgment calls that needed to be made about the framework and type of story, as well as about the type of interpretation used. Coding by paragraph or sentence may prove to have more precise results.

The research could also be expanded by looking at some specific relationships that were implied by this data. It seemed the more partisan the cable television news shows were, the more issue coverage there was. *The Rachel Maddow Show* and *The O'Reilly Factor* were very similar in many ways and seemed to have the same basic style of coverage, even though they are on opposite ends of the political spectrum. Though *Anderson Cooper 360* (which is considered a more politically moderate show) was more similar to these two shows than the *NBC Nightly News* or the *New York Times*, it varied considerably. This would support the idea that partisanship is a determinant in the type of coverage a medium uses (Morris 2007). Future studies should look specifically into this correlation and see if it is indeed a causal relationship and if the relationship is statistically significant.

Another area for further research is the references and the sound bites that are used. Though there was not enough information for me to prove a causal relationship, there did seem to be a correlation between the type and length of sound bite and the type of coverage that was being used. For example, the *New York Times* used very few political pundits, most of their references were to professionals in the field or to candidates and they did seem to have the best overall coverage. Further research, specifically on this relationship may prove to have interesting results.

Finally, the media landscape is continually changing and this study did not acknowledge the internet's role in new media. The internet has changed how people get their news and has

allowed us as a society to be more globally connected. It has also lessened the gatekeeping role of the media. I believe there would be significant differences between television news, newspapers, and online news. This would be an interesting way to expand upon current research in this field.

Overall, this study provided a lot of new information. There were significant differences in the type of stories and the frameworks that were used by different media outlets. There were several factors that contributed to this including the length of the story, the neutrality of the source, and the type of supplemental information used by the source. The information gathered in this study reinforced the idea that newspapers provide the best overall political coverage (Patterson 1993). The study also found that cable news shows actually provide better, more thorough coverage of issues and candidates than do shows like *NBC Nightly News*.

The study implies that though there is no media outlet that does a really good job of covering politics and political issues, there are significant differences between media outlets. The cable news shows had a very different format for coverage than did the traditional types of media and it was evident in the results. They had a significant amount of issue coverage and the amount of interpretation and description varied from the traditional news. This differing format is continuing to expand and to be revised. In the future perhaps more shows will use this type of coverage because it does seem to have more issue content than other television shows. Though overall the *New York Times* the best coverage of any other outlet, the cable news shows did not necessarily do a bad job with coverage and they added a different dimension to the current news landscape.



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Table 1

## Frequency of Political Stories During December 2011

	NBC Nightly News	The New York Times	The O'Reilly Factor	The Rachel Maddow Show	<i>Anderson Cooper 360</i>
<b>Number of Political Stories</b>	25	24	52	54	24
<b>Total Number of Stories</b>	131	115	78	78	121
<b>Percentage</b>	19%	20%	66%	69%	19%

Table 2

## Political News Stories, December 2011

Source of Stories	Frequency	Percent
New York Times	24	13.4
NBC Nightly News	25	14.0
The O'Reilly Factor	52	29.1
The Rachel Maddow Show	54	30.2
<i>Anderson Cooper 360</i>	24	13.4
Total	179	100.0

**Table 3****Coverage of Candidates by Five Media Sources, December 2011**

Story Covered:	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Barack Obama	56	31.3	31.3	31.3
Single Republican candidate	71	39.7	39.7	70.9
Multiple Republican candidates	18	10.1	10.1	81.0
Obama and Republicans	4	2.2	2.2	83.2
All candidates	30	16.8	16.8	100.0
Total	179	100.0	100.0	

**Note:** Based on political stories appearing in New York Times, NBC Nightly News, The O'Reilly Factor, The Rachel Maddow Show, *Anderson Cooper 360*

**Table 4****World Count of Political Stories Appearing in Five Media Sources, December 2011**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total words in story	179	47	11172	1148.73	1039.909
Total Number of references or soundbites	179	0	19	3.22	3.102

**Note:** Based on political stories appearing in New York Times, NBC Nightly News, The O'Reilly Factor, The Rachel Maddow Show, *Anderson Cooper 360*

Table 5

## References or Sound Bites by Persons Other than Reporter, by Media Source, December 2011

	Source story appeared in											
	New York Times N=24		NBC Nightly News N=25		The O'Reilly Factor N=52		The Rachel Maddow Show N=54		<i>Anderson Cooper 360</i> N=24		Total N=179	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Number of references or sound bites	6.83	4.04	3.32	2.41	2.04	1.12	2.91	3.55	2.75	1.75	3.22	3.10
Number of references to candidate	1.08	1.18	1.64	1.44	.50	.67	.74	1.35	1.04	.62	.88	1.15
Total length of candidate references	59.08	82.74	69.56	65.84	110.46	308.35	47.32	80.31	117.83	189.06	79.98	190.46
Number of references to professionals in field	1.17	1.58	.32	.90	.12	.38	.13	.39	.13	.34	.29	.81
Total length of professional references	43.08	62.94	12.68	34.54	32.83	116.57	63.35	184.12	15.29	53.56	38.25	124.08
Number of references to pundits	.67	1.13	.40	.76	1.15	.75	1.26	2.14	1.17	1.17	1.02	1.43



Total length of pundit references	10.29	20.42	21.60	56.36	414.44	356.06	223.94	310.41	416.29	461.41	248.17	346.28
Number of references to campaign officials	1.04	1.40	.00	.000	.04	.19	.06	.30	.17	.48	.19	.66
Total length of campaign references	31.75	61.80	.00	.000	2.13	11.10	.52	2.70	36.50	145.13	9.93	58.91
Number of references to Lobbyist/Government Workers	1.25	1.78	.32	.75	.10	.30	.57	1.06	.17	.48	.44	1.01
Total length of lobbyist references	42.13	63.94	7.64	18.41	13.39	72.14	72.56	207.98	4.21	11.96	33.17	125.78
Number of references to voters	1.63	3.92	.60	1.08	.08	.33	.15	.53	.04	.20	.37	1.59
Total length of voter references	23.71	51.62	12.28	23.08	2.38	10.22	5.87	25.07	1.79	8.78	7.60	26.35
Number of other references	.00	.00	.04	.20	.06	.24	.00	.00	.04	.20	.03	.17
Total length of other reference	.00	.00	.08	.40	16.75	104.35	.00	.00	.92	4.49	5.00	56.39

**Table 6**  
**Type of Story in Five Media Sources, December 2011**

		Source story appeared in					Total
		New York Times	NBC Nightly News	The O'Reilly Factor	The Rachel Maddow Show	<i>Anderson Cooper 360</i>	
Strategic game	Count	10	7	14	18	6	55
	% within Source story appeared in	41.7%	28.0%	26.9%	33.3%	25.0%	30.7%
Winning/losing	Count	3	9	15	5	3	35
	% within Source story appeared in	12.5%	36.0%	28.8%	9.3%	12.5%	19.6%
Campaign dispute or controversy	Count	1	1	6	5	7	20
	% within Source story appeared in	4.2%	4.0%	11.5%	9.3%	29.2%	11.2%
Policies and issues	Count	9	2	11	24	5	51
	% within Source story appeared in	37.5%	8.0%	21.2%	44.4%	20.8%	28.5%
Candidates' political background	Count	1	0	4	0	0	5
	% within Source story appeared in	4.2%	.0%	7.7%	.0%	.0%	2.8%
Candidate's personal background	Count	0	3	1	2	2	8
	% within Source story appeared in	.0%	12.0%	1.9%	3.7%	8.3%	4.5%
Other (event or non-political)	Count	0	3	1	0	1	5
	% within Source story appeared in	.0%	12.0%	1.9%	.0%	4.2%	2.8%
Total	Count	24	25	52	54	24	179
	% within Source story appeared in	100.0 %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0 %

**Table 7****Difference of Means: Percent of Stories Analyzed through Policy Framework, December 2011**

<b>Types of Stories</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Talk Shows</b>	.2308	.42295	-.198	.843
<b>All Other Shows</b>	.2449	.43448	-.195	.846
<b>Talk Shows</b>	.2308	.42295	1.711	.089
<b>NBC Nightly News</b>	.0800	.27689	2.262	.028
<b>Talk Shows</b>	.2308	.42295	-1.919	.057
<b>New York Times</b>	.4167	.50361	-1.701	.100
<b>All Televisions Shows</b>	.2065	.40607	1.949	.061
<b>New York Times</b>	.4167	.50361	2.282	.024

Table 8

## Interpretive or Descriptive Stories in Five Media Sources, December 2011

		Source story appeared in					Total
		New York Times	NBC Nightly News	The O'Reilly Factor	The Rachel Maddow Show	<i>Anderson Cooper 360</i>	New York Times
Mainly interpretive	Count	7	17	35	21	11	91
	% within Source story appeared in	29.2%	68.0%	67.3%	38.9%	45.8%	50.8%
Somewhat interpretive	Count	5	1	12	14	3	35
	% within Source story appeared in	20.8%	4.0%	23.1%	25.9%	12.5%	19.6%
About equally divided	Count	4	2	5	12	2	25
	% within Source story appeared in	16.7%	8.0%	9.6%	22.2%	8.3%	14.0%
Somewhat descriptive	Count	6	0	0	7	4	17
	% within Source story appeared in	25.0%	.0%	.0%	13.0%	16.7%	9.5%
Mainly descriptive	Count	2	5	0	0	4	11
	% within Source story appeared in	8.3%	20.0%	.0%	.0%	16.7%	6.1%

Table 9

**Difference of Means: Interpretive v Descriptive in Nature, December 2011**

<b>Types of Stories</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Talk Shows</b>	1.89	1.129	-1.974	.050
<b>All Other Shows</b>	2.31	1.530	-1.724	.089
<b>Talk Shows</b>	1.89	1.129	-.404	.687
<b>NBC Nightly News</b>	2.00	1.633	-.316	.755
<b>Talk Shows</b>	1.89	1.129	-2.818	.005
<b>New York Times</b>	2.63	1.377	-2.458	.020
<b>All Televisions Shows</b>	1.91	1.219	2.403	.023
<b>New York Times</b>	2.63	1.377	2.629	.009

**Table 10**  
**Framework of Interpretation Relied on by the Five Media Sources, December 2011**

			Source story appeared in					Total
			New York Times	NBC Nightly News	The O'Reilly Factor	The Rachel Maddow Show	<i>Anderson Cooper 360</i>	New York Times
Framework of interpretation	Strategic game	Count	13	17	38	35	11	114
		% within Source story appeared in	54.2%	68.0%	73.1%	64.8%	45.8%	63.7%
	National policy problem	Count	10	2	11	14	5	42
		% within Source story appeared in	41.7%	8.0%	21.2%	25.9%	20.8%	23.5%
	Human interest	Count	1	3	0	1	2	7
		% within Source story appeared in	4.2%	12.0%	.0%	1.9%	8.3%	3.9%
	Other	Count	0	0	3	3	4	10
		% within Source story appeared in	.0%	.0%	5.8%	5.6%	16.7%	5.6%
	Not interpretive	Count	0	3	0	1	2	6
		% within Source story appeared in	.0%	12.0%	.0%	1.9%	8.3%	3.4%

## Appendix A

Front Page of the New York Times if they continue on following page follow them and finish the story.  
For each TV Show do whole transcript.

Date (MMDDYY)

Source

1. New York Times
2. NBC Nightly News
3. The O'Reilly Factor
4. The Rachel Maddow Show
5. *Anderson Cooper 360*

Word Count

Candidate

1. Obama
2. Romney
3. Bachman
4. Perry
5. Santorum
6. Gingrich
7. Huntsman
8. Paul
9. Cain
10. All

Type of Story

1. Strategic game (strategy, tactics, maneuvering, fundraising, etc.)
2. Winning/ losing (poll standings, reporter's assessments of the candidate's chances, expressions voter support or lack thereof, etc)
3. Campaign dispute, controversy, blunder (Cain scandal, Perry gaff, etc.)
4. Policy Issues, Candidate's policy program (Foreign Policy, Domestic Policy, Economic Policy, Civil Rights)
5. Candidates political background
6. Candidates personal background
7. Other (event or non political story)

Interpretive or Descriptive in nature

1. Mainly interpretive (why, how)
2. Somewhat interpretive
3. About equally divided
4. Somewhat descriptive
5. Mainly Descriptive (who, what, when, where)

Framework of Interpretation

1. Strategic Game
2. National Policy Problem
3. Human Interest
4. Other
5. Not Interpretive

Number of References/ Outside Sources

Types References / Outside Sources

1. Candidate
2. Professional in Field (lawyer, police officer, etc)
3. Political Pundit
4. Person within campaign
5. Lobbyist/ Government Worker
6. Voter
7. Other

Length of Quotations (Word Count)