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Party Reputations, Journalistic Expectations: How Issue Ownership Influences Election News


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if Dole was gravely injured ([Canellos & Scales, 1996](#)). The visual may have had an impact beyond the words, whatever their tone or source, that accompanied the photo.

6. As described in Appendix B, there are slight differences between the 1992 and 1996 favorability measures, on one hand, and the 2000 measure, on the other.

7. A list is available from the author upon request.

8. In 1992 and 1996, a randomly selected 5% of all stories were double coded each week. In 2000, one round of reliability tests was conducted during the project. Cohen's kappa for intercoder reliability for the focus of the stories was .85 in 1992, .90 in 1996, and .81 in 2000. The kappa statistics for the favorability measures were also within acceptable ranges of reliability ([Banerjee et al., 1999](#)). In 1992, reliability for Bush favorability was .75, and .73 for Clinton. In 1996, the kappa statistic for Dole favorability was .79, and .77 for Clinton. In 2000, kappa was .74 for Bush and .75 for Gore. This is consistent with other studies analyzing media favorability ([Neuendorf, 2002](#)).

9. Some recent work has challenged the durability of these reputations. [Sides \(2006\)](#) shows that the party advantages on some issues, rather than remaining stable, have fluctuated considerably over the last two decades. [Holian \(2004\)](#) demonstrates that Clinton's efforts to focus on the economy have helped him to challenge the historic Republican advantage on Petro issues. The study also suggests a new definition of the journalistic convention—conventionally understood as a set of shared beliefs about the reputations of public figures—static and perceptually consistent across news coverage.

10. To be sure, the study also found that farmers and ranchers are these groups mentioned aside from economic issues. Stories that included reference to labor

unions typically had more to do with unemployment, economic recession, or trade rather than anything substantive about the unions or labor rights themselves. Similarly, news mentioning farmers usually was framed in terms of broader economic trends, not with regard to subsidies or their position as a Democratic constituency. As such, it seemed appropriate to code these as economic, rather than partisan, issues. Ultimately, any effects of my tweaking of the categories are likely minimal: Just one-half of 1% of campaign stories in the sample focused on farmers, and about 1% of stories dealt with labor unions. The results are substantively unchanged when labor and farmers are coded as Democratic issues, though the labor stories—most of which came in 1992—do benefit Clinton and hurt Bush, as my hypothesis predicts. Since Clinton received better coverage on economic issues more generally, it is impossible to say whether this is a reflection of labor being an economic or Democratic topic.

11. All of the results presented here are restricted to stories about the campaign, defined as those that include a favorability rating for both candidates. Stories about the activities of the Bush presidency in 1992, for example, are not included. If, however, that story included a mention of Clinton that resulted in a favorability score, then it would be included in the analysis. The strategy has the effect of not allowing for an investigation of incumbent-only coverage during the election years, but also reduces the chances that the analysis will include stories that were not focused on the president.

12. I ran a series of regression models to test the hypothesis that news coverage of economic issues would have a larger impact on favorability ratings for Clinton than for Bush. The results show that, in general, news coverage of economic issues has a positive effect on favorability ratings for Clinton, but a negative effect on favorability ratings for Bush. This effect is statistically significant for Clinton, but not for Bush. Among the 100 stories that were statistically significant, 60% mentioned Clinton, 30% mentioned Bush, and 10% mentioned both. In general, the effect of news coverage on favorability ratings is positive for Clinton and negative for Bush. This is true for Democratic issues as well as for economic issues.

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negative coverage for his opponent on the order of 3 points. The effect of the poll standing variable, which indicates the Republican candidate's lead on the Democrat, suggests variations in public support during the last few months of the campaign may not be as influential as is commonly supposed, at least when controlling for other factors. While four of the six coefficients are significant, only two are pointed in the expected direction. In 1992, Bush's favorability scores declined as he approached Clinton in the polls, and in 2000, Gore received better coverage as Bush's lead grew. A candidate's coverage improves considerably during his party convention. For example, Bush in 1992 received a 16.5-point boost in favorability during the Republican convention. The role of debates in shaping favorability is minimal, as only 2 of the 12 debate coefficients are statistically significant. Interestingly, in two of the three elections, coverage becomes more favorable to the winning candidate and less favorable to the loser as election day nears.

14. The sample of stories in the models presents some estimation concerns. While the sample was drawn with a goal of maximizing generalizability—especially with regard to geography and political orientation—the stories in the analysis are ultimately the result of a convenience sample. This is a potential problem if the stories from any single newspaper share characteristics—perhaps because of the paper's editorial orientation or simply because the same reporter is writing many of the campaign stories. If there

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15. These numbers assume the stories appear in a newspaper that did not endorse either candidate. When a newspaper gives a candidate its endorsement, the effects grow larger, from one-half of a point to about 3 points. The effects decrease, though less sharply, when a newspaper endorses the candidate's opponent.

16. Across the two sets of models—one primary issue content, and one for the cumulative issue content—there are 20 coefficients that test the effects of owned-issue content on favorability. Of those, 14 were signed in the expected direction, and only one—a negative effect for Clinton of Democratic issue news in 1996—was contradictory.

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