How the Public Uses the Media

Media Studies Center/Roper Center Surveys on “Voters and the Media in 1996”

Much of the data reported in this section are drawn from Media Studies Center/Roper Center surveys on “Voters and the Media in 1996.” The project includes a series of national voter surveys through the course of the presidential campaign. Data from two surveys from this project are presented. One is a national survey conducted by telephone in February 1996 with 2,007 registered voters. The second is a September 1996 telephone survey with 1,002 registered voters. (The September survey includes 667 panel recontacts from the February survey and 335 new cross-sectional interviews.) Data from Media Studies Center/Roper Center surveys of Washington-based journalists (N=133), the nation’s newspaper editors (N=100), and Members of the U.S. Congress, all conducted in November/December 1995, are also included here.

Americans Get Most of Their Information About the Campaign from TV News...

**Question:** From which news medium would you say you get most of your information about the presidential campaign...?

- Combination: 11%
- TV: 59%
- Radio: 12%
- Newspapers: 18%

Sept. 1996

...But Learn More From Watching the Candidates Debate

**Question:** Generally speaking, how much do you learn about the campaign from each of the following...

- Watching presidential candidates debate live...: 45%
- Reading newspaper stories about campaign...: 32%
- Watching TV news stories...: 30%
- Reading editorials in the newspaper...: 23%
- Reading articles in news magazines...: 21%
- Watching TV programs like “Crossfire”...: 18%
- TV journalists assess performance after debate or speech...: 18%
- Watching Sunday morning talk shows...: 15%
- Listening to political talk radio...: 15%
- Reading newspaper journalists’ accounts...: 14%
- Watching paid political ads...: 5%

Sept. 1996

**Percent saying “a lot”**

- Watching presidential candidates debate live...: 29%
- Reading newspaper stories about campaign...: 32%
- Watching TV news stories...: 31%
- Reading editorials in the newspaper...: 44%
- Reading articles in news magazines...: 46%
- Watching TV programs like “Crossfire”...: 63%
- TV journalists assess performance after debate or speech...: 55%
- Watching Sunday morning talk shows...: 69%
- Listening to political talk radio...: 67%
- Reading newspaper journalists’ accounts...: 57%
- Watching paid political ads...: 77%
Do the Media Cover What You Want Them To? Do They Give You, and the Nation, What is Needed?

We Want to Know More About Where the Candidates Stand on the Issues...

Question: ...Please tell me how interested you are in...?

Percent saying "very interested"

Feb. 1996

...And less About their Personal Lives and "Inside Politics"

Question: ...Do you think the news media devote too much attention, too little attention, or about the right amount of attention to...?

Percent saying "too much attention"

Our Assessment of the Media This Campaign Season is Mixed

February 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News media coverage is confusing and unclear...</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of media coverage... candidates don't focus on issues...</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media give advantage to front runner...</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage discourages good people from running...</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage helps to make up my mind...</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/96</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

September 1996

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Media do a good job of identifying where cand. stand...</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media keep focused on the issues...</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media hold candidates accountable...</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage is entertaining...</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media cover issues important to people my age...</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media cover issues interesting to people who make as much money as I do</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Please tell me whether you agree...?
Are the Media Biased in Partisan and Ideological Terms?

We Detect a Partisan Bias in Media Coverage, and This Sense Intensifies As The Campaign Proceeds

February 1996

**Question:** Overall, do you think news media coverage of the presidential campaign favors the ...?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No bias</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
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</table>


April 1996

**Question:** In the way they have been covering the presidential race so far, do you think that news organizations are biased in favor of...?

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<td>Democrats</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No bias</td>
<td>53%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

September 1996

**Question:** Overall, do you think news media coverage of the presidential campaign favors the ...?

<table>
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<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No bias</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(We felt the same way in the Heat of the 1988 Campaign)

**Question:** In the way they have been covering the presidential race so far, do you think that news organizations are biased in favor of...?

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No bias</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 1988.

Current Partisan Leanings and the 1992 Presidential Vote of Washington Journalists and Newspaper Editors Show a Marked Democratic Tilt

**Party ID**

- **Washington Journalists**
  - Democrat: 50%
  - Independent: 37%
  - Republican: 4%

- **Newspaper Editors**
  - Democrat: 31%
  - Independent: 39%
  - Republican: 14%

**1992 Presidential Vote**

- **Washington Journalists**
  - Clinton: 89%
  - Bush: 7%
  - Other: 2%

- **Newspaper Editors**
  - Clinton: 60%
  - Bush: 22%
  - Other: 9%
  - Refused: 5%
**Media Bias**

We Detect an Ideological Bias in Media Coverage...

**Question:** Overall, do you think news media coverage of the presidential campaign is biased toward the liberal point of view, the conservative point of view, or do you think coverage is pretty evenly balanced?

...That is Compatible with the Orientation of Editors and Journalists in Washington

Concern Over Media Power and Influence

"The News Media Have Too Much Control in Defining the Issues of the Campaign"

While Not Giving Politicians High Marks, We'll Take Their Word Over the Media's

**Question:** Do you agree... "I'm more likely to believe what the news media say about the candidates than what the candidates say about themselves."

Carry the Conventions Live...And Without All the Commentary

**Question:** Do you think the networks should carry the conventions live...?

**Question:** Do you prefer watching the conventions with or without commentary...?

**Note:** Asked of those who said they followed the convention (76%).