



PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

THE IRAQ WAR COVERAGE IS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES: THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL COVERAGE IS ABOUT DEMOCRATS

A Quarterly Report of the PEJ News Coverage Index Spring 2007

The war in Iraq has dwarfed all other topics in the American news media in the early months of 2007—taking up more than three times the space devoted to the next most popular subject. But only a portion of this has focused on the state of things in Iraq itself, and even less about the plight of Iraqis and the internal affairs of their country, according to a new study of the American news media.

The majority of the war coverage, 55%, has been about the political debate back in Washington. Less than a third, 31%, has been focused on events in Iraq itself. And about half that coverage has been about American soldiers there.

In all, just one in six stories about the war has been focused on Iraqis, Iraqi casualties or the internal political affairs of their country, the report finds, while more than eight in ten have focused primarily Americans or American policy.

These are some of the findings drawn from the first quarterly report of the Project for Excellence in Journalism's [News Coverage Index](#), a weekly content analysis of a broad cross-section of national news media.

The findings, among other things, show how the Iraqi war hangs over the presidency of George W. Bush and all other political activity in Washington. They also suggest the extent to which the U.S. media is covering the war from Washington, and with a U.S.-centric lens. This may be understandable given Americans' intense interest in resolving the conflict—and given the difficulties of covering the war on the ground. One question is whether Americans are learning everything they need to evaluate the state of affairs in Iraq and what would happen if American troops left.

Beyond Iraq, only one other story stands out above any others—and the war even looms as part of it. The presidential campaign of 2008, has received startlingly heavy coverage even though key primaries are nine months away, and the general election won't occur for nearly a year and a half. The campaign has taken up 7% of the newshole so far this year, nearly twice the amount of the next most heavily covered story not related to Iraq. And in that, coverage of Democrats outweighed that of Republicans by roughly three-to-one.

These findings are derived from a quarterly look at data from the weekly PEJ News Coverage Index, a research initiative by the Project for Excellence in Journalism that

began in January. The Project's weekly NCI, which examines the news agenda of [48 different outlets](#) from five sectors of the media, is designed to provide news consumers, journalists and researchers with hard data about what stories and topics the media are covering, the trajectories of major stories and differences among news platforms (see [methodology](#).)

But there are limits to what can safely be interpreted from the data on a weekly basis. In quarterly segments, it is possible to compare channels, timeslots, TV programs and newspapers, and to probe coverage of particular stories and topics much more deeply.

Among other findings from the first 90 days of the year:

- Even though both party nominations are wide open, Democrats have received nearly triple the coverage of Republicans (61% versus 24%) in the first three months of the year (before the GOP began holding debates). And two candidates have grabbed most of that, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.
- Virtually none of the campaign coverage in these early days tells much about where candidates would take the country, their policy proposals, record or character. Nine out of ten stories were about tactics and horse race.
- The three cable news channels have been distinct from one another in the news they choose to cover. Fox News has devoted less time to the war in Iraq, for instance, and attached itself a good deal more to the death of Anna Nicole Smith. CNN was more of a mix, standing out primarily for a greater focus on immigration. MSNBC's mix of stories suggests an inside-the-Beltway agenda.
- In contrast, even as the ratings positions among the three evening newscasts are changing for first time in more than a decade, the lineup of what is covered on the programs is nearly indistinguishable. Whatever differences viewers are noticing, it is in the way the stories are put together—the writing and reporting—and in the manner of the anchors. It is not in the topics being covered.
- The online news sites studied have the broadest news agenda of all and the widest mix of international stories. Online news was also the only sector in which the events on the ground in Iraq—rather than the Washington-based policy debate—was the biggest story of the year to date.
- The controversy over the firings of eight U.S. attorneys never really generated broad public interest, and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales's crucial Congressional testimony was overshadowed by the massacre on the Virginia Tech campus. But the controversy—a tale of Beltway intrigue—was the fourth-biggest story in the first three months of the year, outpacing even such stories as Anna Nicole Smith, which finished 8th.¹

¹ The story rankings break Iraq coverage into three distinct threads: policy debate, events on the ground and the U.S. homefront. These ranked 1st, 3rd and 6th, respectively. Together they accounted for 22% of all coverage studied.

The quarterly report of the PEJ News Coverage Index examined 17,416 stories that appeared between December 31, 2006 and March 31, 2007. The index includes 13 newspapers, eight radio outlets (a mix of talk, public radio and headline feeds), five of the top online sites, several hours a day of all three cable news channels and both network morning and evening newscasts and is believed to be the most comprehensive ongoing audit of the American press anywhere.

Top News Stories of the First Quarter of 2007

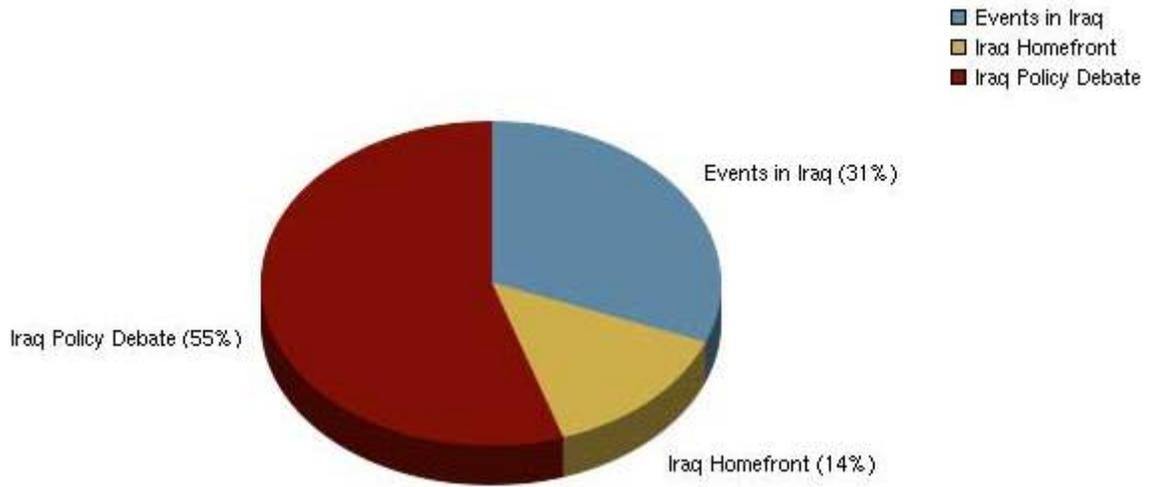
Rank	Top Stories	Percent of Newshole
1	Iraq Policy Debate *	12
2	2008 Campaign	7
3	Events in Iraq *	7
4	Fired U.S. Attorneys	4
5	Iran	3
6	Iraq Homefront *	3
7	CIA Leak/Plame Case	3
8	Anna Nicole Smith	2
9	Democratic led Congress	2
10	Severe Weather/Ice Storms (1/14 - 3/2)	2
* Iraq War Total (a sum of the three starred stories)		22%

THE IRAQ WAR

In the first three months of 2007, the war in Iraq took center stage in the national media with President Bush calling for a troop surge and presidential candidates staking out their positions on the affair.

In first three months of the year, nearly a quarter of the newshole (22%) in the American press was devoted to the war. That was roughly three times the amount given to the next biggest story—the campaign—and six times the amount given to the next biggest non-Iraq story—the fired U.S. attorney controversy.

Breakdown of Iraq War Coverage: All Media
 Percent of Newshole, Dec. 31, '06 – Mar. 31, '07



That coverage, despite the time, space and resources devoted to the topic, was rather narrowly focused. Through the first 90 days of the year, indeed, it would be fair to say that this was not coverage of the war in Iraq per se, but the fate of Americans and American policy there.

Iraq War Coverage Focused on Americans, Dec. 31 '06 – Mar. 31 '07	
• Americans at home:	14%
• U.S. policy debate:	55%
• Americans in Iraq:	15%
Total	84 %

Overall, more than eight in ten stories were largely focused on Americans—either at home, in combat or through the policy debate. Fewer than one in six—or about 16% of the Iraq coverage—was focused on Iraqis.

Breaking the coverage into three different storylines—the U.S. policy debate, events inside Iraq and war-related issues back home—helps pinpoint the media’s focus. The majority of the Iraq coverage (55%), dealt with the policy debate back in Washington. Thus most of what people are seeing is not about the war itself but the argument about what to do about it.

Iraq War Policy Debate
Specific Storylines across All Media

Storyline	Percent of Newshole
Debate over U.S. Strategy	52%
2007 troop increase	34
Policy debate involving Iraq's neighbors (Iran, Syria, etc.)	5
Policy debate of U.S. Allies (Britain, Poland, etc.)	3
Generals retiring/being replaced	2
Anti-War protest/speeches	2

Role of Iraqi government/security forces	1
Other	1
Debate over media coverage	1
Political ramifications for U.S. Politicians	*
Debate over whether the war is a Civil War	*
Baker Report (Iraq Study Group)	*

* equals less than 1%

Less than a third of the Iraq coverage (31%) was about events on the ground in Iraq—which encompasses such subjects as the continuing bloodshed, the insurgents’ development of chlorine bombs, the political situation there, reconstruction efforts, the decision over whether to send England’s Prince Harry to the war zone, and the U.S. security crackdown in Baghdad.

Iraq Events on the Ground Specific Storylines across All Media

Storyline	Percent of Newshole
U.S. combat/violence/casualties	50%
civil combat/violence/casualties not involving U.S.	20
Iraq Internal affairs	15
Other	5
reconstruction waste, corruption	3
Reconstruction efforts	3
Moqtada al-Sadr going to Iran	1
Prince Harry going to Iraq	1
U.S. soldiers charged with crimes	*
Iraqi refugees (added 3/7)	*
Iraqi President Talabani’s health (added 2/26)	*

* equals less than 1%

Yet looking more closely at the ground coverage reveals that even most of this focused on Americans—not Iraqis. What constituted that 31%? Half of it (15%) was about American combat and casualties there and roughly 0.5% was about U.S. soldiers committing crimes.

In contrast, just 7% was about Iraqi civilian casualties and 5% concerned Iraq internal affairs—the state of the country itself, the stability of the government, whether the country was in civil war, and other matters that might answer what would happen if Americans pulled out or what other strategy might best serve that nation.

Reconstruction efforts were even harder to learn about, garnering just 1% of all Iraq coverage. Despite what appears to be a mass movement of Iraqis, both exiting from the country and relocating within its borders, less than half of one percent—just 16 stories in all—focused on Iraqi refugees. According to the estimates by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as many as 2 million of the country’s

population of about 27 million have left for other countries while 1.9 million Iraqis have been displaced within their own country.

One factor that may explain the emphasis on the policy debate is that the political story is easier—and also less expensive—to cover. It is also a domestic story, rather than one about a faraway place, which journalists may think makes it more interesting.

The domestic policy debate is in any case no doubt safer to cover than the war itself. The Committee to Protect Journalists says that since the onset of the war in Iraq in 2003, 102 journalists and 39 media support workers have been killed in the line of duty. That makes it the deadliest conflict for reporters in the organization’s 25-year history.

The third main area of Iraq coverage is the homefront, which includes all aspects of the effects of the war here in the states—military returning home from duty, hospital treatment for wounded soldiers, how families and communities cope as loved ones are sent abroad and economic reverberations, to name a few. More than 1.6 million servicemen and women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the National Veterans Foundation. And the impact of their tours of duty can be widespread. One study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggested that 15 to 17 percent of Iraq vets were suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a serious condition that impacts them and the people around them.

**Iraq War Homefront
Specific Storylines across All Media**

Storyline	Percent of Newshole
Conditions for wounded veterans including Walter Reed Hospital (added 2/18)	49%
Effect on communities, families	23
Other	14
Homecomings, funerals, celebrations	8
Military recruitment	3
Iraq refugees coming to U.S. (added 2/14)	3

In all, 14% of the Iraq coverage (3% of all media coverage) concerned the homefront. About half of that related to one particular issue—substandard conditions at Walter Reed Hospital or other Veterans Affairs hospitals. The *Washington Post* initiated the attention in February with a two-day investigative report on the conditions at the hospital. As awareness mounted, everyone from Defense Secretary Robert Gates to President Bush vowed to remedy the situation at the hospital, and several Army officials lost their jobs. Many with direct contact with the hospital, however, said conditions at Walter Reed have been sub-standard for decades. In any case, the attention did little to spark additional investigations into other military institutions or problems soldiers confront back home.

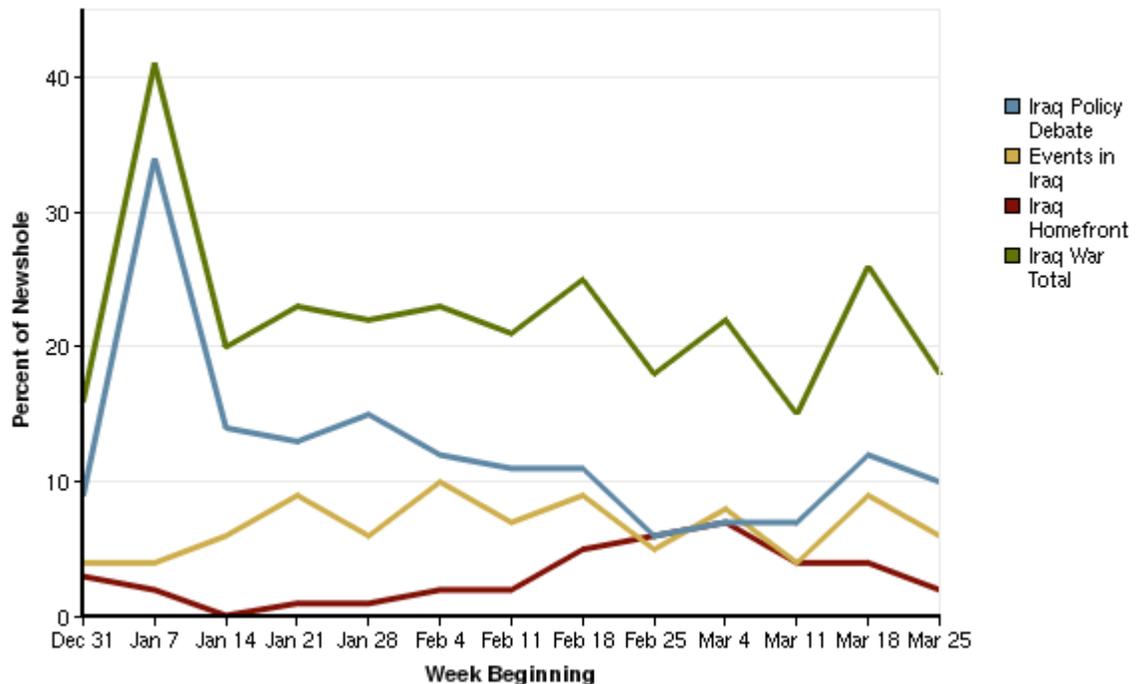
The War Week to Week

The devotion to the war remained fairly consistent across time staying somewhere between 18% and 25% of the newshole most weeks. One week, though, coverage was nearly double the average. The week of January 7-12—when President Bush announced his troop surge—coverage soared to 41%.

From then on, the question of troop strength remained the major subject discussed about the war. Debate surrounding added deployments or withdrawals accounted for 33% of all the Iraq policy debate stories.

Iraq War Coverage over Time

All News Outlets, Dec. 31, '06 – Mar. 31, '07



That overarching narrative about what American policy should be in Iraq played out through a succession of new events. The confirmation of Lt. General David Petraeus as top Iraqi commander, the announcement that Britain would begin a troop withdrawal, and the continuing legislative skirmishing over the war all shaped the course of the debate and drove media interest in the subject. But the basic story line was the same: Democrats took over Congress with what they believed was a mandate to change Iraq policy and get America out. The president believed it was best to continue on the path of growing, not shrinking, U.S. troop involvement.

In February and March, a related but competing story line emerged: the prospect of war with Iran. The president appeared to threaten possible military action against Tehran in his January 10 surge speech, but the subject did not gain any real press attention until a month later when a U.S. military briefer accused the Iranian government of providing weapons that were killing U.S. troops in Iraq.

The administration later backed off that somewhat, but the press had already focused its radar. In an interview with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, ABC’s Diane Sawyer bluntly asked him: “Do you personally fear an invasion or an attack by the United States?”

By the end of the first 90 days of the year, Iran had become the fifth biggest news story overall in the first quarter of 2007.

Sector by Sector

Did the attention to Iraq differ from one medium to the next? Not much. Iraq was the top story in every media sector studied.

There were, though, some variations in degree. Network Evening News gave the war the greatest airtime (26% on the three commercial networks and 45% on PBS’s News Hour). Newspapers devoted the least—18% of their front-page reporting—which reflected the fact that papers in the sample tended to cover a wider range of topics on their front pages than network and cable TV did in their entire newscasts.

Iraq War Coverage

Percent of Newshole, Dec. 31, ‘06 - Mar. 31, ‘07

	Newspapers	Online	Network Morning	Network Evening w/ PBS	Cable TV	Radio
Events in Iraq	7%	12%	5%	10%	5%	3%
Iraq Homefront	4	2	1	7	2	3
Iraq Policy Debate	7	9	13	16	16	17
Iraq War Total	18	23	18	33	23	22

Some media were also more focused on the policy debate in particular than others. Despite potentially dramatic video of wounded soldiers, the broadcast media placed the heaviest emphasis on the political debates in Washington. Cable, network evening and morning programs and radio news all gave the Washington debates more than twice the percent of airtime of other Iraq stories.

Of the 224 hours of cable news studied over the quarter, about 35 hours, or 16% of the airtime, was spent on the policy debate. This was more than triple that spent on ground events in Iraq (5%) and seven times that of homefront issues (2%).

THE 2008 ELECTIONS

The second biggest story of the first three months of 2007 was the kickoff of a new presidential election season. The general election is still a full 17 months away, but with open primary races in both political parties, the campaign—at least according to the press—is already in full swing. It accounted for 7% of the total newshole from January

through March, a third of the Iraq war, but almost twice as much as the next most covered non-Iraq story (the U.S. attorney controversy).

There is no precedent for such heavy coverage so early in the calendar. In 1992, for instance, Bill Clinton didn't announce his candidacy until October of 1991.

What has the early story been about? Not who these candidates are, or how they might lead the country. Even though no votes will be cast until January 2008, or possibly late December 2007, the vast majority of the coverage (roughly nine out of ten stories) was about the horse race—who was ahead, who was behind, and what tactics they were using. The only other areas of the campaign to receive even 1% of the election coverage were election scandals, race and gender issues and the role of the media.

A Battle for Headlines

The other feature of the presidential coverage so far is how heavily it is tilted toward the battle among Democrats rather than Republicans.

Although both party nominations are open, nearly two-thirds of the election coverage (61%) was specifically about candidates vying for the Democratic nomination. This was nearly three times those that focused on Republican candidates (24%). Another 13% dealt with both parties.

That Democratic focus was true of all media sectors. Even in newspapers, which had the least imbalance between the two, the gap was 52% Democratic stories versus 29% Republican.

2008 Presidential Campaign Coverage

Percent of Campaign Coverage (Time/Space) Devoted to Each Party
Dec. 31, '06 – Mar. 31, '07

Sector	Mostly Democrats	Mostly Republicans	Both Parties	Other Issues
All Media	61%	24%	13%	2%
Newspapers	52	29	16	4
Online	67	24	8	0
Network TV	63	19	16	2
Cable TV	61	24	13	2
Radio	72	18	8	2

The explanation for this is hard to pin down with certainty. Is it the notion that some of the Democratic candidates have more celebrity than any of the GOP candidates? Is the novelty of a woman and an African American going head to head on the Democratic side just more compelling? Have the conflicts and squabbling among Democrats already become more intense, and thus deemed more newsworthy by media that likes a fight? Or are reporters, who according to various surveys tend more often to be Democrats than Republicans themselves, just more personally interested in that race?

At least one piece of evidence might argue against the idea that the Democrat-centric coverage reflects a liberal bias of the press. The medium most wrapped up in the Democratic race has been talk radio—where our [sample](#) is made up more heavily of conservative talkers who dominate the medium. Fully 66% of the election stories on talk radio dealt with Democratic candidates, while 21% considered Republican candidates.

Indeed, conservative talkers Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Michael Savage were the most Democratic focused of all—75% of their time on Democrats and only 13% focused mainly on Republicans. (They also focused more on the campaign in general than either the media overall or liberal talk radio shows).

Clinton and Obama

And which candidates were these stories about in particular? To find out, the Project conducted additional analysis of these campaign stories using Lexis-Nexis database. After gathering all the available newspaper and network news content from the Index, we conducted a keyword search of the top three Democratic and top three Republican candidates in the headline and first six sentences of these stories. (Please see [methodology](#) for detailed description of this analysis)

The breakdown of Democratic versus Republican mentions closely mirrored what we found in the main Index: Democrat outpaced Republicans by more than two-to-one.

Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards together had more than 1,100 mentions in the leads of newspaper stories. The top three Republicans—John McCain, Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani— lagged behind at 578.

Yet the coverage, to be more specific, was mostly about two of these Democrats, Clinton and Obama. In both newspapers and on the networks, Clinton and Obama each garnered more than twice the lead mentions of John Edwards, the 3rd place candidate.

Clinton got the most coverage in this search. Her name (Hillary Clinton or Hillary Rodham Clinton) appeared 742 times over the course of the three months, while Obama garnered a very close second at 672. John Edwards trailed far behind with just 249 mentions overall.

Search of LexisNexis Database

Number of Stories with Candidate's Name in Headline or Lead Paragraphs

Dec. 31, '06 - Mar. 31, '07

	Giuliani	Romney	McCain	Top 3 Republicans	Hillary Rodham Clinton / Hillary Clinton	John Edwards	Obama	Top 3 Democrats
Newspapers	177	205	196	578	477	174	452	1103
Network TV	89	36	88	213	265	75	220	560
Total	266	241	284	791	742	249	672	1663

Network news aimed its cameras much more on Democrats as well. There were fewer mentions overall here but still more than a two-to-one gap. The three Democrats reaped 560 mentions while the Republicans totaled just 213. The gap was consistent across all three networks, though ABC had more total mentions.

Among the Republicans, the field was a little more even. Romney and McCain both received roughly 200 mentions in the print search. Giuliani was not far behind with 177. The fact that the New York Times is Giuliani's home paper gave him a bit of an edge. He received more mentions there than did his Republican rivals.

On the three commercial networks, the race seemed to be more between Giuliani and McCain. They each had roughly 90 mentions while Romney had less than half that (36).

The NewsHour on PBS has yet to dive into the scramble. Just 2% of the NewsHour airtime covered by PEJ's weekly Index was devoted to the presidential campaign.

The fascination with the campaign began in earnest the third week of January when Hillary Clinton announced her campaign on her website and embarked on a series of interviews with all three evening network newscasts.

The level of coverage fluctuated more week-to-week than did the coverage of Iraq, with a high of 13% and a low of 1%. Still, in 11 weeks out of 13, the campaign was among the top five stories of the week. After Clinton's announcement, the second biggest week for presidential campaign coverage (at 12%) occurred the week of February 18. That's when Clinton and Obama ended up skirmishing after Hollywood producer David Geffen—a former supporter of the Clintons who is now aligned with Obama—gave an interview to New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd in which he was critical of both Hillary and Bill Clinton. That week, the campaign coverage even outpaced coverage of the Iraq policy debate.

The effect of such saturation coverage so early is difficult to gauge, though speculating about its impact has become something of a Washington cocktail game. Will it hurt turnout? Hurt the front-runners? Or just hurt the messenger?

U.S. ATTORNEYS FIRINGS

If there was any major story in the first quarter of the year that revealed an apparent disconnect between news consumers and news producers, it was the investigation into the firing of eight U.S. attorneys that put Attorney General Alberto Gonzales's future in jeopardy.

Overall, that subject proved to be the fourth biggest story of the year (at 4%), right before the increasing tension between the U.S. and Iran, which was 3%.

Coverage was remarkably consistent across all media sectors. It was the fifth biggest story in newspapers (3%), online (4%), network television (4%), the fourth biggest story

in radio (also at 4%) and the sixth biggest story on cable (also at 4%). It received virtually the same amount of coverage throughout all platforms.

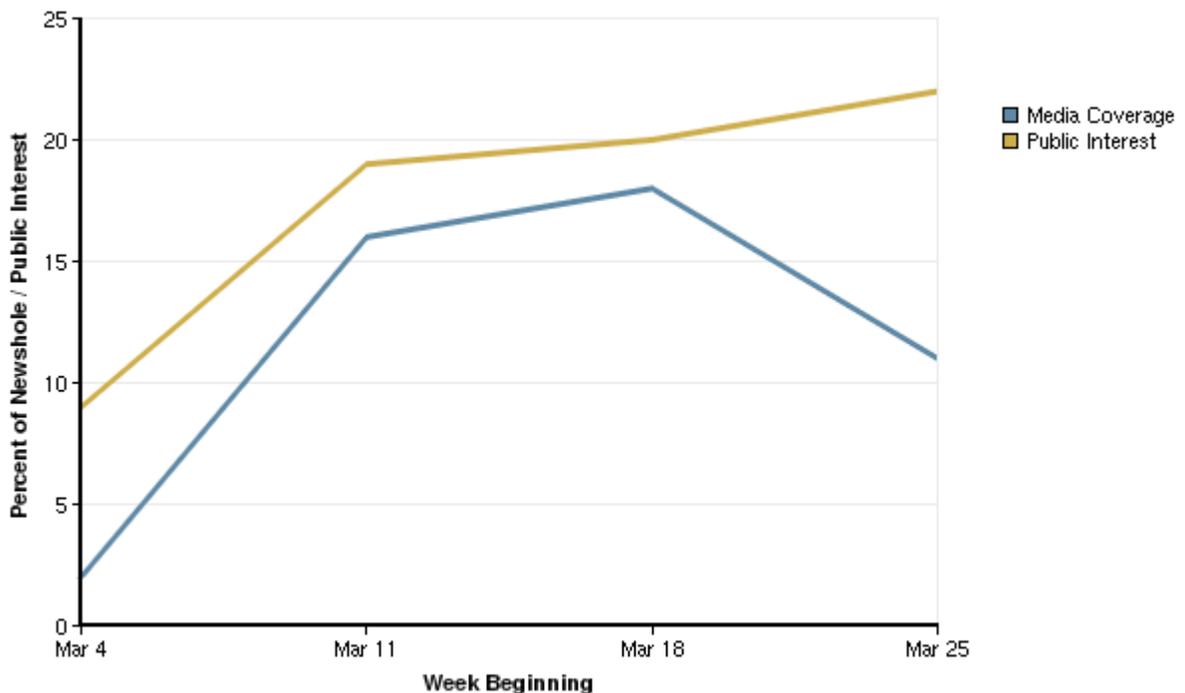
But a survey taken by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press at the height of the coverage in late March found that only 20% of the public was paying very close attention to the news about the investigation. It also revealed that almost half the public—46%—found the story boring. (News interest in this topic appears to have had a clearly partisan tinge. While 59% of Democrats said they found the U.S. attorneys case interesting, only 42% of Republicans agreed).

The story gained media momentum in early March when one of the fired prosecutors, David Iglesias, testified before the new Democratic-controlled Congress that was probing whether the firings were politically motivated. Iglesias said he “felt sick” after getting a call from Republican Senator Pete Domenici asking him about the timing of indictments in a corruption case. From there, the story picked up dramatic momentum.

By the week of March 11—when Gonzales embarked on a media tour to acknowledge the firings were handled poorly and Democrats threatened more subpoenas—the case had become the biggest news story in the country (16%). The following week, with the confrontation depicted as a constitutional showdown between the executive and legislative branches—a term that conjures up Watergate memories—the story was the biggest in the country again, this time filling 18% of the overall newshole.

Fired U.S. Attorney Scandal over Time

News Media Coverage vs. Public Interest, Mar. 4. '07 – Mar. 31, '07



Source: PEJ's News Coverage Index & News Interest Index surveys from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press

Note: The News Interest surveys are conducted at the conclusion of the week (following the news coverage index). Percent of Public Interest refers to percent of people who followed the scandal “Very Closely”

At that point, the level of coverage of the U.S. attorneys flap had substantially exceeded that of two other major Washington scandals—the trial of former vice presidential aide Scooter Libby and the conditions at Walter Reed Army Hospital.

By late March, the big event was the congressional testimony of former Gonzales chief of staff Kyle Sampson, who contradicted Gonzales about his role in the firings. (The story took up 11% of the newshole that week.) But political Washington was now engaged in a full-throated guessing game about the Attorney General’s fate.

“Does Gonzales have to resign?” asked MSNBC’s Chris Matthews bluntly. Other pundits and hosts were now describing the situation as “Gonzo-gate” or “Gonzales-gate.”

Ironically, when Gonzales finally had what many assumed would be his make-or-break moment—an eagerly-anticipated April 19 hearing before Congress that occurred after the first 90 days of the year—the event was largely overshadowed by another story. The media were preoccupied with the April 16 massacre that killed 33 people on the campus of Virginia Tech. That tragedy was easily the biggest story of the year, and the only one that accounted for more than half (51%) of the overall coverage in a single week.

ANNA NICOLE SMITH

A news event in early 2007 well-remembered by many was the sudden and mysterious February 8 death of a 39-year-old heiress and occasional actress named Anna Nicole Smith. By the time she was finally buried 23 days later on March 2—after a legal battle over issues ranging from jurisdiction over her remains to the paternity of her infant daughter—her name had become synonymous with what many viewed as a tabloid-style media feeding frenzy.

While the mainstream media outlets studied in PEJ’s News Coverage Index devote some attention to celebrity info-tainment sagas—Paris Hilton’s run-ins with the law, Alec Baldwin’s voicemail rant at his daughter, the Rosie O’Donnell-Donald Trump feud—most consume about 1% or less of any week’s coverage so far this year. They never really gained traction as major mainstream media events.

For reasons that can still be debated, the Anna Nicole Smith case was very different. For four straight weeks—from February 4 through March 2—it was a top-10 news story. It also re-surfaced as a top-10 story in the week of March 25, when the autopsy report concluded that she had died of an accidental overdose of prescription drugs.

By the end of three months, Smith’s death—and the many related issues—rated as the eighth-biggest news story of the year so far. It filled 2% of the overall newshole, finishing just ahead of the newly elected Democratic majorities in Congress and just behind the Valerie Plame case that led to the conviction of the Vice President’s top aide, Scooter Libby.

As it turned out, the Anna Nicole Smith saga was a classic example of a *selective* feeding frenzy, a story propelled into public consciousness and kept there for weeks by the extensive coverage in two media sectors—cable news networks and network morning shows. And even within those sectors, there were notable variations in the coverage.

With coverage reaching into 30% of the newshole during the height of the saga, the Smith story was the third biggest on cable for the entire first quarter of the year. It filled 7% of the newshole, finishing behind only the Iraq policy debate and the presidential race. On daytime cable, with its greater focus on live coverage and breaking events, it proved to be the biggest story (11%).

There were also differences by cable channel. For the quarter, it was the Fox News Channel that devoted the most time to the subject. The Smith saga accounted for 10% of the network's overall coverage, narrowly finishing as the second biggest story behind the Iraq policy debate (also at 10%). Smith was the fifth-place story at both CNN and MSNBC, where it accounted for 4% and 6% of the coverage respectively.

The only other platform in which Smith's death ranked in the top 5 stories was network morning television, where it was the fifth biggest story overall at 4%. It was the third biggest story (6%) on CBS's "Early Show," the fifth biggest topic (4%) on NBC's "Today" and the seventh biggest subject (3%) on ABC's "Good Morning America."

Polling by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that while a majority of those surveyed (61%) thought the story was over-covered, there was a substantial core of people, particularly young women, who were following the story closely. In the relatively small universe of cable watchers—where audiences are measured in the hundreds of thousands rather than millions—that is enough interest to have an impact on ratings.

BROAD TOPICS OF COVERAGE

How did the attention devoted to the Iraq war and the 2008 elections affect the overall impression of the issues and events in the first quarter of the year? Grouping stories according to their broad topic areas—foreign affairs, crime, health, politics, science—helps paint that bigger picture and provide a sense of what has and has *not* been covered in the news. One thing that seems to have been missing in these 90 days is the coverage of specific ongoing domestic and social issues.

Consider, for instance, that the health care system made up roughly 1% of the newshole. The same was true of race and gender relations, education, housing, and religion. Global warming also made up 1% of the newshole. All other environmental issues combined made up less.

Immigration, despite the debate in Washington, also made up roughly 1% of the coverage.

A host of other issues made up even less, including air transportation, philanthropy, aging, labor, poverty, AIDS, sprawl, Social Security, and transportation.

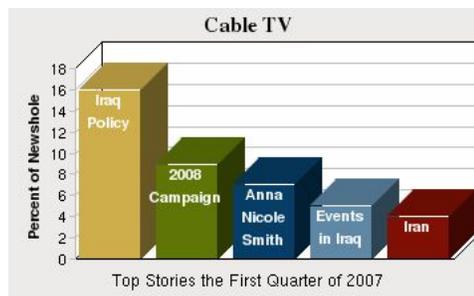
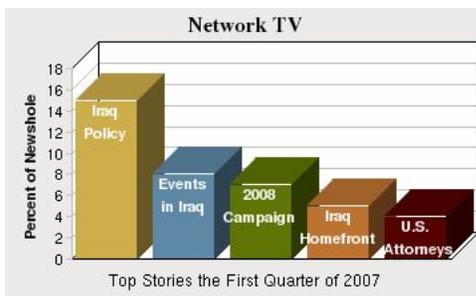
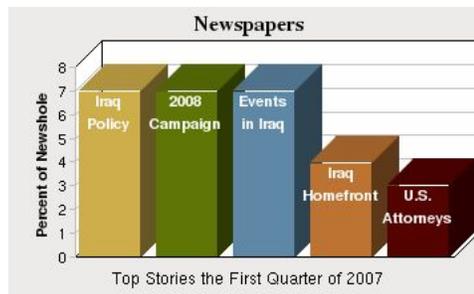
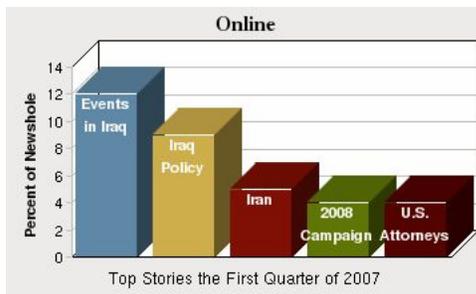
Each of those issues generated less attention than accidents and disasters (5%), celebrity and entertainment (4%), lifestyle news (3%), and sports (2%).

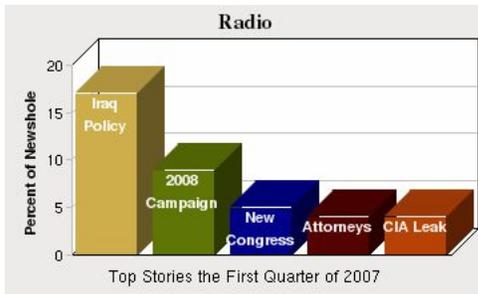
The only separate domestic social issues that made up a noticeable size of the newshole in the first three months were business and economics (6%) and crime (8%).

International coverage that did not involve the United States, it accounted for 8% of overall coverage. The largest element of that was stories about the internal affairs of different countries, and the military conflicts of other countries that did not involve the United States.

THE NATURE OF DIFFERENT MEDIA SECTORS

The PEJ Index is unique in that it includes such a wide cross-section of American media. After three months, some patterns emerge. The news agenda of different media sectors varies noticeably, particularly at different times of day. Radio is more political. Newspapers have a more varied menu of topics—even on their front pages. Network morning news is more celebrity- and lifestyle-oriented. Cable TV’s agenda is now heavily influenced by talk.





Cable News

Looking more closely at the cable universe itself—among the three channels as well as across day parts—PEJ found distinct differences between the three channels, far more than discerned between the three commercial network channels or newspapers.

As an example, we found that coverage of the three biggest stories of the quarter—Iraq policy debate, the 2008 campaign and Anna Nicole Smith differed greatly across the three channels and day parts.

Overall, MSNBC and CNN were much more consumed with the war in Iraq than was Fox. MSNBC, for instance, devoted nearly a third of the time studied to the war (26% on the policy debate, 3% on events on the ground and 2% the homefront). Fox, by contrast, spent less than half that much time on the war—15% in all, (10% on the policy debate, 3% on events in Iraq and 1% on the homefront).

Percent of Newshole Devoted Three Major Stories on Cable TV

Dec. 31, '06 – Mar. 31, '07

	Iraq War Total (all 3 threads)	2008 Presidential Campaign	Anna Nicole Smith
CNN	25	7	4
Fox News	15	9	10
MSNBC	31	14	6
All Cable	23	9	7

On CNN, Iraq coverage totaled 25%, again mostly focused on policy debate (14%). Events on the ground received 7% of the coverage (coming in second overall) while the homefront trailed at 3%.

MSNBC also spent more time on the presidential campaign than its rivals (14%), compared with 9% on Fox and 7% on CNN.

If Fox was less focused on the Iraq War, what took its place? Mostly—according to the numbers—Anna Nicole Smith. Coverage of her death trailed just barely the airtime spent on the Iraq policy debate, accounting for 9.6% of all the Fox content studied (versus 10.1% for the Iraq policy debate). Fox also stood out for its lack of coverage on the firings of the U.S. attorneys, compared with the other channels. The story, which gained

real momentum in mid March, consumed a mere 2% of Fox’s total airtime. CNN devoted twice that percent (4%) and MSNBC four times (8%).

Another interesting comparison is the percent of time devoted to just a few big stories. On MSNBC, more than half of its programming consisted of just four stories. On CNN and Fox, it wasn’t until the 9th and 11th stories respectively that we reached 49%.

Moreover, MSNBC’s four top stories reveal something about the network’s identity. The perennial third-place finisher in the cable news ratings race sometimes seemed to struggle in trying to create a coherent identity and niche. Officials recently stated their intention to focus on Washington politics and policy. The study demonstrates that strategy.

The network’s top four stories—the Iraq policy debate, the 2008 campaign, the fired U.S. attorneys, and the Valerie Plame leak/Scooter Libby trial—are all, at their core, about Washington and politics. When added together, they accounted for 55% of MSNBC’s total coverage. (The same four stories filled 26% of the Fox News Channel’s airtime and 27% of CNN’s newshole.)

That emphasis on Beltway topics is even more obvious in a prime-time MSNBC lineup of hosts that includes former Jimmy Carter speechwriter Chris Matthews, outspoken liberal Keith Olbermann, veteran conservative host Tucker Carlson, and former Republican Congressman Joe Scarborough. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of MSNBC’s prime time airtime was consumed by those four stories in the first part of 2007.

When it comes to the Fox News Channel, there has long been a debate in media circles about whether the cable ratings leader has a clear conservative tilt or whether it is an antidote to a media landscape dominated by liberals. That argument is beyond of the scope of this report, but Fox gave considerably less coverage than its rivals to two subjects that were largely bad news for the Bush administration—the war in Iraq and the U.S. attorneys scandal.

Aside from its high level of interest in the Anna Nicole Smith saga, one of Fox’s other top-10 stories (that did not make either CNN’s or MSNBC’s list) was a sensational crime tale. The network devoted 2% of its total airtime to the January tale of two Missouri teenage boys who were abducted and ultimately rescued from a man now charged with kidnapping, sodomy and attempted murder.

	<u>Iraq War</u>	<u>U.S. Attorneys</u>
Fox News	15%	2%
CNN	25	4
MSNBC	31	8

It is harder to characterize CNN—which fell in the first quarter of 2007 somewhere in between the Fox News Channel and MSNBC in its story selection. The one area of obvious distinction was the network’s emphasis on the immigration debate, which was its sixth biggest story at 4%. The subject was not among MSNBC’s top-10 story list and Fox devoted only 2% of its coverage to the topic. CNN’s attention to the issue stems from the

relentless coverage by Lou Dobbs, the host of the network’s 6 pm show, and an outspoken advocate for stricter enforcement of immigration laws. More than one-third (35%) of all immigrations stories—across all the media studied—appeared on the Lou Dobbs’ show.

Cable Differences by Day Part

There are also noticeable differences in cable news depending on the time of day. Overall, the three channels were much more distinct from each other in the daytime hours. Each had a different top story in the first quarter of the year. Fox viewers were most likely to learn about Anna Nicole (17%), while MSNBC talked primarily about the upcoming elections (16%) and CNN spent most time on Iraq policy debate (11%).

Again, MSNBC stood out here for spending more time on just a few stories, a narrower or more focused or targeted agenda. The top three stories—the campaign, Iraq policy and Anna Nicole Smith—amounted to 41% of all the daytime programming studied, versus about 25% devoted to the top three stories on Fox and CNN.

Percent of Newshole Devoted Three Major Stories on Cable TV

Percent of Newshole, Dec. 31, ‘06 – Mar. 31, ‘07

	Iraq War Total (all 3 threads)	2008 Presidential Campaign	Anna Nicole Smith
Cable Daytime	15	7	11
CNN	20	2	5
Fox News	6	5	17
MSNBC	18	16	10
Cable Evening	25	10	6
CNN	26	8	4
Fox News	17	10	8
MSNBC	36	13	4

In the later programs, the biggest difference was in the degree of emphasis, rather than in the selection of stories themselves. All three channels led with the Iraq policy debate, but MSNBC spent more than twice as much of its airtime (30%) on the subject than Fox (12%) or CNN (15%). The second story was also the same across channels—the 2008 elections—again with MSNBC devoting a greater percent to the topic than the other two (13% versus 10% for Fox and 8% for CNN). After that, the three channels diverged. Fox continued its primetime focus on Anna Nicole (8%), while CNN moved to events in Iraq (7%) and MSNBC talked about the fired U.S. attorneys (10%).

Newspapers

Newspapers are often thought of as covering a wider range of news events on any given day because their newshole—the amount of space they have for news each day—is so much greater than anything on the broadcast side. PEJ’s Index reveals, though, that this breadth exists even on the front page alone. Across the first three months of 2007, no story garnered more than 7% of the newshole. And even the diminished top story shared the limelight. In other words, the more diverse news agenda in print is not simply a

matter of more space. It also may be a function of editorial sensibility—the sense that the audience may be interested in more things, and the availability of a bigger staff to deliver it.

Three different stories—the Iraq policy debate, the 2008 campaign and events in Iraq—each received about 7% of the coverage during the first quarter of 2007.

Small vs. Large Papers

Are there obvious differences between the front pages of large circulation papers and smaller ones? That, too, is something the Index can shed light across a longer span of time, but not meaningfully on a weekly basis.²

In general, larger papers tended to distribute their national coverage more evenly. At mid-sized papers the national coverage was mostly about the elections while at smaller papers the Iraq policy debate earned the most space.

The levelness of front-page coverage was most evident in the largest newspapers, those with a circulation of over 650,000. Their quarterly totals result in nearly a three-way tie for the top story (each receiving roughly 7% of the coverage).

The mid-size and smaller papers studied had clearer—but different—top stories. At the mid-size papers, 12% of the front page coverage was spent on the 2008 elections. Much of this is attributed to [the inclusion here](#) of the Albuquerque Journal, candidate Bill Richardson’s hometown paper.

Beyond the election, another interesting finding emerged among the mid-sized papers. The second ranking story was the Iraq homefront (8%) followed by events on the ground (7%). This was the only outlet group, where homefront and ground stories outpaced those about the U.S. policies.

In the smallest papers, those with a circulation less than 100,000, it was the Iraq policy debate, at 13%, that garnered the most attention. About three-quarters of the stories in these papers that dealt with Iraq were not written by the staffs of these papers, but instead were either from wire stories or other news outlets. The next story of choice, though, ran against the norm. It was the new Democratic-led Congress (6%). Overall, about 60% of the stories about national or international issues on the front pages of these papers were wire stories or from other news outlets.

Online News Sites

While researchers have studied network news and newspapers for years, the data on news websites, a media about a decade old, is scant.

² The NCI studies the national and international news agenda. Therefore, in local newspapers, we include only local stories that relate to a news event that has gained national or international attention.

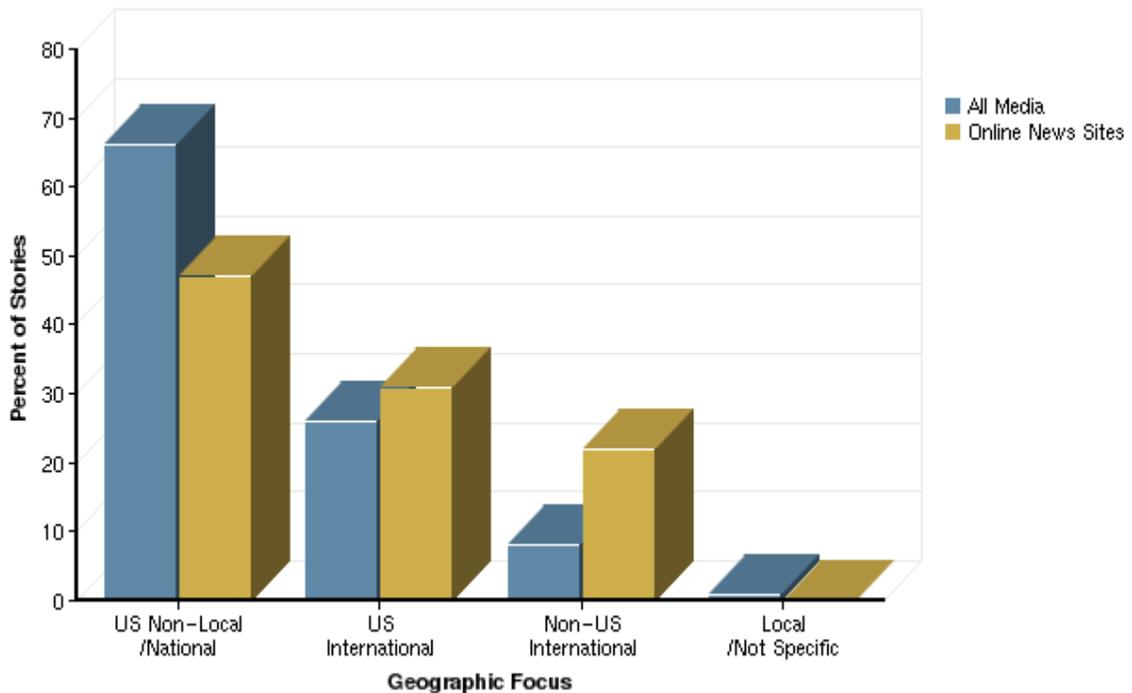
The PEJ Index includes five Internet news sites each day: YahooNews, MSNBC.com, CNN.com, AOLNews, and GoogleNews. (The first four are the top online news sites by traffic).³

In the first three months of 2007, these web sites have carved out a fairly distinctive niche for news consumers. The online platform offered readers more wide-ranging and diverse coverage of events around the globe than any other sector. The online platform had the greatest percentage of stories (22%) that were about international subjects that did not primarily involve the United States. The next closest, and it wasn't even close, were newspapers at 8%.

This was the clearly the place where one would be most likely to find out what was going on outside the borders of the United States. From hostage takings in Manila to political upheaval in Zimbabwe, the web sites provided a more international lens on the news.

Geographic Focus

Percent of Stories, Dec. 31, '06 – Mar. 31, '07



It was, for example, the only one of the five media sectors to have the situation inside Iraq as the number one story for the entire first quarter. (It filled 12% of its total newshole.) The newspaper, network and cable TV and radio sectors all had the more U.S.-centric, Washington-based Iraq policy debate as the top story.

³ The Index monitors the top five stories on each site, to make it roughly comparable to the size of a newspaper front page.

Online, along with radio, also stood out because it gave less emphasis to the war on the homefront. And only the online sites gave enough coverage to the nuclear negotiations with North Korea (eighth at 2%) and the continued combat in Afghanistan (ninth at 2%) to have those subjects rank among their top-10 stories.

The increasing tensions between the U.S. and Iran over both Tehran's nuclear ambitions and its role in the Iraq fighting also generated more coverage in the online sector, (third biggest story at 5%) than anywhere else.

This may reflect a sensibility that the audience for websites is international, bounded more by language than borders. Yet it also may reflect the sense that the depth of a website allows journalists to order stories more by their sense of significance, with the notion that the audience can easily find what it wants. A website front page might contain a few dozen story links. A newspaper front page typically holds no more than seven stories. A half-hour newscast in its entirety might include just 10 stories total.

One other characteristic of the online sector—which it shared with newspapers—was less of an impulse to devote extensive coverage to one or two big stories and more of a proclivity to offer a balanced variety of topics. The top three subjects in the online sector for the quarter—events inside Iraq, the Iraq policy debate, and tensions with Iran—accounted for only 26% of the total newshole. Only in the newspaper sector—where the three biggest stories added up to 21% of total coverage—was there less emphasis placed on the few top stories.

Network News

The storylines that dominated discussions of network news so far in 2007 are the rise of the ABC's World News Tonight led by Charles Gibson to the No. 1 position, overtaking Brian Williams on NBC, and the ratings difficulties of the program led by Katie Couric on CBS. Couric's CBS Evening News had its lowest ratings in the 20 years since Nielsen Media introduced People Meters.

Despite this changing of the guard in evening news, the Index data show that in terms of the topics they cover the three programs are remarkably similar.

They were identical, for instance, in the top four stories they devoted the most time to in the first quarter of the year—and nearly so in the percent of time dedicated to each. All three, as an example, spent about a quarter of their airtime on the Iraq war (ABC 27%, CBS 24%, and NBC 26%).

Indeed, the only story in the top seven topics this year in which the three programs differ is that NBC Evening News has devoted 3% of its time to the aftermath of Katrina, a subject it has made a special franchise.

The remarkable similarities also extend to the choice of lead stories on each night. All three shows lead more with stories about the Iraq policy debate than any other story,

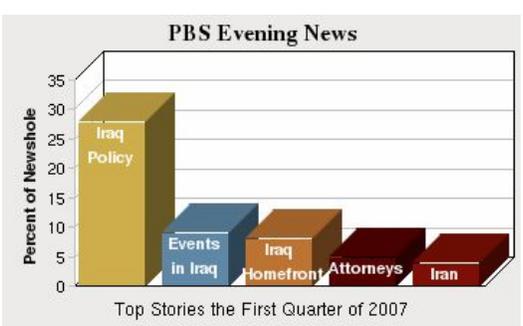
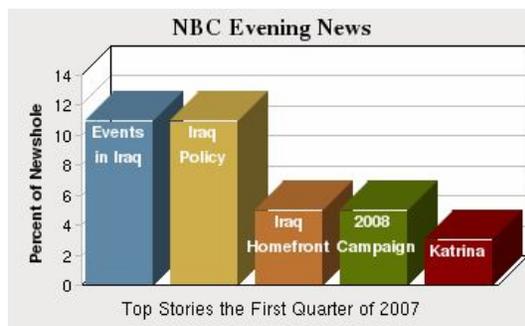
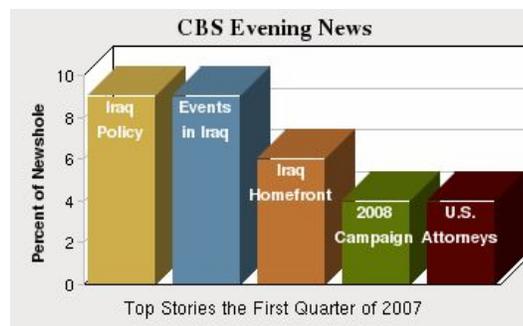
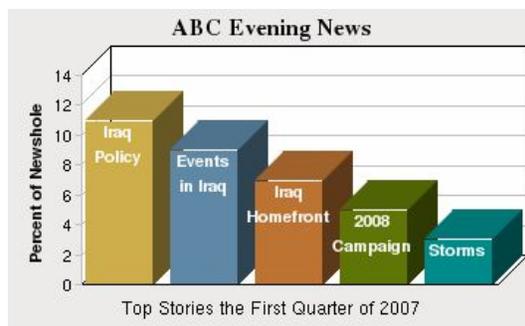
followed by events on the ground in Iraq, severe weather the week of January 14, and the fired U.S. attorney scandal.

Over the 65 weekdays in the first three months of the year, all three programs had the same lead story 45% of the time.

Anchor Charles Gibson has made a point recently in interviews of noting that he has tried not to over-cover the presidential campaign. “I love politics and *I’m* not engaged,” he told the Washington Post on May 17. By the numbers, however, all three network evening newscasts treated the campaign at the same level—ABC 5%, CBS 4%, and NBC 5%.

If viewers are sensing differences among these three programs, in other words, it is in how these stories or put together, or the tone and style of presentation of the anchor. The differences between these shows are not in their basic news agenda—that is, the topics they choose to cover and how much time they devote to those topics.

For television professionals this reinforces the idea that it is treatment (the quality of the reporting) not topic that may drive ratings.



The one evening show that is demonstrably different is on PBS. The first half hour of the News Hour with Jim Lehrer includes a daily news summary as well as a fuller report of the top two or three stories. As an example, the NewsHour devoted more of its newshole to the debate about U.S. policy toward Iraq (28% vs. 10% on the three commercial newscasts) and only 40% as much attention to the 2008 elections (2% and 8th in prominence vs. 5% and fourth). As a result, the coverage also had more of an international focus than did coverage on the commercial newscasts. We do need to note,

though, that this is based on the first 30 minutes of the hour-long newscast, a time frame that makes it analogous to the commercial programs but misses what might come in the second half hour.

Morning News

The bigger difference in commercial network news comes not between networks but in daypart. The network morning newscasts are softer in nature—even in the hard news first 30 minutes studied in our Index.

Celebrity entertainment news, for instance, made up 8% of the first half hour of the morning shows, but only 2% in the evening. Accidents and disasters filled 13% of the morning news time, but 7% of the evening.

Another twist is that when the morning shows cover Washington, it is the campaign they are mostly talking about. Campaign and elections, namely the presidential campaign at this point, made up 15% of the time on the morning shows, twice the 7% it made up of the evening.

Domestic social issues, on the other hand, made up 7% of the morning time, compared with 20% on the evening programs on the same networks.

Broad Story Topic

Percent of Newshole on Commercial Network TV

Topic	Morning	Evening
accidents/disasters	13%	7%
business/economics	5	8
celebrity/entertainment	8	2
court/legal system	*	1
crime	8	6
defense/military	2	5
domestic issues	7	20
domestic other	*	0
elections/politics	15	7
foreign (non U.S.)	4	5
government	8	6
lifestyle	3	8
media	*	1
science	1	2
sports	2	1
traffic/weather	4	*
U.S. foreign affairs	19	21

* equals less than 1%

Another finding worth noting suggests some kinship—in format at least—between NBC and its cable sibling, MSNBC. More than 30% of NBC’s airtime was spent on the top two stories—the Iraq policy debate and the campaign.

Talk Radio

In February, a classic Beltway flap arose over the request that new Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi use a government plane large enough to fly non-stop to her home in California.

In the rest of the news media, this was not a big story, taking up only 1% of the week's overall news coverage. In talk radio, however, this was a major issue. And not surprisingly, radio talk hosts on the right and left staked out very different positions.

With Peter, Paul and Mary's hit song "Leaving on a Jet Plane" playing in the background, conservative radio host Sean Hannity (also a Fox News Channel host) criticized Pelosi for wanting "a gas guzzling presidential-sized aircraft."

To liberal radio talker Ed Schultz, such critics were motivated by something less lofty than budgetary or environmental concerns. "This is basically a story about chauvinism," he asserted.

The Pelosi debate highlights a few fundamental truths about talk radio, the most blatantly ideological of the media platforms in PEJ's News Coverage Index.

For one thing, its news agenda—and its sense of what is newsworthy—differ markedly from that of the rest of the media universe. In talk radio, qualities like passion, polarization, and hyperbole are the criteria of importance rather than the number of people affected by an event. The way that plays out is that rather than adding to the news agenda, the biggest tendency for talk radio is to take the top one or two stories in the mainstream press and then magnify and chew over them—often giving them double the time of the press overall. Thus, the new Democratic Congress, with Pelosi as its most visible symbol, received 5% of the news coverage in talk radio (making it the third most popular topic) versus 2% in the overall Index. The Iraq policy debate was the top story for both, but received more attention among the talk shows (12% overall versus 19% for talk). The presidential race that made up 7% of general newshole filled twice that (14%) on radio talk.

Indeed, when combined, the two top talk radio topics consumed one-third of all the airtime while the two biggest general news stories accounted for only one-fifth of the overall newshole.

Some subjects that get limited coverage generally do get more time in talk radio, but it might be a stretch to call it coverage. Global warming, a subject many talk hosts treat as synonymous with former Vice President Al Gore, filled 4% of the talk radio time, while getting only 1% of the coverage in the general Index.

If the radio hosts were similar in their tendency to focus on just two or three big news events, they were anything but that in the events they chose and in what they said about them. The ideology of the host had a major impact on *what* subjects get talked about at

all. (Despite the emergence of more liberal hosts in recent years, talk radio is still dominated by conservatives, and so the PEJ sample contains more conservative than liberal radio talk.)

One lesson that this pattern drives home is that in the talk radio universe, it is much easier to play offense than defense, far more desirable to attack rather than sing praises.

Conservative hosts, for example, made the Democratic takeover of Congress their third most popular topic of the year, (at 6%). Liberal talkers were noticeably less interested in the issue, which was their sixth most popular story at 4%.

The reverse was true of the controversy over the fired U.S. attorneys, which has put the administration's top law enforcement official, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, in the crosshairs. At 7% of the total airtime, liberal hosts made the issue their third biggest topic. But on this subject, conservative talkers have been considerably quieter, making it only their sixth favorite subject at 3% of the newshole.

Global warming, the fourth most popular subject among conservative radio hosts, did not even make the liberals' top-10 list. That's because Gore, the former vice president and Democratic presidential hopeful, makes an inviting target for conservatives. Meanwhile, liberal radio hosts were twice as likely as conservatives to talk about George Bush's State of the Union speech, with the president serving as the chief punching bag.

There are also significant differences when it comes to the presidential campaign, with conservatives being nearly twice as likely as liberals (16% to 9%) to raise that subject. The candidacy of Hillary Clinton may be dividing Democrats who have to choose between several major candidates. But it is uniting conservative talkers who have made the former First Lady a subject of major interest. In fact, both Hillary and Bill Clinton have had a long and not particularly positive relationship with the medium. The rise of conservative talk, and of its best-known practitioner Rush Limbaugh, coincided in good measure with Bill Clinton's 1992 election.

This year, as the Democrat's unofficial frontrunner for the White House, Hillary Clinton has not only generated more news coverage than any other candidate, she's gotten the most attention from the talk hosts as well. And on the conservative side, it hasn't been very flattering.

Some of those conservative hosts' antipathy toward Clinton has been so intense that they have been saying nice things about Barack Obama, a liberal Democrat whose primary virtue in their eyes may be that he can defeat Clinton for the nomination.

The March 4 speeches by both Clinton and Obama in Selma, Ala., are a good example. After criticizing Clinton on his radio show, Sean Hannity said Obama's address advocating more personal responsibility "was echoing Bill Cosby." And as the host was quick to note, "I love Bill Cosby."

On his show, Limbaugh was also eager to award the battle of Selma to the Illinois Senator. “Obama upstaged Mrs. Clinton yesterday,” he declared firmly. “Drew a larger crowd, didn’t speak with a fake southern accent, didn’t screech.”

She’s not the only reason that conservative talk hosts are eager to discuss the presidential campaign. But Hillary Clinton’s role as a talk radio lightning rod is well into its second decade.

News Radio

If the 2008 presidential campaign was a hot topic on talk radio in the first quarter of the year, it had much less of a presence on another radio platform—NPR’s “Morning Edition.” Not surprisingly, those two very different radio sectors had noticeably divergent news agendas for the first three months of 2007.

Public radio and the talk hosts both spent more time on the Iraq policy debate than any other story (15% on NPR compared with 19% in talk). But NPR spent a lot less time on the 2008 race for the White House (3% compared with 14% for the talkers) and considerably more time on events inside Iraq (7% versus 1% for talk).

In addition, several subjects that made “Morning Edition’s” top-10 story list—such as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (2%) and U.S. economic conditions (2%) —failed to get on the talkers’ radar screen. Conversely, the president’s State of the Union Address (2%) and domestic terrorism issues (1%) that were on the talkers’ top-10 story list did not make the NPR roster.

Yet another kind of radio news, the syndicated ABC and CBS radio headlines, revealed its own set of news priorities. After the Iraq policy debate and events in Iraq, the third biggest story in those headlines were storms and severe weather (4%). And by consuming 3% of the headlines’ newshole, the Anna Nicole Smith saga turned out to be the seventh biggest story.

METHODOLOGY

As a special report for PEJ’s weekly News Coverage Index (NCI), the Quarterly Report is based on the aggregated data collected from December 31, 2006 – March 31, 2007 (the first quarter of 2007).

Examining the news agenda of 48 different outlets in five media sectors, including newspapers, online, network TV, cable TV, and radio, the NCI is designed to provide news consumers, journalists and researchers with hard data about what stories and topics the media are covering, the trajectories of major stories and differences among news platforms. Following a rotation system, 35 outlets each weekday were selected as well as 7 newspapers each Sunday).

For its News Index PEJ monitors 48 different news outlets each week (35 per week-day) from five different media sectors

Newspapers (Thirteen in all, Sun-Fri)

NY Times every day

Code 2 out of these 4 every day

Wash Post

LA Times

USA Today

Wall Street Journal

Code 2 out of these 4 every day

The Boston Globe

Star Tribune

Austin American-Statesman

Albuquerque Journal

Code 2 out of these 4 every day

The Sun Chronicle

Star Beacon

The Chattanooga Times Free Press

The Bakersfield Californian

Web sites (Five in all, Mon-Fri)

CNN.com

Yahoo News

MSNBC.com

Google News

AOL News

Network TV (Seven in all, Mon-Fri)

Morning shows

ABC – Good Morning America

CBS – Early Show

NBC - Today

Evening news

ABC – World News Tonight

CBS – CBS Evening News

NBC – NBC Nightly News

PBS – Newshour with Jim Lehrer

Cable TV (Fifteen in all, Mon-Fri)

Daytime (1–1:30 pm) – code 2 out of 3 every day

CNN

Fox News

MSNBC

Nighttime CNN – code 3 out of the 4 every day

Lou Dobbs Tonight

Situation Room (7 pm)

Paula Zahn Now

Anderson Cooper 360

Nighttime Fox News – code 3 out of the 4 every day

Special Report w/ Britt Hume

Fox Report w/ Shepard Smith

O'Reilly Factor

Hannity & Colmes

Nighttime MSNBC – code 2 out of the 4 every day

Tucker (6 pm)

Hardball (7 pm)

Countdown w/ Keith Olbermann

Scarborough Country

Radio (Eight in all, Mon-Fri)

Headlines every day

ABC Radio headlines at 9am and 5pm

CBS Radio headlines at 9am and 5pm

NPR Morning Edition every day

Talk Radio

Rush Limbaugh every day

1 out of 2 additional conservatives each day

Sean Hannity

Michael Savage

1 out of 2 liberals each day

Ed Schultz

Randi Rhodes

From that content, PEJ analyzes all stories with a national or international focus that appearing as follows:

- On the front page of newspapers

- In the entirety of commercial network evening newscasts.
- The first 30 minutes of network morning news, the PBS evening news, and all cable programs
- The top 5 stories on each website at the time of capture

The resulting universe of stories was coded by a team, which is made up of 8 trained coders, a coding administrator, and a senior research methodologist. The complete methodology for the weekly NCI has further details on the coding system and coder reliability.

This report aggregates the NCI from December 31, 2006- March 31, 2007. The resulting universe totals 17,416 news stories, 456 hours of broadcast content (147 hours from network TV, 224 hours from cable, 85 hours from radio), 2.10 million words in newspapers, and 1.06 million words from news websites.

The accumulated quarterly data not only allows us to analyze the news coverage over the entire quarter across media sector. With this much data we can also compare the news agenda by news outlets, by time of day, or by media sector, and probe coverage of particular stories and topics much more deeply.

In particular, this quarterly report identified the top stories over the quarter and examined how certain big stories (such as Iraq War, presidential campaign, Anna Nicole Smith, U.S. attorney firings) ebbed and flowed, and how their treatment differed among media sectors or outlets. The Iraq War has received so much so far in 2007 that we developed three distinct threads: the Iraq policy debate, events on the ground in Iraq, and U.S. homefront. Each Iraq story is coded for one of these three story lines. For the statistics that relate to coverage of the Iraq War as a whole, we added the total of those three storylines together to get the overall Iraq War coverage statistics.

Lexis Database Search

The Lexis-Nexis database search was conducted for each of the three leading candidates from both the Republican and Democratic fields. The newspapers that were searched were the ones that were included in our weekly index that are also available in the Lexis database.

The newspapers included in this search were:

- New York Times
- Washington Post
- Los Angeles Times
- USA Today
- Boston Globe
- Star Tribune (MN)
- Chattanooga Times Free Press
- Albuquerque Journal
- Austin American-Statesmen

We also searched news transcripts from the three major network television stations. These transcripts include such news programs like 20/20 and 60 Minutes that are not a part of the PEJ's weekly sample. Election news in these programs, though, was minimal. In addition, Lexis transcripts cover the entire program not only the 1st 30 min's as is studied for the NCI.

The television programs included in the search were:

ABC

- World News Tonight
- This Week
- 20/20
- Good Morning America

CBS

- 60 Minutes
- CBS Evening News
- The Early Show
- Face the Nation

NBC

- Meet the Press
- NBC Nightly News
- Today

PBS

- NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

For both newspapers and the television transcripts, searches were conducted using the last names of the candidates that appeared in either the headline or lead paragraphs of the story. The reason for searching for the names in the headline or lead paragraphs was to determine the number of stories that focused on the candidates. Another option would have been to search for mentions anywhere in the article or transcript which would have yielded more results, but would have also included many stories where the candidates were not central to the story.

The one exception for using the candidate's last name was Hillary Clinton. Because of former President Bill Clinton, a search of the name "Clinton" would yield many articles about him and not the current Senator from New York. In addition, many articles refer to the candidate as "Hillary Clinton" while others refer to her as "Hillary Rodham Clinton". Therefore, we searched for both options in order to get the proper total number of stories.