



Midwest News Index releases latest findings on TV political news

May 21, 2007

by Dennis Chaptman

A new University of Wisconsin–Madison study shows that political news stories on local television news outlets in five Midwestern states comprised less than two minutes of a typical 30–minute broadcast during the first quarter of 2007.

The **Midwest News Index**, a project of the UW–Madison NewsLab, analyzed more than 1,800 broadcasts, or more than 900 hours of programming, that included 2,797 government news stories and 258 stories on elections.

The latest findings show that stations devoted one minute, 35 seconds to government news and 20 seconds to election news.

NewsLab and several other research projects have systematically examined election coverage on local news in 2002, 2004 and 2006, but until now there have been no systematic studies of local TV news outside of an election period.

"Even with the huge growth of cable and the Internet, most Americans get most of their news from local television news," says Kenneth Goldstein, professor of political science and NewsLab's director. "We are excited to provide scholars and policymakers with this data set and archive."

The findings are part of an ongoing study examining the content and effect of local television news in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The project is funded by the Joyce Foundation of Chicago, a leading philanthropic group in the area of political and government reform. Previously, the project captured and coded local news coverage in the 60 days preceding the 2006 midterm elections.

In this stage of the study, NewsLab captured and analyzed a representative random sample of early and late–evening newscasts on ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates in nine television markets in the five states.

The complete breakdown of an average 30–minute broadcast in the 36–station, 2,015–broadcast sample was as follows:

- Local interest: two minutes, 11 seconds
- Business/economy: one minute, three seconds
- World affairs: 24 seconds
- Health: 52 seconds

- Sports and weather: seven minutes, 41 seconds
- Unintentional injury: 16 seconds
- Crime: two minutes, 13 seconds
- Government news: one minute, 35 seconds
- Election coverage: 20 seconds
- Advertising: nine minutes, 12 seconds
- Other: two minutes, 16 seconds
- Teasers, bumpers, intros: one minute, 57 seconds

The amount of coverage dedicated to politics (government and election stories) is consistent with NewsLab findings of nonpresidential election and government coverage in 2004 and is also consistent with findings from Midwest stations in 2002. In fact, there was very little change in the overall volume of political coverage on the 14 Midwest stations tracked in 2002 and 2006.

Average amounts of government coverage for the random sample of broadcasts in each market are shown below, with the first number being the amount of nonelection government coverage and the second number being the amount of election coverage.

- Springfield: two minutes, 17 seconds; 30 seconds
- Chicago: one minute, 33 seconds; 56 seconds
- Columbus: one minute, 43 seconds; seven seconds
- Cleveland: one minute, 29 seconds; eight seconds
- Lansing: two minutes, 12 seconds; eight seconds
- Detroit: one minute, six seconds; five seconds
- Madison: one minute, 24 seconds; 29 seconds
- Milwaukee: one minute, 11 seconds; 10 seconds
- Minneapolis: one minute, 26 seconds; eight seconds

While often not in the largest areas, news broadcasts in markets that are a state capital dedicated more time to coverage of government news. For example, on average, Lansing stations dedicated twice as much time to government news as Detroit stations.



The study also found that:

- Nearly one quarter of government stories, or 18 percent, mentioned or focused on a piece of legislation, and 5 percent of those stories focused on bills about education, while 11 percent focused on health-care legislation
- At the state government level, 17 percent of the government stories mentioned the governor, and state legislatures were mentioned in 12 percent. Locally, mayors were mentioned in 8 percent of the stories.
- About 4 percent of stories mentioned or focused on political reform, while 8 percent dealt with scandal.

In election stories, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) had a pronounced edge in attention. Obama was mentioned in nearly a quarter of the stories — 34 percent — compared to U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), who was mentioned 12 percent of the time. Republicans Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor, and U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) were mentioned with notably lower frequencies — 2 percent for Giuliani and 4 percent for McCain.

NewsLab has the infrastructure, technical skill and supervisory capability to capture, clip, code, analyze and archive any media in any market — domestic or international — in real time.

Share this story:

 Delicious  Digg  Reddit  Facebook  StumbleUpon