

## MIDWEST LOCAL TV NEWSCASTS DEVOTE 2.5 TIMES AS MUCH AIR TIME TO POLITICAL ADS AS ELECTION COVERAGE, STUDY FINDS

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CHICAGO, Illinois – In the month leading up to the recent 2006 mid-term elections, local television news viewers got considerably more information about campaigns from paid political advertisements than from actual news coverage, a new study shows. Local newscasts in seven Midwest markets aired nearly four and a-half minutes of paid political ads during the typical 30-minute broadcast while dedicating an average of one minute and 43 seconds to election news coverage.

The new post-election analysis also shows that most of the actual news coverage of elections on early and late-evening broadcasts was devoted to campaign strategy and polling, which outpaced reporting on policy issues by a margin of over three to one (65 percent to 17 percent). These findings come amid studies consistently showing that voters look to local television newscasts as their primary source of information about elections.

The analysis was released today by the Midwest News Index (MNI), a project of the University of Wisconsin's NewsLab. 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 MNI is funded by the Joyce Foundation of Chicago, a leading philanthropy in the area of political and government reform.

From October 7 to November 6, the UW NewsLab captured and coded the content of early- and late-evening newscasts on 28 ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC affiliates in seven markets in the five-state region. They include: Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Cleveland, Columbus, Madison, and Milwaukee. During this four-week period, the UW NewsLab system captured 99.3% of targeted broadcasts, a notably high rate. The UW NewsLab also obtained and analyzed corresponding advertising data from TNS Media Intelligence/CMAG during this timeframe for the affiliates included in these markets.

The amount of election coverage increased considerably, just over a minute, from an initial set of findings presented by the MNI in October. From September 7 to October 6, local television stations devoted an average of 36 seconds to election coverage during the early- and late-evening newscasts captured in the study. The new findings show that 2,392 election stories aired in captured broadcasts on the stations in the seven markets while 8,995 political ads aired during the same timeframe.

The study also found:

- The average length of a single story devoted primarily to elections was roughly 76 seconds. By contrast, a similar national study conducted by the UW NewsLab during the 2002 mid-term election found the average story ran 89 seconds.

- 41 percent of the election stories were aired in the final week before Election Day.
- There was a political ad “echo effect:” Over one in ten election stories mentioned, pictured, or focused on a specific campaign ad.
- Gubernatorial coverage consumed over a quarter of the airtime (26 percent) devoted to election stories overall.

The Midwest News Index will continue to capture and analyze local news broadcasts in a total of nine Midwest markets through the summer of 2007. The figures in this release are based on seven of the nine markets, as advertising data was not available for the Springfield, Illinois and Lansing, Michigan media markets. With the election season concluded, future MNI reports will focus on coverage of government and other civic news.

UW NewsLab is directed by UW-Madison political science professor Ken Goldstein. The state-of-the-art facility 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. The Wisconsin NewsLab archives include data collected in the 2002 and 2004 national elections, and are the most comprehensive and systematic collection of campaign news coverage on local television stations ever gathered.

The Midwest News Index findings will be continually updated on the project Web site at [www.mni.wisc.edu](http://www.mni.wisc.edu), which provides a comprehensive, Web-based searchable archive available to journalists, scholars, civic organizations and others.

“The data gathered by the UW NewsLab represent a comprehensive look at the highest rated early evening and late evening television news broadcasts in major Midwest markets. The MNI 2006 study builds on studies conducted in 2002 and 2004 and provides a strong evidentiary base for assessing the sorts of information that voters receive from a crucial source of news over the course of the campaign,” Goldstein said. “Scholars, reformers, policy makers, and broadcasters may hold different opinions on the responsibilities of broadcasters and the relative effect of different sorts of campaign communications, but the data here are unambiguous – local television news provides less news on politics than many other topics and the coverage is overwhelmingly characterized by stories on strategy, horserace, and the game of politics. Any intelligent debate needs to begin from that starting point.”

Larry Hansen, vice president of the Joyce Foundation, expressed concern over a troubling trend in the way the general public receives information about elections and the lack of responsibility exhibited by television broadcasters.

“When you reflect on the recent campaign season, with its relentless assault of outlandish, negative political ads, you can’t help but fear what future elections may bring. This year, political campaigns invested hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising to local broadcasters to get their message across during local evening newscasts,” Hansen said. “All the while, local broadcasters failed in their

responsibility to provide an adequate amount of substantive election coverage, which might have helped counterbalance the waves of negative ads. In the end, well funded candidates and local broadcasters win while voters, most candidates and democracy lose.”

Mike McCabe of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, a political reform organization affiliated with the Joyce Foundation added, “Today’s report shows that paid political ads have now become the primary source of information leading into our elections. During such an important election cycle, it is alarming to see that viewers were influenced more by campaign consultants than by objective television coverage.”

Following is a chart illustrating a breakdown of the typical 30-minute local news broadcast in the seven markets in which news coverage and political advertising were analyzed by the UW NewsLab. Times reflect averages based on total broadcasts captured and coded.

### Typical 30 Minute Broadcast Breakdown

Category	10.7.06 - 11.6.06
Total Advertising	9 min 46 sec
*Political Advertising	4 min 24 sec
*Avg. Number of Political Ads	8.81
Sports and weather	6 min 58 sec
Crime	2 min 20 sec
Other	2 min 13 sec
Local interest	1 min 54 sec
Teasers, bumpers, intros	1 min 51 sec
Election coverage	1 min 43 sec
Non-campaign gov’t news	1 min 2 sec
Business, economy	47 sec
Health	45 sec
Foreign policy	27 sec
Unintentional injury	14 sec

**(NOTE: Individual reports on each of the seven markets providing additional detail for each of the five states are attached and available at [www.mni.wisc.edu](http://www.mni.wisc.edu) and [www.joycefdn.org](http://www.joycefdn.org).**

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN NEWSLAB AND THE MIDWEST NEWS INDEX: This report is released by the Wisconsin NewsLab of the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The principal investigators are Ken Goldstein, professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Director of the Wisconsin NewsLab and Wisconsin

Advertising Project and Erika Franklin Fowler, Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Research Director of the Wisconsin NewsLab. The project is funded by a grant from The Joyce Foundation. In the eight weeks leading up to the 2006 election campaign (September 7<sup>th</sup> through November 6<sup>th</sup>), project staff captured local news on the ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates in 9 Midwest markets in five states (the capital city and the largest media market in the state): Minnesota (Minneapolis/St. Paul), Wisconsin (Madison and Milwaukee), Illinois (Chicago and Champaign/Springfield), Michigan (Detroit and Lansing), and Ohio (Cleveland and Columbus). This 9-market study of local news coverage of politics is part of a longer project that will examine the content of local news throughout the year, the most in-depth research on individual markets ever conducted ([www.mni.wisc.edu](http://www.mni.wisc.edu)).

The news programming was captured through a sophisticated market-based media server technology. Each day, digitally-recorded video was sent over the Internet to the UW NewsLab servers overnight. The NewsLab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison ([www.polisci.wisc.edu/uwnewslab](http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/uwnewslab)) is a unique state-of-the art facility that 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. Video can be gathered, digitized, sorted and archived automatically by the InfoSite system, a media analysis product of CommIT Technology Solutions of Madison, Wisconsin ([www.commitonline.com](http://www.commitonline.com)). This system includes a variety of automatic validation checks to ensure superior coding reliability and logical consistency. With over a terabyte of storage, the UW NewsLab servers manage data, encode and archive video, and serve content through one of many custom media analysis tools, both internally, and to the rest of the world via the Internet. The Midwest News Index director is Tricia Olsen. The University of Wisconsin Advertising Project ([www.polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising](http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising)) is also housed in the UW NewsLab facility, where it tracks real time political advertising flows across the nation.

**ABOUT THE JOYCE FOUNDATION:** Based in Chicago with assets of \$830 million, the Joyce Foundation funds groups working to strengthen public policies and improve the quality of life in the Great Lakes region. Its Money and Politics program supports efforts to promote a well-functioning representative democracy with open and accountable government, informed citizen participation, competition of ideas and candidates, fair and equal application of the laws, a high level of public trust and protection of fundamental rights.

Other grant making areas for the Joyce Foundation are education, employment, the environment, gun violence prevention and culture. More information can be found at [www.joycefdn.org](http://www.joycefdn.org).

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