



# WISCONSIN NEWS LAB



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON  
*Department of Political Science*

---

## Midwest News Index (MNI) Methodology

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.

### ***Research Design***

In the 60 days preceding Election Day, UW NewsLab will examine up to an hour a day from each of the four major stations in all 9 Midwest media markets covering 10 percent of the nation's population. Over the rest of the year UW NewsLab will randomly sample 8,760 broadcasts (33 percent) from a sampling frame of up to an hour a day from each station (two half-hour or one hour long broadcast) aired over the course of the year. Throughout the entire study, the Wisconsin NewsLab will also analyze national news.

### ***Capture***

The process of capturing local news data begins by placing servers in each media market. We placed servers in 9 markets (Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Detroit, Lansing, Madison, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Springfield), which capture up to an hour of news programming: generally the 5pm and 10pm broadcasts from ABC, CBS, and NBC for markets in Central Time, the 6pm and 11pm broadcasts from ABC, CBS, and NBC for markets in Eastern Time, and up to an hour of Fox at 9pm in CST and 10pm in EST. Once the video is electronically captured, all segments are sent over the internet to the University of Wisconsin NewsLab servers. For the 2006 study, the system is capturing over 250 hours of local news content each week.

The sample is not a sample of **all** local television news broadcasts in the Midwest and therefore does not allow this study to speak to the content of **all** Midwest local news programming. It is, however, a sample of some of the highest-rated programming from the capitol city and largest media market in five Midwestern states, allowing us to make generalizable comparisons among and between states in the sample.

The NewsLab system captured on average 96 percent of targeted broadcasts, a notably high rate. In 8 out of 9 markets, the average station capture rate equaled or exceeded 95 percent. A full listing of each individual station capture rate can be found in the appendix.

There is no reason to suspect that there are systematic differences between the overall findings about regularly scheduled news broadcasts reported here and the missing data. Even so, the findings in this report are based only on the broadcasts and campaign news stories actually watched and analyzed by project staff. The majority of the report contains overall percentages and averages which, given the high capture rate, are unlikely to be significantly affected by missing data. Broadcasts analyzed in this report aired from September 7 through October 6, 2006. Television news broadcasts are often pre-empted or replaced by late-running sporting events, particularly on weekends. As a result, the number of broadcasts for each station is based on broadcasts where the regular news programs actually aired, not on the number of broadcasts a station would have aired without being pre-empted or replaced.

### ***Clipping, Coding, and Archiving***

In the initial step of the analysis, all news segments are clipped into individual stories and categorized by story topic.<sup>1</sup> Trained “clippers” use the system to mark the beginning and end of each story, code it by primary and secondary foci and then automatically send each story to a “coding” queue, where it is assigned to a trained, student coder. At this juncture, all election-related news stories are coded on a variety of information including story length, office focus (gubernatorial, senatorial, etc), candidates covered, tone of story (positive, negative, balanced and value neutral) and length of candidate sound bites. Once stories have been captured, clipped and coded, they are sent automatically to a web-based searchable archive. All 2006 election related stories are available for users to search the video database on a host of items including: keywords, story subject, station, market, date aired, tone of coverage as well as other project-specific items (such as candidates mentioned for elections, etc) to name a few. UW NewsLab also uses inter-coder reliability (ICR) statistics. This process assures that our coders, independent of one another, are coding in a similar fashion.

### ***Reliability Mechanisms***

Multiple checks are employed to guarantee data reliability. These checks ensure a dataset in which all variables are complete and consistent: 1) the system requires data to pass automatic logic checks before submitting stories into the coding system; 2) a series of filters are used to flag data that contains seemingly contradictory answers for supervisor review; and 3) inter-coder reliability (ICR) is constantly monitored to ensure the consistency and reliability of the data.<sup>2</sup> Through the comparison of these two answer sets, we are able to track the consistency and accuracy of our data.

### **UW NewsLab Staff**

#### ***Kenneth Goldstein – Principal Investigator***

Ken Goldstein is a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Director of the University of Wisconsin Advertising Project ([www.polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising](http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising)) and the University of Wisconsin NewsLab. Goldstein received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1996 with a focus on American politics and research methodology. He is the author of *Interest Groups, Lobbying, and Participation in America*, published by Cambridge University Press, and recently completed a book on the impact of television advertising. He is also at work on a book under contract with Princeton University Press on the targeting of campaign activity and television advertising in the 2004 campaign. In addition, his research on political communication and local news, news coverage of health issues and unintentional

---

<sup>1</sup> During the clipping phase, a custom software application, Infosite, (a product of CommIT Technology Solutions, Inc.) automatically retrieved each piece of video and linked the video record to data collected by Wisconsin NewsLab staff, reducing human error. UW NewsLab staff had the ability to rewind, fast forward and pause the video while answering questions about the recorded content.

<sup>2</sup> ICR is checked by randomly selecting a percentage of completed stories to be recoded by a second individual. The two sets of answers are compared both in terms of percent agreement but also (and more importantly) by computing a chance-corrected reliability statistic such as Scott's Pi and Krippendorff's R depending on the nature of the variable being compared. Each coder is monitored and supervisors continually give feedback to UW NewsLab staff to ensure a high overall level of ICR.

injuries, voter turnout, survey methodology, Israeli politics, and presidential elections has appeared in over 25 refereed journal articles and book chapters.

Goldstein's reputation for unbiased and non-partisan analysis has made him a favorite source for politicians and the news media alike. He has appeared numerous times on Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Nightline, ABC World News Tonight, NBC Nightly News, CBS Evening News, FOX News Channel, MSNBC, CNBC and CNN, and is a frequent contributor on National Public Radio. He is also quoted extensively in the country's top newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. His expert testimony was also used in the litigation and Supreme Court decision on BCRA.

***Erika Franklin Fowler – Principal Investigator***

Erika Franklin Fowler is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Wisconsin – Madison and the Research Director of the Wisconsin NewsLab. She is completing a dissertation about the political content and effectiveness of local television news coverage of elections in which she concludes that political advertisements actually have more substantive information and a more consistent effect on citizen knowledge, perceptions of the campaign and turnout than local television news messages. Fowler has also published several pieces on political communication and free media in particular, including a book chapter on effects of free media in campaigns with Ken Goldstein, an article with Ken Goldstein, Marty Kaplan and Matthew Hale to appear in an upcoming volume of *Stanford Law & Policy Review* and an analysis of health news on local television (with Ken Goldstein and medical researchers at the University of Michigan) published in the *American Journal of Managed Care*.

A summa cum laude graduate of St. Olaf College with a B.A. in political science and mathematics, Fowler has worked with the Wisconsin NewsLab since its inception in 2002.

***Tricia Olsen – MNI Project Director***

A graduate student at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, Tricia Olsen has worked with the Wisconsin NewsLab since the fall of 2004. She is the Project Director for UW NewsLab and will run the Midwest News Index, the first and most systematic project to track a full year of news coverage in nine Midwestern markets. Olsen is also responsible for overseeing Spanish-language coding and writing and administering foundation grants for UW NewsLab. Olsen graduated from Carleton College with a B.A. in Latin American Studies and a minor in Political Science, where she refined her Spanish and Portuguese language skills. She earned her M.A. in Political Science from UW - Madison in 2006. Her research interests include Latin American politics, methodology, and transnational social movements and networks.

**APPENDIX**

**INDIVIDUAL STATION CAPTURE RATES  
(October 7 – November 6, 2006)**

<b>MARKET</b>	<b>STATION</b>	<b>NETWORK</b>	<b>SCHEDULED BROADCASTS</b>	<b>VIDEO CAPTURE RATE</b>
Chicago	WLS1	ABC	62	100.0%
Chicago	WBBM	CBS	62	96.9%
Chicago	WFLD	FOX	31	100.0%
Chicago	WMAQ	NBC	62	98.5%
Cleveland	WEWS	ABC	62	100.0%
Cleveland	WOIO	CBS	62	100.0%
Cleveland	WJW1	Fox	31	100.0%
Cleveland	WKYC	NBC	62	96.9%
Columbus	WSYX	ABC	62	98.4%
Columbus	WBNS	CBS	62	98.5%
Columbus	WTTE	FOX	31	100.0%
Columbus	WCMH	NBC	62	98.4%
Detroit	WXYZ	ABC	62	100.0%
Detroit	WWJ	CBS	no news	-
Detroit	WJBK	Fox	31	100.0%
Detroit	WDIV	NBC	62	100.0%
Lansing	WLAJ	ABC	42	100.0%
Lansing	WLNS	CBS	62	100.0%
Lansing	WSYM	FOX	31	93.9%
Lansing	WILX	NBC	62	100.0%
Madison	WKOW	ABC	62	100.0%
Madison	WISC	CBS	62	100.0%
Madison	WMSN	FOX	31	100.0%
Madison	WMTV	NBC	62	100.0%
Milwaukee	WISN	ABC	62	96.9%
Milwaukee	WDJT	CBS	62	100.0%
Milwaukee	WITI	Fox	31	100.0%
Milwaukee	WTMJ	NBC	62	100.0%
Minneapolis	KSTP	ABC	62	100.0%
Minneapolis	WCCO	CBS	62	100.0%
Minneapolis	KMSP	FOX	31	100.0%
Minneapolis	KARE	NBC	62	96.9%
Springfield	WICS	ABC	62	98.4%
Springfield	WCIA	CBS	62	96.9%
Springfield	WRSP	FOX	31	100.0%
Springfield	WAND	NBC	62	98.4%
<b>Overall</b>				<b>99.1%</b>