

## **MIDWEST LOCAL TV NEWSCASTS AVERAGE 36 SECONDS OF ELECTION COVERAGE IN TYPICAL 30-MINUTE BROADCAST**

*Campaign strategy and horserace stories dominate limited election coverage by local TV news in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Ohio*

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MADISON, Wisconsin -- In the month following the traditional Labor Day kickoff of the 2006 election campaign season, television stations in nine Midwest markets devoted an average of 36 seconds to election coverage during the typical 30-minute local news broadcast, a new analysis shows.

By contrast, the typical early- and late-evening local news broadcasts contained more than 10 minutes of advertising, over seven minutes of sports and weather, and almost two and a-half minutes of crime stories.

The analysis traces broadcast news coverage in media markets in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio, all of them witnessing highly competitive campaigns for state office this year. Public opinion research consistently shows that voters rely on local television newscasts as their primary source of information about elections and politics.

The findings were reported today by the Midwest News Index (MNI), a new project of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's NewsLab. The Joyce Foundation of Chicago is funding the news analysis as part of an ongoing project examining democratic institutions and processes in the five-state region.

The UW NewsLab analysis captured up to one hour per night of the early- and late-evening broadcasts on 36 NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX affiliates in nine Midwest markets between September 7 and October 6. The analysis covered the largest media market and state capital city in each state: Chicago, Springfield, Detroit, Lansing, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Cleveland, Columbus, Madison and Milwaukee.

Highlights of the initial report include:

- Of the more than 1,800 broadcasts analyzed by UW NewsLab (900 hours of programming), 1,629 election related stories aired. These included stories that were primarily about campaigns and elections and stories that either tangentially included elections or that mentioned a candidate running for office in November 2006.

- Just over half of all broadcasts (56 percent) contained at least one story that was primarily about elections, and the average length of stories devoted primarily to elections was 68 seconds.
- In coverage of elections, strategy and horserace stories vastly outweighed substantive issue coverage by a margin of almost 3 to 1 (63 percent to 23 percent).
- Gubernatorial coverage consumed a third of the airtime (34 percent) devoted to election stories.

This initial report on pre-election coverage is the first in a series of analyses running through the summer of 2007 of how local news broadcasts cover politics and government. The duration of the study and its regional focus are unprecedented.

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.

“Although it is the single greatest source of news information for most Americans, scholarly studies have consistently shown that citizens learn little from local news,” Goldstein said. “The results from this study show why. There must be significant substantive content for learning to take place. This study, consistent with previous studies conducted at UW NewsLab, show that there is relatively little coverage of campaigns and elections on local news, and when coverage does occur, it tends to focus on horserace and strategy frames.”

The Midwest News Index findings will be continually updated on the project Web site at [www.mni.wisc.edu](http://www.mni.wisc.edu). The study will also produce a comprehensive, Web-based searchable archive available to journalists, scholars, civic organizations and others. A second report covering the final month of the campaign will be released in mid-November.

Lawrence Hansen, vice president of the Joyce Foundation, said he hoped the initial findings of the Midwest News Index would spur both station owners and their regulators to do a better job of fulfilling their public interest obligations in the final weeks before the elections.

“The airwaves – like our national parks – are owned by the American people, not, as is often mistakenly assumed, by broadcasters. The results of this study show that most broadcasters are retreating from their obligation to serve the public interest, including their responsibility to inform citizens so they can participate in the political process,” said Hansen.

“Meanwhile television station owners reap millions of dollars from paid political advertising –which in turn drives up the cost of running for office and makes candidates dependent on special interests and large donors willing to pick up the tab,” Hansen said.

National and regional public opinion research consistently shows that local television news broadcasts are the leading source of information on government and politics, outpolling newspapers, radio and the Internet. For example, a recent survey of residents in the five Midwest states, commissioned by the Joyce Foundation, found that 69 percent of voters in the region "regularly watch local broadcast news," compared with 58 percent who read a daily or Sunday newspaper, 32 percent who use the Internet to get news and information and 30 percent who listen to talk radio.

Following is a chart illustrating a breakdown of the typical 30-minute local news broadcast in the nine markets covered by the Wisconsin NewsLab’s Midwest News Index. Times reflect averages based on total broadcasts analyzed.

**Typical 30 Minute Broadcast Breakdown**

<b>Category</b>	<b>9.7.06 – 10.6.06</b>
Advertising	10 min 7 sec
Sports and weather	7 min 1 sec
Crime	2 min 27 sec
Other	2 min 18 sec
Local interest	2 min 1sec
Teasers, bumpers, intros	1 min 46 sec
Non-campaign gov’t news	1 min 6 sec
Health	1 min 4 sec
Business, economy	1 min 2 sec
Election coverage	36 sec
Foreign policy	23 sec
Unintentional injury	11 sec

**(NOTE: Individual reports on each of the nine 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 four weeks following the traditional Labor Day

kickoff of the 2006 election campaign (September 7<sup>th</sup> through October 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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