

BALANCE IN NEWS COVERAGE OF THE 2008 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Final Report
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1. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Introduction

This analysis of news coverage of the 2008 federal election campaign was undertaken to determine whether treatment of the parties was fair and balanced.

A number of quantitative indicators are useful in deciding whether the balance in coverage was appropriate. The primary purpose of this analysis is to describe these indicators. The three principal indicators are:

- **The amount of time** that representatives of each party have to present their platform (measured as time that party representatives are heard speaking);
- **The amount of discussion** about each party (measured as the number of statements that are made about each party);
- **The direction in coverage** – the proportion of positive, neutral and negative statements made about each party.

These measures are simply facts: deciding whether coverage is fairly balanced is a matter of comparing what these indicator numbers *are* with what they *ought to be*. This is a matter of judgment that is based on experience, knowledge of political events, and one's view of the role of news media.

At the macro level, balance involves fulfilling CBC's role as a broadcaster. The operating assumptions of campaign coverage in the past have been that CBC should:

- Provide a space for the political parties to present their platforms;
- Provide scrutiny of the parties' positions by analysts and experts;
- Present the views of citizens, so that voters across the country will understand how others respond to the parties' offerings and to the issues of the day.

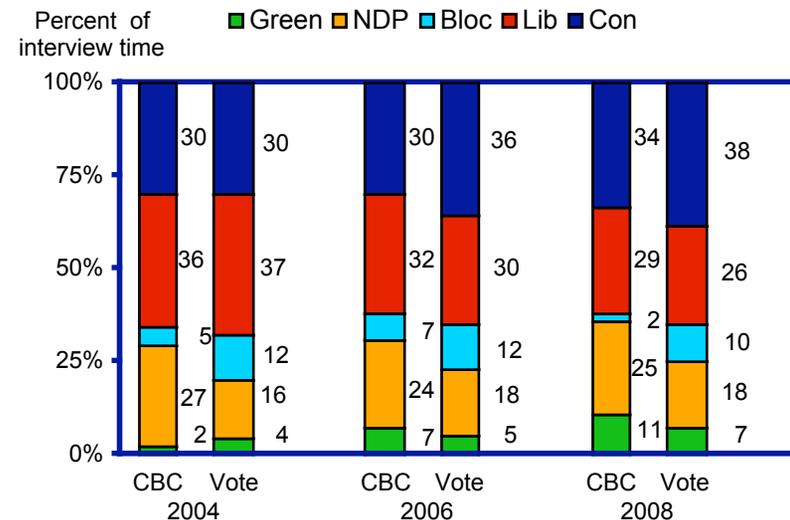
Interview time

The Conservatives received 34% of the parties' share of interview time, the Liberals 29%, and the NDP 25%. Interview time corresponds quite closely to a party's standing among citizens, that is, with opinion polls during the campaign and the popular vote in the election (Figure 1).

In 2004, as the governing party, the Liberals received the largest proportion of interview time. In 2006, the momentum switched from Liberals to Conservatives toward the end of the campaign and the division of interview time followed the trend.

Figure 1. Percent of interview time for major parties on CBC vs popular vote

2004 – 2008



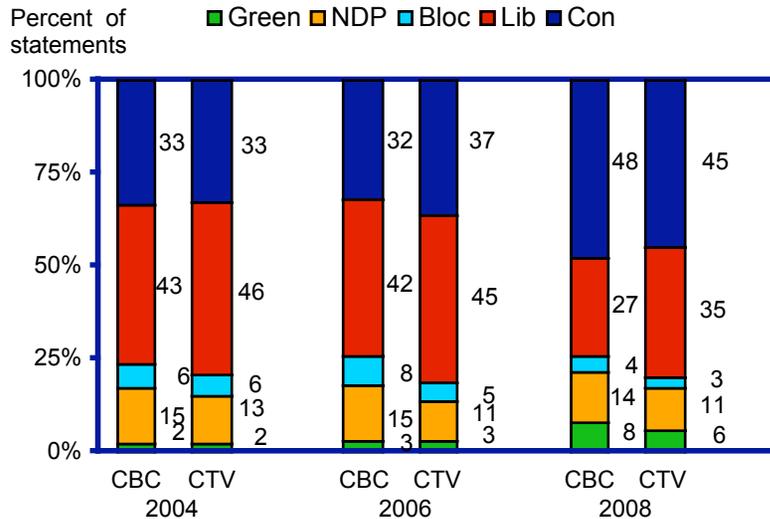
Discussion

The leading party usually generates more discussion than others, partly because it is likely to form the next government and is of interest on that basis, and also because it tends to be the focus of attacks by the challenging parties.

In the 2008 campaign, the Conservatives also drew most of the discussion, 48%, followed by the Liberals at 27% and the NDP at 14%. (Figure 2).

In 2004 and 2006, the situation was reversed with the Liberals being the major focus of discussion.

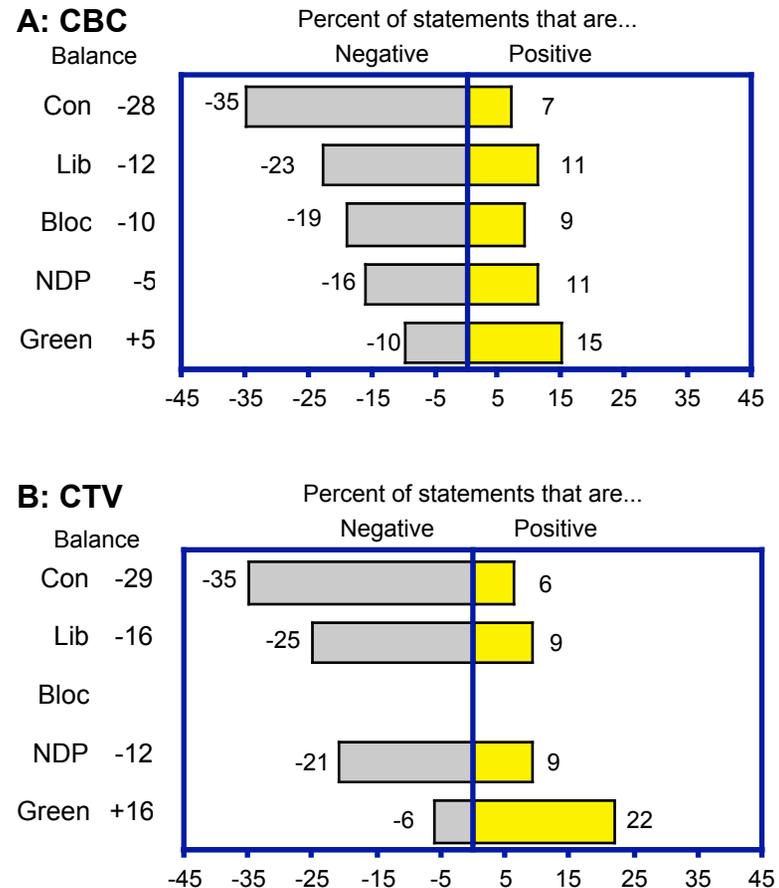
Figure 2. Percentage of discussion about each party
2004 – 2008



Direction

The Conservatives received the largest proportion of negative coverage: on the CBC, 35% of statements about the Conservatives were negative and 7% positive, for a balance of -28. The Liberal balance was -12 and the NDP balance -5 (Figure 3). This pattern is consistent with the Conservatives' position going into the campaign. As front-runner, they were the focus of attacks by the other parties.

Figure 3. Statements about the parties: all sources
Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008



Conclusions

The patterns described are consistent with federal election campaigns in the past 15 years: the front-runner commands a greater share of attention, but also carries a greater burden of criticism.

There is a high degree of consistency across CBC's three platforms of radio, television and Internet, and between the CBC sources and the CTV National News. The different formats and objectives of these sources means that there will be some variation on each of the major indicators. This variation appears to be within a reasonable range.

Finally, CBC provided a forum for discussion of the parties' positions. Approximately one-half of the total interview time went to the parties, one-third to citizens and interest groups (business, labour, arts etc.) and the balance to political analysts and experts.

All in all, CBC coverage of the 2008 campaign appears to be fair and balanced. There are no absolute standards for what a broadcaster ought to do in campaign coverage; it is a matter of informed judgment. Past journalistic practice is probably as good a guide as any, and by this standard, CBC coverage was on course, consistent with the 5 election campaigns since 1993.

2. SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS

The analysis of balance in campaign coverage includes three platforms; television, radio and Internet. Analyses of several earlier campaigns have described news coverage on television and radio, however this is the first to include reporting on the Internet.

The study extends to all campaign stories on the radio and television programs shown in Table 1.

Stories were selected from cbc.ca, as follows:

- All campaign stories on the main news page (usually 2 or 3 per day);
- All campaign coverage on the Canada Votes landing page (usually 9-12 per day);
- Current affairs stories on the Canada Votes landing page (usually 1 or 2 per day).

Web stories were downloaded at noon each day and all new stories of the types described above were analyzed. Excluded from the web content are background stories that do not directly relate to the campaign, blogs, and factual content such as the Voter Toolkit.

The amount of coverage is reported in terms of time for radio and television programs, and in terms of the number of statements made for all platforms including the Internet. Please see the Appendix for definitions of “statement” and other terms used in this analysis.

Table 1. 2008 Campaign coverage

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Source | Minutes of coverage | Number of statements |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The National | 685 | 6,599 |
| CBC News: Sunday Night | 130 | 1,137 |
| World Report | 113 | 1,326 |
| The World at 6 | 257 | 2,782 |
| The House | 228 | 2,093 |
| The CTV National News | 247 | 2,877 |
| cbc.ca | – | 9,012 |
| Total | 1,659 | 25,826 |

The following section provides a brief synopsis of major events in the campaign.

Notable events

Week 1: Sept 7–14, 2008

- Tues Sept 9 Danny Williams begins his ABC campaign
- Tues 9 The leader's image and style are emphasized by each party
- Tues 9 Taliban step up attacks on troops due to election campaign in Canada
- Wed 10 Elizabeth May is included in the television debates
- Wed 10 Stephen Harper confirms the date for withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan
- Thurs 11 Conservative Director of Communications questions the motives of dead soldier's father, resigns
- Thurs 11 Liberal candidate in Quebec is asked to step down after comments on Oka crisis resurface
- Fri 12 Gas prices spike overnight due to Hurricane Ike, making gouging an issue
- Fri 12 The looming failure of Lehman Brothers and the near collapse of Merrill Lynch and AIG Insurance highlight the global financial crisis and bring economic issues to the fore

Week 2: Sept 15–21, 2008

- Mon Sept 15 Wall Street bank meltdowns frame the economic message of the parties' campaigns
- Mon 15 Online vote pairing makes its debut on the Canadian political scene
- Tues 16 Dion begins to share the stage with his team
- Tues 16 Liberals emphasize jobs and the economy over the Green Shift
- Wed 17 Agriculture Minister Ritz makes a public apology for tasteless comments about Listeriosis outbreak
- Wed 17 Former Pot TV host resigns as NDP candidate after recordings of drug abuse surface. Marijuana Party founder follows
- Wed 17 Liberals and NDP unveil their childcare proposals

- Thurs 18 Bloc appears to be losing ground in Québec
- Thurs 18 Lawrence Cannon forced to apologize for insulting response to Algonquin constituent from his aide
- Fri 19 PSAC warns that Conservatives plan to pull out of provincial meat inspection programs
- Fri 19 Group protesting cuts to culture budget greets Harper in Montreal
- Fri 19 Mayors across Canada emphasize their requirements

Week 3: Sept 22–28, 2008

- The halting progress of the proposed financial bail-out bill in the US forms the backdrop to this entire week
- Mon Sept 22 Liberals release their costed party platform with the Green Shift as its centerpiece
- Mon 22 Conservatives announce their policy for dealing with young offenders convicted of serious, violent crime
- Mon 22 Elizabeth May rides the rails across Canada to deliver her Green message
- Tues 23 Québec artists take to the stage to express their anger with Conservative culture cuts
- Wed 24 Harper states that culture is an issue that only the rich, elite care about
- Wed 24 Ominous report by Merrill Lynch Canada warns of looming financial crisis in Canada
- Thurs 25 Former Liberal Party President forecasts a "devastating drubbing" in the election for his party
- Thurs 25 Top film and TV performers gather in Toronto to condemn Conservative cuts to the arts
- Fri 26 Movement in the polls suggests a resurgence of the Bloc in Québec
- Sun 28 Six candidates of various stripes come under scrutiny in the last eight days for inappropriate comments, past and present

Week 4: Sept 29 – Oct 5, 2008

- Mon Sept 29 Polls suggest Conservative support still climbing nationally but stalled in Québec, as Bloc support strengthens
- Mon 29 Tories announce children's arts tax credit
- Mon 29 House of Representatives rejects rescue package and Stock Market meltdown impacts leaders' campaign messages
- Mon 29 Ontario's Liberal Finance Minister rejects Green Shift, favours NDP approach
- Tues 30 Hopes rise for a compromise bail-out Bill in the US
- Tues 30 Liberals accuse Harper of plagiarism; speech writer resigns
- Wed Oct 1 French debate airs: Dion and May exceed expectations, Harper judged too low key
- Wed 1 Julie Couillard releases her tell-all book
- Wed 1 US Senate passes bail-out Bill
- Thurs 2 English debate airs: Jack Layton suggested as winner
- Fri 3 Financial crisis Bill passes second vote in US
- Sat 4 Disturbing vandalism takes place in Carolyn Bennett's riding
- Sun 5 Britain's top soldier in Afghanistan declares the war to be impossible to win

Week 5: Oct 6–13, 2008

- Mon Oct 6 Paul Martin supports Dion as the Liberal Party creeps higher in the polls
- Mon 6 Opposition parties increase the pressure for an economic plan from the Conservatives
- Mon 6 Stéphane Dion encourages all "progressives" to vote Liberal
- Tues 7 Conservatives release their platform and reverse their plans to change tax credits in the film industry
- Tues 7 Expectations of a Conservative majority decline as Liberals surge in the polls
- Wed 8 Harper's suggestion of a good time for "buying opportunities" is described by the NDP as out of touch with the plight of average Canadians
- Thurs 9 Parliament's budget officer projects the cost of the Afghan war to be more than double the original Government prediction
- Thurs 9 Two international reports praise Canadian banks and predict Canadian economy will outperform other G7 nations
- Fri 10 CTV broadcasts Dion's three attempts to answer a question on what he would have done, if he were PM, to handle the economic crisis
- Fri 10 Statistics Canada employment figures show an increase of 107,000 jobs in September
- Sat 11 Governor of the Bank of Canada assures Canadians that key measures are in place to deal with the financial crisis
- Sun 12 Conservative support in Quebec weakens as backlash to culture cuts grows
- Mon 13 During the course of the election campaign the TSX dropped more than 4,000 points and the dollar dived 10 cents

3. INTERVIEW TIME FOR PARTIES

“Interview time” is the amount of broadcast time that party representatives are heard speaking. “Party representatives” include the leader, candidates, and party spokespeople. Political observers who have important past associations with the parties are also included, for example, the panel of former premiers, Grant Devine, David Peterson and Howard Pawley on The House, and the “Insiders”, Rick Anderson and David Herle on The National.

The amount of time that each party has on air is a primary indicator of balance because it is such a clear and direct measure of exposure. So, what proportion of the available time should a party get?

One major principle has been that interview time should reflect, at least in part, the likelihood that the party might form a government. Two indicators of this likelihood are the proportion of seats the party had in the previous parliament and the party’s current standing in the polls.

Both of these are starting points. On a day-by-day basis, newsworthiness is a major consideration. If a party does something particularly brave, innovative or outrageous, the voter needs to know.

Air time in recent campaigns

Figure 4 shows how interview time divided among the parties in the last three federal campaigns.

The CBC numbers include the four radio and television programs analyzed in 2004 and the five programs in the 2006 and 2008 studies.

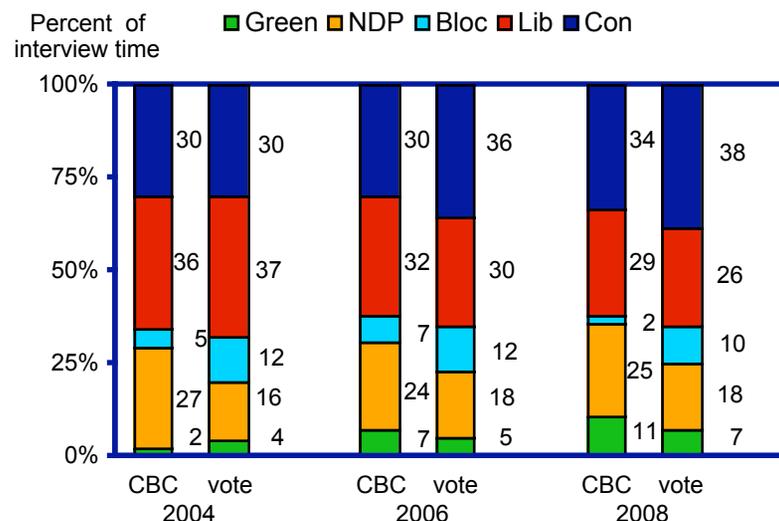
In 2004, the Liberals lead throughout the campaign and received the largest amount of speaking time. In 2006, the Liberals were in power going into the campaign and lead until the final week. Then, the Conservatives shot ahead in the polls and in that final week received the largest share of interview time. Overall, Liberals had an advantage in interview time, but only a small one.

In 2008 the Conservatives lead in the polls throughout the campaign and the figures for interview time reflect this.

In each recent campaign, the CBC invited leaders of the major national parties to appear in feature interviews on Sunday Night and/or The National, though not all parties took full advantage of these opportunities. The Green Party had feature interviews in 2006 and 2008 but not in 2004.

Figure 4. Percent of interview time for major parties on CBC vs popular vote

2004 – 2008



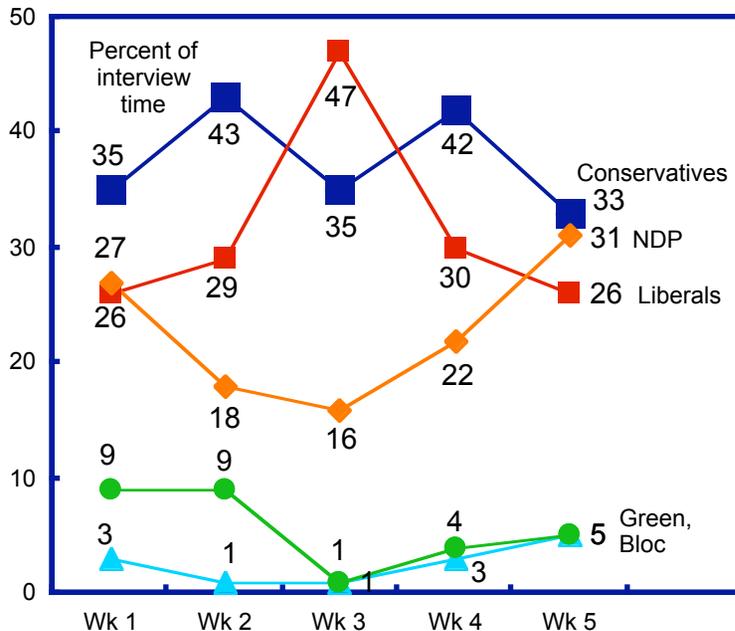
Results in detail

On a daily and weekly basis there is considerable variation in speaking time. The feature interviews with leaders have a large impact on weekly results and these interviews are excluded from these results, shown in Figure 5.

The Liberal peak in Week 3, with 47 percent of the time, is largely due to that week's episode of The House. On this program, Liberals John Manley and David Peterson combined for 7.3 minutes, while Howard Pawley spoke for 2.5 minutes and Grant Devine for just 1.6 minutes. As the total speaking time for all parties on all CBC programs in Week 3 was 33.9 minutes, this 7.3 minutes of Liberal time had a large impact on the overall percentages.

Figure 5. Interview time for leaders, candidates and party spokespeople on CBC radio and television

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008



“Taxi Chat” on The National also contributes to weekly fluctuations, giving a boost of approximately 5 percent to the party involved. Taxi Chat contributed to the Liberal spike in Week 3 and put the NDP ahead of the Liberals in Week 5. The Taxi Chat segments were: Week 1 – Green Party, Week 3 – Liberals, Week 4 – Conservatives, and Week 5 – NDP.

Table 2 gives results for individual programs. The relatively large proportion of speaking time for the NDP rests with two programs,

- Sunday Night: The Conservative national campaign took Sundays off while the NDP tended to be quite active on that day. The results for Sunday Night reflect this.
- The House: The Premiers’ Panel accounted for approximately one-third of the parties’ interview time and this contributed to balancing time for the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP.

Figure 6. Interview time for leaders, candidates and party spokespeople on the CTV National News

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

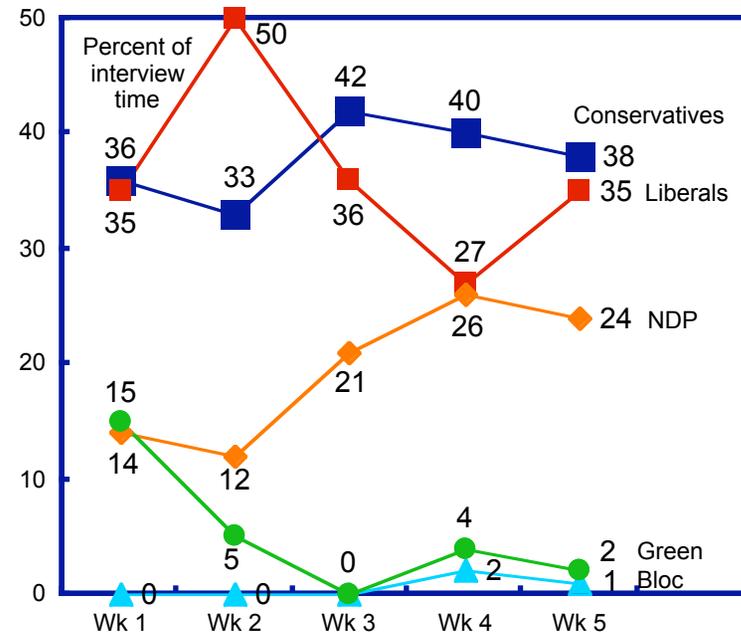


Table 2. Total speaking time for representatives of major parties (in minutes)

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

A. Feature interviews with leaders on Sunday Night and The National are *included*

| Party | CPAC-Nanos* | The National | | Sun. Night | | World Report | | World at 6 | | The House | | Total CBC | | CTV | |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------|------------|
| | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % |
| Conservative | 34 | 54.3 | 35 | 2.5 | 10 | 3.6 | 33 | 14.9 | 41 | 32.3 | 36 | 107.5 | 34 | 15.8 | 38 |
| Liberal | 27 | 42.4 | 27 | 6.8 | 27 | 3.7 | 34 | 9.8 | 27 | 28.2 | 32 | 90.9 | 29 | 15.6 | 37 |
| Bloc Québécois | 10 | 2.2 | 1 | 0.5 | 2 | 0.6 | 5 | 2.8 | 8 | 0.5 | 1 | 6.6 | 2 | 0.3 | 1 |
| NDP | 21 | 33.0 | 21 | 9.9 | 39 | 2.6 | 24 | 6.4 | 17 | 26.7 | 30 | 78.6 | 25 | 8.3 | 20 |
| Green | 8 | 23.0 | 15 | 5.8 | 23 | 0.3 | <1 | 2.8 | 8 | 1.6 | 2 | 33.4 | 11 | 2.0 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 155.0 | 100 | 25.5 | 100 | 10.7 | 100 | 36.6 | 100 | 89.3 | 100 | 317.0 | 100 | 42.0 | 100 |

B. Feature interviews with leaders on Sunday Night and The National are *excluded*

| Party | CPAC-Nanos* | The National | | Sun. Night | | World Report | | World at 6 | | The House | | Total CBC | | CTV | |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------|------------|
| | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % |
| Conservative | 34 | 35.8 | 39 | 2.5 | 23 | 3.6 | 34 | 14.9 | 41 | 32.3 | 36 | 89.0 | 37 | 15.8 | 38 |
| Liberal | 27 | 27.4 | 30 | 3.3 | 31 | 3.7 | 35 | 9.8 | 27 | 28.2 | 32 | 72.3 | 30 | 15.6 | 37 |
| Bloc Québécois | 10 | 2.2 | 2 | 0.5 | 5 | 0.6 | 6 | 2.8 | 8 | 0.5 | 1 | 6.6 | 3 | 0.3 | 1 |
| NDP | 21 | 18.3 | 20 | 3.6 | 34 | 2.6 | 24 | 6.4 | 17 | 26.7 | 30 | 57.7 | 24 | 8.3 | 20 |
| Green | 8 | 8.7 | 9 | 0.8 | 7 | 0.3 | <1 | 2.8 | 8 | 1.6 | 2 | 14.1 | 6 | 2.0 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 92.4 | 100 | 10.7 | 100 | 10.7 | 100 | 36.6 | 100 | 89.3 | 100 | 239.7 | 100 | 42.0 | 100 |

* As of Oct 13, 2008.

Not included above are the minor parties, which received a total of 7.3 minutes of air time on the CBC (mainly on Sunday Night) and none on CTV.

4. DISCUSSION OF PARTIES

“Discussion” is measured by counting the number of statements that are made about a party by all sources. Discussion about the Liberals, for example, includes statements made by journalists, analysts, citizens, other parties, and the Liberals themselves.

Discussion is a more broad-based measure than party speaking time. It includes everything that is said on the three platforms, radio, television and Internet, and so encompasses essentially 100 percent of campaign coverage. Speaking time for leaders and parties represents 19 percent of the total volume of campaign coverage on radio and television programming.

Where standings in public opinion polls can be a useful criterion for assessing how much speaking time a party gets, public opinion is less relevant when it comes to discussion. One might expect that the leading party would be the major focus of discussion because it has the greatest likelihood of forming the next government. Discussion about the lead party is further increased by the other parties. Typically, the leading party is the main target of attacks by the other parties. This generates discussion, most of which is negative in tone.

The pattern of discussion on CBC’s The National, shows this increased separation in the quantity of discussion about the leading party and others – Figure 7 shows that the Conservatives’ figures for discussion are close to ten percentage points higher than their results for speaking time. This pattern also holds for CBC broadcasting as a whole (Figure 9) and CBC.ca (Figure 10).

The CTV National News has equal discussion of the Liberals and Conservatives for the first three weeks, with the expected spread appearing in Weeks 4 and 5 (Figure 8).

The 2008 campaign is the first in which CBC’s on-line coverage has been analyzed. Figure 9 and Figure 10 show that discussion on the broadcast and Internet media are similar overall, though there are differences on a week-by-week basis.

Table 3 and Table 4 provide results for the individual programs.

Figure 7. Proportion of statements that refer to each party on CBC's The National

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

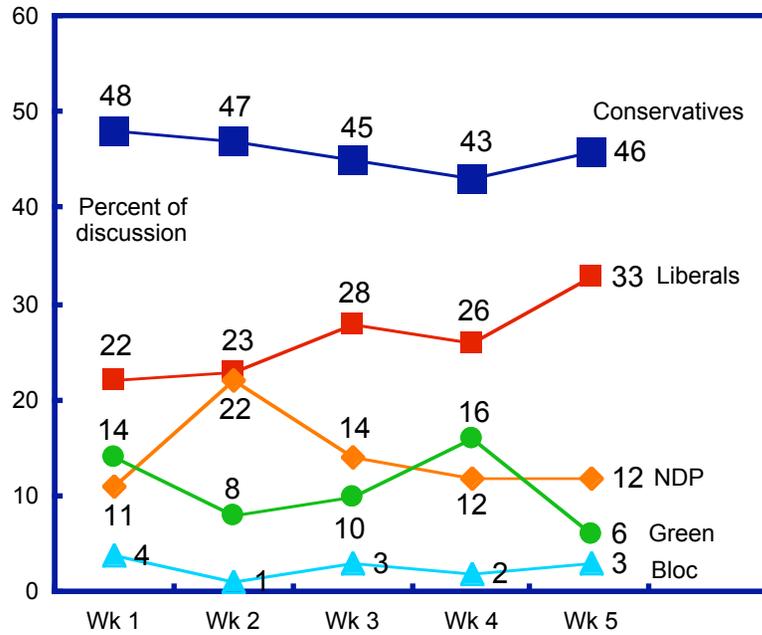


Figure 8. Proportion of statements that refer to each party on the CTV National News

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

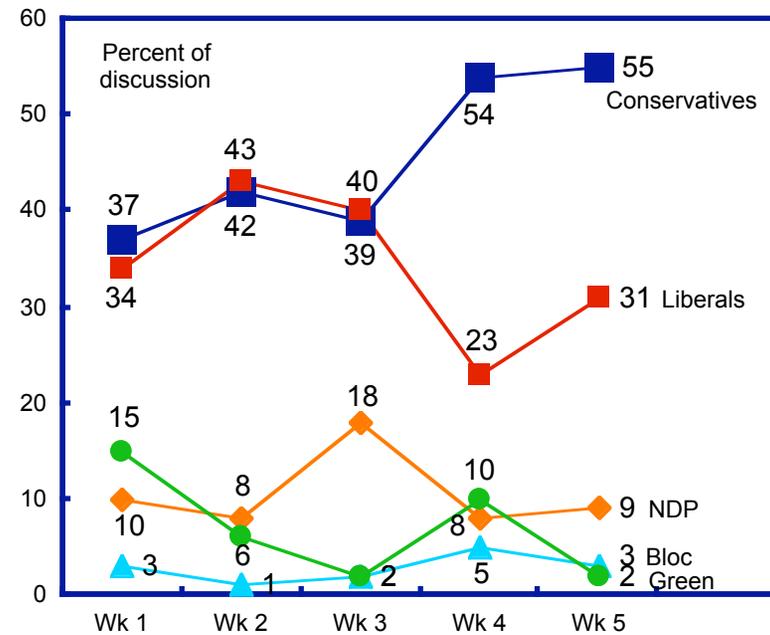


Figure 9. Proportion of statements that refer to each party on CBC radio and television

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

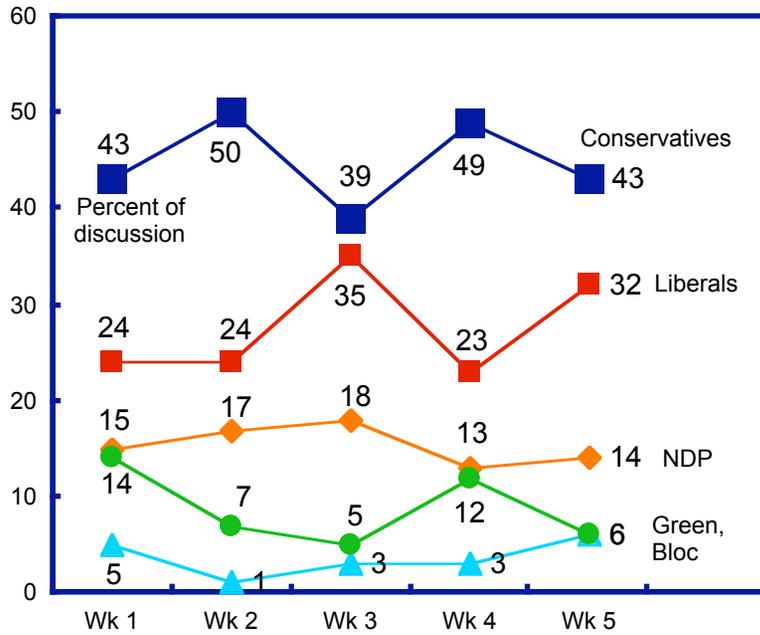


Figure 10. Proportion of statements that refer to each party on cbc.ca

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

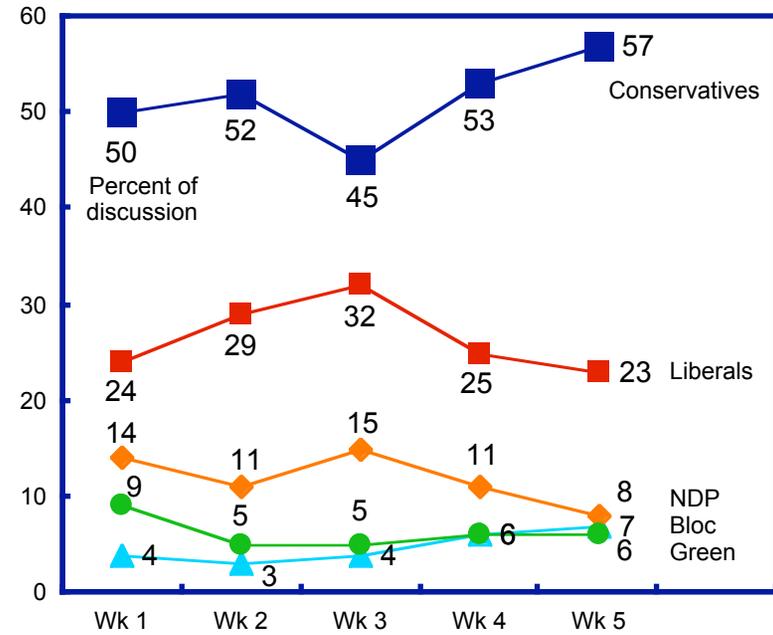


Table 3. Proportion of statements that refer to each major party

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| | cbc.ca | The National | Sun. Night | World Report | World at 6 | The House | CBC | CTV |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------|------------|
| Party | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Conservatives | 52 | 46 | 35 | 40 | 46 | 49 | 48 | 45 |
| Liberals | 26 | 27 | 25 | 28 | 28 | 28 | 27 | 35 |
| Bloc | 5 | 3 | 9 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| NDP | 12 | 14 | 20 | 19 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 11 |
| Green | 6 | 11 | 11 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Base # statements | 4,937 | 3,325 | 584 | 722 | 1,365 | 972 | 11,905 | 1,727 |

Table 4. Proportion of statements that refer to each party leader

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| | cbc.ca | The National | Sun. Night | World Report | World at 6 | The House | CBC | CTV |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------|------------|
| Party | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Harper | 52 | 49 | 42 | 41 | 51 | 50 | 49 | 51 |
| Dion | 24 | 23 | 23 | 27 | 23 | 22 | 24 | 31 |
| Duceppe | 6 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Layton | 10 | 12 | 22 | 17 | 12 | 13 | 12 | 9 |
| May | 10 | 13 | 7 | 7 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Base # statements | 1,774 | 1,456 | 231 | 311 | 577 | 385 | 4,734 | 776 |

5. EVOLUTION OF PARTY STRATEGIES

The descriptions of party strategy in this chapter are not measures of balance *per se*, but the tactics that the parties adopt underlie two of the balance measures – the amount of discussion that there is about a party and the directional tone of that discussion.

Figure 11 contrasts the number of statements that each party makes about its own members and policies with the statements that it makes about the members and policies of other parties.

In Figure 11, 64 percent of the statements that the Conservatives made were about their own party, 24 percent were about the Liberals, and so on.

Figure 11 explains why there is more discussion about the Conservatives than about other parties: all the other parties are focused on the Conservatives, to a greater or lesser extent. The other parties' remarks are reported by journalists and scrutinized by analysts, and the volume of discussion about the Conservatives increases.

Discussion of the Conservatives that originates with the competing parties is largely negative, and this underlies the negative balance in overall discussion of the Conservatives (described in Chapter 7). As the object of the other parties' attention, the Conservatives are the main focus of criticism.

Figure 11. Proportion of a party's statements that refer to itself and to each other party

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

CBC TV and radio programs and cbc.ca

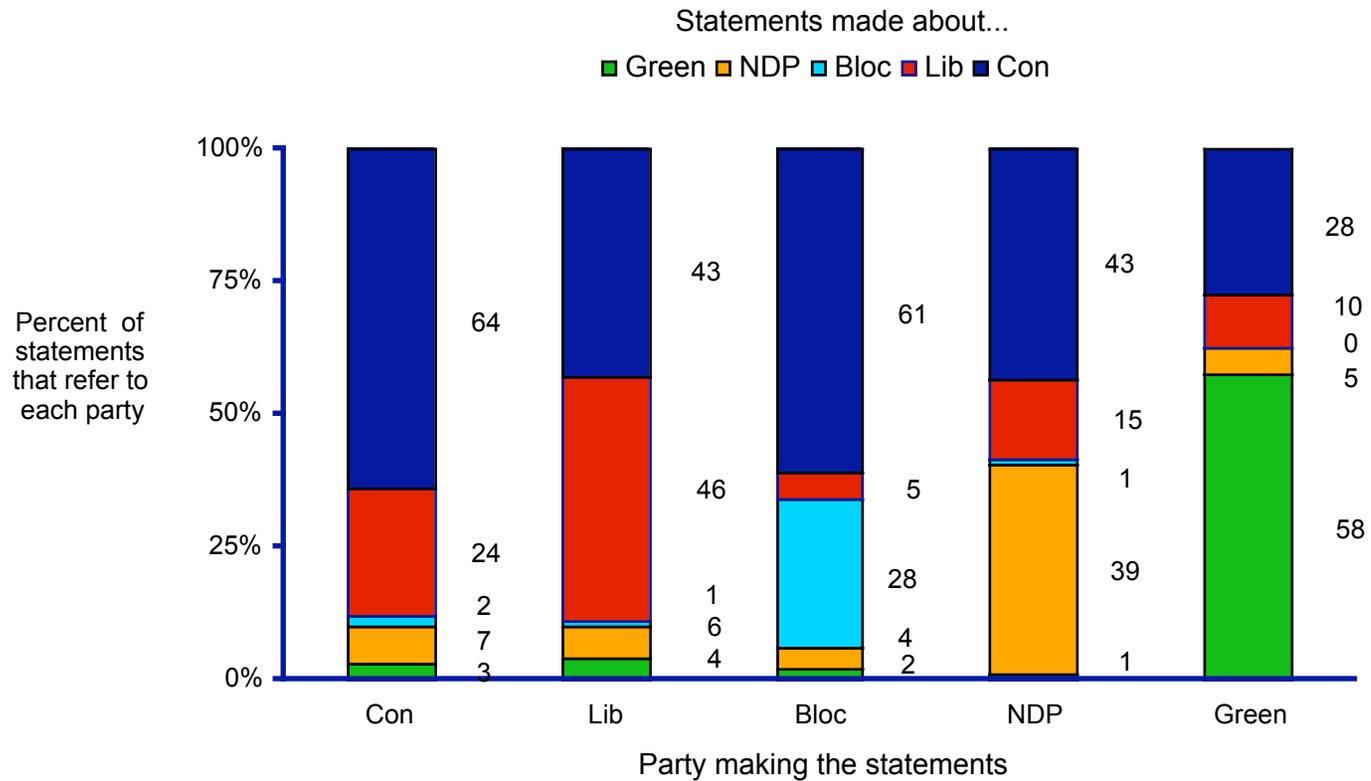
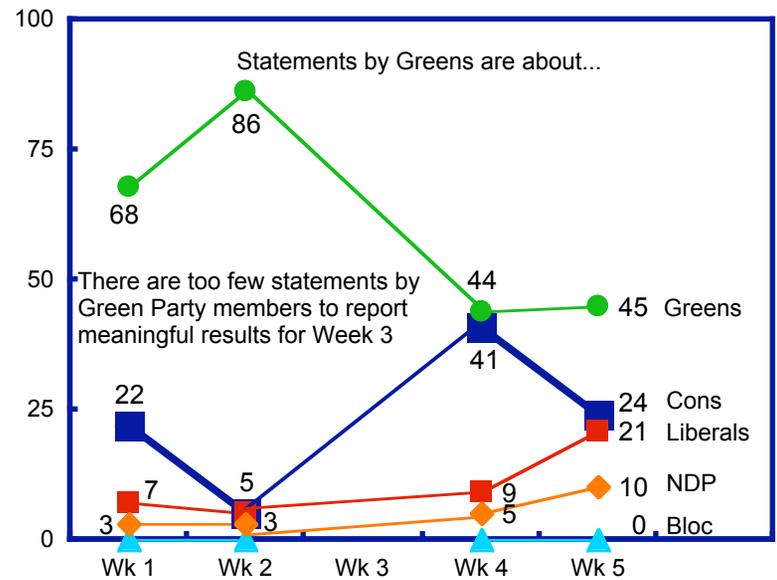
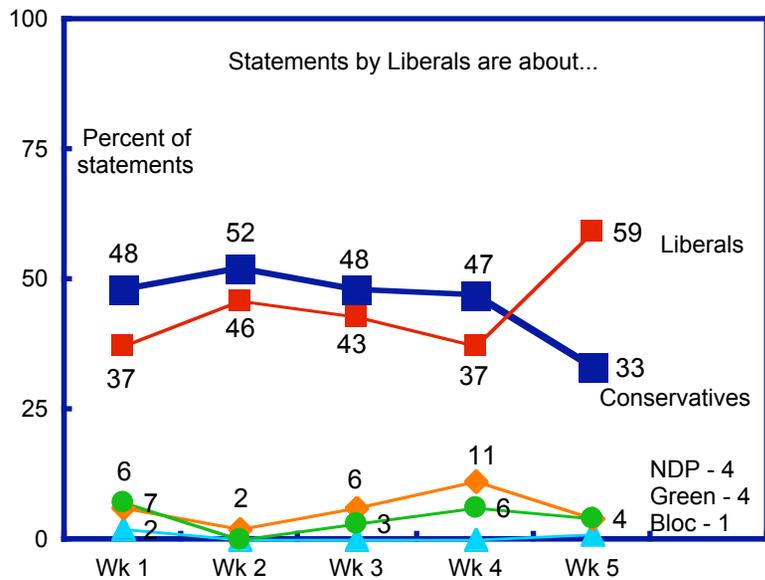
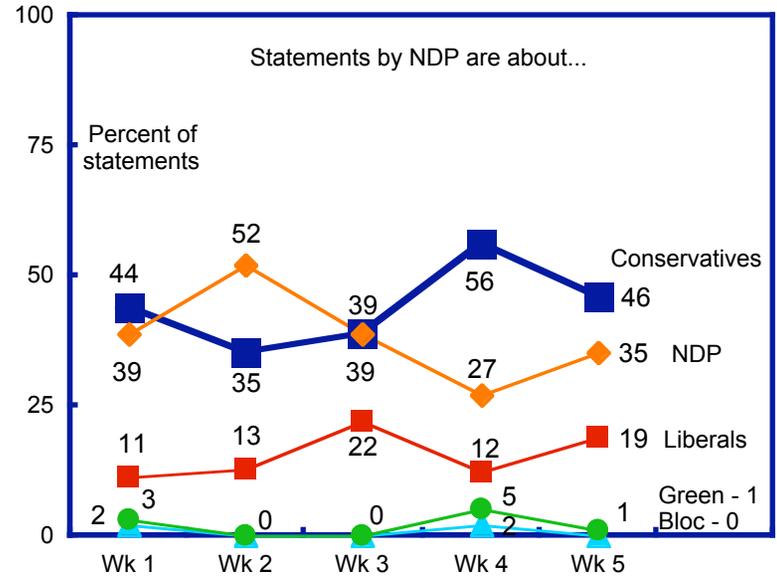
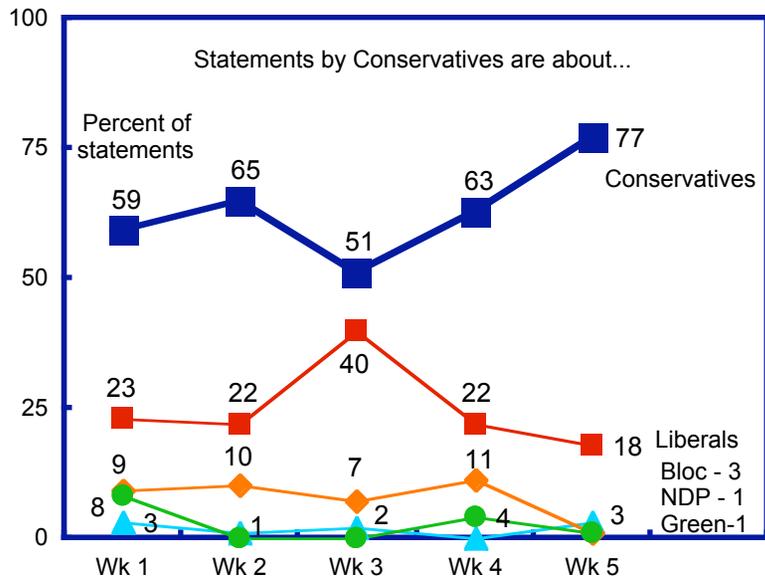


Figure 12. Evolution of party strategies

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008



6. SPECTRUM OF INTERVIEWEES

Table 5 breaks down speaking time among the political interests and citizenry.

CBC and CTV contrast in their emphasis on the political realm. Politicians (groups 1 to 4 below) account for 51 percent of the interview time on CBC and 74 percent on CTV. This is similar to

the 2006 campaign, where political figures accounted for 47 percent of interview time on CBC and 71 percent on CTV.

The “analyst” group includes experts (often academics) and pundits who offer non-partisan commentary on events. Analysts and ordinary citizens each account for approximately one-sixth of the interview time on the CBC programs.

Table 5. Spectrum of interviewees

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Type of interviewee | CBC programs /08 | | CTV /08 | | Total, 2008 | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Min. | % | Min. | % | Min. | % |
| 1. Leaders | 93.8 | 19.0 | 35.5 | 53.6 | 129.3 | 23.1 |
| 2. MPs, candidates | 59.4 | 12.0 | 4.9 | 7.4 | 64.3 | 11.5 |
| 3. Party spokespersons | 87.0 | 17.6 | 8.2 | 12.4 | 95.3 | 17.0 |
| 4. Provincial MPs, MLAs | 12.2 | 2.5 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 12.4 | 2.2 |
| 5. Analysts | 87.5 | 17.7 | 6.2 | 9.3 | 95.3 | 17.0 |
| 6. Business and professional sector | 15.4 | 3.1 | 1.9 | 2.9 | 17.2 | 3.1 |
| 7. Labour sector | 3.6 | 0.7 | - | 0.0 | 3.6 | 0.6 |
| 8. Social sector | 6.8 | 1.4 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 7.1 | 1.3 |
| 9. Ethnic & Aboriginal groups | 15.9 | 3.2 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 16.0 | 2.9 |
| 10. Artistic community | 4.3 | 0.9 | 0.7 | 1.1 | 5.0 | 0.9 |
| 11. Citizens | 93.2 | 18.8 | 7.5 | 11.3 | 100.6 | 17.9 |
| 12. Civil servants | 1.7 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 2.1 | 0.4 |
| 13. Others, e.g. foreign observers | 13.9 | 2.8 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 14.3 | 2.5 |
| Total | 494.6 | 100.0 | 66.2 | 100.0 | 560.8 | 100.0 |

Gender and race

The gender balance on CBC is similar for analysts and citizens, with just over one-third of interviewees being female. These proportions are similar to the results of the last several campaigns.

Visible minorities account for 25 percent of the interview time with citizens on the CBC television programs but just 5 percent

of the interview time for analysts. Visible minorities were rarely seen in campaign coverage prior to the 2004 election. In that campaign the situation changed dramatically, such that minorities accounted for 25 percent of the interview time with analysts and 24 percent of the time with citizens. Fewer visible minorities appeared in the analyst role in 2006 and 2008, however the proportion of minorities among citizens interviewed has remained consistent.

Table 6. Speaking time for female and male interviewees (TV and radio programs)

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Type of interviewee | CBC | | | CTV | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| | % F | % M | Minutes | % F | % M | Minutes |
| Analysts | 35 | 65 | 87.1 | 7 | 93 | 6.2 |
| Citizens | 39 | 61 | 142.6 | 43 | 57 | 9.8 |

Table 7. Speaking time for visible minorities and whites (TV programs only)

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Type of interviewee | CBC | | | CTV | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|----------|------------|---------|
| | % VM | % White | Minutes | % VM | % White | Minutes |
| Analysts | 5 | 95 | 68.0 | 0 | 100 | 6.2 |
| Citizens | 25 | 75 | 70.2 | 8 | 92 | 9.1 |

7. DIRECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

Approximately one-half of all statements in coverage of federal politics are explicitly about political parties – about their leaders or candidates or policies. Each of these statements has a “direction” – it can be classed as either positive, negative or neutral in its description of the party and its fortunes.

The Appendix gives examples of directional statements.

The overall picture

Table 8 shows the overall pattern of directional statements for the campaign as a whole. The left-hand side shows results for all CBC material (radio, television and Internet) while the right-hand side shows the CTV National News. The patterns of directional statements on CBC and CTV are very similar:

- The Conservatives received the most negative commentary. This reflects their status as front-runner – they were the main target of each of the other parties. (In the past several election campaigns, each of which began with the Liberals in front, the Liberals received the greatest proportion of negative mentions.)
- Coverage of the Liberals is somewhat less negative. They were under attack from the Conservatives, to some extent, but not from the other parties.
- The Greens were generally ignored by the other parties, and are the only party where the balance of discussion is more positive than negative.

These patterns follow to some considerable degree from the “party strategies” chart, Figure 11.

Figure 15 shows patterns in direction over time – there was rather little variation on a week-by-week basis.

Journalists and others

In describing the campaign, journalists frequently quote or paraphrase the political figures involved. Statements of this type are termed “attributed”. An example is, “Harper said that while the economy is in trouble, the only way Canada would see a recession is if the Liberal Party forms the next government.” This statement is attributed to Harper, about the Liberal party, and is negative – critical of the Liberals.

Table 9 breaks the discussion about politicians and parties on CBC into four groups:

- Statements that journalists attribute to others are largely either positive or negative;
- Statements that journalists make without attribution are largely neutral;
- Statements that politicians, analysts and citizens make divide between neutral and directional in roughly equal proportion.

Table 10 gives parallel results for the CTV National News. The pattern is similar to that on CBC.

Leaders and parties

Figures 13 and 14 divide the directional statements into those about a) the leader, and b) other party members or party policies. (Figure 3 in the Summary of results section shows figures for the leaders and parties combined.)

The 2008 campaign resembles others in that statements about the leader are more sharply negative than those about the party and its policies. On CBC, for example, 43 percent of all statements about Harper were negative compared to 29 percent of statements about others in the party. This pattern holds for all the parties, on both CBC and CTV.

Table 8. Overall pattern of directional statements by both journalists and interviewees

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Statements about | CBC TV and radio programs and cbc.ca Percent of statements | | | | CTV National News Percent of statements | | | |
|------------------|---|----------|-----------|---------------|--|----------|-----------|--------------|
| | Neut. | Pos. | Neg. | Base* | Neut. | Pos. | Neg. | Base* |
| Conservatives | 58 | 7 | 35 | 5,680 | 59 | 6 | 35 | 783 |
| Liberals | 66 | 11 | 23 | 3,161 | 67 | 9 | 25 | 601 |
| BQ | 71 | 9 | 19 | 503 | 85 | 11 | 4 | 46 |
| NDP | 73 | 11 | 16 | 1,606 | 71 | 9 | 21 | 187 |
| Greens | 75 | 15 | 10 | 952 | 72 | 22 | 6 | 110 |
| Total | 64 | 9 | 27 | 11,902 | 64 | 9 | 27 | 1,727 |

* Number of statements

Table 9. Directional statements about Conservatives and Liberals from four sources on CBC

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Statements | CBC radio and TV Percent of statements | | | | cbc.ca Percent of statements | | | |
|--|---|-----------|-----------|-------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| | Neut. | Pos. | Neg. | Base | Neut. | Pos. | Neg. | Base |
| <i>About the Conservatives...</i> | | | | | | | | |
| By journalists, attributed | 27 | 11 | 62 | 589 | 36 | 8 | 56 | 1001 |
| By journalists, not attributed | 86 | 3 | 12 | 1206 | 90 | 2 | 8 | 1002 |
| By all political parties | 45 | 12 | 43 | 666 | 37 | 10 | 53 | 427 |
| By other interviewees | 46 | 14 | 40 | 480 | 35 | 7 | 59 | 119 |
| Total | 58 | 8 | 34 | 2941 | 57 | 6 | 37 | 2549 |
| <i>About the Liberals...</i> | | | | | | | | |
| By journalists, attributed | 32 | 16 | 52 | 247 | 41 | 16 | 44 | 449 |
| By journalists, not attributed | 84 | 4 | 11 | 850 | 92 | 2 | 6 | 611 |
| By all political parties | 52 | 18 | 30 | 391 | 40 | 20 | 40 | 183 |
| By other interviewees | 54 | 19 | 27 | 241 | 58 | 24 | 19 | 33 |
| Total | 65 | 11 | 24 | 1729 | 66 | 10 | 25 | 1276 |

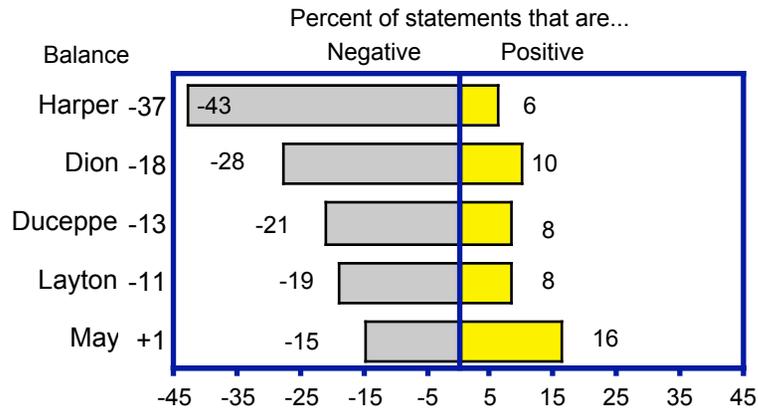
Table 10. Directional statements about Conservatives and Liberals from four sources: CTV National News
Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Statements | CTV National News Percent of statements | | | | Base | CTV National News Percent of statements | | | | Base |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------|-----------|--|------------------------------|--|----------|-----------|--|------------|
| | Neut. | Pos. | Neg. | | | Neut. | Pos. | Neg. | | |
| <i>About the Conservatives...</i> | | | | | <i>About the Liberals...</i> | | | | | |
| By journalists, attributed | 26 | 7 | 67 | | 137 | 38 | 11 | 52 | | 95 |
| By journalists, not attributed | 82 | 3 | 15 | | 404 | 80 | 6 | 14 | | 328 |
| By all political parties | 33 | 12 | 55 | | 179 | 58 | 13 | 30 | | 132 |
| By other interviewees | 54 | 10 | 37 | | 63 | 57 | 11 | 33 | | 46 |
| Total | 59 | 6 | 35 | | 783 | 67 | 9 | 25 | | 601 |

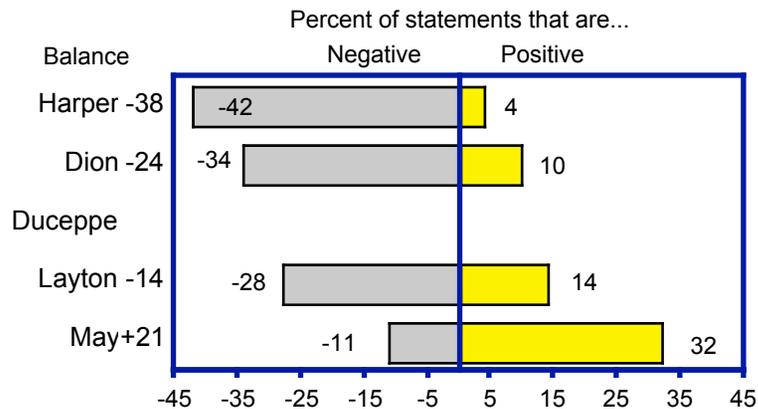
Figure 13. Statements about party leaders from all sources

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

A. CBC broadcast programs and cbc.ca



B. CTV

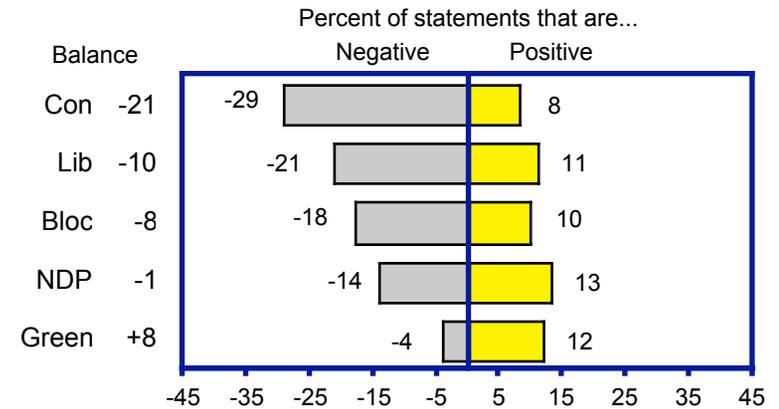


The number of statements about the Bloc on CTV is too small to report meaningful percentages.

Figure 14. Statements about parties (leaders excluded) from all sources

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

A. CBC broadcast programs and cbc.ca



B. CTV

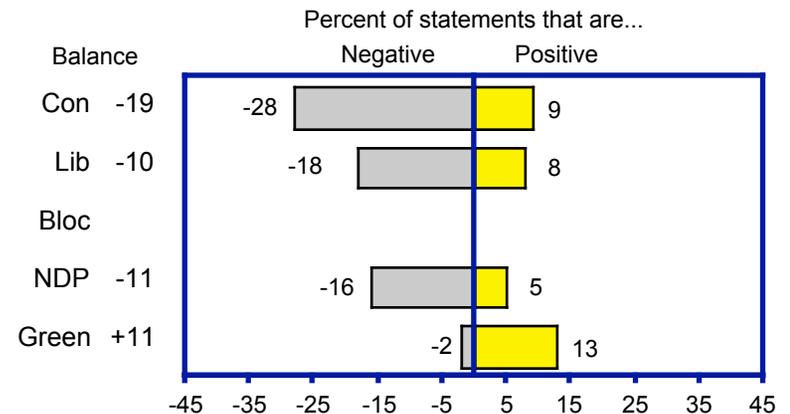


Figure 15. Trends in direction regarding the Conservatives and Liberals on The National and CTV

Feature interviews excluded

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

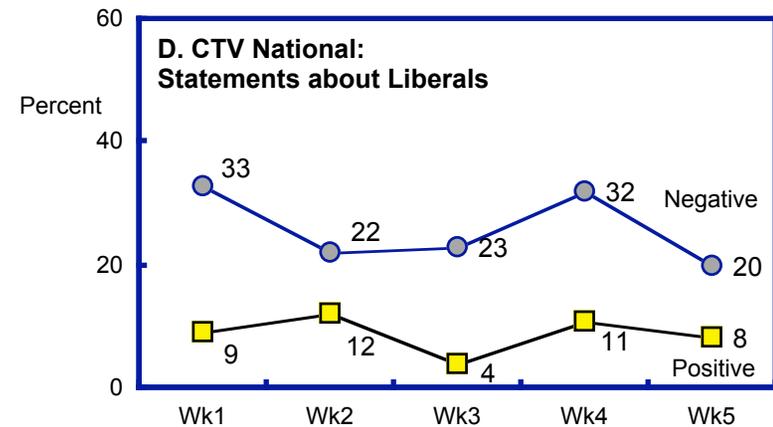
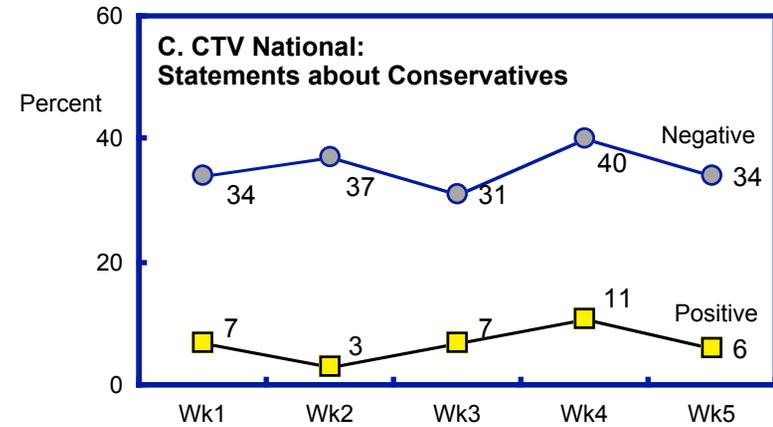
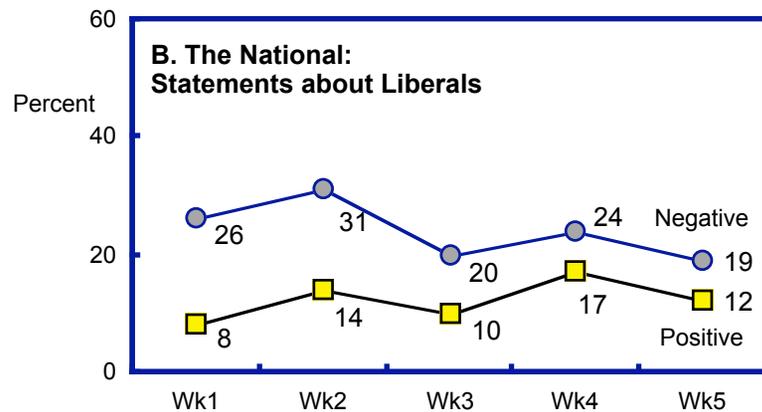
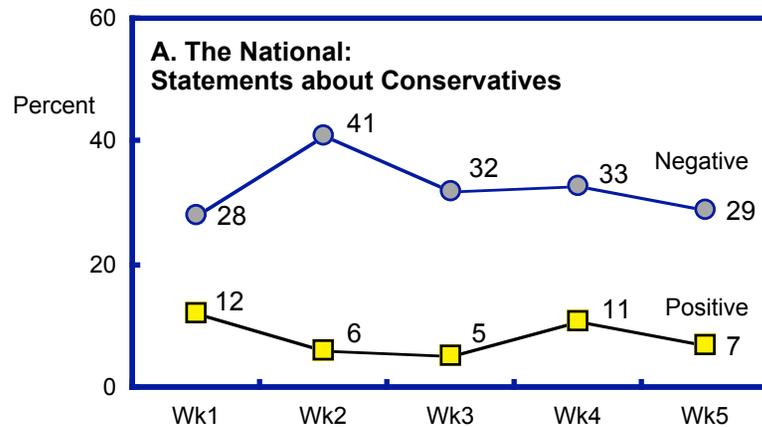
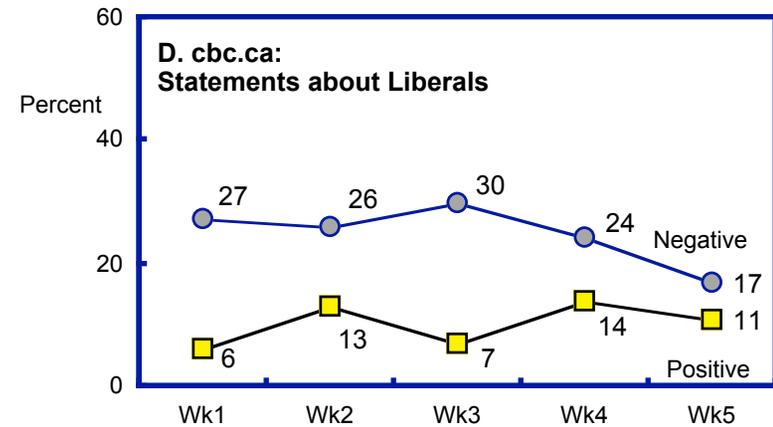
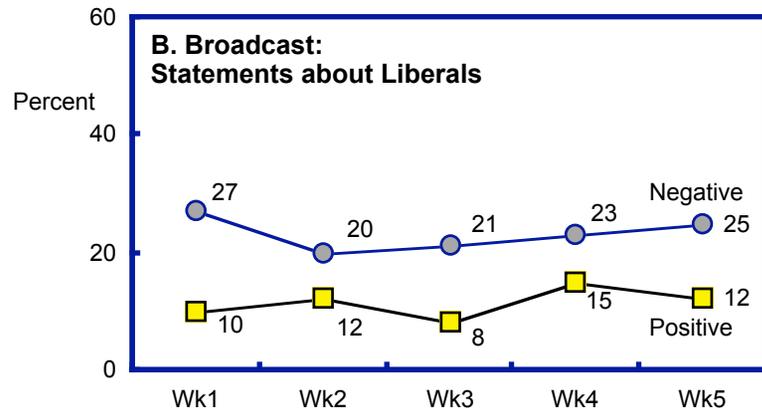
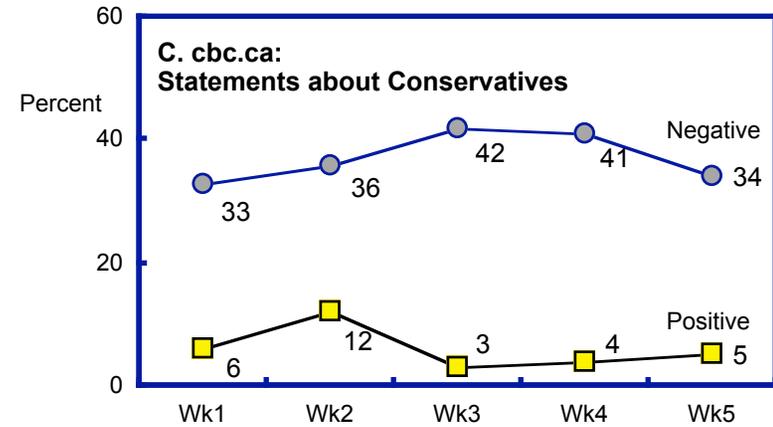
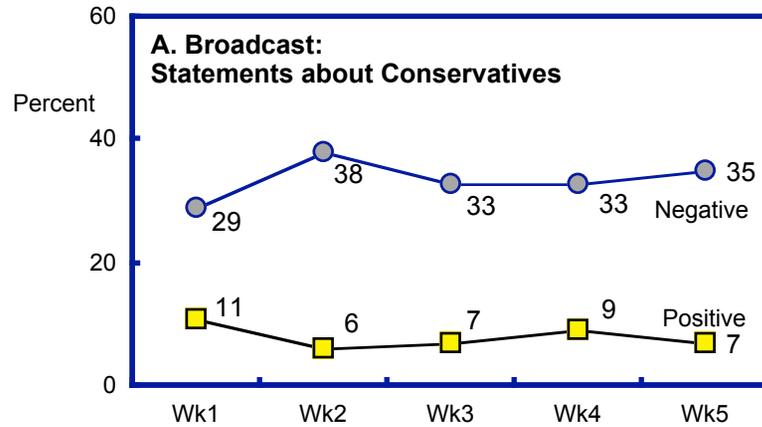


Figure 16. Trends in direction on CBC broadcast media and cbc.ca

Feature interviews are excluded

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

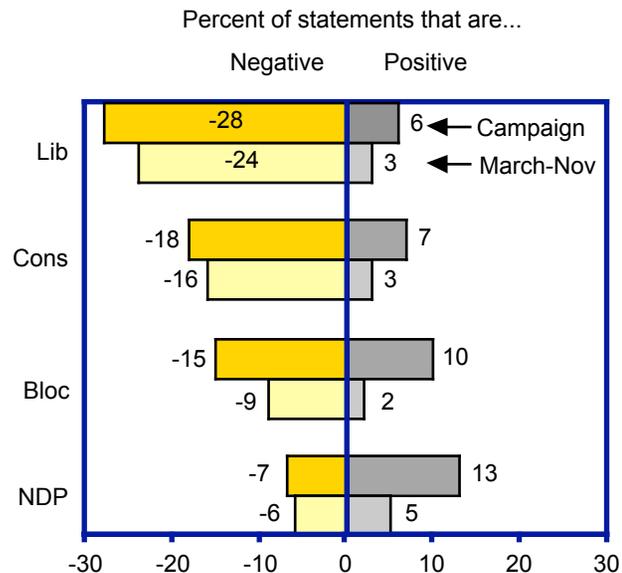


Are election campaigns nasty by nature? Results from the 2006 campaign

It is common wisdom that once an election campaign begins, civility fails and nastiness becomes the norm. Coverage of federal politics on The National and on the CTV National News was analyzed from March 2005 through to the start of the campaign in November 2005. This allows a direct comparison of directional tone before and during the campaign. The 2006 results are repeated here, as there was no pre-campaign analysis in 2008.

- On The National, there was a slightly higher proportion of negative commentary about each party during the campaign, **and also** a slightly higher proportion of positive commentary about each party.
- The pattern on CTV is not identical but is largely similar.

Figure 17. Statements about all parties from all sources
March – November 2005 vs 2006 Campaign
The National

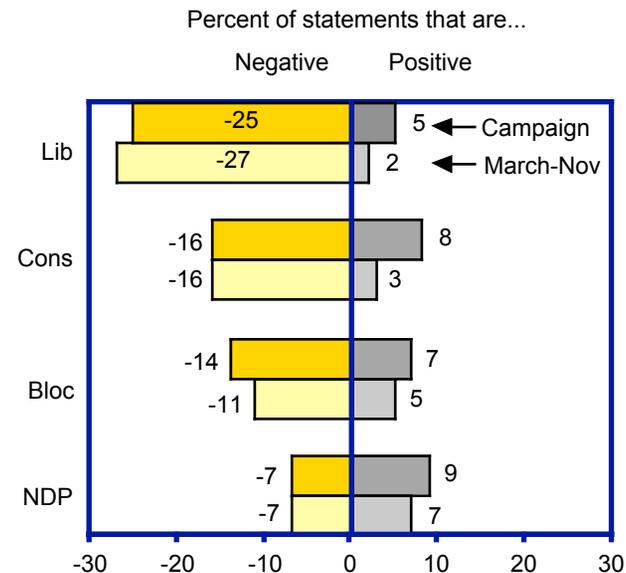


An increase in negative commentary might be expected, given the competitive nature of the process. The increase in positive commentary may come as a surprise, but on reflection it is reasonable. Each party is saying as many good things about itself as it can manage, and citizens and analysts join in, praising what appears to have merit.

These results speak only to the volume of positive and negative comments that occur, and not their intensity. Some comments made during the campaign were personal and some were perhaps unusually offensive. Such exceptional events may fix in people's minds, creating the impression of greater nastiness.

On the other hand, the pre-election period saw its share of conflict and acrimony. Overall, media portrayal of the parties during the campaign was less neutral than during the lead-up, but the heightened emotional tone was nearly equal parts positive and negative.

Figure 18. Statements about all parties from all sources
March – November 2005 vs 2006 Campaign
CTV National News



8. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

Discussion can be divided into two large groups. “Policy issues” includes the set of substantive policy matters listed in Table 11. The “Other” category is everything else – party strategies, discussion of personalities, polls, the horserace element, etc.

The campaign began with an emphasis on the strategic element. In Weeks 2 and 3 all parties except the Conservatives unveiled their platforms and discussion of policy issues was dominant. In Week 4 the debates sparked much discussion of winners and losers, appeal and style – all strategy elements.

Policy issues dominated in Weeks 2 and 3. In Week 4 the debates, with much discussion of winners and losers and speaking styles, dropped policy issues into the minority zone.

Table 11 breaks the policy-related discussion down by issue (discussion related to strategy is excluded from this table).

The economy dominated the entire 2008 campaign, consuming 42 percent of the policy-related discussion over the entire campaign. The environment was a distant second at 13 percent. The economy is perennially a leading issue in election campaigns but is rarely as central as in 2008. The last time the economy held such a lead was the 1993 campaign, which followed the recession of the early 1990's. The focus of recent campaigns has been:

- 2006: No dominant issue
- 2004: Health, then the economy
- 2000: The economy, health and social issues
- 1997: National unity with the economy a distant second
- 1993: The economy

Figure 20 shows week-by-week trends in discussion of policy-related issues on all CBC platforms. In Week 5, the economy increased its lead over all other issues.

Figure 19. Policy and strategy

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

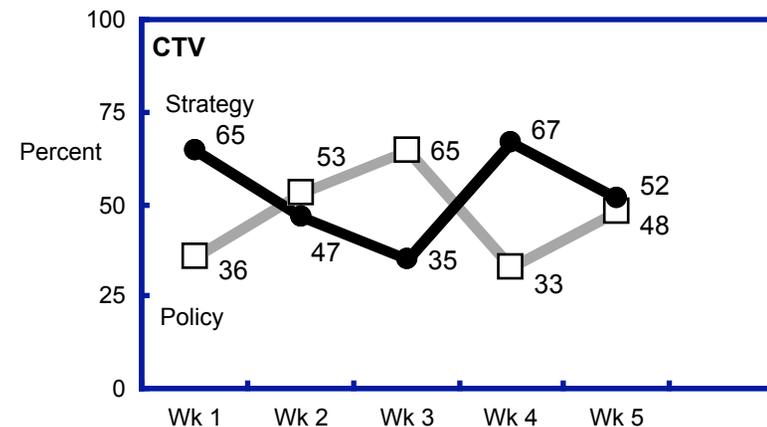
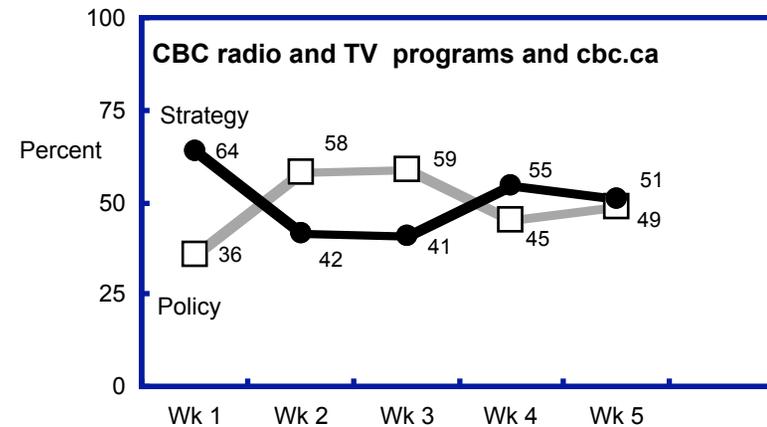


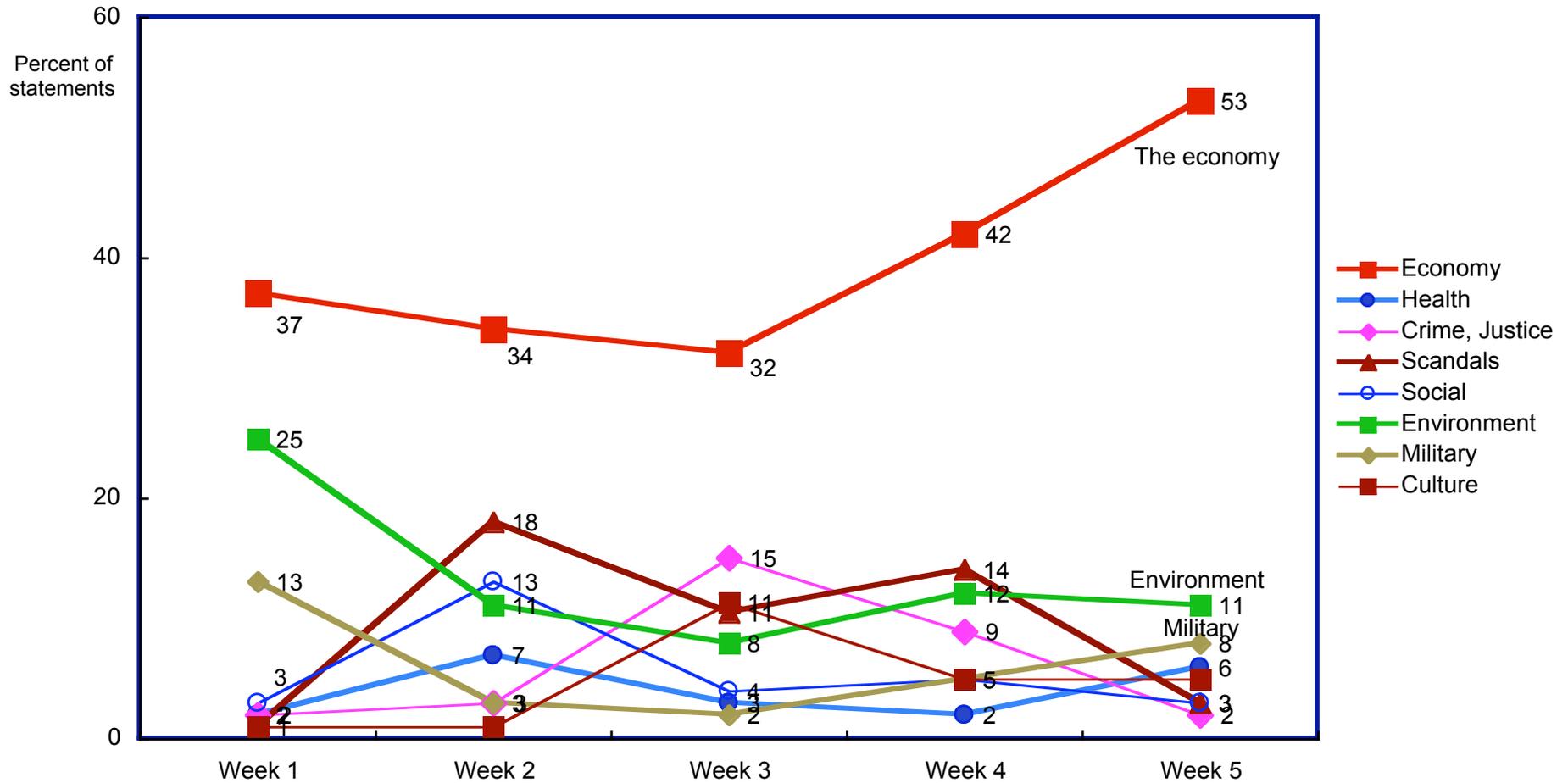
Table 11. Issues in the news

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Issue | Percent of statements | |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | CBC TV/radio programs and cbc.ca | CTV National News |
| 1. The economy, employment, tax cuts, deficit..... | 42 | 46 |
| 2. National unity, separation, the constitution..... | 2 | 3 |
| 3. Federal-provincial relations..... | 2 | <1 |
| 4. Health, Medicare | 4 | 1 |
| 5. Social issues, education, social programs | 6 | 3 |
| 6. Justice..... | 4 | 6 |
| 7. Crime..... | 3 | 3 |
| 8. Arts, culture | 5 | 8 |
| 9. Resource management, fishing, agriculture..... | 2 | <1 |
| 10. Environment | 13 | 9 |
| 11. Military issues, Afghanistan..... | 6 | 6 |
| 12. Aboriginal issues..... | 1 | – |
| 13. Foreign policy | 1 | – |
| 14. Restructuring government..... | <1 | – |
| 15. Past and current scandals | 9 | 15 |
| 16. Other legacy issues, past record in government..... | 3 | <1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Base no. of statements | 11,106 | 1,386 |

Figure 20. Trends in discussion of issues: all CBC sources

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008



9. THE PRINT MEDIA PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

When two journalists cover the same event, the stories they produce may differ considerably. Even if the core facts are the same, they are likely to summarize the background leading up to the event differently, and to cite reaction and analysis from different sources.

Although individual stories may vary considerably, one expects that, when a large number of stories are considered together, there should be some consensus as to the message that is delivered.

In Canada, there is an expectation that broadcast news will be unbiased, and therefore that there should be a fair degree of similarity in coverage of an election campaign at the structural level that is analyzed in this report. If there are large differences among broadcasters, questions are asked.

Newspapers traditionally have a larger proportion of editorial and opinion content than the broadcast media, and this creates a range of stances on the politics of the day. Still, one might expect that a broad sample of newspapers would provide a collective picture of the campaign that was similar to that in the broadcast media.

McGill University's Media Observatory has tracked newspaper coverage in several recent campaigns. In 2008, seven English language newspapers were analyzed:

- Calgary Herald
- Montreal Gazette
- National Post
- Ottawa Citizen
- Globe and Mail
- Toronto Star
- Vancouver Sun.

In previous campaigns, human researchers coded the content of newspaper stories, in much the same manner as analysts at ERIN Research code coverage in the broadcast media. In 2008, the Media Observatory switched to a completely computerized word-counting system. Their current methods are therefore very different from those used in this study, however what they are attempting to measure remains similar.

Issues in the campaign

The McGill study tracks the prevalence of issues, giving results that parallel those in Chapter 9 of this report. Because of differences in the issue categories, some categories are combined to make direct comparison possible (Table 12).

Table 12. Issue categories in ERIN and McGill studies

| ERIN | McGill |
|---------------------------|--|
| Economy | Economy, Employment, Finance, International trade |
| Social issues | Education, Immigration, Social Welfare, Civil rights |
| Foreign affairs, military | Foreign affairs |
| Environment | Environment, Energy, Transportation |
| Crime, Justice | Crime |

The McGill study does not track Arts and Culture, National Unity, or Federal-Provincial relations. These are therefore omitted from the comparison.

The McGill study is available at: <http://media-observatory.mcgill.ca/pages/2008election.html#data>

Issues on CBC and in newspapers

The emphasis on issues is very similar on CBC and in the newspapers (Table 13). There is one main point of departure:

- CBC has placed more emphasis on the economy (51 percent of the discussion, versus 43 percent in the papers);
- The papers have placed more emphasis on foreign policy and the military (8 percent on CBC versus 14 percent in the papers).

Table 13. Issues in the news

Weeks 1–5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

| Issue | Percent of statements | |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | CBC TV/radio and cbc.ca * | 7 English newspapers |
| 1. The economy, employment, finance..... | 51 | 43 |
| 2. Health, Medicare | 5 | 5 |
| 3. Social issues, education, immigration..... | 7 | 10 |
| 4. Crime, Justice | 8 | 10 |
| 5. Resource management, fishing, agriculture..... | 3 | 2 |
| 6. Environment, Energy, Transportation..... | 16 | 16 |
| 7. Aboriginal issues..... | 1 | 1 |
| 8. Foreign policy, military..... | 8 | 14 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Base | 8,738 Statements | 4,068 Articles |

* The percentages in this table do not match those in Chapter 8. This is because the universe of issues has changed, as shown in Table 12. Some issues defined in the CBC research have no equivalent in the McGill study and were therefore dropped from Table 13. The CBC percentages change as a result.

Methodological note

The McGill results in Table 13 have been scaled out of 100 so that they compare directly to the present study.

ERIN assigns an issue to each statement. A story might have 15 statements about the economy and 5 statements on foreign policy. McGill's unit of analysis is the story. For this example story, the McGill data would report that two issues were present – the economy and foreign policy, but it would not record the differential treatment.

The McGill results have been recalculated to exclude the first week of their analysis, Sept 3 to 9, as most of this time precedes the election call. The ERIN analysis commenced on Sept. 7 when the election was announced.

Attention to leaders and parties

ERIN records two measures of the amount of attention that is paid to leaders and parties:

- The amount of interview time they receive. (This is the amount of time that party leaders or members can be clearly heard speaking, and is measured on radio and television);
- The number of statements that are made about the leader or party. This is recorded for radio, television and Internet coverage.

There is, of course, no interview time measure for the newspapers, however the measures of “discussion” for the CBC material is similar to the measure of attention in the newspapers.

The McGill study uses “first mentions” as its unit of measurement. It counts the number of stories that mention Harper first, the number that mention Dion first, etc.

The McGill method is not as exact as that used in the ERIN study, where the discussion measure counts **every** mention of each leader or party and where the speaking time measure reflects every second of interview time. Still, if one assumes that a newspaper story that leads with Party X will be about party X more than about other parties, the results of this method should approximate the results of counting every mention when totaled over a large number of newspaper stories.

Figure 21 and Figure 22 compare measures of attention for leaders and parties on CBC and in the sample of newspapers.

Discussion on CBC divides almost equally between the Conservatives and the challenging parties. This is true of results pertaining to leaders and to parties.

For parties, the McGill results mirror the CBC results almost exactly. For newspapers, McGill finds greater attention paid to Steven Harper (by 10 percentage points), and slightly less to each of the other leaders.

Perhaps the more interesting comparison is between the measures of speaking time and discussion on CBC. The difference between these rests largely with the NDP and the Tories. The NDP had a larger proportion of interview time than discussion, and the Conservatives a smaller proportion of interview time than discussion.

There is no reason that the speaking time and discussion measures should necessarily be the same. Speaking time reflects direct reporting of events, while discussion includes additional program components such as background and analysis.

Figure 21. Attention to leaders (feature interviews excluded)

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008

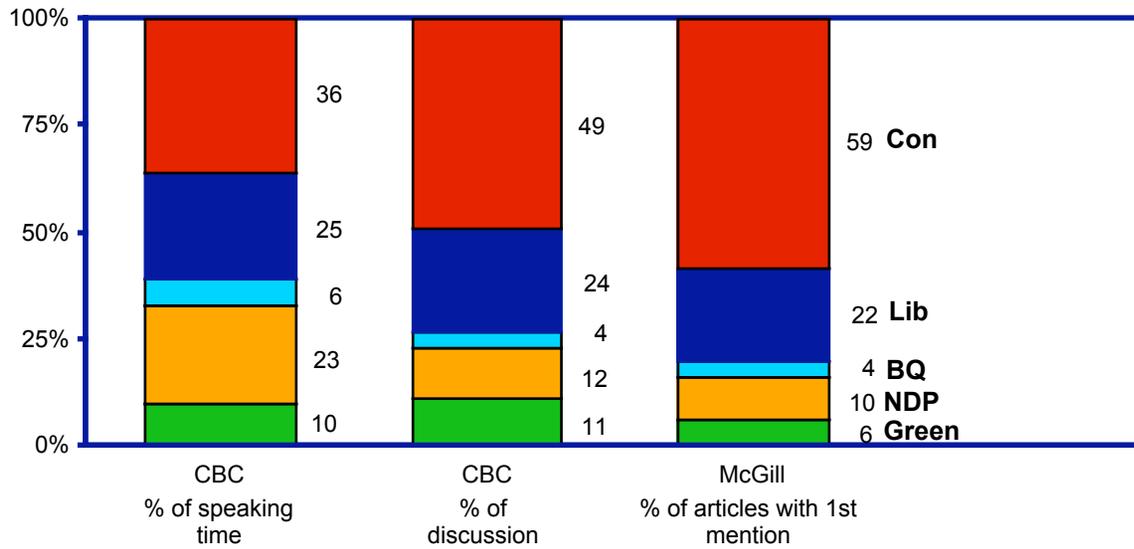
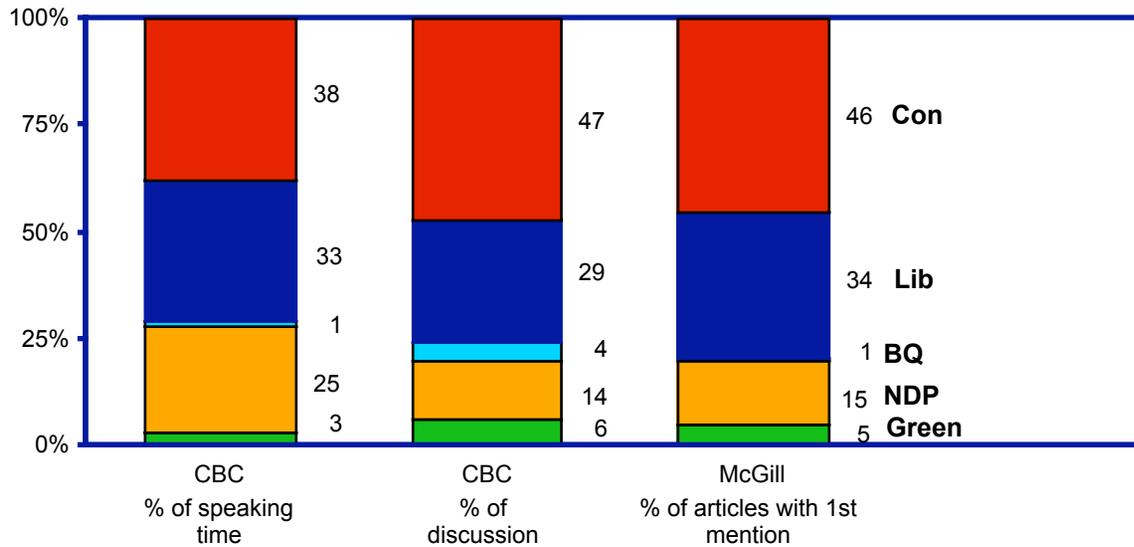


Figure 22. Attention to parties: Candidates, spokespeople, policies (references to leaders and feature interviews excluded)

Weeks 1-5, Sept. 7 – Oct. 13, 2008



Direction or tone

The McGill study tracks “tone” of coverage by counting the positive and negative references to the leaders and parties. This would appear to be similar to the “direction” in the ERIN study, and in fact the net tone results of McGill’s study of newspapers in the 2006 campaign accorded closely with the results for direction in the broadcast media.

In 2008, the results of the two studies are entirely dissimilar. This may be due to methodological differences that are not apparent at present. Lacking a complete understanding of the McGill procedures, these results are not reported.

APPENDIX: METHOD

Measures of balance

Two sets of measures are applied to each radio and television story: measures of time and measures of statement content and direction. Only the statement-based measures are applied to internet stories.

1. Analysis of time

On each occasion that an interviewee speaks, the duration of their speech is recorded. If a person speaks on five occasions in the course of a story, each instance of speech is recorded separately. Times are measured to the nearest second. Speaking times are recorded for all persons other than journalists (i.e. the program host or anchor and reporters).

The total length of the story is also recorded. Journalists are not timed directly, however their share of the program is the total length of the story minus the length of the interview segments it contains.

Interviewees are timed when the audience can hear and understand their speech. Crowd noise and interruptions (e.g., people talking at once so that the conversation cannot be understood) are not counted as interview time.

Only full stories of campaign coverage are analyzed. Program introductions, billboards, and stories that do not describe the election campaign are omitted.

2. Analysis of statement content and direction

A complete transcript of each news story is prepared in order to analyze statements. All statements made by both journalists and interviewees are analyzed.

A statement is a single coherent expression. Very often it is a single sentence. When a speaker makes several independent assertions in the same sentence, several statements are recorded. Sometimes, (especially in unscripted discussion) speakers take more than a single sentence to produce one codable statement. On radio and television, a statement represents about 6 seconds of speech, on average.

For each statement, researchers recorded:

- A description of the speaker including name, party affiliation if any, role (i.e. candidate, expert, citizen etc.), gender, race and geographical location;
- The person or party spoken about;
- The issue addressed;
- The “direction” that the statement conveys (positive, negative or neutral).

Directional statements

Direction describes how the statement reflects on the person or party spoken about. Directional statements convey the tone of events and the tensions that exist among parties and individuals. As such, directional statements are an essential component of news.

Direction can take the form of praise or criticism, expressions of support or lack of support, and indications of success or failure.

A string of explicitly negative comments appears in this commentary by a citizen: “I think the whole system under the Liberals has been running for so long; I think the improper activity is huge. I think it's just run wild back there, and somebody needs to come in and straighten a few things out.”

Political platforms and promises such as, “We will spend one billion dollars on X”, are considered neutral. While the person making the promise hopes that voters will regard the statement in a positive light, some voters, as well as some analysts and the opposing parties, will not.

Directional statements can also convey a sense of momentum, for example, by describing a party as “surging ahead in the polls”.

Examples of negative statements

Stéphane Dion: “I call on Steven Harper to debate it seriously, not to lie to Canadians...”

Jim Prentice (describing the NDP plan to halt any new tar sands projects): “Frankly, I think it's irresponsible”.

Janet Dirks, CTV (describing Stéphane Dion): “In French, he's in total command // in English, not so much”. (This is two statements a positive and a negative.)

Bernie McNamee: While the Liberals are still trying to get their act together, the NDP....

Examples of positive statements

Steven Harper: “Our achievements have been built on a foundation of strong economic management”.

Jim Davis (father of dead soldier accused of politicizing his son's death by a Conservative communications staffer): “I certainly do forgive him, and I accept his apology, and I think he's a big man for it.”

James Fitzmorris: “For a woman (whom) political leaders say shouldn't be taken seriously, Elizabeth May seems to be the talk of towns across the country.”

This sentence contains two statements, a positive and a negative:

Peter Mansbridge: “For a party firmly ahead in the polls, seemingly riding a wave of success and confidence and strong leadership (positive) // the Conservatives have had to do an awful lot of damage control in the first few days of this election campaign” (negative).

Examples of attributed statements

Attributed statements are those in which a journalist paraphrases another person's comments. They are often negative.

Peter Mansbridge: “The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador declared today that a Conservative majority would be one of the most negative events in Canadian history”. The data records this as a statement by Peter Mansbridge, attributed to Danny Williams, about the Conservatives, and negative with regard to the Conservatives.

Susan Bonner: “Dion's plan to tax carbon while cutting income tax has been denounced by the NDP.”

Direction and quality of coverage

It is important to note that the directional results assess one critical component of news coverage – the overall evaluative tone. Direction does not indicate whether the coverage is insightful or informative or accurate.