TV News and Politics

To a vast audience, television in America presents its own version of reality. As a result, America's political processes have been altered in ways both obvious and obscure. Election campaigns are geared to the special needs of television news; millions of dollars are spent on political TV advertising. But the effects on voters remain a matter of scholarly dispute and speculation. Here, discussing the 1976 campaign, political scientists Thomas E. Patterson and Michael J. Robinson raise some of the issues of concern to academic TV researchers. Then, in a Wilson Center "evening dialogue," network news executives respond.

THE 1976 HORSERACE

by Thomas E. Patterson

The 1976 presidential campaign, as presented on the network evening news, was primarily a competition to be won or lost. Only secondarily did it seem to involve national policy and quality of leadership.

Most of the evening news coverage was given over to what can most aptly be called the "horserace"—the candidates' comings and goings on the campaign trail, their strategies for winning votes, and their prospects for victory or defeat. Such subjects accounted for 60 percent of the networks' presidential election news during 1976. By contrast, only 28 percent of the television coverage was devoted to the "substance" of the campaign—the issues, the candidates' policy positions, their characters and abilities, their public records and personal backgrounds.

These figures come from a content analysis of a randomly selected sample of 117 weeknight network newscasts made between January 1 and November 1, 1976, 39 newscasts being

analyzed for each network—ABC, CBS, NBC.

Network television news emphasized the "horserace" aspects from the beginning. Even before the New Hampshire primary on February 24, news coverage focused on the candidates' strategies and campaign efforts and the odds they faced in trying to win the party nominations. The early coverage of Ford and Reagan did touch on the ideological and other bases of their contest, but considerably more time was spent on the candidates' early personal appearances—mostly Reagan's—and the strategies and resources of each. On the Democratic side, except for one-shot biographical sketches of some of the candidates, almost no attention was given to substantive issues. The coverage revolved around such questions as who was gaining the early advantage, how effective did their organizations appear to be, and who was campaigning today—and where.

After the New Hampshire primary, the horserace type of coverage received even more emphasis. With 30 primaries to be covered in 100 days, election reporting was necessarily heavy on who was winning and by how much in each primary and where. This emphasis, however, was not limited to Tuesday's vote predictions and Wednesday's vote analyses. Nearly every day the lead report on both the Republican and Democratic races dealt with the candidates' progress toward the nominations. Each development was analyzed primarily for its effect on the race. Carter's "ethnic purity" statement, for instance, was mentioned much more often in terms of its possible effects on his chances than in terms of what, if anything, it revealed about his politics.

During the first five months of 1976, no more than 11 percent of network coverage of the primaries was concerned with the candidates' policies and political leanings and only 5 percent with such topics as their abilities, characters, and public records. These percentages are based on all news references, regardless of length or source, originating in an anchorman's lead, a correspondent's narrative, or some other format. In the period of the party conventions, the horserace coverage continued to dominate.

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NETWORK EVENING NEWS COVERAGE OF THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN (January 1 to November 1, 1976)

	ABC	CBS	NBC	network average
THE HORSERACE				
winning and losing	19%	21%	22%	21%
strategy, logistics, and support	22	21	27	23
appearances, crowds, hoopla	17	15	15	16
	58	**57**	**64**	**60**
THE SUBSTANCE				
candidates' policies	13	11	9	11
candidates' characteristics and backgrounds	6	8	7	7
issue-related subjects (e.g., party platforms)	11	12	8	10
	30	**31**	**24**	**28**
THE REST				
(e.g., campaign calendar, election procedures)	12	12	12	12
	100%	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Attention to the substance of the 1976 presidential campaign rose moderately from a three-network average low of 25 percent during the primary period to 35 percent during the post-convention period.

Once the campaign had been narrowed to Ford and Carter, "substance" did receive more attention, particularly on the evening newscasts of ABC and CBS, accounting for almost 40 percent of their coverage, as compared to 30 percent of NBC's. At every stage of the general election campaign, these network differences reflected a tendency on the part of NBC to pay consistently less attention to substance than the other two networks.

Television's emphasis on substance was greater during the 1976 general election than it had been in 1972. In our study of network reporting of the Nixon-McGovern race,* Robert McClure and I found that less than 30 percent of the post-convention

*Thomas E. Patterson and Robert D. McClure, *The Unseeing Eye* (Putnam's, 1976).

coverage was given to issue and candidate assessments.

But 1976 was different. ABC and CBS gave more continuous coverage to what the candidates were saying on a variety of issues and placed more emphasis on analyses of their characters and qualifications. Although events, such as the televised debates, contributed to the networks' substantive coverage, it is my feeling that ABC and CBS made an effort in 1976 to cover substance more heavily than in previous elections. Nonetheless, the horserace was clearly the central theme of television's post-convention coverage, accounting for about 50 percent of such reporting by ABC and CBS and nearly 60 percent by NBC.

One apparent reason for this emphasis is that television is a visual medium, which is more effective when it shows people in motion rather than "talking heads." A candidate disembarking from an airplane or wading through a crowd provides a better television picture than a candidate standing still and making a statement. But the "good picture" argument does not fully explain the 1976 election coverage, since less "action" film was displayed on the nightly news in 1976 than in 1972.

Explaining the "Why"

A more fundamental reason for the horserace emphasis in 1976 might be the interpretive form of most network news reporting. While a newspaper report is often simply a matter-of-fact description of a day's campaign events, a television report usually tries to explain a day's events and present them as a "story." A television report tends to answer why as much as what, which requires a context or perspective that will explain what happened. If the candidate is the focus of the report, as he usually is, his actions must be explained. The one thing that can be safely assumed about a major presidential candidate is that he is in the race to win, so his relative position in the race is the most obvious explanation for his actions and, in fact, the one most frequently used by network correspondents.

Although some reporters have suggested that network emphasis on the horserace merely reflects reality (the candidates *are* seeking office), the campaign actually offers the networks wide latitude in their coverage. Once in a while, a candidate will make a startling blunder or score a major triumph. Such banner stories must be broadcast, but they are not everyday occurrences, and on most days, the networks have free rein as to what they report. The typical campaign day will find candidates immersed in campaign hoopla. Nothing earthshaking may happen. Nevertheless,

the story possibilities are many.

Nightly newscasts, of course, are only one element of the networks' election coverage, but because they provide the daily news to millions of Americans, they are undoubtedly the most important. The evening news reaches an average of 28 million homes, according to the Nielsen ratings—11.2 million for CBS, 9.8 million for NBC, and 7 million for ABC. The other programming is more substantive, less so than is commonly assumed.

Whatever the explanation for network television's emphasis on the horserace, its effects are far-reaching. Television provides a window on the campaign for a vast number of American voters. Our research on the 1972 campaign revealed that regular viewers of the nightly news learned nothing more about the candidates' policies or qualifications than did non-viewers. During the entire period of the 1976 primaries, regular viewers learned almost nothing about what the candidates represented, although they were well informed about the candidates' chances of winning the party nominations. During the 1976 post-convention general election campaign, regular viewers did become better informed, but not nearly as well informed as regular newspaper readers.

Emphasis on the horserace also heightens the feeling of some voters that campaigns really are not very important and that candidates really are not very noble fellows. When asked to recall what they had seen on television in regard to the 1976 campaign, nearly 60 percent of the persons questioned in the course of this study cited a "horserace" story, which is almost exactly the percentage of such stories broadcast on the evening news during the campaign. When asked what "went through their minds" at the time, those recalling a horserace story were apt to say, "It was meaningless," or "Just more of the same old stuff." At the same time, however, particularly when the news report was about strategy or maneuvering, they tended to link a candidate's actions with negative stereotypes: "Politicians will do most anything to get votes" . . . "All politicians are the same."

People may vote differently when their votes are based on information of the horserace type rather than on substance. Our evidence on this subject has not yet been fully analyzed, but there is no reason to assume that knowledge of a candidate's strategies and campaign style—not to mention speculation on his chances of winning—provides a better basis for a voter's decision than knowledge of the candidate's policies and qualifications.

Horserace coverage may well affect the outcome of presidential elections in this country. At the very least, it affects the quality of the electorate's decision.

TV'S "HORSERACE" COVERAGE: A SAMPLE

On October 14, 1976, less than three weeks before election day, Jimmy Carter made a campaign swing through upstate New York, stopping in Rochester and Syracuse, where he spoke on taxes and economy, among other things. Professor Patterson saw it as a fairly typical campaign day; the following reports were aired that night on the three network evening news shows, as part of their election coverage.

ABC NEWS

Barbara Walters: New York State has 41 electoral votes—that's 15 percent of the total the winner needs, and that's not peanuts. So it's no wonder that Jimmy Carter followed the President into New York State by one day for a round of campaigning today. Sam Donaldson also made the trip which began in upstate New York.

Sam Donaldson: There were the old familiar lines today in upstate New York: "unemployment too high . . . home ownership too difficult . . . an income tax system that is a disgrace to the human race." Jimmy Carter returning to his tested routine—proof, if any was needed, that last week's heady mood of attack on a President then clearly on the run had given way to a more cautious thrust. More proof at airport news conferences—where Carter endorsed the special prosecutor's favorable report on the President. Smart politics perhaps—but putting Carter slightly on the defensive.

Jimmy Carter: I never have accused Mr. Ford of doing anything wrong—I just want to make sure that he lets the people have access to him, and has press conferences now and then.

Unidentified Reporter: There have been charges that you are waging a nasty little campaign. How do you react to that?

Jimmy Carter: Well, I never have done that—and don't intend to. If I did, it would be very damaging to me, and I certainly wouldn't deliberately permit it.

Sam Donaldson: Throughout the day, the crowds were large and enthusiastic, adding to Carter's belief that he's ahead and can stay ahead. Carter and his aides expect more difficulties. A heckler in Syracuse, for instance, upset the beginning of a rally before he was carried off. But the strategy for handling difficulties in the two and one-half weeks remaining seems to be—ignore them, if possible.

CBS NEWS

Walter Cronkite: With just two and a half weeks until the voting, Carter appears to be making an adjustment in his campaign style, and Ed Bradley has that story.

Ed Bradley: Carter's campaign winged toward New York State with a sharply reduced schedule that will keep the candidate on the road less often, just two or three days at a time. Carter senses he now has the momentum and President Ford the problems, so he sharply reduced the acidity of his attacks, but still reminds vot-

ers of the President's statements on Eastern Europe and the Arab boycott. As for attacks against him, Jimmy Carter delights in telling his audiences he knows what the Republicans have to say.

Jimmy Carter: Don't believe all the stories that you hear from our Republican administration, from my Republican opposition. If I believed everything I heard said about me, I wouldn't vote for myself. You help me, I help you, and we'll have a great country once again. Thank you very much, and God bless all of you.

Ed Bradley: A number of polls both public and private show Carter with a comfortable and growing lead in several key states as well as nationwide. Carter's strategists feel the cutback in the schedule will reduce the possibility their candidate will make a serious mistake that could reverse the trend in the polls. Still, it will keep him on the road often enough to provide a contrast with the Ford campaign. Ed Bradley, CBS News, with the Carter campaign in Syracuse.

NBC NEWS

John Chancellor: Jimmy Carter was on the road in New York State while all of this was going on. He was talking about economic issues and on stopping the build-up of nuclear arms by the United States and the Soviet Union. Don Oliver reports from the Carter campaign.

Don Oliver: Carter has been criticized of late for running a somewhat mean campaign, with personal jabs at President Ford. There were no sharp attacks by the Democratic nominee today and he warned the Rochester crowd about believing charges against him.

Jimmy Carter: Don't believe all the stories that you hear from our Republican administration, my Republican opposition. If I believed everything I heard said about me, I wouldn't vote for myself.

Don Oliver: In Syracuse Carter was asked about the clean bill of health the Special Prosecutor has given President Ford on allegations of misuse of campaign funds in Michigan.

Jimmy Carter: I've never used his . . . ah . . . his ah . . . violating or not violating the law as a campaign issue. The only campaign issue I've raised is that he ought to have a press conference, reveal all his records and let the public or the investigators decide. And I think that to the extent that the investigators or the news media can have access to Mr. Ford, then that way you can keep these questions from being carried on from one day to another.

Don Oliver: Carter says he is happy that President Ford is going to hold a news conference tonight, but he is not happy that it will be carried live on nationwide TV. Carter says that puts him at a disadvantage, and he may ask for equal time. Don Oliver, NBC News, with the Carter campaign in Syracuse.

THE TV PRIMARIES

by Michael J. Robinson

Most of us have grown up with the idea that large states have more influence in the selection of a President than small states because of the peculiarities of our electoral system. The big states do wield significant power on Election Day because of the all-or-nothing quality of the electoral college vote. But there is, in fact, an even greater inequality of influence among the states during the nominating process—the state conventions, caucuses, and primary elections. This particular inequality can be attributed almost solely to the communications media. The political weight that accrues to some states because of this "communications advantage" has expanded exponentially since the advent of the present television news systems in 1963.

Three criteria help to determine the relative communications advantage of a given state: (*a*) the day on which it selects delegates (the earlier the better); (*b*) the democratic basis of the selection process (the larger the vote base the better); and (*c*) the journalistic tradition that has grown up around that state's selection process (the amount of news coverage attracted by a state in the last election is the best indicator).

Since it holds the first presidential primary, New Hampshire ranks very high on timing* and highest in terms of the other two criteria. In 1976, Florida and Massachusetts came out very high on all three, but no state ever approaches New Hampshire in overall news coverage.

Although California, New York, and other large states have disproportionate influence on who is *elected* President (due to the electoral college's unit rule tradition), their share of influence is less disproportionate than that of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Florida when it comes to deciding who is *nominated* by each party. In fact, recent history leads us to believe that

*In 1976, Iowa held delegate selection *caucuses* on January 19, 36 days before the New Hampshire primary *election*.

winning New Hampshire and either Florida or Massachusetts—or both—may now be tantamount to winning the nomination.

During the early spring of 1976, Jimmy Carter and Henry Jackson emerged as the two most likely Democratic candidates. To most observers, Carter was virtually assured of the nomination by the end of April, but it was February that was crucial, not April, because by February Carter had won the three states that determine the true strength of presidential candidacies.

Henry Jackson had won nearly 300,000 more popular votes in states where he had been a contestant—1,880,644 against an aggregate of 1,597,186 for Carter in New Hampshire (February 24), Massachusetts (March 2), Florida (March 9), North Carolina (March 23), and Wisconsin and New York (both April 6). But Jackson lost the first three states—the "top communications states"—which have become essential for the nomination. The top communications states separate losers from winners. Whoever wins New Hampshire is perceived as the eventual winner and, what's more, is assured continuing coverage. Nothing demonstrates this more vividly than the difference in news attention given to the results of the primaries in New Hampshire on network evening news and the attention given to the results of the New York primaries.

New Hampshire, which gave Carter his first primary victory, cast a total of 82,381 Democratic votes. On the day following the election, the New Hampshire results received 2,100 seconds of total news time on the three networks—an average of 700 news seconds per network. New York, which was Jackson's biggest victory, cast 3,746,414 Democratic votes. On the following day, his victory received only 560 seconds on the three shows combined—fewer than 190 seconds per network. Thus, the New Hampshire results received 170 times as much network news time per Democratic vote as the outcome in New York.

Promoting Primaries

The process that made this possible began ten years ago when television journalism, quite indirectly, supported the expansion of the presidential primary election system at the expense of the caucus or state convention systems. By paying much greater attention to primary politics than to other types of delegate selection, television encouraged the growth of the primary system throughout the nation, as states, like candidates, sought free television time. By 1976, 90 percent of the delegate selection stories on TV were about primaries.

Iowa attracted such meager press and television coverage of its first-in-the-nation delegate selection caucuses in 1976 that Iowa, like so many other states, is now likely to switch to a primary system in order to secure the kind of coverage only primaries can attract. Even Minnesota, long the archetype of convention politics—where primaries have never been especially important—is seriously considering moving to a presidential primary system. "Don't kid yourself," a state Democratic leader told us, "they want the TV time up here too."

More primaries have meant more primary voters and a larger percentage of delegates selected by voters in the primary elections. The number of primary voters and the number of primaries more than doubled between 1968 and 1976. This has been as much an electoral revolution as doubling the percentage of delegates selected through primaries, because primary voters are always considerably less involved in party politics than state caucus or state convention delegates. They are more volatile politically, consequently more vulnerable to "bandwagon effects" and "image candidacies." This has been the most important factor in the growing "communicational" influence accruing to states like New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Florida.

Vicious Circles

What's more, states that have already adopted the primary system, partly in pursuit of TV exposure, have a second card to play—holding their primary election on an earlier date. In 1976 New York and Massachusetts moved their primaries ahead in order to enjoy a communications advantage (New York even adopted a "second primary"). New Hampshire, not to be outdone, passed a public law ensuring that its presidential primary would always be first in the nation.

There are more presidential candidates than ever, now that any candidate who gives the appearance of winning in one of the top communications states believes he or she has a good chance of winning the nomination. There are earlier candidacies as well. Dark-horse candidates, or candidates challenging an incumbent

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President for the nomination, begin to cultivate New Hampshire up to two years before the general election is held.

The process is both a vicious circle *and* a chain reaction. More television coverage implies more primary states, implies more primary voters, implies more primary delegates, implies more candidates, implies more television coverage, etc. We seem, in fact, to be moving toward a 50-state primary system adapted to the needs of television news and influenced by the whims of the voters in New Hampshire.

Television increased its coverage of the New Hampshire primary by 39 percent between 1972 and 1976. Between November 24, 1975, and February 27, 1976, there were 32 more delegate selection stories on weeknight network news than in the corresponding period for 1971–72. Twenty-nine of them focused principally on New Hampshire. Television's affinity for New Hampshire increases with each passing campaign.

The one positive thing that can be said of this system of choosing nominees is that it tends to ensure predictability as to who will win, several months before the nominating conventions take place. Political mavericks, retired governors, and social scientists should at least be able to appreciate—and capitalize—on that.

TV News and the 1976 Election: A Dialogue

The issues raised by Professors Patterson and Robinson were discussed at an "evening dialogue" at the Wilson Center on January 18, just two days before Jimmy Carter's inauguration. Among those present to confront the academics were NBC and CBS news executives (their ABC counterparts were unable to attend). CBS and NBC were not in total agreement. Edited excerpts from the transcript follow:

ROAN CONRAD, *Political Editor, NBC News:* The central question posed by Professor Patterson is the proper relationship between what he calls "substance" (and what we'll call substance) and the "horserace" element in TV campaign coverage. I was surprised frankly, when I read his paper, that we did as well as

we did in terms of substance.

Now, from a newsman's point of view, the news is what happens. The news is what somebody says or does. The news is not a reporter's perception or explanation of what happens; it's simply what happens. That's horserace, granted. And I think there is a real question as to whether the proper role of an evening news service, 30 minutes long and much shorter than that (22 minutes) once we take out all the commercials, is to give people the kind of in-depth examination of political and policy issues that has been suggested, at least by implication.

What if the proportions were reversed? What if the networks had given twice as much emphasis to substance and only one-third to horserace? I bet you a nickel we'd be sitting in this building tonight discussing papers that said the networks had failed to report the news accurately and had devoted far too much attention to their own perceptions of the issues.

Network television news, it seems to me, is really not in the business of making assessments. We shy away from them. We get into trouble when we make assessments. Networks don't like to present themselves in the role of the arbiter of what is good and what is bad. It is safer, in all candor, to stick to the horserace elements of the election and not go wandering off into the thickets of substance.

Another point—there is a myth that networks enjoy great freedom of choice in what they can cover during a campaign, that they can choose not to film the arrival of Milton Shapp at North Ravenswood, New Hampshire, on a snowy winter morning.

Network executives would be very upset if a major event occurred and there was no one there to cover it. I'm talking about people getting shot. I'm talking about people making big mistakes, and I'm talking about every happenstance that can change the shape of a campaign in two minutes.

There is a problem of over-coverage of the New Hampshire primary that needs some explanation. The emphasis on over-coverage has proceeded from a faulty understanding of what the political process is like in an election year. The presidential primaries are a process. The process begins in New Hampshire [in February] and it ends in June. Last year, the process involved 30 or 31 different contests, depending on how you count, which have different weights. They have different weights because sometimes there are three or four contests on a single night and you can't cover them all adequately. You can't give them all equal weight. [*Conrad noted the limited number of available correspondents and camera crews and the technical hazards that circumscribe*

what harried network producers can put into the "campaign" segment of a 22-minute evening news show.]

Of course New Hampshire is emphasized and probably overemphasized. There are several good reasons for that. First of all, you have to introduce to the country at large a new crop of candidates. That immediately produces more stories about New Hampshire than other states because you have a long lead time. The candidates are up there. Jimmy Carter was up there, God knows, in 1974 and '75. Ronald Reagan spent a considerable part —perhaps the major part of his total campaign time—in New Hampshire.

ROBERT CHANDLER, *Vice President, Administration, and Assistant to the President, CBS News:* We at CBS were concerned with the problem of making some sense for the public out of the preconvention campaign that involved coverage of 30 primaries within a 15-week period. But another concern of ours was the fact that in 1972 we had fallen prey to some degree to the so-called media event; to the balloons, the baby kissing, the marching bands, the hoopla, if you will. We were determined to put more substance into our reporting in 1976.

Curiously enough, we now find ourselves attacked for having done that very thing; Mr. Patterson talks about our narratives dealing with campaign tactics. Those narratives came about because we instructed our reporters and our producers not to use the hoopla, but to tell the people what was going on. Forget the pictures, but report. That's exactly what we did.*

Mr. Patterson tells us that our "issue" content was much lower during the primary campaign than during the general election campaign. Let me tell you a story. In April of last year, Governor Carter kindly consented to have lunch with a number of our correspondents and executives in New York. One of us asked him why he had not put forth any position papers during the primary campaign, why he had not taken definitive stands and put out white papers and made specific proposals. His response was that the only Presidents he knew of who had done that dur-

*According to information provided by network officials, CBS initially assigned 15 correspondents to cover presidential primary candidates (1 to each of 10 Democrats, 3 to Ford, 2 to Reagan); NBC employed a maximum of 11 (8 with the Democratic contenders, 2 with Ford, 1 with Reagan) during the peak primary period, with 3 more correspondents "roving" in early January 1976. CBS and the *New York Times* conducted 20 polls: 6 to explore issues and candidate standings prior to June 1976, 10 to analyze voters' primary choices, and 4 to test post-convention trends. NBC ran 30 polls: 7 for pre-primary guidance on key issues, 14 to analyze voter primary choices, and 9 national phone surveys. ABC followed the same pattern, assigning a maximum of 15 correspondents and making use of some 7 polls provided by Louis Harris.—ED.

ing the primary campaign were Presidents Dewey, Humphrey, and McGovern.

He had no intention of dealing with the issues. That was his privilege. But you tell us we have a responsibility to raise our issue content, when, indeed, the candidates will not deal with issues. I think this places something of an unfair burden on us.

One of the ways we attacked that problem was to pick up the ball on our own. In early November 1975, we took a public opinion poll and asked the public what national problems were of greatest concern to them. Then we did a series on the evening news called "The Candidates and the Issues," which began in late November of 1975 and carried through until we had covered all 12 candidates.

We did, as did NBC, a considerable amount of polling (with the *New York Times*—in our case) to see what public positions were on the issues, what problems in the country were bothering the public, what the public perception of the candidates was—because not only issues but qualities of character were fundamental to this first post-Watergate election.

I can't say we succeeded to the extent that we should have, but I suggest that we didn't succeed largely because the candidates didn't succeed.

What we have here is Mr. Patterson constructing an elaborate thesis to the effect that we failed in our responsibilities to report the substance of the campaign. As he represents our coverage of events, he slices out only a small part and says that's what we did. Well, we did a good deal more than that. What I find in Professor Robinson's paper is a political and journalistic vacuum; nice neat sets of data about quantities of stories without any consideration of the circumstances surrounding these stories and the reasons why they had to be covered in certain ways.

Professor Robinson attempts to prolong a popular myth that New Hampshire is unimportant, that it provides so few delegates to the nominating conventions, has so limited a population, and is so atypical that its real value in the political process is negligible. I think that's nonsense. New Hampshire is important. As long as we continue to have a presidential primary system, as long as New Hampshire continues to have the first primary contest, it is important.

As I said, the primaries account for 75 percent of the delegates. Secondly, the primary process is really a continuum because it's compressed into 15 weeks and because there are 30 primaries. No one state on its own remains unaffected by the others. It is a process; it is a continuum.

The real value of primaries is that they constitute tests for the candidates, and the public can examine the results of those tests. They put the candidates out front under stress, where their strengths and their weaknesses are exposed for all to see.

DOUGLAS BAILEY, *Political Consultant, Bailey, Deardourff, and Eyre, Washington, D.C.:* It seems to me from the perspective of a professional political planner that the New Hampshire primary is beyond belief in its importance, and one of the reasons for its importance is the inevitable coverage that the networks give to it. You can't run in New Hampshire without it affecting your campaign enormously, much more so than any other primary. That shouldn't be so, but that's not the fault of the networks. It is the fault of the political system that somehow allows that to happen.

LAWRENCE LICHTY, *Professor of Communications, University of Wisconsin:* You said, Mr. Conrad, that television is not in the business of making assessments. All of the emphasis on New Hampshire aside, it seems to me that the big difference between newspapers and television during the early primary coverage is that the "standup"—the concluding statement by a TV correspondent holding a microphone and facing the camera—is almost always an assessment of how the day went, who has "momentum," and so forth.

CONRAD: Perhaps I was reflecting only my own prejudice that assessments should be kept to the bare minimum in all news. I think that the number of times a correspondent says a candidate is gaining or losing is strictly limited, and I expect that most producers would not like that kind of flat-out assessment. That's one of the reasons why we go to the trouble of taking public opinion polls. It is much easier and much better from a journalistic standpoint to have some basis on which to make an assessment.

CHANDLER: I'm afraid I don't agree. I think the reporter's job is to make assessments. That's what he's paid for. A reporter, and particularly a reporter traveling with the candidate, has a far greater basis of comparison with the past and with what the candidate has said and done than the average citizen or even the average TV anchorman. It's his job to assess as he goes along. The basis of his story selection is assessment based on his own professional judgments and what he's seen and heard not only that day, but on previous days. It's not only a justifiable responsibility; it's a necessary one.

NORMAN ORNSTEIN, *Staff Member, Senate Select Committee on the Committee System:* The comments by the network people suggest that they're trying to have it both ways. They say: We cover the primaries because they represent 75 percent of the delegates. And then they say: But we don't cover the primaries that have the delegates because they aren't the important ones. The Wisconsin primary is important because it's a beauty contest, because it's a horserace, because it's one that's close. The New York primary isn't important because it's already decided. Jackson's already got it, and it's not really a primary in which candidates are running.

MICHAEL J. ROBINSON: There was 39 percent more coverage of the New Hampshire primary in '76 than in '72. Now I don't think that's a function of the fact that there were more candidates. The candidates are not foolish, and they do not operate in a political or journalistic vacuum. If in '68 they knew that New Hampshire was going to get the plurality of coverage, by '72 challengers would have said I'm going to New Hampshire, and the media in part stimulated that.

I'm convinced that the candidates are going to be in New Hampshire in 1980, and there are going to be more of them and they are going to be spending more and more days there. But the point is they're not operating in a vacuum; they're operating in response to what the media, especially television, is doing. If television is going to increase its coverage in New Hampshire, then the activity of the candidates will increase.

CONRAD: As you know, there is a great move toward regional primaries. A number of states gathered together this year. New Hampshire wouldn't go along, but Vermont and Massachusetts decided to have theirs the same day. There was no network coverage of the Vermont primary as far as I know.

I suggest the reason there were more candidates running for President in 1976 than in 1972 is that you had the curious situation of both party's nominations being open; we had an unelected incumbent President, and we also had federal money that went to 12 candidates for the first time, several million dollars, which made possible candidacies that otherwise could not have gotten off the ground.

ROBINSON: One of the reasons we moved to a primary system as rapidly and as totally as we have is that it fits the organizational needs of television network news to cover primaries.

CHANDLER: As one of the poor victims of this situation and as the man who is responsible for putting on our primary programs week after week after week, I can assure you those are terrible television programs.

ROBINSON: But they're not as bad as caucus states. Caucuses are hard to follow, and they're not very exciting.

CHANDLER: Sure, but I can assure you that those half-hours at 11:30 every Tuesday night when there was a primary were dreadful television.

BURT HOFFMAN, *Staff Member, Office of the House Majority Whip:* My problem with television news coverage, and indeed with newspaper coverage nowadays as well, is that we're getting far too much analysis and not enough of what the candidate has to say.*

CHANDLER: I don't know what your experience is, but relating that observation to the presidential campaign, the problems our reporters had were that the candidates were saying the same thing every day, or nearly every day. We're trying to report news and when a candidate repeats the same thing day after day, at some point that no longer is news.

CONRAD: I really want to quash the notion that the networks have a vested interest of some kind in perpetuating or increasing the number of primaries. I believe the primaries are going to continue to increase, but it has nothing to do with the desires of television. It costs the networks more. It's a drain on resources, and it often doesn't turn out to be very good television.

It has much more to do with the continued democratization of our political parties, with the widespread desire among political professionals to spread the responsibility over a larger number of the people who determine who the candidates of their party are going to be. I shouldn't be surprised at all if we have 40 or more state primaries in 1980.

*Paul Weaver, a *Fortune* editor and former assistant professor of government at Harvard, argues that "newspaper and television news are alike in being essentially melodramatic accounts of current events." Hence, the "generalized image of politics as a horserace." But while the newspaper story is an impersonal, "quasi-random" presentation of information, the brief TV film report is "thematic" (often to the point of distortion), superficial, highly personal, with the TV reporter striking a "pose of omniscience." Television news is "pre-eminently an instrument of symbolic politics." See Weaver's analysis, among others, in *Television As a Social Force* (Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies/Praeger, 1975).—Ed.

THOMAS E. PATTERSON: In the process of doing their classic studies of the 1940 and 1948 elections, Paul Lazersfeld and Bernard Berelson did some content analysis [see Background Books, p. 91]. Their methods are not terribly clear, but I think a reasonable reader would conclude from their data that they do prove that the horserace accounted for about 25 to 40 percent of newspaper coverage in 1940 and 1948. In newspaper coverage of the 1976 campaign, it was about 50 percent. On television news, it was almost 60 percent.

Now, one can argue that there is very little choice involved on the part of the networks as to what facets of the campaign story they cover. But I think you have to confront a couple of facts if you're going to make that argument. First of all, there is almost 10 percent more horserace coverage on network news than in newspapers. And if one makes some judgment about the structure of those stories, one sees that the structure, the narrative theme that holds the TV story together, is very frequently the horserace.

My feeling is that in 1976, compared with 1972, there was a substantial difference in network news coverage during the post-convention period. It was more substantive. But from my personal bias, I don't think it was substantive enough.

BACKGROUND BOOKS

TV NEWS AND POLITICS

Books discussing broadcast coverage of presidential campaigns have followed each inaugural since 1940 as the night the day. But solid fare, as opposed to extended sermons and jeremiads, has only begun to appear.

This brief bibliography includes books that can be grouped as (*a*) serious attempts to assess the impact on the voter of broadcast coverage and/or campaign advertising, (*b*) studies of broadcast content, and (*c*) related general analyses of network operations and news selection.

Broadcasting and politics have been closely connected since the beginning of radio. In November 1920, KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pa., broadcast the returns of the Harding-Cox election. By 1928, despite a prominent Republican's remark that "We haven't time to monkey around with novelties," Democrats and Republicans were ready to spend a total of more than $1 million for commercial radio time. But not until the mid-1940s did the first detailed examination of radio's impact on politics appear—in **THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign** by Paul F. Lazarsfeld et al. (Columbia, 1944, later eds. 1948–68, cloth & paper).

The case in point was the 1940 re-election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Lazarsfeld concluded that, although radio broadcasts (like newspapers) were frequently used as a source for concrete information, their overall impact was small. People-to-people communication had greater significance.

"Impact studies" in general fall short of providing conclusive evidence on how the mass media—print or broadcast—affect Americans' votes. Even the widely accepted notion that Nixon's wan physical appearance had an adverse effect on voters watching the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960 cannot be "conclusively" proven, as Sidney Kraus's book **THE GREAT DEBATES: Background, Perspective, Effects** (Ind. Univ., 1962; Peter Smith, 1968) demonstrates.

"To trace a change in a political climate . . . straight to the door of television is a task foredoomed to failure," say Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang in **POLITICS AND TELEVISION** (Quadrangle, 1968, cloth & paper). Yet "failure to 'prove' the cumulative effects does not mean that political life has been unaffected" by TV. In their view, the effects on late voters of TV broadcasts of early returns had no impact on the outcome of the 1964 election; future elections might be different.

In **THE UNSEEING EYE: The Myth of Television Power in National Politics** (Putnam's, 1976), Thomas E. Patterson and Robert D. McClure argue that "in almost every instance" the prevailing view of heavy TV influence in the election process is "wrong." They found that the average change on issues for respondents exposed to TV political advertising and news, compared with those not exposed, was small. Yet their statistics show fairly large changes on individual issues.

Most political scientists have barely considered TV as a factor in the political education of ordinary Americans. Moreover, most media studies published so far have underrated the impact of TV in "setting the agenda" in campaigns. Sidney Kraus and Dennis Davis make a start on closing these gaps in

THE EFFECTS OF MASS COMMUNICATION ON POLITICAL BEHAVIOR (Pa. State Univ., 1976).

The first scholarly examinations of TV news "content" have focused on the 1972 elections. Most calculate the amount of air time devoted to each candidate, the issues, and other aspects of the campaign and analyze news items for "positive," "neutral," or "negative" coloration.

One example can be found in the Alternative Educational Foundation's 1974 **REPORT ON NETWORK TREATMENT OF THE 1972 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES,** which is good on the primaries. Another is C. Richard Hofstetter's detailed **BIAS IN THE NEWS: Network Television Coverage of the 1972 Election Campaign** (Ohio State Univ., 1976). Other content analyses by university researchers generally agree with Hofstetter that network news coverage did not deliberately favor McGovern over Nixon or vice versa.

The half-hour (22-minute) nightly network news show began in 1963. But only recently have writers begun to analyze *how* NBC, CBS, and ABC cover election campaigns. An early example is former NBC correspondent Robert MacNeil's **THE PEOPLE MACHINE: The Influence of Television on American Politics** (Harper & Row, 1968, cloth & paper). Despite the title, MacNeil concentrates on the networks' 1960 and '64 campaign broadcast efforts and the competition for profit (ratings) and prestige (e.g., drawing the biggest audience on election nights).

General discussion, mostly by broadcast journalists, of the sins and virtues of network (and local) TV news is available in the five volumes of the periodic Alfred I. duPont–Columbia University Survey of Broadcast Journalism, edited by Marvin Barrett. The most recent, **MOMENTS OF TRUTH?** (Crowell, 1975, cloth & paper), is largely devoted to Watergate coverage.

Edwin Diamond, TV critic and visiting lecturer in political science at MIT, in **THE TIN KAZOO: Television, Politics, and the News** (MIT, 1975), discusses both network and local news, with no great admiration for either.

In **NEWS FROM NOWHERE: Television and the News** (Random House, 1973, cloth; 1974, paper), Edward Jay Epstein reports on news operations, primarily at NBC, over a six-month period in 1968. In the first systematic (though flawed) analysis of its kind, he describes how network news is selected; he stresses the importance of limited manpower, budgets, and the competition to attract (and entertain) mass audiences in shaping what we finally see on the evening news.

The major overview of the industry is Sydney W. Head's **BROADCASTING IN AMERICA: A Survey of Television and Radio** (Houghton Mifflin, 3rd ed., 1976). Other good treatments include Les Brown's **TELEVISION: The Business Behind the Box** (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanich, 1971, cloth; 1973, paper) and Ben H. Bagdikian's **THE INFORMATION MACHINES: Their Impact on Men and the Media** (Harper & Row, 1971, cloth & paper). Bagdikian examines newspapers as well as local TV; he considers the implications of various technologies that will affect the content of news and its delivery to the next generation of consumers.

—Adapted from a longer bibliographical essay by Lawrence W. Lichty, available on request from the author, Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis. 53706. Professor Lichty will be a Fellow at the Wilson Center beginning in July 1977.