

Norris, P. (2001). A failing grade? The news media and campaign 2000. *Press/Politics* 6(2), 3-9.
Because of the controversy surrounding the aftermath of the 2000 election (Florida), more routine questions about the media and the campaign became obscured.

Who tuned in and who tuned out?

- Campaign 2000 saw an accelerated fragmentation of channels, sources and audiences.
- Pew Research study showed people increasingly turning to alternative 24-7 breaking news sources (cable TV and Internet) rather than traditional news sources (network news, newspapers). *The size of the audience for campaign news 1992 vs. 2000:*
 - Network news dropped from 1/2 to about 1/5 in eight years
 - Cable TV increased to 1/3 (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News)
 - The trend was particularly evident in the under-30 generation and among strong partisans more than independents and leaners.
 - Modest boost for radio news and a substantial in news via the Internet.
 - Only 1 or 10 voters got most of the news from the Internet. However, 1/3 got at least some of their campaign news from online sources.

Is this "digital shift" as revolutionary as it appears?

- Many of the online users actually used mainstream news organizations' Web sites (CNN, MSNBC, etc.), broadcast TV Web sites and national newspaper sites.
 - About half said they went to major news organizations' sites for news about the 2000 elections.
 - Only 7 percent visited candidate Web sites.
 - Only 4 percent visited issue-oriented sites
- The Internet alters "the mode and speed of transmission" and "patterns of revenue for the news industry, more than the use of trusted news outlets" (p. 5).
 - Established reputations thrive in the information age.
 - "The process of news 'de-alignment' represents a shift from a captive, habitual and loyal passive mass audience to one of segmented audiences with a greater choice of outlets and stories" (p. 5).
 - The attentive public has more opportunities today to find detailed, timely and in-depth information about the campaign and stories that interest them, when they want it, at work or at home.
 - Convenience is the main reason Americans have turned to the Internet for campaign news (Pew).
 - Nielsen research showed surges in the use of Internet and cable TV news in the post-election period, with the daytime audience.

If viewers did switch to network TV news during the campaign, what did they learn?

- Data showed that during the 9-week campaign, the Big 3 networks produced just over two stories per night per network.
 - More election news was covered in 2000 during the longer "breakfast shows" (GMA, Early Show, Today).
 - The "horse-race" - The closeness of the Bush-Gore race saw extensive footage – who was ahead or behind and candidate election strategies represented almost three-quarters of the campaign news on network TV.
 - Horse race coverage surged during the final two weeks on all programs except PBS's The Newshour with Jim Lehrer which stuck with policy, social security, tax cuts, educational standards, etc.
 - However, stories that discussed policy were still up, representing 44 percent on network news.
 - Gore received 60 percent negative to 40 percent positive evaluations
 - Bush 63 percent negative to 37 percent positive
 - The coverage was mostly negative, even though the negative coverage was pretty evenly spread between the two candidates.

After it was over, how was it for you?

- 83 percent of voters thought they had learned enough about candidates and the issues to make an informed choice.
- 62 percent of voters found the presidential debates helpful in their decision.
- Voters thought there was more discussion of issues and less mudslinging than in 1996.
- 29 percent awarded the press a top grade of an A or B for its performance, while 39 percent graded the news media a D or F.
- Overall, Americans proved pretty satisfied with the overall process.

Author's conclusions:

- The news industry has experienced greater diversification of sources, outlets and audiences.
- The American public has moved to more convenient news cycles.
- The audience for early-evening news has eroded, but the segmented audience continues to find enough information from a multitude of choices.
- "In interpreting these developments, it is not clear why we should mourn the loss of the loyal mass audience for network evening news, with its overpaid aging male anchors, myopia to world affairs, and inconvenient time slot, anymore than we should decry the loss of other phenomena that enjoyed their fashionable heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, such as bell-bottoms, tie-dyed T-shirts, and disco... If the networks were genuinely concerned about the erosion of their news audience when they would learn from European television, and all channels would not operate a virtual cartel by scheduling their evening news in the same time slot, well before many Americans get home from work" (p. 6).