

U.S. Presidential Politics on the Global Stage:
A Content Analysis of 2008 Election Coverage on
Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today

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This thesis titled
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ABSTRACT

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The 2008 U.S. presidential election garnered unprecedented global interest and international news coverage. This study, guided by the framing theoretical perspective, examined how the U.S. presidential candidates, Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain, were framed by three major international networks: Al Jazeera (English), the BBC, and Russia Today. It also examined what type of coverage, horse race or issue coverage, aired on the networks, and how the election process itself was framed by the networks. A content analysis of 117 stories on evening newscasts, from October 6, 2008, through November 3, 2008, found that Obama was framed more positively than his rival McCain on all three networks. The majority of coverage on Al Jazeera and the BBC focused on the horse race, rather than the issues. The analysis indicated that similar frames are used to describe candidates internationally. It is argued here that if networks continue to focus on the horse race, rather than the issues, audiences will learn only who is ahead in the polls and not necessarily which candidate is better suited for the office. Future research should expand the findings of this study by analyzing more international networks to determine if these findings are generalizable beyond the cultures featured here.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When U.S. voters went to the polls on November 4, 2008, to elect a new president, the presidential campaigns had generated unprecedented global interest and international news coverage. The United States was on the brink of history no matter which candidate was victorious. Senator Barack Obama, a Democrat from Illinois, became the first African-American U.S. president, and had Senator John McCain of Arizona won the election, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska would have become the first female U.S. vice-president.

Scope and Rationale

Although the world could not cast a ballot in the U.S. presidential election, citizens in other countries were watching the U.S. election carefully. In a BBC poll of 22,000 people in 22 countries a month and a half before the election, 46 percent said Obama would be more likely to improve the United States' relationship with other countries ("The World Vote" 2008). That same survey found 49 percent of people preferred Obama, while only 12 percent preferred McCain. Following Obama's election, the influential German news magazine *Spiegel* wrote in an editorial, "Say what you will about press bias in the United States. No one in Germany ever felt the need to pretend: Like elsewhere in Europe, the media here was always in the bag for Barack Obama" ("Barack Obama" 2008). However, Obama's overwhelming popularity did not extend to the Middle East. He had marginal support across the region, and Israel was one of the

few countries in the world where McCain was ahead in popularity ("The World Vote" 2008).

The re-election of President George W. Bush in 2004 was viewed negatively by the majority of people in several European countries. According to an *Associated Press* poll shortly after his re-election, seven of ten people in France, Germany, and Spain had an unfavorable view of him (Lester 2004). The poll surveyed 1,000 people in each of the countries. By the time he left office, Bush was the most unpopular president since approval ratings were first taken six decades ago (Steinhauser 2008). As a candidate, Obama's popularity in many countries was a far cry from that of his predecessor, Republican president, George W. Bush.

Design and Theoretical Proposition

This study sought to find out if three major networks' campaign news coverage of a popular U.S. presidential candidate, Senator Barack Obama, translated into more positive frames than for Senator John McCain. The three major networks were Al Jazeera (English), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Russia Today. These three networks were examined here because of the relationship the United States has with the networks' country of origin. The networks also represent news from three major regions of the world: Europe, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, it is important to examine coverage from the three international networks, because they are available to a wide English-speaking audience around the world; each network is pushing its own view of the United States. Al Jazeera originates from a country that has been an ally of the United States, from a region where the public and state opinion of the United States is

largely unfavorable. The BBC broadcasts from a long-established ally of the United States, and Russia Today is based in a country that has been a historical adversary of the United States. Of particular interest to this study, how are the candidates framed by the coverage of the three networks? Were they framed positively or negatively? What types of stories did the networks use to cover the election? How was the election process framed by the networks? Was the vote framed as fair or unfair?

The analysis was based on thirty days of news coverage prior to the U.S. presidential election in order to determine how the U.S. presidential election was framed by Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today. Primetime, half-hour newscasts from all three television networks were examined Monday through Friday from October 6, 2008, through November 3, 2008. The time period for this study was selected in order to give the researcher as clear a picture as possible of what kind of election coverage was featured on these three networks.

This study was guided by the theoretical framework of framing, more specifically, media frames. Journalists frame the news in such a way that gives interpretation to facts and can lead to inadvertent bias in the reporting of a story (McQuail 2005). In particular, this study examined a proposition that news is framed ethnocentrically. According to Entman (1993), frames can increase the salience or meaningfulness of news, especially when those frames are paired with “culturally familiar symbols” (Entman 1993, 53).

With increased globalization, and worldwide economic concerns, it is more important than ever to advance our understanding of how the United States and its president and policies are viewed in countries around the world (Flaherty 2009). This study provided some insight into how the recent U.S. election was portrayed by Al

Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today and also how coverage compared among the three networks.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NETWORKS

Al Jazeera

Since it started broadcasting in 1996, Al Jazeera has been controversial in both the Arab and Western worlds. The station is based in the oil rich nation of Qatar and was pioneered by the country's leader, Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, as an effort to modernize. Sheikh Thani overthrew his father in a bloodless coup in 1995. He was educated in Britain, and, soon after taking power, he started reforms that included allowing women to participate in the electoral process, and establishing a parliamentary system under his regime. He also abolished the Ministry of Information, which in many Middle Eastern countries is designed to dictate news to the press. He started Al Jazeera soon after a bilateral deal for an Arabic broadcast between the BBC and a Saudi-backed communications company collapsed because the BBC insisted on an independent press. Sheikh Thani hired 20 BBC journalists, all with Arab backgrounds, to launch Al Jazeera (Burns 1999).

Sheikh Thani wanted to separate himself from the more traditional leaders in the region by creating an atmosphere that encouraged freedom of press. Government-controlled television in the Middle East has been the "defining feature" of both local and national broadcasts for more than four decades (Ayish 2002, 140). Starting with just a six-hour broadcast, Al Jazeera took advantage of the freedom it enjoyed compared to other media in the region. For the first time in the Arab world, Al Jazeera aired uncensored talk shows with debates on usually taboo topics and also featured uncensored

reporting. It is the only station in the region that features a women's program not focused on cooking or parenting (Najjar 2009). The station gradually increased the amount of time it broadcast from just a few hours a day until 1999, when it began airing programming 24 hours a day. By the time the war in Afghanistan started in October 2001, the station reached an estimated 35 million people (Rich 2001).

Al Jazeera, and its distinction from other networks in the region, has been the focus of several studies and the focus of much debate (Ayish 2002; Garyantes 2006; Cherribi 2006). Some researchers have questioned just what kind of freedom Al Jazeera has. Cherribi (2006) argued that Al Jazeera is more of a religious station than a news network, which allows some liberal programming to be shown. He contended that Al Jazeera is pushing a religious agenda and that the network used the issue of Muslim women wearing the veil in France to "mobilize a shared public opinion, and construct an imagined transnational Muslim community" (Cherribi 2006, 121). Other researchers have supported the idea that Al Jazeera is an independent voice in the region. When examining political communication patterns in the Middle East, Ayish (2002) called Al Jazeera a liberal network and wrote that it "has won a reputation for independent reporting that sharply contrasts with the state-sponsored news coming from other media outlets in the Arab world" (Ayish 2002, 143).

But the amount of freedom Al Jazeera enjoyed, including the ability to criticize governments in the Middle East, soon began to have consequences. In 1999, the Algerian government cut electricity to several major cities to keep people from watching a controversial talk show on Al Jazeera when the topic was about the brutal civil war that had been going on in Algeria for several years (Burns 1999). Al Jazeera claimed some

Middle Eastern countries had denied its reporters entry visas; at least two countries even went so far as to shut down the station's bureaus in response to more scandalous reports. In March 2001, the Palestinian Authority shut down Al Jazeera's West Bank and Gaza bureaus for broadcasting video of a protestor holding a poster of Yasir Arafat with a shoe dangling in Arafat's face. Showing someone a shoe in Middle Eastern cultures is a grave insult, and Palestinian officials said they believed Al Jazeera would not have shown other leaders in such a way. However, one senior Palestinian official said of the decision to remove Al Jazeera from the country, "We are not just shooting ourselves in the foot. We are shooting ourselves in the nose" (Sontag 2001).

Despite the reaction from neighboring countries, Sheikh Thani said he was standing behind his creation. In an interview at his Doha palace, he said of the station: "What a headache. It's caused no end of problems, but all the same I think of it as a kind of oxygen, invigorating our thinking. I tell my children, if you want to know the issues of real importance in the Arab world, watch Al Jazeera" (Burns 1999). At the time, however, much of the criticism directed at Al Jazeera was coming from the Arab world. That changed in the days following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Al Jazeera's decision to broadcast tapes from Osama bin Laden in the months following the attack garnered criticism from the Bush administration. Then Secretary of State Colin Powell even went so far as to urge Sheikh Thani to tone down the network's rhetoric, a request that caused media outlets around the world to protest the move. *The New York Times* wrote in an editorial, "The correct response to Al Jazeera, however, is not to ask Qatar to censor it. The Islamic world has far too much censorship already" ("Censorship" 2001).

Tensions between the Bush administration and the network's journalists did not relax as the war in Afghanistan began. Before dawn broke on November 13, 2001, a U.S. bomb struck Al Jazeera's empty offices in Kabul, leveling the building. No one was inside the two-story, residential building. U.S. officials said they were targeting Al Qaeda and was unaware Al Jazeera had an office in the building, but Al Jazeera's chief editor said the U.S. forces knew the network was in the building and believed the bureau had been on a list of targets since the beginning of the conflict (Wells 2001). Al Jazeera would come under literal attack from the United States again during the Iraq War. On April 8, 2003, a U.S. missile struck Al Jazeera's Baghdad bureau, killing a journalist. Media watchdog groups around the world condemned the bombing and some questioned if the attack was deliberate; the general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists said, "It is impossible not to detect a sinister pattern of targeting" (Monaghan 2003).

Al Jazeera English, the network that is the focus of this study, was launched in 1996 and can be seen in many parts around the world. But the announcement of the network's expansion was not without controversy. Some cable providers in the United States refused to carry Al Jazeera English because of the network's association with the bin Laden video and audio tapes. Despite being denied the distribution channel by some providers, Al Jazeera, is available to an estimated 110 million homes through its licensing agreements and online channels (Pfanner 2008).

The BBC

Britain, along with the United States, is often credited as inventors of modern journalism (Tunstall 1977). *The Times* (London), beginning in the 1840s, is considered to be the first elite newspaper; it stayed the leader of news until it was eclipsed by *The New York Times* in the 1940s (Tunstall 1999). Tunstall (1999) argued that Britain and the United States form a duopoly in controlling news flow. The British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC, and the British news agency Reuters are responsible for providing news around the globe. Reuters gained a reputation worldwide by becoming the semi-official news agency of the government in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The BBC, likewise, “has established a world reputation as perhaps the least biased and most reliable international news service in its field” (Tunstall 1999, 193). The BBC was established by U.K. government charter, and it is funded by public money in an effort to keep the BBC “independent from political and commercial influences” (“Review” 2005). It is funded by a license fee set by the government. Furthermore, in Britain the BBC is “deeply embedded in the national consciousness” (Tunstall 1983, xii).

British citizens may consider their country to have a free press, but that may not be the case. The government has always closely regulated broadcasting in the majority of countries because of the “spectrum scarcity” (Goodwin 1999, 131). There are a limited number of airwaves on which television (or radio) can be broadcast, a natural monopoly, with the government in control. Furthermore, the BBC may have been established as separate from the government, but some scholars argue that is not necessarily the case. Lawmakers may not exercise formal control over the BBC, but politicians are responsible for passing the legislation that regulates television (Tunstall 1983). Despite questions

over state regulation, Tunstall (1983) concluded the power within and outside the BBC is distributed evenly enough between producers, business leaders, and the board of governors to keep any one person or group from having too much influence.

Who can broadcast on which airwaves is not the only way the British government manages broadcasters. Included in the BBC Agreement is a clause that allows direct state intervention, including the following: “The Secretary of State may from time to time by notice in writing require the Corporation to refrain at any specified time or at all times from broadcasting or transmitting any matter or matter of any class specified in such notice” (HMSO 1996, 10). Furthermore, indecency laws keep television networks from airing anything offensive, and program codes deal with advertising, violence, and impartiality toward political matters (Petley 1999).

Regulation of the airwaves is not the only way the British government enacts control over the press. There are no special laws that protect journalists, because they “are not regarded as society’s watchdogs” (Petley 1999, 144). One law in Britain that is considered to limit the abilities of the press is the libel law. British libel law puts the burden of proof on the journalist, rather than the person suing, and its favorable climate for lawsuits has earned London the nickname of “libel capital of the world” (Petley 1999, 145). Scholars have concluded the ability of defendants to win large settlements in court has created a chilling effect on the press, and editors are more likely to write stories in relation to how defensible the copy is in court (Petley 1999). Recently, prior restraint, or pre-publication censorship, in Britain has also been derided by media scholars. Petley (1999) wrote that prior restraint was “an unacceptable shackle on media freedom [that] has been badly eroded” (Petley 1999, 146).

More recently, however, the debate over freedom of the press in Britain has turned to concentration of ownership. Concerns have been raised over the idea of too much power resting in the hands of too few people. British media scholars have pointed to media mogul Rupert Murdoch as someone who could potentially control the British press (Stokes 1999). His company News International already owns several British media companies including *The Times*. There are, however, controls in Britain to keep one company from monopolizing the media; a company is not allowed to own more than 15 percent of the television market as determined by audience share (Stokes 1999).

Freedom, objectivity, pragmatism, and voluntarism are often described as the driving ideals behind the media in Britain; although Tunstall (1983) contended those ideals are often myths. Objectivity, or the quest for objectivity, is particularly important in the British press. It is one of the reasons why many programs on the BBC are categorized as either news or current affairs, in order to distinguish between news and commentary (Tunstall 1983). But, as with all media systems, the idea of objectivity is not necessarily achieved. Newspapers in Britain have been accused of being biased toward the conservative or liberal parties and has also been called “ethnocentric and at times even chauvinistic in its coverage” (Kuhn 2007, 160).

Whether or not the coverage is biased or constrained by the government, the BBC has enjoyed success worldwide. It is now the world’s largest broadcasting company; and, through its worldwide service, it is estimated the BBC reaches 200 million people across the globe (“BBC Worldwide” 2003). Besides being available on many satellite networks, many BBC programs can be viewed at its website, further expanding its reach.

Russia Today

The broadcast media and its function in Russia can be broken into two time periods: during the Soviet Union and after the collapse of the USSR. Rantanen (2002) wrote that during the Cold War, Soviet propaganda and media were used to serve three functions: to endorse the Soviet Union and its way of life, to proliferate Soviet supremacy, and to encourage international proletarianism. In order to make this possible, the media was controlled through censorship, both through official government censorship and self-censorship. Television, similar to other media in the USSR, was regulated under strict guidelines. Television networks were forbidden from going live and the medium was essentially unable to develop (Zassoursky 2004). The Soviet Union's oppression of the press was not limited to the country itself, but also countries that shared its border. Salminen (1999) argued the Soviet government tried to silence and manipulate the press in Finland in hopes of making the country part of its bloc and similar tactics were used to influence other neighboring countries.

In post-Soviet Russia, the media landscape is rapidly changing. Some types of media, including broadcast advertising and new media did not exist during the Soviet rule and the media laws under the new government are not completely written (Rantanen 2002). Rantanen (2002) contended that globalization is forcing a shift in the media; citizens were isolated from the Western world before the fall of the Soviet Union. But the media in Russia is far from free now that the Soviet Union has collapsed. Pro-government groups have been known to find ways around laws that put a ceiling on the amount of money they can spend on campaign advertising (Oates and Roselle 2000). Reporters without Borders, a media watchdog group, ranked Russia as 140 of 167 for

press freedom. During two major elections in 2007, independent newspapers were shut down and at least two journalists were forcibly admitted to psychiatric hospitals, “a frequent practice during Soviet days to discredit those with ‘undesirable’ views” (“Russia” 2008). Several other reporters were arrested in the same year; one was arrested for interviewing a protestor in the run-up to the latest election (“Russia” 2008).

The measures described by Reporters without Borders, meant to have a chilling effect, appear to have worked in the past. Studies have found that the press in Russia, especially regarding elections, has supported the government’s agenda. Oates and Roselle (2000) used content analysis to examine Russia’s state-owned television network and the country’s largest private television network’s coverage of the 1995 parliamentary and the 1996 presidential elections. Researchers found the private network to be more balanced than the state-run network in the 1995 parliamentary elections; the state-run network avoided criticizing the government and also spent more time on the pro-government candidates. For the 1996 presidential election, however, both stations “abandoned the pretense of neutrality” and openly supported Boris Yeltsin, who was the incumbent candidate (Oates and Roselle 2000, 30). Oates and Roselle argued that the results of the study showed that voters had no source for unbiased information about candidates and that it was a “missed opportunity to consolidate the growth of an independent media in Russia” (Oates and Roselle 2000, 30).

White, Oates, and MacAllister (2005) found television coverage of the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1999 and 2000 appeared to greatly influence the outcome of the election, showing the importance of a balanced press. Researchers found that television was the main source for people to get information about the

elections, and Vladimir Putin, the eventual winner of the election, was found to have received a disproportionate amount of coverage on the state-run television station. During the parliamentary campaign, coverage on the state-run network went one step further, insinuating that opposing one candidate was “too old and sick to govern” (White, Oates, and McAllister 2005, 198). White, Oates, and MacAllister’s overall analysis was that the state-run television, through the parliamentary election coverage, essentially paved the way for Putin’s victory in the presidential election.

Russia Today was launched in 2005 and is a 24-hour network based in Moscow. The network is supported by the state-funded news agency RIA-Novosti. During the South Ossetia conflict in 2008, Russia Today’s viewership peaked at ten to fifteen million people (“Authors” 2009). Similar to Al Jazeera and the BBC, Russia Today has extended its reach through the internet. Its programming is available through its website and on the newscast website LiveStation.

CHAPTER THREE

FRAMING THEORY

This study was guided by media framing theory to examine how the U.S. presidential election coverage was framed during the course of a month on three networks: Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today. By examining the differences in coverage among these three networks, this study advanced understanding of how media framing is used cross-culturally. Gamson (1989) argued framing is necessary to make facts significant, because facts alone have no “intrinsic meaning” (Gamson 1989, 157). Framing is defined as “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (Entman 2007, 164). Parts of a news story are gathered and organized into a storyline that gives the audience a way to interpret the meaning of the information. The presence of frames makes news more salient or memorable to the audience (Entman 2007).

While framing makes news more comprehensible to the audience, it limits the telling of a story as well. Entman (1993) argued “frames call attention to some aspects of reality, while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions” (Entman 1993, p. 55). Journalists, by using frames, make decisions about what is included and what is omitted in a story; this “reveals the implicit story line” (Gamson 1989, p.157). By creating the story line, journalists are influencing the audience’s perception of the event and limiting understanding of it.

Framing Concepts

Frames can be broken down into two concepts: media frames and audience frames (Scheufele 1997). Media frames are defined as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 143). Entman (1991) called media frames “attributes of the news itself” (Entman 1991, 7). These frames are part of the news story and give clarity to information and provide a way for journalists to categorize news stories and the details they contain. Audience frames are “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (Entman 1993, 53). Price and Tewksbury (1997) found frames that were most available to the audience were used to evaluate an issue. Audience frames help viewers of news interpret what they see. Both types of frames are necessary to increase salience between both the sender and receiver of the frames. This study focused on media frames, as opposed to audience frames, because it examined how the networks used frames, instead of how the viewers comprehended them. Media frames were used to examine two research questions involved with this study: how the candidates were framed and how the election process was framed.

Other framing theorists have also expanded our understanding of framing using two different approaches: episodic and thematic. Episodic frames, as the name suggests, center on a specific event or example, while thematic frames put news stories into a larger perspective (Gross 2008). Gross (2008) argued that episodic frames were used by journalists to keep viewers’ attention and are generally more “emotionally engaging” than thematic frames (Gross 2008, 169). Iyengar (1990) concluded that episodic frames, particularly in political coverage, led to more individualistic attributions and thematic

frames led to more societal attributions. The study suggested episodic framing influenced the audience to consider individuals responsible for their own situations in life, particularly when it came to government assistance. The study found thematic frames, on the other hand, could have persuaded people to have a more collective, society-oriented response. However, these concepts are beyond the scope of this study.

Framing research often involves looking at frames as independent and dependent variables. Frames can be manipulated in a study, or other factors could be manipulated to change the effects of the frames. Some studies have altered media frames to determine their effects on the audience, while others have focused on both media and audience frames. Research that focused on frames as dependent variables often examine how frames are created or influenced (Scheufele 2000). Entman (1991) concluded frames were the result of five factors: importance judgment, agency, identification, categorization, and generalization. This study examined how the U.S. presidential election coverage frames were generalized. Studies that manipulate frames as independent variables usually look at the effects of framing and how media frames link to audience frames (Scheufele 1999).

Framing Studies

Where framing fits into the world of mass communication has been cause for debate among scholars. McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) argued that framing was merely an aspect of agenda-setting. Agenda-setting is the idea that the news media tell audiences what the important issues are, especially during political campaigning (McQuail 2005). Scheufele (1999), however, suggested framing deserved its own model

which indicated the effects of framing were the result of interface among media organizations, journalists, and the audience. Entman (1993) argued that framing should be considered a single paradigm, but D'Angelo (2002) concluded there are at least three different paradigms that should be equated with framing. Both Entman (1993) and Scheufele (1999) have referred to framing as a "fractured paradigm," because "a general conceptual definition of framing needs to be developed" (Scheufele 1999, p. 104).

Despite the debate over where framing stands in the world of mass communication theory, there seems to be no debate that frames are created both intentionally and unintentionally. Gamson (1989) wrote that both journalists and sources should be considered "sponsors of frames" (Gamson 1989, 158). The unintentional or unconscious frames could be present only to provide context for the information, while intentional frames could serve the agenda of the source. Frames are not only determined by what they include, but by what is omitted as well (Entman 1993).

Entman, Livingston, and Kim (2009) contend the media's failure to produce a frame to counterbalance the Bush administration's pro-Iraq War frame led to an accountability gap in the coverage. They argued the accountability gap was created by the "weak relationship between the frames dominating the news and the facts on the ground" (Entman, Livingston, and Kim 2009, 690). Journalists accepted the pro-war frame presented by the Bush administration and did not determine if it was the appropriate frame for the information. Moreover, the authors wrote that this accountability gap is a common occurrence in the coverage of wars by the media and that the media rarely learn from its past mistakes.

The presence and importance of frames have also been examined in many content analysis studies. Entman (1993) argued that frames can have a great impact on political communication, and that often, politicians “compete” to determine how news is framed (Entman 1993, 55). Fridkin, Kenney, Gershon and Woodall (2008) showed why politicians should be concerned with how they are framed in the news. Researchers monitored test subjects’ exposure to television, internet, and newspaper coverage following the final 2004 presidential debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry. The study used an experiment, public survey, and content analysis to determine the effects of media spin on voters in the 24 hours following the debate. The study found that the coverage was framed favorably toward Bush and also determined that pro-Bush spin caused voters to think more negatively of Kerry.

Media framing is the theory chosen for this study, not only because of its importance in understanding news, but also because frames can be found in every culture. Gamson (1989) argued “the frames for a given story are frequently drawn from shared cultural narratives and myths” (Gamson 1989, 161). Media frames are applicable to examining Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today. Past studies suggest frames can have an impact on viewers. Using content analysis, Entman (1991) examined how two similar incidents were framed differently by the U.S. media. When the United States shot down an Iranian plane it was referred to as a tragedy and technical problem. However, a similar event in which the Soviet Union shot down a Korean jet was framed as a moral outrage. The study also found that viewers held opinions in line with the framing of the stories. Likewise, McLeod and Detenber (1999) found viewers formed different opinions about the same protests based on how the news stories were framed.

This study expanded on that of Entman's (1991) content analysis. That study examined how two separate events were framed by one country's media. While the events were similar in nature, the inherent differences in facts were something researchers could not control. This study instead examined at how the same event was framed by the media of three different countries. By centering the study on a common event, the similarities and contrasts among the coverage became more apparent. Comparing the frames of the three networks also assisted in giving the frames used by the networks context. Entman (1991) wrote that comparison between media narratives is essential because otherwise "frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as "natural," unremarkable choices of words" (Entman 1991, 6). By examining three networks, this study attempted to gain a more accurate and complete picture of how U.S. election coverage was framed by networks from different regions of the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been extensive research on how the media cover elections in both the United States and other countries. Much of the research on elections within the United States has focused on the type of coverage or bias (Brewer and Sigelman 2002; Fox, Angelini, and Gable 2005; Fridkin et al. 2008). Several studies have compared how different countries cover elections within their own borders (Esser 2008; Semetko 1996; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2006). Christensen (2005) examined how U.S. and U.K. newspapers covered the 2002 elections in Turkey, and Scammell (2005) looked at how U.K. newspapers and television reported the 2004 U.S. presidential election. However, there has been little effort to compare how multiple television networks have reported on elections outside of their own boundaries from a press nationalism or ethnocentric point of view.

Press Nationalism

Studies have shown the foreign policies of a particular country are often reflected by the media of that country. Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model contends that media coverage of an event would vary between countries, depending on the policies of each (Herman and Chomsky 1988). Krishnaiah, Signorelli, and McLeod (1993) used this model to examine *The New York Times'* coverage of the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Their findings mirrored the changing relations between the United States and the Soviet Union; as the perceived threat from the Soviet Union

lessened, the coverage became more positive (Krishnaiah, Signorielli, and McLeod 1993).

The press has been found to report ethnocentrically, especially in the case of war. Hallin (1986) disproved the idea that the media opposed the Vietnam War from the beginning of the conflict. Through the examination of coverage, he found that the press started reporting stories from Vietnam in line with the U.S. government's policies. At first the "defense" of South Vietnam was seen as "vital to American interests" (Hallin 1986, p. 58). For example, the My Lai massacre, in which hundreds of Vietnamese citizens were killed, was first reported as a victory over the Viet Cong. Only later did it become a massacre (Molotch and Lester 1999). The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were routinely depicted as "cruel, ruthless, and fanatical" (Hallin 1986, p. 148). It was only after the press realized the United States was in a conflict the country was unlikely to win that the media began to move away from more 'patriotic' journalism. After this shift in the view of the press, reporters began to seek out alternative sources, rather than relying on the version of events distributed by the U.S. government. This change to less traditional sources was reflected in the coverage. When students were asked to comment on war reports from Vietnam and World War II, they often said that the Vietnam reporters seemed unsure of themselves, as if they "aren't really sure what they're talking about" (Hallin 1986, p. 6). This was because the Vietnam reporters were not depending on the pre-packaged statements provided by the government.

Hallin (1986) argued that the press usually begins its reporting of any conflict, even the Vietnam War, within what he calls the Sphere of Consensus. While reporting within this circle, the journalist is not just an observer, but "a patriot, a partisan of what

he frequently referred to as ‘our’ peace offensive” (Hallin 1986, p. 116). Within the Sphere of Consensus, the media look to government for their sources and rarely question policy. The journalist is seen as a sponsor of the task at hand. Sometimes, however, such as in the case of Vietnam, reporters move into the second of the three regions: the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy. It is here that “objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic virtues” (Hallin 1986, p. 116). The final outer circle is the Sphere of Deviance, where the media “marks out and defends the limits of acceptable political conflict” (Hallin 1986, p. 117).

It was not just through covering the Vietnam War itself that the U.S. media supported the U.S. government’s policies. Through the coverage, or sometimes absence of coverage, the media made a statement about anti-war protestors. Gitlin (2003) focused on the coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS, as it organized anti-war demonstrations across the country beginning in 1965. Gitlin argued the media used trivialization, polarization, and marginalization when reporting about the SDS. Media demeaned the movement’s way of dressing and speaking, while depicting the protestors as “deviant or unrepresentative” (Gitlin 2003, p. 27). Coverage of the protests was also erratic. In September, CBS News devoted less than two minutes to anti-draft protests. However, in October, as President Johnson called for an investigation into SDS, CBS ran news of anti-draft demonstrations for six consecutive days. Gitlin argues the coverage of the SDS had “unintended consequences,” and that the media were “deeply *implicated*” in the history of the organization (Gitlin 2003 p. 127). Gitlin wrote the treatment of the protestors was due to a “journalistic squeamishness at the unscripted disorder of protest (Gitlin 2003, p. xix).

A study on the U.S. coverage of the 1989 invasion of Panama found that the mainstream media tended to support U.S. foreign policy in its reporting. Gutierrez-Villalobos, Hertog, and Rush (1994) examined coverage of the event in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The Nation*. The authors' content analysis found that *Time* and *Newsweek* posed little opposition for the George H.W. Bush administration policies, indicating a "closed debate at the strategic level of discussion in the mainstream press" (Gutierrez-Villalobos, Hertog, and Rush 1994, 625). *The Nation*, however, was more likely to give a critical view of the administration, leading the authors to conclude readers must look outside the mainstream press to gather information about both sides of the debate.

The debate over policy has been absent from coverage of other conflicts, because of the ethnocentricity of the press. Dickson (1992) conducted a content analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*'s coverage of the United States-Nicaraguan conflict between 1983 and 1987. Approximately half of all the sources used by the newspapers were government officials, and the Nicaraguan viewpoint was rarely addressed. Furthermore, the study found that when the newspapers did take a critical stance on the conflict, the criticism was aimed more at the methods of achieving the United States' goals, rather than censure of the policies in place. Dickson argued the newspapers were missing "a divergence of political views and a vigorous debate on the goals of U.S. policy" (Dickson 1992, 570).

The media's tendency to report from a nationalism point of view is not limited to conflicts. Separate but similar events are covered in completely different ways depending upon the countries involved in those events. Entman (1991) examined the

U.S. media's coverage of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. In 1983, a Soviet fighter plane shot down a Korean Air Lines plane, killing more than 250 people. According to the results of the study, major U.S. media outlets, including the "CBS Evening News," framed the story as "moral outrage" (Entman 1991, p. 6). *Time* wrote on its cover that the Soviets were "Shooting to Kill," and *Newsweek's* cover called the shooting of the plane "Murder in the Air." Five years later, under similar conditions, a U.S. Navy ship shot down an Iran Air plane, killing nearly 300 people. This time, however, the U.S. media outlets framed the story as an accident resulting from a technical problem. *Time* did not even feature the incident on its cover; it was mentioned in a small coverline on the upper left-hand corner of the magazine. *Newsweek* did put the Iran Air incident on its cover, but it was called "The Gulf Tragedy" and the headline was "Why It Happened." Furthermore, the news outlets devoted much more time to covering the KAL incident, as opposed to the Iran Air attack. *Time* and *Newsweek* devoted double the number of pages to the KAL incident; *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* likewise covered the KAL attack twice as much as the Iran Air incident. Even the victims of the events were treated differently in the coverage. The people killed in the KAL incident were the focus of many stories, and they were humanized and referred to by such terms as "loved ones" (Entman 1991, p. 17). The victims, however, were not the focus of the Iran Air incident; it was reduced to a technical story and the people onboard the plane were "civilians" and "travelers" (Entman 1991, p. 17).

The KAL and Iran Air study is important not only because it demonstrates the ethnocentric bias of the press, but also because Entman included polling that appears to show the unbalanced coverage swayed public opinion against the Soviet Union. A poll

found that 52% believed that President Reagan's responses were not tough enough, and only 3% thought his responses were too tough. Entman argues this suggested that the majority of the public "accepted the Soviets' moral guilt and hardly anyone rejected it" (Entman 1994, p. 23). The polls concerning the Iran Air attack, much like the coverage, showed people had a different perspective about the incident. One poll showed that 71% thought the naval ship was defensible in shooting down the plane, and an even higher percentage, 74%, thought that Iran was more responsible than the United States for what happened. As Entman pointed out, there is no way to prove definitively that these numbers were exclusively due to the media coverage. The Soviet Union had been the United States' enemy for some time, and the country's perceived guilt could have been a reflex action. However, it is likely that the media coverage at least contributed to the public's view of the two incidents.

The press has also been found to change its coverage of a person's policy once he becomes president. Chang (1984) analyzed news stories, editorials, and features to determine how *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* covered President Ronald Reagan's policy toward China before and after his inauguration. The study found the newspapers were critical of Reagan's policies before he became president, but after he was inaugurated, the coverage became more favorable. Chang argued that it was unclear if the press followed Reagan's policies or if Reagan changed his policies because of the negative coverage he had received during his campaign (Chang 1984).

Much of the research suggests that it is the press that adjusts its coverage to fit U.S. policy, and it is not the government that makes changes according to the media

coverage. Furthermore, only showing one side of any policy can leave the citizens in a country undereducated about both sides of an issue. Barranco and Shyles (1988) examined Middle East coverage in *The New York Times* in 1976 and 1984. They found that Israel was mentioned twice as many times as any single Arab country. The only exception was Lebanon, which was in the middle of a civil war that garnered an unusual amount of coverage. The unbalanced amount of coverage, they argued, is due to Israel's position as an ally of the United States and the similarity of its ideology with that of the United States. They contend that the U.S. media's tendency to support U.S. policy toward Israel not only had the "potential to mar the American, as well as the international, comprehension of events" in the Middle East, but also could hold Israel up to "unrealistic expectations" (Barranco and Shyles 1988, p. 179).

Horse Race Coverage

Covering the horse race rather than the issues in a U.S. presidential election is a practice nearly as old as the U.S. media itself. Sigelman and Bullock (2001) defined horse race coverage as stories that deal with a candidate's chances of winning the election. Their content analysis of newspaper coverage in the 1888, 1908, 1928, 1948, 1968 and 1988 U.S. presidential elections found that as far back as 1888, one of every three paragraphs of front page coverage in major newspapers was devoted to who would win the campaign (Sigelman and Bullock 1991).

Studies of more recent presidential campaigns have shown broadcast media have continued the tradition of horse race coverage first developed by newspapers. Lichter (2001) used content analysis to investigate the ABC, NBC, and CBS evening news

coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election. The study compared the coverage of that election with the presidential elections in 1988, 1992, and 1996. Researchers looked at how thoroughly the election was covered, as well as how substantive the coverage was, by coding each news story within the newscasts. The study found the number of news stories that centered on the horse race increased dramatically in the 2000 election while issue coverage did not rise. For example, the late-breaking discovery that George W. Bush had been arrested for drunk driving was the focus of more reports than foreign policy issues were in the entire election (Lichter 2001). Fox, Angelini, and Goble (2005) used the same four elections, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000, for a study; however, they analyzed the video and audio of the coverage separately. Despite the difference in methods, the findings were much the same as Lichter's. With the exception of 1996, researchers found a spike in stories that focused on the horse race rather than substance. In 2000, the network newscasts devoted four times more coverage to the 'hoopla' surrounding the campaign than to issue coverage (Fox, Angelini, and Goble 2005).

It is not just the major networks that are spending the majority of time covering the race itself. Kerbel, Apee, and Ross (2000) compared coverage of the 1996 U.S. presidential campaign on PBS with that of ABC. The study found the coverage on PBS and ABC was in fact similar, and PBS did not spend more time focusing on the issues (Kerbel, Apee, and Ross 2000).

The U.S. media system is not alone in privileging horse race coverage over stories about the issues. Brookes, Lewis, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2001) found a similar pattern when examining the broadcast coverage of the 2001 British general election. The study looked at 214 stories broadcast on the evening news programs of the BBC and ITV and

found that two-thirds of the stories contained some reference to public opinion polls. Furthermore, the study discovered that 93% of the references to polls were conducted by reporters, instead of by the candidates and 84% of those polls were horse race related (Brookes, Lewis, and Wahi-Jorgensen 2004).

The emphasis on horse race coverage, however, cannot only leave viewers without important information about candidates, but it can also shift the audience's opinions. Using an experiment, public survey, and content analysis, Fridkin, Kenney, Gershon, and Woodall (2008) monitored test subjects' exposure to television, internet, and newspaper coverage following the final 2004 U.S. presidential debate. The study sought to determine the effects of media spin following the last debate between Senator John Kerry and President George W. Bush. The study found that post-debate coverage in all three media focused more on Kerry's outing of Vice-President Dick Cheney's daughter as a lesbian, rather than how each candidate stood on the issues discussed in the debate. Kerry's comment was part of the lead of each network newscast. The study also determined that the pro-Bush post-debate tone of media did influence voters to have a more negative opinion of Kerry (Fridkin et al. 2008).

Research Questions

This study sought to find out how three international networks, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today, framed the candidates in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Furthermore, the study sought to examine how the democratic election process in the United States was portrayed by the networks. Therefore, the study explored the following research questions:

RQ1: How did Al Jazeera, BBC Television, and Russia Today evening newscasts frame the 2008 U.S. Presidential Candidates Barack Obama and John McCain and Vice-Presidential candidates Joe Biden and Sarah Palin?

RQ2: In what order of prominence were the frames used to describe the candidates featured on all three networks?

RQ3: How did the three networks cover the election with regard to horse race and issue coverage?

RQ4: How was the election or voting process framed by the three networks?

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how the U.S. presidential election coverage was framed on three networks: Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today. The networks were chosen because they represent news from three major regions in the world. Furthermore, each originates in a country where the government's relationship with the government of the United States is vital to international cooperation.

Data Collection

Data were collected from the three major international networks: Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today. Regular primetime half-hour newscasts on the three networks were recorded; recording started on October 6, 2008, and ended on November 3, 2008, the day before the election. There is no standard time period used when conducting a broadcast news election study; some studies have focused on the final two weeks of the campaign, and others have looked at a period of twenty-four hours (Fox, Angelini, and Gable 2005; Fridkin et al. 2008). This study examined four weeks of Monday through Friday coverage before the election in an effort to collect as much coverage as possible. No shows were recorded on Saturday and Sunday because the networks do not always have regular programming on the weekend.

Al Jazeera English is a 24-hour news network that was launched in 2006. The show that is the focus of this study is broadcast out of Washington, D.C., but the station is part of the Al Jazeera Network based out of the Middle East country of Qatar. Al Jazeera English airs in dozens of countries and is available to an estimated 110 million

homes (Pfanner 2008). The British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC, is the world's largest broadcasting company and through its worldwide service it is estimated the BBC reaches 200 million people across the globe ("BBC Worldwide" 2003). Russia Today was launched in 2005 and is a 24-hour network based out of Moscow. The network is supported by the state-funded news agency RIA-Novosti. During the South Ossetia conflict in 2008, Russia Today's viewership peaked at ten to fifteen million through cable, satellite, and online ("Authors" 2009).

The shows were recorded live via the internet using the audio program Audacity, a free audio editing program available online. Both Al Jazeera and Russia Today were viewed with the free online newscast player Livestation. The 9 p.m. newscast on Al Jazeera was recorded, and the Russia Today 10 p.m. newscast was recorded. On two dates during the recording period, the Livestation player was unavailable; therefore, the newscasts were recorded on the networks respective websites. The BBC was recorded at 10 p.m. through the news agency's website www.bbc.co.uk. All three newscasts were half an hour long. The BBC News at 10 p.m. was chosen for this study because it is the flagship newscast for the network. It typically gives a comprehensive look at the news of the day. In order to choose a similar newscast on the other two networks, the Russia Today 10 p.m. newscast was chosen. Al Jazeera does not air a 10 p.m. newscast, so the earlier 9 p.m. newscast was chosen.

Coding

Each story that dealt with the U.S. election within each newscast was considered a unit of analysis; each time the election story switched focus or the anchors switched to a

different reporter it was considered a new story. Al Jazeera aired a total of 45 stories that dealt with the U.S. presidential election, the BBC aired 42 stories, and Russia Today aired 30 stories. The total number of stories on all three networks was 117. The stories were transcribed, and the time each story appeared in the newscast was recorded. Each story was coded using a code sheet and code book partially based on the system used by Fridkin, Kenney, Gershon, and Serignese Woodall (2008). Categories used for the purpose of identification included: story date, story network, time story appears, and length of story. The other categories included the focus of the story, election portrayal, and candidate coverage. These categories were designed to answer the research questions associated with this particular study.

Independent coders were trained with a code book (see Appendix A) and each category was explained. Coders were asked to determine if each presidential and vice-presidential candidate were portrayed positively or negatively. In order to define how the candidate was framed, a worksheet was created for the coder to count the number of positive and negative traits mentioned for each candidate (see Appendix A). The positive traits included on the worksheet for each candidate included whether he or she was portrayed as honest (or honorable in intentions), experienced (or having encountered a situation before), intelligent (or smart), a strong leader (or able to lead without difficulty), decisive (or able to make decisions), consistent (or steady in his or her decisions), trustworthy (deserving of confidence), and ahead in the polls. The negative traits included on the worksheet were opposites of the positive traits. Coders were asked to keep track of the number of mentions of each positive and negative trait. If the candidate received more mentions of positive traits, the story was deemed to have portrayed the

candidate positively. If the candidate received more mentions of negative traits, the story was deemed to have portrayed the candidate negatively. If the candidate received an equal number of mentions of positive and negative traits, the coder was asked to assign neutral to the candidate portrayal.

Coders were also asked to determine if the story's focus was horse race or issue coverage. Horse race coverage was defined as any story that dealt with topics such as who was winning the election, campaign rallies, commentary on the race, and fundraising; issue coverage was defined as reports that addressed such themes as the economy, housing, and taxes (see Appendix A). Coders also determined if the election process was addressed. If the election process was addressed coders determined if it was portrayed as fair, or free from bias or dishonesty. If the story dealt with the election process and indicated everyone who was eligible to vote was able to vote, it was deemed the story portrayed a fair election. If the story focused on voter disenfranchisement or voting machine malfunctions, the story was considered to have portrayed an unfair or biased election (see Appendices A and B). Coders were also asked to record the length of each story so the average length of coverage could be determined.

Reliability

In order to ascertain inter-coder reliability, 12 stories from each network were coded by three coders. The first three election stories that aired on each of the four weeks that were recorded were selected for the inter-coder reliability test. That amounted to 30 percent of the stories the three networks aired about the election. The coders were all masters students in journalism at Ohio University. Scott's Pi was used to determine the

effectiveness of the coding instrument (Stempel 2003). The overall observed agreement for all of the categories was .93. There was complete agreement on the following variables: story date, story network, time story appeared, and length of story. The observed agreement for how Joe Biden was portrayed was .95. Both the focus of the story and election portrayal had .89 observed agreement. How Barack Obama was portrayed had .87 observed agreement and John McCain's portrayal had .86 observed agreement. The lowest variable was how Sarah Palin was portrayed and that was .88 observed agreement.

CHAPTER SIX

RESULTS

This study examined how three major networks, Al Jazeera (English), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Russia Today, framed the U.S. presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2008 election. This study also sought to determine what types of campaign issues were more prominent than others on the three international networks. The three networks aired on their evening newscasts a total of 117 stories from October 6, 2003, through November 3, 2003, about the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Al Jazeera aired more stories than the other two networks, with 45 stories, while the BBC carried 42 stories and 30 stories on Russia Today.

Results for RQ1

The first research question addressed how the Al Jazeera, BBC Television, and Russia Today evening newscasts framed the 2008 U.S. Presidential Candidates Barack Obama and John McCain and Vice-Presidential candidates Joe Biden and Sarah Palin. Results show that on all three networks, Senator Barack Obama, a Democrat was framed positively more often than Senator John McCain, a Republican. More stories mentioned Obama as having more positive traits (see Appendix A). Concerning the coverage of the vice-presidential candidates, Senator Joe Biden, who was Obama's running mate, was only mentioned a few times throughout the coverage and most stories were neutral in tone. The coverage of Governor Sarah Palin, who was McCain's running mate, varied among the networks between the positive and negative tones.

As shown on Table 6.1, the coverage of Obama was positive on Al Jazeera, with 80% of the stories on the network having a positive slant toward the Democrat. McCain was portrayed positively in only 22% of the stories on Al Jazeera. McCain had a higher percentage of positive stories on the BBC at 31%; however, Obama was mentioned positively in 60% of the stories on the network. Russia Today also favored Obama, but the percentage of times he was mentioned favorably was lower than on the other networks. Of the stories featuring Obama, he was portrayed positively in 50% of the stories on Russia Today, while McCain was only mentioned favorably 17% of the time in the stories that mentioned him. On all three networks Obama was portrayed positively at least 50% of the time. McCain, however, was portrayed negatively at least 54% of the time on all three networks. Results show a statistically significant difference in the coverage of Obama among the networks ($X^2 = 13.902$; $df = 6$; $p = .031$) at the .05 alpha level. Results for McCain's coverage did not show any significant differences among the networks ($X^2 = 7.353$; $df = 6$; $p = .289$) at the .05 alpha level.

The most used positive frame in stories concerning Obama was "ahead in polls." As illustrated in Table 6.2, Al Jazeera mentioned Obama as being "ahead in polls" 30 times, the BBC mentioned this 22 times, and Russia Today noted it 18 times. In total, Obama was described as being "ahead in polls" 70 times on the networks. Conversely, the opposite, "behind in polls," was the most used negative frame for McCain. He was framed as being "behind in polls" a total of 56 times on the networks. The second most used positive frame used for Obama was "strong leader," and the primary negative frame for him was "untrustworthy." McCain was positively framed as a "strong leader" 16

times, his most frequent positive frame. The most used negative frame used for McCain was “inconsistent.”

As demonstrated in Table 6.3, the difference in positive-negative coverage between the two presidential candidates was not as significant when the coverage was described by average length of story in minutes. In fact, on average the positive stories about McCain were longer in duration on all three networks than were the positive stories about Obama. On average, a positive story about McCain on Al Jazeera was 3.05 minutes. A positive story about Obama on Al Jazeera averaged only 2.84 minutes. The difference was less obvious on the BBC, since the positive story about McCain averaged only two seconds longer than the positive stories for his opponent. On Russia Today, the positive story about McCain lasted 2.88 minutes on average and about 2.33 minutes about Obama. Overall, a positive story about McCain on all three networks averaged 2.82 minutes long, and the story about Obama averaged 2.56 minutes. When it came to the length of stories with a negative tone, the networks differed on which candidate had the longer stories. On Al Jazeera and Russia Today, the stories about McCain that employed a negative frame were longer than those about Obama. On the BBC, however, the stories about Obama with a negative frame were longer than those about McCain. Obama fared better across the three networks as his negative stories averaged 2.40 minutes. Meanwhile, on average, stories about McCain with a negative frame lasted 2.48 minutes.

Stories featuring specific issue coverage on all three networks as a whole tended to be longer. The positive-negative split between the candidates was not as significant with issue coverage. As shown in Table 6.5, positive stories with a horse race focus about Obama on Al Jazeera averaged 2.65 minutes, but positive issue coverage stories

about Obama averaged 4.41 minutes. Obama received no negative issue attention on Al Jazeera. McCain, however, actually had more positive issue coverage about his candidacy than Obama on Al Jazeera. Positive McCain issue coverage stories averaged 5.23 minutes long. McCain received an average of 51 seconds of negative issue coverage on the network. On the BBC, McCain had less positive issue coverage than Obama. Positive issue coverage stories for Obama averaged 2.94 minutes as compared to 2.89 minutes for McCain. On the BBC, the negative issue coverage for Obama was actually longer in average duration than the same type of story for McCain, 2.62 minutes and 2.51 minutes respectively. The same was true on Russia Today. The negative issue coverage for Obama averaged 2.02 minutes long compared to 1.41 for McCain. McCain also received more positive issue coverage on Russia Today, with the average story being 3.28 minutes for him and 2.04 minutes for Obama.

As shown in Table 6.1, vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden was mentioned only a few times by the networks during the time period of this study. Of all the stories aired on the networks between October 6, 2008, and November 3, 2008, he was only mentioned 2% of the time on Al Jazeera, 3% of the time on Russia Today, and was never mentioned on the BBC. The one story on Al Jazeera that mentioned Biden was neutral, and on Russia Today he was portrayed only once with a negative slant and once with a neutral slant. His counterpart, Sarah Palin, however, was given more coverage. She was mentioned in at least 19% of stories on each of the networks. Al Jazeera mentioned Palin the most of all three networks; she was featured in 27% of all the stories on that network. The BBC mentioned her in 19% of its coverage, and Russia Today mentioned her in 23% of its stories. Moreover, the networks were split on how she was portrayed. The BBC

and Russia Today had a higher percentage of negative stories on Palin, while Al Jazeera had a higher percentage of positive stories on the vice-presidential candidate. Results did not show a statistical difference among the networks for Biden ($X^2 = 4.231$; $df = 6$; $p = .376$) at the .05 alpha level or for Palin ($X^2 = 2.912$; $df = 6$; $p = .820$) at the .05 alpha level.

In the breakdown of length of positive and negative stories, Palin received better coverage than did her counterpart Biden. Biden had no positive stories that mentioned him on any of the three networks. Positive stories about Palin across the three networks averaged 2.92 minutes long. Her most used positive frame was “strong leader.” Positive stories about Palin averaged longer than the negative stories about her on all three networks. Biden was framed negatively on one network, Russia Today, and the average length of those stories was 5.08 minutes.

Table 6.1

Story Frequencies for U.S. Presidential Candidates on Three Networks

| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | <u>BBC</u> | <u>Russia Today</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|
| <u>Obama</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 36 (80%)* | 25 (60%)* | 15 (50%)* | 76 |
| Negative | 4 (9%) | 8 (19%) | 6 (20%) | 18 |
| Neutral | 0 | 7 (17%) | 5 (17%) | 12 |
| Not Mentioned | 5 (11%) | 2 (4%) | 4 (13%) | 11 |
| Total | 45 (100%) | 42 (100%) | 30 (100%) | |
| <u>McCain</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 10 (22%) | 13 (31%) | 5 (17%) | 28 |
| Negative | 24 (54%)* | 23 (55%)* | 17 (57%)* | 64 |
| Neutral | 5 (11%) | 5 (12%) | 2 (6%) | 12 |
| Not Mentioned | 6 (13%) | 1 (2%) | 6 (20%) | 13 |
| Total | 45 (100%) | 42 (100%) | 30 (100%) | |
| <u>Biden</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Negative | 0 | 0 | 1 (3%) | 1 |
| Neutral | 1 (2%) | 0 | 1 (3%) | 2 |
| Not Mentioned | 44 (98%)* | 42 (100%)* | 28 (94%)* | 114 |
| Total | 45 (100%) | 42 (100%) | 30 (100%) | |
| <u>Palin</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 5 (11%) | 2 (5%) | 1 (3%) | 8 |
| Negative | 4 (9%) | 3 (7%) | 4 (13%) | 11 |
| Neutral | 3 (7%) | 3 (7%) | 2 (7%) | 8 |
| Not Mentioned | 33 (73%)* | 34 (81%)* | 23 (77%)* | 90 |
| Total | 45 (100%) | 42 (100%) | 30 (100%) | |

Notes: Table 6.1 illustrates the number of stories and percentages featuring the U.S. presidential candidates on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today.

*Indicates the highest percentage for each candidate on each network

Table 6.2

Frames Portraying the U.S. Presidential Candidates by the Networks

| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | <u>BBC</u> | <u>Russia Today</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--|-------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|
| <u>Positive Frames – Obama</u> | | | | |
| Experienced | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Strong Leader | 6 | 7 | 6 | 19 |
| Decisive | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Consistent | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Trustworthy | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ahead in Polls | 30* | 22* | 18* | 70 |
| <u>Negative Frames - Obama</u> | | | | |
| Inexperienced | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Weak Leader | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Indecisive | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Inconsistent | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Untrustworthy | 2** | 7** | 4** | 13 |
| Behind in Polls | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| <u>Positive Frames - McCain</u> | | | | |
| Experienced | 2 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Strong Leader | 7* | 7* | 2* | 16 |
| Decisive | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Consistent | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Trustworthy | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ahead in Polls | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| <u>Negative Frames - McCain</u> | | | | |
| Inexperienced | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Weak Leader | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Indecisive | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Inconsistent | 6 | 2 | 5 | 13 |
| Untrustworthy | 2 | 0 | 8 | 10 |
| Behind in Polls | 18** | 28** | 10** | 56 |

Notes: Table 6.2 shows the total number of times each particular positive or negative frame was used for the candidates on the networks.

-Frames not used by the networks were not included in this table.

* Indicates the most frequently used positive frame for the candidates on each network.

** Indicates the most frequently used negative frame for the candidates on each network.

Table 6.3

Average Length of Stories in Minutes by Candidate Frame

| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | <u>BBC</u> | <u>Russia Today</u> | <u>Average</u> |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|----------------|
| <u>Obama</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 2.84* | 2.50* | 2.33 | 2.56 |
| Negative | 2.29 | 2.38 | 2.53 | 2.40 |
| Neutral | 0.00 | 2.09 | 3.18* | 1.76 |
| Not Mentioned | 1.82 | 2.03 | 1.64 | 1.83 |
| Total Average | 2.32 | 2.25 | 2.42 | |
| <u>McCain</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 3.05* | 2.52 | 2.88* | 2.82 |
| Negative | 2.73 | 2.25 | 2.46 | 2.48 |
| Neutral | 2.42 | 2.82* | 2.68 | 2.64 |
| Not Mentioned | 2.06 | 1.60 | 1.82 | 1.83 |
| Total Average | 2.57 | 2.30 | 2.46 | |
| <u>Biden</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00** |
| Negative | 0.00 | 0.00 | 5.08* | 1.70 |
| Neutral | 2.03 | 0.00 | 3.23 | 1.75 |
| Not Mentioned | 2.71* | 2.39* | 2.30 | 2.47 |
| Total Average | 1.19 | 0.60 | 2.65 | |
| <u>Palin</u> | | | | |
| Positive | 3.67* | 2.50 | 2.60 | 2.92 |
| Negative | 2.34 | 2.23 | 2.41 | 2.33 |
| Neutral | 2.92 | 2.56* | 4.57* | 3.53 |
| Not Mentioned | 2.54 | 2.38 | 2.22 | 2.53 |
| Total Average | 2.87 | 2.53 | 2.95 | |

Notes: Table 6.3 illustrates the breakdown of the average length in minutes of positive and negative coverage for each of the candidates on the networks.

* Indicates the longest average story for each candidate.

** Indicates no coverage.

Table 6.4

Average Length of Story in Minutes by Type of Coverage and Candidate Frame

| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | | <u>BBC</u> | | <u>Russia Today</u> | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | Horse Race | Issue Coverage | Horse Race | Issue Coverage | Horse Race | Issue Coverage |
| <u>Positive</u> | | | | | | |
| Obama | 2.65 | 4.41* | 2.47 | 2.94* | 2.57* | 2.04 |
| McCain | 2.50 | 5.23* | 2.48 | 2.89* | 1.96 | 3.28* |
| <u>Negative</u> | | | | | | |
| Obama | 2.29* | 0.00 | 2.11 | 2.62* | 2.93* | 2.02 |
| McCain | 2.82* | 0.51 | 2.22 | 2.51* | 3.14* | 1.41 |
| <u>Neutral</u> | | | | | | |
| Obama | 0.00 | 0.00 | 2.07 | 0.00 | 3.35 | 0.00 |
| McCain | 2.33 | 0.00 | 2.85 | 0.00 | 2.68 | 0.00 |
| <u>Not Mentioned</u> | | | | | | |
| Obama | 1.43 | 0.00 | 2.52 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| McCain | 0.33 | 2.55 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Notes: Table 6.4 demonstrates the average length in minutes of stories broken down into the focus of the story and the frame used to describe each candidate.

* Indicates the longest average story for each candidate for each story focus and frame.

Results for RQ2

The order of prominence of frames used to describe the candidates on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today was the topic of the second. A statistically stringent correlation procedure called Spearman rank order (ρ) was used to determine the order of frame-prominence since multiple frames occurred within the television newscasts and in the stories (Andsager 2000). The most commonly used frames about Obama's presidential candidacy were associated with the positive tone and the most commonly used frames about McCain were associated with the negative tone on all three networks. The ρ calculations with the greatest frequency for the positive frames about Obama featured him with "ahead in polls" being ranked highly on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today ($\rho = .54, p < .01$). John McCain's ρ calculations with the greatest frequency for the positive frames featured him with "strong leader," being ranked highly on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today ($\rho = .31, p < .01$).

Furthermore, the next tier of frames quoted most frequently for the negative frames were also associated with the polling coverage. The most frequently used negative frame featured McCain with "behind in polls," being ranked highly on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today ($\rho = .41, p < .01$). As for Obama, "untrustworthy" was most frequently used negative frame which ranked highly on all three networks ($\rho = .33, p < .01$). As Figure 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 show, the second highest ranked positive frame for Obama was also "strong leader" on all three networks. Similarly, second highest ranked positive frame about McCain was "experienced" on all three networks.

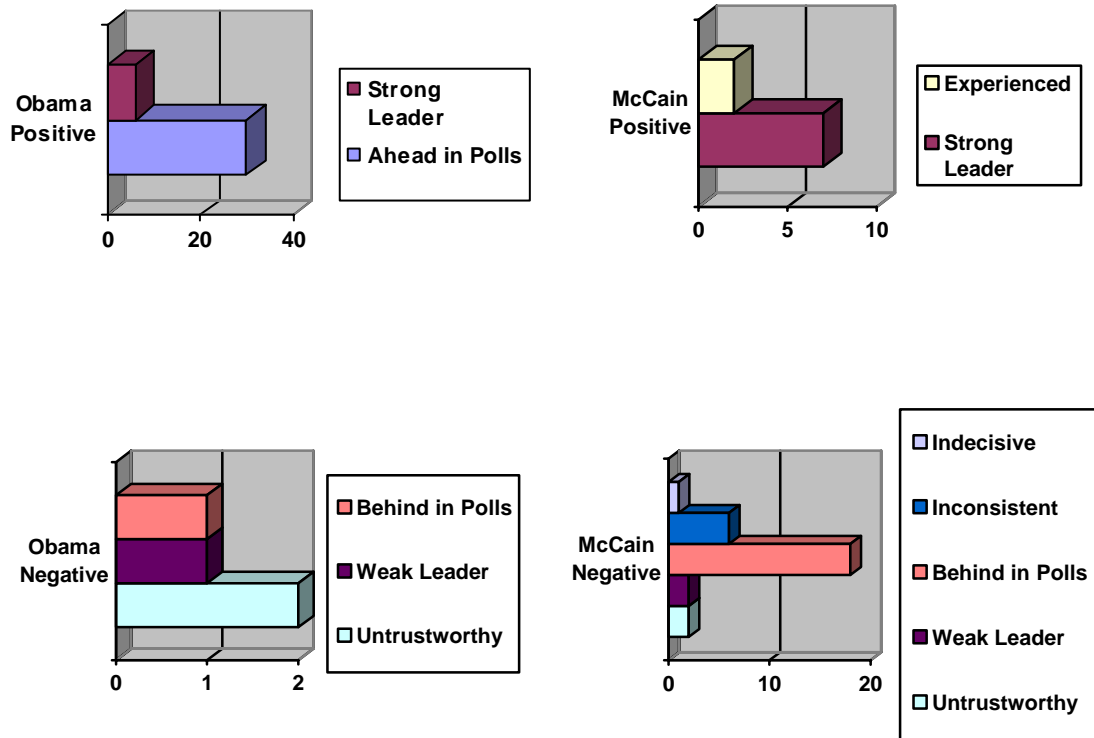


Figure 6.1 Frequency of Frames Associated with Al Jazeera Coverage

Notes: Figure 6.1 shows the number of times a positive and negative frame was associated with the candidates on Al Jazeera.

-Only the frames used to describe each candidate were used in this figure.

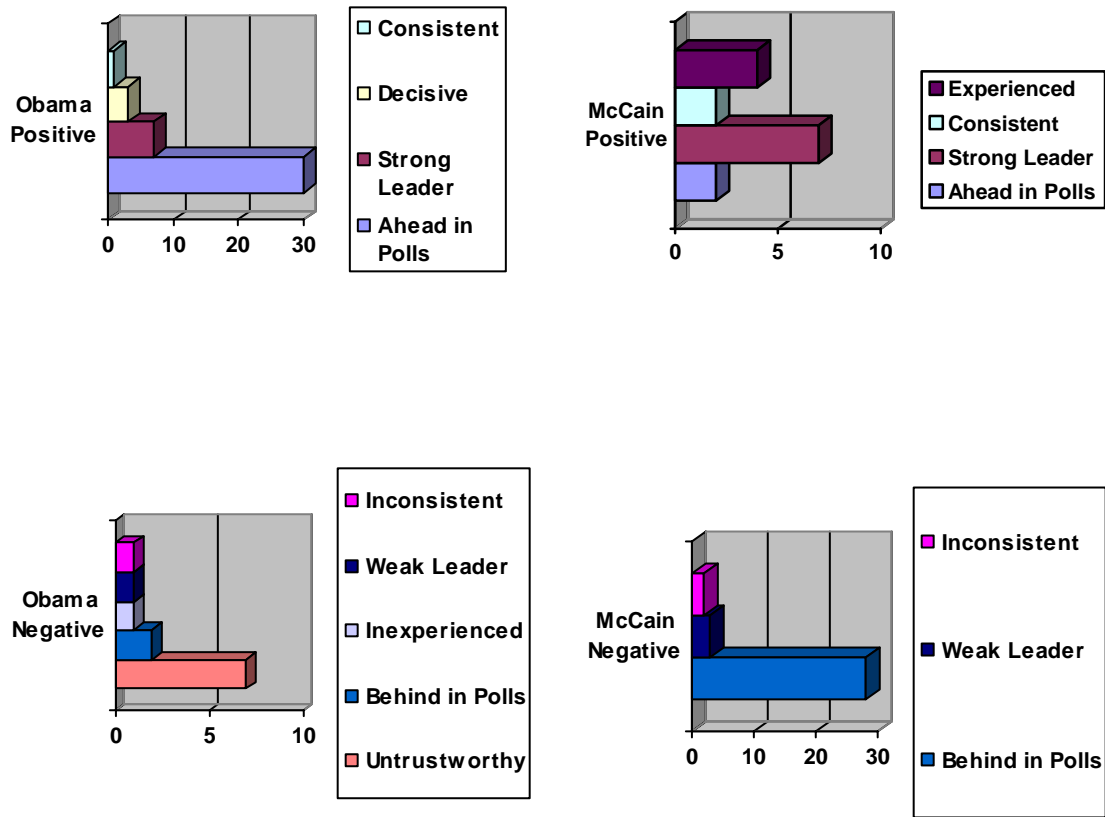


Figure 6.2 Frequency of Frames Associated with BBC Coverage

Note: Figure 6.2 shows the number of times a positive and negative frame was associated with the candidates on the BBC.

-Only the frames used to describe each candidate were used in this figure.

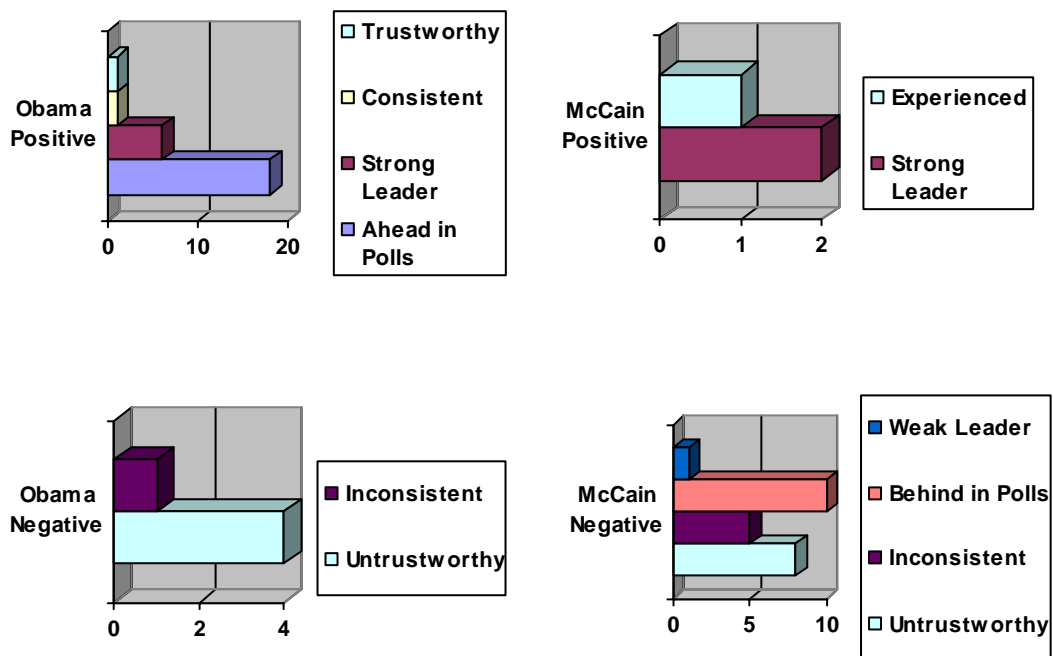


Figure 6.3 Frequency of Frames Associated with Russia Today Coverage

Notes: Figure 6.3 shows the number of times a positive and negative frame was associated with a presidential candidate on Russia Today.
 -Only the frames used to describe each candidate were used in this figure.

Results for RQ3

The purpose of the third research question was to determine how Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today covered the election in terms of horse race and issue coverage. Horse race coverage was more prominent than issue coverage on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today, although the percentages varied on the networks. The majority of stories on Al Jazeera and the BBC were horse race stories, with 73% and 72% respectively. Russia Today had a lower percentage of horse race stories than the other two networks, with only 40% addressing with polling and the campaign trail. However, only 10% of Russia Today's stories actually dealt with issue coverage. As shown in Table 6.5 and Figure 6.4, half of all the stories on Russia Today fell into the "other" category, which included stories such as disenfranchised voters and voting machine problems. Al Jazeera devoted 11% of its coverage on issues, while the 14% of BBC coverage related to issues. As demonstrated in Figure 6.4, the percentage of coverage of horse race and issue coverage on Al Jazeera and the BBC were similar. Russia Today, however, stood apart from the other two networks in the focus of its election stories. Results show a statistically significant difference in the focus of coverage among the networks ($X^2 = 15.453$; $df = 4$; $p = .004$) at the .05 alpha level.

The networks aired more horse race coverage, but stories with a focus on issues tended to be longer in average minutes. Stories with an issue coverage focus on Al Jazeera averaged 3.21 minutes long, and stories that focused on the horse race on the network averaged 2.60 minutes long. Issue coverage was longer on the BBC as well. Issue stories averaged 2.83 minutes; horse race stories averaged 2.36 minutes long. Russia Today was the exception; it aired longer horse race stories. The network's horse

race stories averaged 2.86, and issue coverage averaged 2.03 minutes long. Across the three networks, the horse race stories averaged shorter than issue coverage stories, averaging 2.61 minutes and 2.69 minutes, respectively.

Table 6.5

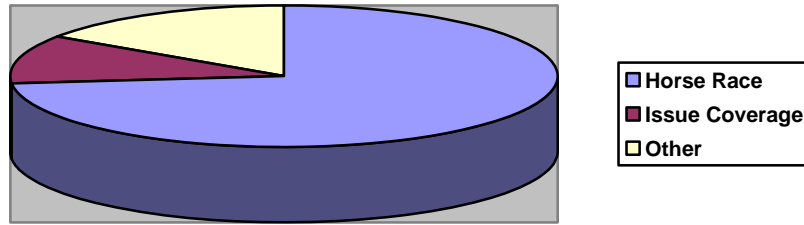
Story Focus by Number of Stories

| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | <u>BBC</u> | <u>Russia Today</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|
| <u>Focus of Story</u> | | | | |
| Horse Race | 33 (73%)* | 30 (72%)* | 12 (40%) | 75 |
| Issue Coverage | 5 (11%) | 6 (14%) | 3 (10%) | 14 |
| Other | 7 (16%) | 6 (14%) | 15 (50%)* | 28 |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| Total | 45 (100%) | 42 (100%) | 30 (100%) | |

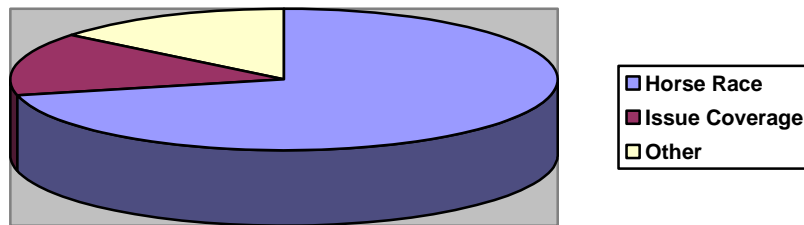
Note: Table 6.5 displays the number and percentage of horse race, issue coverage, and other coverage on the three networks.

* Indicates the highest percentage of coverage on each network.

Al Jazeera Story Focus



BBC Story Focus



Russia Today Story Focus

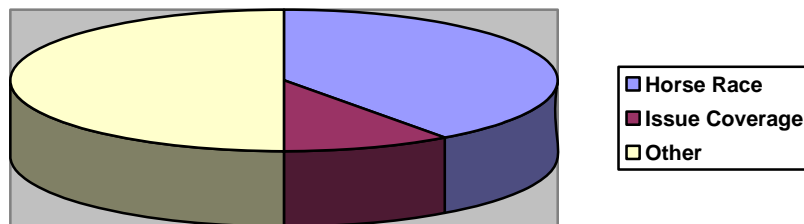


Figure 6.4 Story Focus by Number of Stories

Notes: Figure 6.4 illustrates a visual breakdown of the focus of the stories on each network.

Table 6.6

Focus of Story in Average Minutes by Network

| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | <u>BBC</u> | <u>Russia Today</u> | <u>Average</u> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|----------------|
| <u>Focus of Story</u> | | | | |
| Horse Race | 2.60 | 2.36 | 2.86* | 2.61 |
| Issue Coverage | 3.21* | 2.83* | 2.03 | 2.69 |
| Other | 2.63 | 2.07 | 2.13 | 2.28 |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| Average | 2.81 | 2.42 | 2.34 | |

Note: Table 6.6 demonstrates the average number of minutes spent on each type of coverage on the networks.

* Indicates the longest average story by focus for each network.

Results for RQ4

The final research question addressed how election process was framed by the three networks. The election process, or the way the U.S. voters chose a new president, itself was only the focus of a few stories on both Al Jazeera and the BBC. Al Jazeera mentioned the election process in 7% of the stories it aired during the time period recorded, and the BBC focused on the election process in 4% of the stories aired. However, as shown on Table 6.7, Russia Today aired more stories about the election process than the other two networks; the network mentioned the election process in 26% of its stories. Concerning the portrayal of the election as fair or unfair, as figure 6.5 shows, Al Jazeera and the BBC had a similar amount of coverage. Al Jazeera had no stories that portrayed the election as unfair. The network addressed the election process in a total of 7% of its stories and portrayed the election as fair in each of those stories. The BBC portrayed the election as fair in 2% of its stories and unfair in 2% of its stories. Russia Today, however, differed from the other two networks; it portrayed the election as fair in 3% of its stories and unfair in 23% of its stories. Results show a statistically significant difference in the coverage of the election process among the networks ($X^2 = 18.360$; $df = 4$; $p = .001$) at the .05 alpha level.

Table 6.7

Election Portrayal by Number of Stories

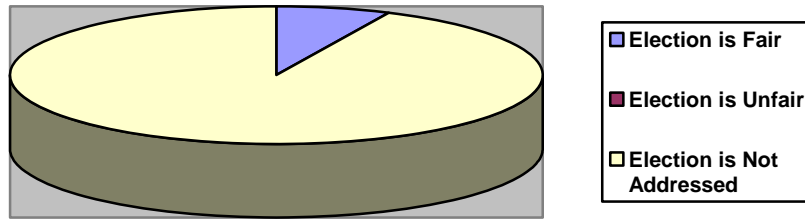
| | <u>Al Jazeera</u> | <u>BBC</u> | <u>Russia Today</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|
| <u>Election Portrayal</u> | | | | |
| Election is Fair | 3 (7%) | 1 (2%) | 1 (3%) | 4 |
| Election is Unfair | 0 | 1 (2%) | 7 (23%)* | 8 |
| Election not Addressed | 42 (93%)** | 40 (96%)** | 22 (74%)** | 104 |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| Total | 45 (100%) | 42 (100%) | 30 (100%) | |

Notes: Table 6.7 shows the number and percentage of stories on each network that portrayed the election as fair or unfair.

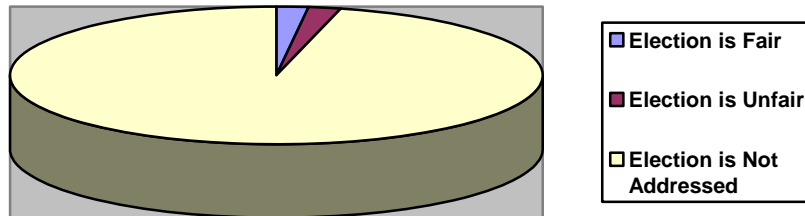
* Indicates the highest percentage of stories that portrayed the election as “unfair.”

** Indicates the highest percentage of election process coverage on each network.

Al Jazeera Election Portrayal



BBC Election Portrayal



Russia Today Election Portrayal

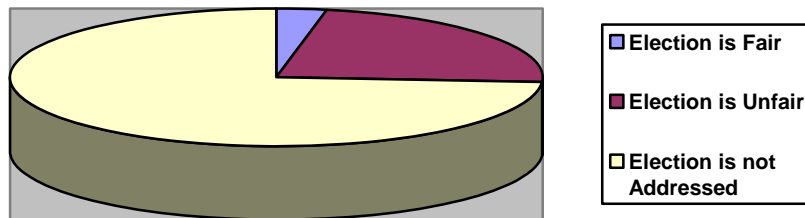


Figure 6.5 Election Portrayal on the Networks by Percentage

Note: Figure 6.5 illustrates a visual breakdown of the election portrayal on each network.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the coverage of the 2008 U.S. presidential election on three major international networks: Al Jazeera (English), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Russia Today. Evening newscasts from the three networks were examined a month before the election, from October 6, 2008, through November 3, 2008. This study was guided by the framing theoretical perspective to explain how the U.S. presidential candidates were framed by the three networks. The results in Chapter Six showed what type of coverage, whether horse race or issue coverage, dominated the networks and how the election process itself was framed. Here is a summary of the key findings.

- Senator Barack Obama, a Democrat, was framed more positively than his Republican rival, Senator John McCain on all three networks.
- The most frequently used positive frame for Obama on all three networks was “ahead in the polls.” “Strong leader” was the most used positive frame associated with McCain.
- The most frequently used negative frame for Obama on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today was “untrustworthy.” The negative frame most frequently associated with McCain was “behind in the polls.”
- Most coverage on Al Jazeera and the BBC focused on the horse race, rather than issue coverage. Yet, Russia Today was quite the opposite and an outlier.

- Half of Russia Today’s coverage fell into the “other” category, which included stories about the voting process or third-party politics. The network focused 40% of coverage on the horse race.
- Coverage of the United States’ election process was more prominent on Russia Today than on Al Jazeera and the BBC.
- Russia Today mostly framed the U.S. election process as unfair to the voters.

Based on the findings of this and past studies, it could be deduced that the framing of U.S. presidential candidates on international networks could be influenced by the relationship between the government where the network is based and the United States government. This was reflected by the way McCain, a Republican, was portrayed by Russia Today. Both McCain and President George W. Bush, also a Republican, had a tenuous relationship with the Russian government. Moreover, the candidate who was ahead in the polls was framed more positively on the networks that were the focus of this story because of the high percentage of horse race coverage on each network. If the coverage focused more on issues involved in the campaign, a different candidate could have received more positive coverage.

Coverage of the Candidates

This study found that across the three networks, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today, Obama had a higher percentage of positive stories than did his rival McCain. Obama was most often framed as “ahead in the polls,” and McCain was usually described as “behind in the polls.” As for the vice-presidential candidate, Obama’s running-mate,

Senator Joe Biden was largely ignored by the networks. He was never mentioned at all on the BBC and mentioned infrequently by Al Jazeera and Russia Today. Biden was never framed positively by any of the networks during the period of coverage that this study examined. Biden's counterpart from the opposition, Governor Sarah Palin, however, received more coverage than him. Whether Palin was framed positively or negatively depended upon the network; the majority of stories on Al Jazeera that mentioned Palin had a positive slant. On the BBC and Russia Today, a higher percentage of stories that mentioned Palin were negative.

According to international polling in the month before the election, Obama had a lead over McCain in Europe and Asia. Based on the findings of this study, it appears that the popularity demonstrated in these polls translated into more positive frames for Obama. Throughout the month of October, Obama was also ahead in the polls in the United States. The high percentage of horse race coverage on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today meant that he was most often described as being "ahead in the polls." However, this was not the only positive frame associated with Obama. He was also framed as a "strong leader" consistently by all three networks. Coverage described his ability to electrify crowds and focused on his call for hope and change. In one Al Jazeera broadcast, the coverage referred to his campaign's emphasis on change as the "new American catchphrase" in the context of international coordination (Al Jazeera 10 October 2008). It could be deduced that Obama's strong public speaking skills, coupled with his call for change from the policies of the internationally unpopular George W. Bush, may have created an environment where the media focused on Obama's positive qualities, rather than his negative ones. For example, when airing a story on the

economic crisis, Al Jazeera emphasized an Obama speech where he said, “We’re going to have to coordinate with other countries to make sure that what ever actions we take work” (Al Jazeera 10 October 2008). McCain, however, was not featured in the story. The BBC, in one story, speculated that McCain was avoiding talking about the economy, because he would “lose.” The same story praised Obama’s focus on issues and called his moves “effortless” (BBC 6 October 2008).

The emphasis on horse race coverage, coupled with McCain’s lagging in the polls through most of October meant his most often used negative frame on all three networks was “behind in the polls.” McCain received some positive coverage. “Strong leader” was the positive frame most often associated with McCain, and it was usually used in the context of his experience in the military. Even outside the horse race coverage, however, McCain was more likely to be framed negatively, particularly on Russia Today. The network often described him as being “untrustworthy” and “inconsistent” throughout its coverage. McCain’s unpopularity in Russia and on Russia Today was likely contributed to by the low opinion of Bush in the country. Throughout his presidency, Bush was often at odds with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. McCain also had a tenuous relationship with the Russian government throughout his campaign, which could also explain the higher number of negative stories about McCain. McCain referred to Russia’s leaders as being “corrupt with power” and even said Putin’s Russia was “basically [a] KGB apparition run government” (Russia Today 20 October 2008). Similar quotations by McCain targeting Russia were aired repeatedly throughout Russia Today’s coverage of the U.S. presidential election. One report even accused McCain of “dishing the dirt on Russia” in his campaign actions (Russia Today 20 October 2008). However, when the coverage was

broken down into the average length of a story, McCain's positively framed coverage was often longer. Al Jazeera especially aired longer, issue-based stories that were positive toward McCain. This would suggest Al Jazeera was not influenced by the precarious relationship between the network and McCain's Republican predecessor, George W. Bush.

Much like in the United States, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today consistently devoted more coverage to Palin than to her rival Biden. There are a few explanations why the media focused more on the Republican vice presidential candidate. Had McCain been elected, Palin's selection as vice-president would have been historic. Moreover, Palin was a surprise selection as the running-mate, a little known governor from Alaska. There seemed to be a fascination with her on the networks, both because of her gender and ultra-conservative stance on the issues of the campaign. Her assertion that Obama was "palling around with terrorists" received heavy play on each of the networks. Furthermore, an ethical investigation into her firing of an Alaskan official was the focus of stories on all three networks. The night the investigation committee declared she had abused her power Al Jazeera led with the story and followed with an update at the end of the newscast. Throughout the time period of this study, Biden was not a participant in any headline grabbing events the way Palin was; this could explain why more coverage was devoted to her, as opposed to Biden, on the networks.

Focus of Coverage

The domination of horse race coverage on Al Jazeera and the BBC supported earlier studies of how the media cover elections, although less than half of Russia

Today's coverage was on horse race (Fox et al., 2005; Brookes et al., 2004). Even though Russia Today had less coverage than Al Jazeera and the BBC, the network's high percentage of "other" stories meant that only a small percentage of total coverage on Russia Today focused on the issues. The "other" category included stories that involved the election, but did not focus on the horse race or the issues. Examples of such reports include voting machine fraud and third-party rallies.

Al Jazeera and the BBC did not air much more issue coverage than did Russia Today. Most of the past research on horse race versus issue coverage has focused on the U.S. media and how campaigns are covered in the United States. This study furthers past research, as it demonstrates that this tendency to focus on horse race coverage can be found on networks in other countries. As the breakdown in the average number of minutes per type of story showed, McCain actually received more positive coverage on Al Jazeera and Russia Today when the topic of the story had to do with issues. It could be inferred that had the networks focused more on the issues, instead of horse race coverage, which candidate was framed more positively could have differed. If horse race coverage had not been the focus of the majority of stories, McCain could have been framed more positively. This suggests the candidate who would be framed more positively overall could be different in any election, if networks focused more on issue coverage.

Moreover, Obama was ahead in the polls for most of October; this means the amount of horse race coverage increased his chances of having more positive coverage. Therefore, if the framing of a candidate can change the way voters perceive that candidate, as suggested by Fridkin, Kenney, Gershon, and Woodall (2008), the candidate

who is ahead in the polls is likely to stay there, because the coverage of the media would reinforce the candidate's positive traits. This means, in the context of this study, the networks' positive coverage would only strengthen the already favorable opinion of Obama in most regions of the world. Conversely, McCain's unpopularity in many regions of the world would only be reinforced by the negatively framed coverage.

Coverage of the Election Process

This study found that Al Jazeera and the BBC also had similar coverage in respect to the type of stories. Both networks focused the majority of coverage on the horse race. How Al Jazeera got its start as a network could explain the similarities between Al Jazeera and the BBC. Al Jazeera was originally created by the Emir of Qatar to modernize and present an alternative to traditional Middle Eastern press. The first employees the Emir hired to begin the network were 20 journalists who had previously worked at the BBC (Burns 1999). Although this study focused on Al Jazeera (English), it is likely the English version of the channel was influenced by its parent network. Furthermore, Al Jazeera English features several former BBC broadcasters including David Frost, Riz Khan, and Veronica Pedrosa.

The origin of Russia Today, and the idea of press nationalism, could also point to its difference in coverage from the other two networks. The findings of this study support much of the earlier research that theorizes how a country's media reflects its foreign policies (Gutierrez-Villalobos and Hertog, 1994; Krishnaiah, Signorielli and McLeod 1993). Entman (1991) determined that the U.S. media reported ethnocentrically when he examined how the media covered two similar events. This study furthers

Entman's findings in two ways. Firstly, this study analyzed coverage of the same event across three international networks. This study, through the findings in regards to Russia Today, demonstrated that press nationalism, or ethnocentric reporting, can be found in more countries than just the United States. Russia Today is a state-owned network in a country that has seen its ties with the United States strained in recent years, particularly during the republican Bush administration (Bishara 2008). It was created, much like the United States' own Voice of America and TV Martí broadcasts, to "be a perspective on the world from Russia" ("Russia Today" 2005). Half of all the coverage on Russia Today fell into "other" categories, and most of these stories focused on voter disenfranchisement or questioned the validity of the election. Past studies of Russian TV news have found networks within the country to push a pro-government agenda (Oates & Roselle, 2000). Furthermore, according to Reporters Without Borders annual report on press freedom, journalists in Russia often are pressured to report along government lines. This tendency of Russian news to support the government, coupled with the strain between the governments of Russia and the United States could explain why Russia Today questioned the United States' system for choosing a new president. The structure of society in Russia could also explain the increased focus on the election process. Typically in Russia, the whole is more important than the individual; this could point to an interest in the systematic workings of an election, rather than interest in the personalities involved.

This idea of press nationalism could also apply to Al Jazeera and the BBC. The relationship between the origin countries of Al Jazeera and the BBC and the United States might explain why those two networks largely ignored the election process. Al

Jazeera only mentioned the election process in three stories during the month of coverage and never described the election process as unfair. The BBC only mentioned the election process twice, once as fair and once as unfair. Again, Russia Today differed from Al Jazeera and the BBC in how it portrayed the election. Russia Today framed the election process as unfair in a much higher percentage of stories. Unlike Russia Today, Al Jazeera and the BBC originate in countries that have been seen as largely supportive of the United States' policies in recent years. The government of Qatar spent millions of dollars expanding a U.S. military base just outside the capital city of Doha which is now home to thousands of U.S. troops (Burns 2002). Likewise, the British government was an ally with the United States in the Iraq War. Previous studies have shown news agencies slant reports in favor of allies (Barranco and Shyles 1988).

Implications and Limitations

By examining Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today's 2008 U.S. presidential election coverage, speculations can be made about the inferences of international television news coverage of the U.S. presidential elections from those three regions. This analysis demonstrates that elections are covered similarly, despite what country is reporting on the election; this suggests that it is becoming harder for news consumers to find a different point of view from television networks with the same type of appeal. Coverage from the three networks showed an emphasis on the horse race, rather than reports on the issues. If networks continue in this path, audiences will be knowledgeable only about who is ahead in the polls, but not which candidate is better suited for the office.

The results found here, like past research, also strengthens the assumption that framing is a media phenomenon that can be found cross-culturally. This analysis of media frames is set apart from previous research, because it examined how three international networks covered the same event, an election in another country. Furthermore, the findings here demonstrated that when it comes to election coverage, the frames used on both the candidates and the election coverage is nearly similar irrespective of the network. Results indicate that press nationalism exists regardless of the country from which the report originates. This press nationalism also does a disservice to viewers; if networks continue to report with a slant that supports a government agenda, the larger impact of an event could be ignored. For example, a large percentage of Russia Today's coverage portrayed the election process in the United States as unfair. This means less time was devoted to informing the audience about the candidates' foreign policies and what those policies could mean for Russia.

One of the limitations of this study is that it examines frames in the U.S. presidential campaign coverage on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today, but it does not examine the effects of such framing, which is beyond the scope of this particular study. Future studies could combine a content analysis with surveys to determine if the coverage changed the audiences' opinion of the candidates. Furthermore, this study was primarily concerned with the month before the election, a time period where one candidate, Obama, had a clear lead in the polls. Due to the heavy coverage of the horse race, a longer time period that included instances in which McCain was the poll leader, could have provided different results of who was framed more positively.

This study also raises questions that should be addressed in future research. The timing of this particular study was important because the 2008 U.S. presidential election followed a widely unpopular George W. Bush presidency. Future studies should analyze elections that did not include the influence of such a polarizing figure as Bush. In addition, future research should replicate and expand this framing analysis to include more international networks to determine if the findings are generalizable beyond these three networks during this period in other cultures.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

This content analysis gave some insight into how U.S. elections are covered in national and international television networks based in other countries. Guided by the media theory framing, this study examined coverage of the U.S. presidential election on three international networks, Al Jazeera (English), the BBC, and Russia Today, during the month before the November 2008 election. The findings indicated that the country from which the reports originated had some bearing on how the candidates and the election process were framed. The domination of horse race coverage also revealed the similarities between the election coverage on U.S. media and that of the international networks.

The timing of this study was particularly important, due to the global economic concerns and the animosity felt worldwide toward the U.S. government's policies during the past eight years. This increased globalization, and the need to gain insight into how the United States is viewed by international media networks, was the driving force behind this study. By examining how three international networks covered the same event, this study gave some insight into how elections are covered around the world. Overall, Senator Barack Obama received more positive coverage than his opponent Senator John McCain on Al Jazeera, the BBC, and Russia Today. The primary focus on horse race coverage on all three networks, coupled with Obama's strength in the polls throughout that time period, resulted in frequent use of the positive frame "ahead in the polls." McCain, conversely, was frequently framed as being behind in the polls. Past studies have shown the U.S. media has a tendency to focus on the horse race; the significance of

this assessment is finding that other media systems also have a tendency to focus on the horse race when they cover presidential elections. The prevalence of horse race coverage on all three networks could suggest these networks are modeling coverage after U.S. networks. After all, Al Jazeera has often been referred to as the ‘CNN of the Arab World.’ Competition could also force the executives of the networks to take other international networks’ coverage into account during election time. Through the internet and satellite television, these networks are competing with each other. Older, established networks such as CNN and the BBC are now competing with fairly new networks such as Al Jazeera and Russia Today.

This study also discovered that the election process was largely ignored by Al Jazeera and the BBC, but was the focus of several stories that aired on Russia Today. Furthermore, Russia Today usually framed the election process as “unfair.” This comes after eight years of a U.S. administration that was often at odds with the government of Russia. The network’s approach to the coverage of the election could be questioning the legitimacy of the U.S. elections; Russia Today could be trying to push the audience to question democracy in the United States. This assertion and overall conclusion about Russia Today leads to an untested hypothesis, which posits that its coverage of the U.S. politics, particularly the U.S. presidential elections, manifests Russia’s deep-rooted rift with the United States.

Technological advances have made the world a smaller place; the networks that were the focus of this study now have audiences around the globe. Increased globalization and the ability to transfer news quickly around the world may create an environment in which news networks not only sharing information, but also similarly

report that information. It is likely that in the future, international networks will continue to display some similarities in how elections are covered, both in the way candidates are framed and in the type of election stories that are reported.

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APPENDIX A: CODE BOOK

Procedure

The following steps should be taken when using the following code sheet. The transcript of all relevant election related stories from three newscasts are to be read and analyzed for each variable (v) below. A new code sheet should be used for each story.

v1. Story Date

The date when the story aired.

v2. Story Network

The network on which the story aired.

v3. Time Story Appears

How many minutes into the newscast the story appears.

v4. Length of Story

The number of minutes long the story is.

v5. Focus of Story

Decide the main focus of the story.

1 = Horse Race: Commentary on the race, polling, campaign strategy, money raised, etc.

2 = Issue Coverage: The economy, housing, job creation, taxes, etc.

3 = Other: A story topic that does not fall into either of the above categories, such security, third party candidates, etc.

v6. Election Portrayal

How is the election or vote itself framed.

1 = Election is fair: Everyone who is eligible gets to vote, no sign of voter disenfranchisement, etc.

2 = Election is unfair: Parties are ignored, eligible voters are not allowed to vote, voters are disenfranchised, etc.

3 = Election itself is not addressed: Story focuses only on candidates and/or race.

v7. Candidate Coverage

How is each presidential and vice-presidential portrayed. Candidate is defined by the candidate's name, the campaign, the camp, or anytime it is implied.

To determine how the candidate is portrayed, count the number of each positive and negative trait mentioned in the story. Mark the story positive or negative based on which category has the most mentions.

1 = Positive: The candidate is listed as having more positive traits.

2 = Negative: The candidate is listed as having more negative traits.

3 = Neutral: The candidate has the same amount of positive and negative traits.

4 = Not Mentioned: The candidate is not mentioned in the story.

APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET

v1. Story Date _____/_____/_____

v2. Story Network _____
 1= Al Jazeera
 2= BBC
 3= Russia Today

v3. Time Story Appears _____:_____:_____

v4. Length of Story _____:_____

v5. Focus of Story _____
 1= Horse Race
 2= Issue Coverage
 3= Other _____

v6. Election Portrayal _____
 1= Election is fair
 2= Election is unfair
 3= Election itself is not addressed

v7. Candidate Coverage

Barack Obama _____
 1= Positive
 2= Negative
 3= Neutral
 4= Not Mentioned

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (# of Mentions) | |
| Positive _____ # of M | Negative _____ # M |
| Honest | Dishonest |
| Experienced | Inexperienced |
| Intelligent | Unintelligent |
| Strong Leader | Weak Leader |
| Decisive | Indecisive |
| Consistent | Inconsistent |
| Trustworthy | Untrustworthy |
| Ahead in Polls | Behind in Polls |
| Other _____ | Other _____ |

John McCain _____

- 1= Positive
- 2= Negative
- 3= Neutral
- 4= Not Mentioned

(# of Mentions)

Positive _____ # of M

- Honest
- Experienced
- Intelligent
- Strong Leader
- Decisive
- Consistent
- Trustworthy
- Ahead in Polls
- Other _____

Negative _____ # M

- Dishonest
- Inexperienced
- Unintelligent
- Weak Leader
- Indecisive
- Inconsistent
- Untrustworthy
- Behind in Polls
- Other _____

Joe Biden _____

- 1= Positive
- 2= Negative
- 3= Neutral
- 4= Not Mentioned

(# of Mentions)

Positive _____ # of M

- Honest
- Experienced
- Intelligent
- Strong Leader
- Decisive
- Consistent
- Trustworthy
- Ahead in Polls
- Other _____

Negative _____ # M

- Dishonest
- Inexperienced
- Unintelligent
- Weak Leader
- Indecisive
- Inconsistent
- Untrustworthy
- Behind in Polls
- Other _____

Sarah Palin _____

- 1= Positive
- 2= Negative
- 3= Neutral
- 4= Not Mentioned

(# of Mentions)

Positive _____ # of M

- Honest
- Experienced
- Intelligent
- Strong Leader
- Decisive
- Consistent
- Trustworthy
- Ahead in Polls
- Other _____

Negative _____ # M

- Dishonest
- Inexperienced
- Unintelligent
- Weak Leader
- Indecisive
- Inconsistent
- Untrustworthy
- Behind in Polls
- Other _____