

SURFACE VERSUS SUBSTANTIVE NEWS COVERAGE
OF OKLAHOMA'S 1986 GUBERNATORIAL RACE
BY THREE DAILY NEWSPAPERS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Mounting concern among politicians, the public and members of the media about shallow campaign news coverage seemed to climax nationwide in the November 1986 elections. Widely published criticism of campaign tactics and media response to this criticism spotlighted a long-brewing controversy over the lack of in-depth election coverage. Much of this criticism was based on the theory that the media have a social responsibility to provide solid information on platforms and issues, so voters may make wiser choices on election day. Controversy centers more and more on the tendency of mass media to focus coverage upon campaign strategy, mudslinging and personal conflict among candidates rather than upon substantial, issue-oriented news.

Objectives

This thesis studies 1986 campaign coverage in Oklahoma's three largest daily newspapers--The Tulsa Tribune, Tulsa World and the Oklahoman.* It tests increasingly publicized notions that the news media

*For simplicity in this thesis, the three editions published by the Oklahoma Publishing Co. will be analyzed under an all-encompassing heading: Oklahoman. Their actual titles are The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday Oklahoman, and Saturday Oklahoman and Times.

generate significantly more news describing the surface characteristics of the campaign itself than news outlining issues, candidates' qualifications and platforms. While this thesis deals primarily with newspaper coverage of the 1986 gubernatorial race, the questions raised by this research are by no means unique to newspapers, Oklahoma or this particular political race.

Background

The Negative Campaign

The 1986 gubernatorial and U. S. congressional races stimulated widespread criticism of what euphemistically has been called the "negative campaign." Otherwise known as mudslinging and name-calling, the negative campaign was the biggest issue in elections nationwide.

In Oklahoma, one of the hottest negative campaigns was waged between Democratic gubernatorial candidate David Walters and Republican Henry Bellmon. Throughout the race, newspapers printed stories in which candidates questioned one another's integrity¹ as well as editorials analyzing what some writers considered a rise in dirty politics.²

On Sept. 21, just after the Democratic gubernatorial primary runoff, the Tulsa World published an editorial outlining examples of negative politics in the primaries and predicting more before the general election. It began, "Is Oklahoma entering a new phase of dirtier-than-usual politics?"

"The answer is probably yes for a simple reason: it works."³

Later, toward the close of the campaign, the World ran a front-page analysis of what it called "political gimmickry" or events staged by candidates to focus media attention on personalities rather than plat-

forms. The story cited instances in which Walters and Bellmon had taken turns appearing uninvited at each other's campaign headquarters, sometimes interrupting news conferences, to create conflicts for media attention. The writer concluded, "Oklahomans may not be getting informed about the issues in this campaign, but they sure are being entertained."⁴

Many journalists wrote critical pieces on negative campaigning. The criticism was not confined to Oklahoma's gubernatorial race; Oklahoma U. S. Senate candidates Don Nickles and Jim Jones were blasted too.⁵ Nor was it confined to Oklahoma politics. A column by Neal R. Peirce in the Tulsa Tribune contended negative campaigning had become a nationwide trend fueled by the public's response to mudslinging. "We get what we deserve, what we respond to," Peirce wrote.⁶

Other columnists scoffed at the sudden outcry against mudslinging. Just after the election, an Oklahoma City weekly, Oklahoma Gazette, published a commentary by Jack Edens:

. . . the claim that the 1986 elections brought new heights of negative campaigning is simply ignorance. Scores of historical examples could be cited. Even in Oklahoma the claims are absurd. Only in the 1978 U. S. Senate race, Gov. David Boren was defending himself against thinly veiled charges as to his sexual preferences. In 1958 gubernatorial candidate J. Howard Edmondson had to go on television to rebut charges that his family operated a nudist camp.

The Henry Bellmon-David Walters and Don Nickles-Jim Jones charges and countercharges look tepid in comparison.⁷

A World staff editorialist conceded that the negative campaigning in the November 1986 elections was not new to politics, but stated it was so frequently used that it became the main feature.⁸

In the Nov. 1 Tribune, three days before election, Jenkin Lloyd Jones remarked:

Much has been written this year about the rebirth of dirty campaigning. In the 19th century, blatant scurrility and billingsgate delivered from the stump was commonplace in

America, but later we passed into a period in which a sort of Marquis of Queensberry rule system was established. This didn't mean one couldn't knock the opposition, but it was considered better form to wield a rapier instead of a bludgeon.

But now we see the rise of the outrageous slogan, the twisted half-truth and the inflammatory picture. An early sample of the trend was the TV footage some years ago showing a little girl being blown away in an atomic war. It had impact. Many pollsters are now in agreement that mudslinging is vote-productive.⁹

Whether negative campaigning--especially prevalent in frontier journalism--has made a comeback is insignificant. What is significant, however, is that three groups--the media, public and politicians--have suddenly focused on it as a problem to be reckoned with. But by whom?

Many groups are to blame, according to a pre-election syndicated column by David S. Broder in the Nov. 1 World. Broder contended the apparent rise in negative campaigning occurred when politicians discovered more public tolerance for negative television commercials. He noted increased fund raising has provided politicians more money to spend on TV ads produced by media experts who "employ any tactics that 'work,' and offer no warranties on their 'products' and no refunds to voters who find out after Election Day that they have been gypped."¹⁰

Broder next blamed TV stations that "make millions from these hit-and-run, 30-second ads." Voters, too, are at fault, he stated, adding that "candidates would not employ cheap and negative tactics if they believed that voters would punish them. Silence lends assent."¹¹

While Broder did cite politicians' advertising tactics as major instigators of negative campaigning, the news media did not escape his criticism. He apparently considered inadequate the election news offered by newspapers as well as television. Of TV, he stated, "Except for a scattering of televised debates, voters got few looks at the can-

didates in anything but their own ads."¹²

Of newspapers, Broder wrote, "Candidates complained with justification that the only way to get coverage was to introduce a new TV ad."¹³ Oklahoma candidates did, in fact, make news with a barrage of TV ads. Several newspaper stories were centered solely on campaign strategies, including detailed descriptions of political commercials.¹⁴

Broder's statements about political TV ads echoed complaints of many newspaper writers during the 1986 campaign. Often it seemed writers were quick to place blame on TV while admitting no fault of their own. Jones, in a Tribune editorial, blamed the trend in negative campaigning primarily on TV advertising and "the fact that within a period from 15 to 60 seconds the TV message must have wallop and deliver, if possible, a memorable picture."¹⁵

The cause of the proliferation of such commercials was analyzed by yet another staff editorialist in the World:

Candidates and their consultants wage negative, personal campaigns because they get results. Such campaigns, and the petty issues they revolve around, are well-suited to 15- and 30-second television ads, and voters respond to them.¹⁶

Another World editorial expanded on the public-at-fault theme while including professional campaigners in the list of culprits:

Don't blame the politicians. They use it because the public responds to this kind of stuff. They hire talented 'consultants'--experts in manipulating public opinion--to determine precisely what public antagonisms and prejudices are the most easily exploited. These fellows are political soap salesmen. They couldn't care less about issues.¹⁷

Perhaps it is true that the public has been lax by not demanding substance from campaigns. That may be changing, however. While newspaper writers were busy blaming the public for the popularity of negative campaigns, the public was facing frustrations of its own. A

Tribune article explaining results of a statewide straw poll of Oklahoma registered voters stated:

Time after time voters expressed disgust with the 'mud-slinging' tone of this year's campaign, which started in the David Walters-Mike Turpen Democratic gubernatorial primary and the GOP 1st District primary this summer and has spread into other races this fall.¹⁸

Letters to the editor also reflected the public's growing concern about negative campaigns. A World reader wrote:

Never before have I seen or heard of such blatant 'mudslinging' as exhibited almost daily by the 'honorable' politicians of this state. Instead of voting for the most qualified candidate, the voters must choose the least guilty one.¹⁹

The Tribune quoted an Oklahoma City ad agency owner who predicted that campaign negativism is beginning to alienate voters and "may backlash on those who use it heavily."²⁰

In fact, just days earlier, a World letter to the editor stated, "Labels are a poor basis for decision making. If it is not possible to separate the wheat from the chaff, vote against the name-callers."²¹

So, as newspaper writers blamed TV, campaign consultants and the public for the rise in negative campaigns, the public was pointing the finger at politicians. Politicians responded as politicians do. Few were suicidal enough to blast the voting public or image-forming news-people, so naturally they blamed each other. Throughout the campaign, Bellmon and Walters each condemned mudslinging while charging the other with using it.²² After the primary, both vowed not to resort to negativism before the general election. Bellmon was quoted by the Oklahoman as saying, "I will not play Democratic games of personal attack and name-calling,"²³ a statement that, in itself, could be considered mudslinging.

With Walters' and Bellmon's promises not to resort to negativism, mudslinging became an Oklahoma election issue alongside tax reform, economic development, educational funding and right-to-work. The content of the candidates' remarks became less newsworthy than the fact that the remarks were made. For example, each publicly questioned the ethics of his opponent's campaign financing. However, the remarks seemed to make headlines not for their substance but simply because so-and-so was mudslinging again.²⁴

As noted earlier, the Tribune, World and Oklahoman carried items making mudslinging an election issue. Many editorials put the blame on TV ads and shrewd campaign consultants. But a few writers, including Broder, said journalists, by merely reporting rhetorical barbs among candidates, may be ignoring their responsibility to research real issues. Perhaps newspaper writers should avoid placing the blame for negative campaigns on TV, politicians and the public until they have studied their own political reporting.

In The Selling of the President 1968, Joe McGinniss describes the newspaper-smart candidate:

He should express distaste for television; suspicion that there is something 'phony' about it. This guarantees him good press, because newspaper reporters, bitter over their loss of prestige to the television men, are certain to stress anti-television remarks. Thus, the sophisticated candidate, while analyzing his own on-the-air technique as carefully as a golf pro studies his swing, will state frequently that there is no place for 'public relations gimmicks' or 'those show business guys' in his campaign.²⁵

Edens stressed an absurdity in newspeople's tendency to blame others for the rise in negative campaigning:

It's understandable for candidates to publicly extoll the positive campaign as a moralistic device to prevent probing of their own faults, but for the watchdog, make that lap-dog, media to croon this tune is journalistic abdication.²⁶

Edens chastised the media for failing "to objectively evaluate the torrent of charges and countercharges . . . while self-righteously condemning the confusion."²⁷ He reasoned that negative campaigns are a natural, necessary ingredient in a democratic electoral process, but stated:

For the news media, which all but ignores [sic] candidates' substantive platform statements while headlining every name-calling attack, to denounce negative campaigning and its 30-second spot perfection is an exercise of gall, hypocrisy and ignorance . . .²⁸

In the book Media Voices: Debating Critical Issues in Mass Media, George McKenna notes that candidates often complain newspeople "are not interested in serious, thoughtful speeches but in gaffes, fights, and bizarre stunts." Thus, the media have in effect set the stage for theatrics in politics.²⁹

David L. Paletz and Robert M. Entman, in the book Media Power Politics, note this agenda-setting power of the press:

Controversy is news. When it is absent from a presidential election, reporters will stimulate it; when inchoate, they try to tease it out. They do so by encouraging each camp to respond to the statements, behavior, and actions of the other, and publicizing the responses. The sides are presented and represented. But the concomitant stories of charges and countercharges depict the confrontation without resolving it.³⁰

Reporters who have not studied candidates' backgrounds before covering a story may be unprepared to sift political rhetoric for substance. For these reporters, it is easier to pass off all remarks by candidates as mudslinging or say-nothing rhetoric instead of researching the remarks themselves. Paletz and Entman, citing the 1980 presidential race between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, discuss one effect of this type of reporting:

Carter's gubernatorial actions were not dissected in 1976, nor Reagan's in 1980. Carter denounced Reagan's past statements and behavior in 1980, characterizing the Republican, in ef-

fect, as promoting the forces of racism, sexism, and nuclear madness. But by depicting Carter's charges as mudslinging attacks on Reagan's personal integrity and character rather than on his proposed policies, the media accommodated Reagan's defense, thus turning the Republican's record into Carter's liability.³¹

In the book Reporting Public Affairs, Henry Schulte cites two major deficiencies in political reporting. One, reporters are not adequately informed about candidates' platforms and backgrounds to offer readers a clear perspective of the real people and philosophies.³² Two, reporters often separate campaign promises and assumption of office into two worlds. Schulte contends politicians would be forced to wage more responsible campaigns if reporters pressed for substantial platform information, then followed up after the election on the campaign promises. Thus, Schulte states, politicians would be held accountable for their campaign stances and "what more capable person to assist with these accountings than the reporter who originally transcribed the promises as they were being made?"³³

While mudslinging may be the more recently discussed flaw in political coverage, it in fact could be just a symptom of a broader problem --media laziness. Although journalists may think they are taking corrective action when they publish whining editorials about the state of campaigns, they might push harder for actual changes. Broder, like Schulte, noted a lack of news media pressure on candidates to supply hard facts about real issues:

Too few papers monitored what was being said--or evaded--in the face-to-face campaigning. Too few pushed aggressively for news conferences and interviews in which the candidate would have to speak for himself--not hide behind his media managers.³⁴

The Horse Race

Besides negative campaign news, Paletz and Entman stress the "horse race" syndrome, another symptom of media laziness.³⁵ The horse race characteristics of an election--voter polls, campaign strategy, who is ahead, who is behind, who is picking up speed--give reporters something easy to write in lieu of well-researched items about issues and platforms.

Paletz and Entman write that this tendency to cover only the surface characteristics of an election is due partly to newspeople's perceptions of newsworthiness, what their readers want. They state:

The emphasis on the strategic and horse race characteristics of presidential elections at the expense of both the candidates' records and their policy pronouncements is rooted in the imperatives and constraints under which journalists labor. Circumspect, couched in rhetoric, often boringly detailed, candidates' policy pronouncements are rarely dramatically newsworthy. If reported once, they are seldom considered worth repeating by the media.³⁶

Paletz and Entman illustrate the media's attraction to and politicians' manipulation of the horse race, by listing three points known to Jimmy Carter's campaign workers:

- The themes sounded earliest are often the ones reported longest.
- Competition and newsgathering procedures tend to draw each medium into convergence with others so that they focus on the same events and develop similar themes.
- Cultural assumptions, such as the notion that every race has but one winner, shape definitions of news.³⁷

The first point was illustrated in the Bellmon-Walters race with the issue of campaign financing. Both candidates zeroed in on the question of ethics in fund raising. Previously cited news stories note that each candidate spoke passionately throughout the race about possible special-interest financing of the opponent's campaign. This theme was

sounded early when Walters used funds from mortgages on his home to finance his campaign. It remained the most written-about issue to the end.

Paletz and Entman's second point was illustrated as well. One example of media converging to report the same events and themes was an incident when Walters "crashed" a Bellmon news conference. Politically speaking, it may have been an effective tactic by Walters because so many media were present to report it. Here, however, it should be noted that the three papers all reported it with the same angle--campaign negativism. Through headlines alone, it was clear more emphasis was put on the personal confrontation between candidates than the issues they discussed:

Oklahoman: "Walters Crashes Press Session, Trades Barbs With Bellmon"³⁸

Tribune: "News Conference Confrontation"³⁹

World: "Walters, Supporters Interrupt Bellmon Conference"⁴⁰

On their third point, Paletz and Entman state that

when journalistic shortcuts reduce the campaign to a personal conflict between two men instead of a jostling for control of government among elite coalitions, they reflect (among other things) the individualism of the culture, traditional myths about the democratic process, and the failure to seek out radical analysts of the electoral process from left or right.⁴¹

Assumption

The above-cited criticism of the news media is based on the idea that responsible newspeople, in spite of their constitutional right to operate freely, still have social and ethical obligations. This premise, discussed in the 1940s by the Commission on Freedom of the Press,⁴² is called the social-responsibility theory and is widely used

today in various media codes of ethics.⁴³

William L. Rivers, Wilbur Schramm and Clifford G. Christians, in the book Responsibility in Mass Communication, quote the commission's report by stating that the media's major mission is to raise social conflict "from the plane of violence to the plane of discussion."⁴⁴

Therefore, this thesis is written on the assumption that one duty of the press is to offer readers solid information about election issues and candidate stances on those issues, so readers may make informed choices at the polls. The press should raise social conflict (the campaign) from a plane of violence (mudslinging and the horse race syndrome) to a plane of discussion (candidates' platforms and qualifications).

Hypotheses

This content analysis of 1986 Oklahoma gubernatorial election coverage examines the relation of "substantive" news, which describes candidate platforms or qualifications, to "surface" news, which merely describes horse race characteristics or mudslinging.

In light of the many articles criticizing horse race journalism and noting a rise in negative campaigning, the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1. Overall, coverage will contain more surface news than substantive news.

Hypothesis 2. More articles than not will contain surface news but not substantive news.

Hypothesis 3. Articles that do contain substantive news will still contain more surface news.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 were formulated to examine which types of surface and substantive news received more play:

Hypothesis 4. More surface news will be devoted to mudslinging than to the horse race. This prediction too was based on the idea that negative campaigning is on the rise.

Hypothesis 5. More substantive news will be devoted to candidates' platforms than to candidates' formal qualifications and political records. This hypothesis reflects a belief that current issue platforms would be considered more newsworthy than candidates' past achievements, especially because neither candidate in this case held recent office.

Finally, a series of five null hypotheses (Hypotheses 6.1-6.5) was based on Paletz and Entman's previously cited contention that competition and newsgathering procedures draw media together so they focus on the same events and story angles. It was generally predicted that there would be no differences among the papers in regard to the first five hypotheses.

Definitions of surface and substantive news are provided in Chapter III.

ENDNOTES

¹Examples of news stories reiterating candidate charges and counter-charges against each other:

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Nancy Mathis, "Demos, GOP Trade Accusations on Telephone Poll," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 9, 1986), p. C1.

Samme Chittum, "Bellmon Says 'No, Never' to Accepting Loans," Tulsa World (Oct. 10, 1986), p. A2.

Chuck Ervin, "Words Sharpen as Governor's Race Nears Finish," Tulsa World (Oct. 19, 1986), p. A12.

John Greiner, "Campaigners Confine Debate to Lively Letters," The Sunday Oklahoman (Oct. 19, 1986), p. 1.

John Greiner, "Walters Crashes Press Session, Trades Barbs with Bellmon," The Daily Oklahoman (Oct. 24, 1986), p. 1.

²Examples of editorials noting a rise of negative campaigning:

Jenkin Lloyd Jones, "The 30-Second Images," The Tulsa Tribune (Nov. 1, 1986), p. B24.

"Negative Politics: It Pays," Tulsa World (Sept. 21, 1986), p. D8.

Allan Cromley, "Candidates Not Known for Civility," The Sunday Oklahoman (Nov. 2, 1986), p. 18.

³"Negative Politics: It Pays," Tulsa World.

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⁶Neal R. Peirce, "TV Political Ads: Meet the Manipulators," The Tulsa Tribune (Nov. 3, 1986), p. C11.

⁷Jack Edens, "Media Has [sic] Gall Decrying Negative Campaigning," Oklahoma Gazette (Nov. 12, 1986), p. 5.

⁸"Campaign '86: Idiot's Tale," Tulsa World (Nov. 1, 1986), p. A10.

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¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

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Tribune Capitol Bureau, "Gubernatorial Candidates Planning Last-Minute Blitz," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 27, 1986), p. A8.

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Tribune Capitol Bureau, "Walters Target of GOP Ads," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 29, 1986), p. A14.

¹⁵Jones.

¹⁶"Campaign '86: Idiot's Tale," Tulsa World.

¹⁷"Negative Politics: It Pays," Tulsa World.

¹⁸"Poll Shows Statewide Traditions Crumbling," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 31, 1986), p. A1.

¹⁹Charles Bass, "Oklahoma Style," "The People's Choice: Politics, Oklahoma Style, Shock Reader," Tulsa World (Oct. 26, 1986), p. D8.

²⁰E. O'Neil Robinson, "\$10 Million Poured Into State Races," The Tulsa Tribune (Nov. 4, 1986), p. A4.

²¹A. M. Schnitzer, "Poor Basis," "The People's Choice: Readers Fire One More at Politics," Tulsa World (Nov. 1, 1986), p. A10.

²²Examples of stories in which candidates charged their opponents with mudslinging:

Nancy Mathis, "Stage Set for Appeal on OK of Walters Loans," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 15, 1986), p. A1.

The Associated Press, "Bellmon Says Foe Desperate," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 20, 1986), p. A2.

Jim Myers, "Candidates Say They'll Stress Issues," Tulsa World (Sept. 18, 1986), p. D1.

Chris Casteel, "Bellmon Keeps Up Attack on Leone," The Daily Oklahoman (Sept. 25, 1986), p. 33.

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The Associated Press, "Bellmon Draws Fire," The Tulsa Tribune (Oct. 17, 1986), p. A1.

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- ³¹Ibid., p. 51.
- ³²Henry H. Schulte, Reporting Public Affairs (New York, 1981), p. 282.
- ³³Ibid., p. 291.
- ³⁴Broder.
- ³⁵Paletz and Entman, p. 51.
- ³⁶Ibid.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 34.
- ³⁸Greiner, "Walters Crashes Press Session, Trades Barbs with Bellmon."
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- ⁴¹Paletz and Entman, p. 52.
- ⁴²William L. Rivers, Wilbur Schramm, and Clifford G. Christians, Responsibility in Mass Communication, 3rd ed. (New York, 1980), p. 44.
- ⁴³Ibid., pp. 289-300. The authors cite these examples of such ethics codes: American Society of Newspaper Editors Statement of Principles 1975; Sigma Delta Chi Code of Ethics 1973; Chicago Sun-Times Code of Professional Standards 1974; and Washington Post Standards and Ethics 1977.
- ⁴⁴Commission on Freedom of the Press, A Free and Responsible Press, in Rivers, Schramm, and Christians, p. 45.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis examines through content analysis the 1986 gubernatorial campaign news reported in Oklahoma's three largest metropolitan daily newspapers. It measures the amount of news about candidates' platforms and qualifications (substantive news) versus the amount of news about campaign strategies and candidates' personal verbal attacks on each other (surface news).

Scores of studies over the years have addressed the problems of biased election coverage and issue agenda-setting by the press. Few, however, have delved into the recent controversy over an apparent tendency by journalists to ignore substantial campaign issues and focus coverage instead upon the contest among personalities.

This chapter first examines prior research in imbalanced election coverage--namely studies of agenda-setting and news bias--which called early attention to the now-flourishing controversy over horse race journalism and negative campaigning. Second, it explores prevailing definitions of newsworthiness and practical constraints of the news industry that encourage contest-oriented, issue-shy reporting. Third, it discusses the need for studies of content to determine what types of information voters actually are receiving and how much. Finally, it reviews similar recent studies that form the basis for this study's methodology.

Prior Research in Imbalanced Coverage

Studies of News Bias

Past content analyses have called attention to many deficiencies in election news coverage. They have been based, as is this study, on the assumption that good election coverage should be fair and complete and should offer the reader news about issues and platforms so he may make informed voting decisions.

Many of the more prominent of such election studies dealt with biased coverage and whether papers editorially favored one candidate or party over another. Some of the earlier studies of news bias were conducted by Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet. Their study of the 1940 presidential election determined that newspapers, magazines and radio newscasts available in Erie County, Ohio, presented the Republican position twice as heavily as the Democratic position.¹

Although Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet's main question concerned news bias, these researchers foreshadowed the problems addressed in this paper--depiction of the election as a contest or "horse race" and the increasingly popular tactic of mudslinging or negative campaigning. They contended that media partisanship--the act of journalists taking sides in the election--may be due partly to "the framework of American sport where the main objective is to win. For better or for worse, the presidential campaign is depicted almost exclusively in black or white."²

They also noted an increased use of negative campaigning by supporters of Republican Wendell Wilkie late in the race when the focus of propaganda shifted from building up Wilkie to tearing down Franklin

Roosevelt.³

Elections of the 1960s and 1970s prompted many more studies of news bias. Guido Stempel's landmark studies of the "prestige press" in 1960 and 1964 showed the Democratic and Republican parties received virtually equal space in the 15 metropolitan dailies studied as a whole.⁴ Stempel's later study of the same papers showed third-party candidate George Wallace in the 1968 campaign was treated equally when compared with other candidates.⁵

Jules Becker and Douglas A. Fuchs conducted a content analysis of 1966 California gubernatorial campaign coverage. It compared the relation of editorial page stance to favorable or unfavorable coverage in straight news stories. The research showed the pro-Brown Sacramento Bee favored its candidate more in space than the pro-Reagan Oakland Tribune did its candidate, but both papers "drew clean bills of health on bias and play."⁶

Robert G. Meadow, in a study of the 1972 presidential campaign, reported that the three commercial TV networks, the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin and New York Times gave equal coverage to all candidates with no obvious preferences.⁷

A study by C. Richard Hofstetter showed evidence of some news bias by newspapers and television toward Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential campaign, with more bias by newspapers.⁸

Above are just a few examples of the many studies of bias in election coverage. While these studies can alert journalists to this aspect of imbalanced election coverage, Stempel cautions:

Studies of bias are limited by our inability to determine precisely what unbiased coverage is. Naturally the candidates and their backers expect equal space, but it is almost universally recognized that equal space is not necessarily un-

biased coverage. One candidate may make more news than the other.⁹

Other researchers have examined the potential for imbalanced election coverage by focusing on the aspect of "agenda-setting."

Studies of Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting is the conscious or unconscious act of selecting news topics so that certain issues and themes get more coverage in relation to others. Agenda-setting studies by M. E. McCombs and D. L. Shaw have consistently shown the press has an indirect impact on elections by choosing certain topics for emphasis, thus making them more salient in the audience's perceptions.¹⁰ In other words, audiences equate a topic's importance with the amount of coverage it receives relative to other topics.

If one accepts the findings of McCombs and Shaw, one can see that it is possible for the media to shape, merely through news selection and content emphasis, the flow of campaign information.

In regard to this thesis it should be noted that agenda-setting can occur not only in coverage of specific public policy issues, but also in news about campaign strategy. Hence, the media may choose to emphasize mudslinging and horse race characteristics of the campaign over actual policy platforms. In a 1972 study, McCombs and Shaw noted that a "considerable amount of campaign news (47%) was not devoted to a discussion of the issues but rather to an analysis of the campaign itself."¹¹

Similarly, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet noted that in the 1940 presidential election more than one-third of all discussion centered on the progress of the campaign, campaign strategy and speculation about

who would win. One-fourth was devoted to Roosevelt's record and the rest of the news involved a combination of candidates' proposals.¹²

Contributing Factors of Contest-Oriented Reporting

Prevailing Notions of Newsworthiness

The journalistic tendency to report the campaign primarily in terms of a contest may be attributable in part to the prevailing notions in the media that conflict is news. Journalism students traditionally are taught that a good news story contains at least one of these elements: timeliness, proximity, significance, prominence, human interest and conflict. According to a textbook by Frederick Shook and Dan Lattimore, the "conflict" news element involves "whatever happens between two opposing forces, whether between individuals, nations or as a result of fateful occurrences."¹³

Thus, newspeople are trained to seek conflict in a political campaign and expand on it in their reports. This may give audiences a distorted view of the campaign. As V. O. Key, Jr., states in the book

Public Opinion and American Democracy:

Conflict, to judge from the headlines, is the entirety of politics. The American press, prone as it is to balloon casual differences into small scale wars, conveys an image of a society ever embroiled in intramural battles.¹⁴

With the conflict element so relished and amplified by newspeople, it is only reasonable to assume that someone somewhere will learn to initiate conflict for the sheer purpose of manipulating the public issue agenda. However, Bernard Hennessey, in Public Opinion, notes that the media hold the power to generate a conflict in the news or stop it dead in its tracks:

Activist groups and their speakers can suggest, demand, implore, deplore, and confront, but their efforts will fail unless the newspapers and television pay attention to them. . . . When an issue is picked up by the papers and TV news, a serious and sustained dialogue can take place, but only if political opinion leaders of several kinds respond and react, charge and countercharge. And as long as that clash of elites continues to reinforce and be reinforced by the media presentations, the issue will be under consideration.¹⁵

In the case of political campaigns, then, manipulation is possible on both fronts. Newspeople depend on politicians for conflict; politicians depend on newspeople for coverage. Conflict begets coverage and vice versa.

What role does the public play in this interchange? An agenda-setting study by Taik Sup Auh of the 1974 Indiana senatorial campaign showed issue conflict in news stories was a better predictor than sheer volume of issue coverage of how voters ranked issues of importance. Respondents equated the degree of conflict surrounding a news topic with that topic's importance.¹⁶ It is difficult to measure, however, whether the media have conditioned voters to believe that only controversial topics are newsworthy or whether the media formulated their definition of newsworthiness after a real demand for conflict.

Constraints of the News Industry

As noted in Chapter I, politicians, journalists and the public agree that a growing emphasis in campaign news on the horse race and mudslinging aspects is creating a deficiency in substantive issue coverage. All groups have blamed each other and all may have grounds for the charges. The news media's role in the problem possibly stems more from practical constraints of the industry than a conscious desire to distort the news. Hennessey states:

Modern journalism suffers from the stultifying conventions that have to do with 'newspaper style' and the demand for immediacy. The archaic rules of newspaper style require that a 'good story' tell only what happened since the last issue of the paper and that the essential features of the story be summarized in a few crisp sentences in the first paragraph. This requirement, of course, is absurd. Most of the important news of any day is not new at all, but a development of yesterday's news, as that news was a development of the news the day before.¹⁷

Deadlines and news space limitations can force the media to report only basic outlines of the most complex issues. "The public expects no less," writes Hunter S. Thompson. "They want a man who can zap around the nation like a goddamn methedrine bat: Racing from airport to airport, from one crisis to another--sucking up the news and then spewing it out by the 'Five W's' in a package that makes perfect sense."¹⁸

Journalists also face problems with a wide audience of people with varying degrees of education and diverse interests. The media must gear the news to all groups, focus on the most general interests. Hennessey contends that people look to the mass media for help in forming opinions, but adds:

. . . because in most people the motivation for opinions on public issues is weak, as the facility for the ordering and assessing of relevant facts also is weak, the help sought from the mass media is in the nature of clues that make public events simple and consistent with pre-existing values and a conventional world view.¹⁹

Consequently, Hennessey states, journalists must "simplify, dramatize, and emotionalize" the news while they focus on human interest.²⁰

The dynamic nature of news is another practical constraint of the industry. Ever-changing events make it impossible for journalists to be knowledgeable on every topic. This forces them, as James Fallows notes, to rely, perhaps too heavily, on "experts" as sources of infor-

mation. Fallows states that a conscious lack of their own knowledge causes reporters to stress the easily analyzed surface contest over more complex substantive issues in the campaign.²¹

Peter Sandman, David M. Rubin and David D. Sachsman state the need to appear impartial on election issues also encourages journalists to stress the surface characteristics of the campaign. They note that journalists excel in election-night coverage when who wins by how much is justifiably the biggest news.²²

They add that journalists

are at their best with the concrete details of a dramatic competition, where they can impartially record the battle and impartially announce the winner. No story involves less news management than the results of an election. No story is less influenced by friendships with news sources, or by civic boosterism. No story, in short, makes so few demands for independence, integrity, and the adversary relationship. That is why the media do such a good job with election results.²³

Finally, a major constraint of the news media in campaign reporting is business competition. The need for journalists to cater to a market may hinder their ability to be radically different from their competitors. Therefore, the audience's access to differing viewpoints is limited.

In a study of 1971 Ohio municipal elections, John W. Windhauser found that "newspapers tend to agree in their coverage of certain campaign references, and are somewhat consistent in their main issue coverage for both parties."²⁴

Windhauser's findings are not unique. Similar studies will be cited, but it should be noted that competing media often cover events in the same way. This suggests that they look to each other for guidance. Timothy Crouse agrees. In his book, The Boys on the Bus, Crouse

analyzes what he calls "pack journalism" among reporters assigned to follow 1972 presidential candidates in the day-to-day campaign.²⁵ He states that these reporters

all fed out of the same pool report, the same daily handout, the same speech by the candidate; the whole pack was isolated in the same mobile village. After a while, they began to believe the same rumors, subscribe to the same theories, and write the same stories.²⁶

Crouse contends that while newspeople may denounce pack journalism they resort to it because of competition. He quotes Karl Fleming, former political reporter and Los Angeles bureau chief for Newsweek magazine:

The editors don't want scoops. Their abiding interest is making sure that nobody else has got anything that they don't have, not getting something that nobody else has.²⁷

Pack journalism, then, may compound the effects of agenda-setting. If one medium chooses to emphasize mudslinging, for example, all other media may follow suit, further limiting the voter's access to substantive issue coverage.

The Need for Studies of Content Emphasis

News coverage of the 1986 Oklahoma gubernatorial race spurred criticism and cries for change. As noted in Chapter I, critics stressed a need for more issue-oriented reporting and less preoccupation with campaign strategy and mudslinging. The controversy stems from an assumption that newspeople should strive to provide substantive information necessary for knowledgeable voting.

Charles K. Atkin, John Galloway and Oguz B. Nayman studied the relation of news media exposure to political knowledge and campaign interest. They defined political knowledge in the campaign context as

the individual's possession of accurate information about political actors, issues and events relevant to a campaign for public office. Knowledge is typically defined in terms of recall of candidates' names, personal characteristics and qualifications; identification of election issues and current campaign developments; recognition of connections between candidates and issue positions.²⁸

Atkin, Galloway and Nayman concluded that "a person's basic interest in politics probably leads him to read and watch news about a particular campaign; in turn, this exposure arouses his interest which then produces more exposure behavior."²⁹

They reported that the amount of political reading in newspapers was the strongest correlate of both political interest and political knowledge. Newspapers were followed by TV, then radio.³⁰

Let us assume journalists do, in fact, strive to enhance political knowledge as defined above equally in terms of the contest and the issues. And, let us assume that newspaper exposure, above TV and radio exposure, correlates with both knowledge and interest. It would seem useful, then, to analyze newspaper content to determine how much information is provided, for example, about "campaign developments" compared with "connections between candidates and issue positions." Are voters receiving doses of news about the contest proportionate to doses of news about issues? Is their knowledge at risk of being skewed toward either the surface or the substantive aspects of the election?

This thesis, which addresses those questions, is rooted in several similar studies conducted in the last 20 years.

Similar Studies

In 1968, Doris A. Graber broke the ground in research aimed at determining patterns of content emphasis in campaign coverage. Her anal-

ysis showed 1968 presidential campaign coverage was strikingly uniform in 20 newspapers selected nationwide to represent a cross-section of the American press.³¹ Graber found that information about candidates' presidential qualifications was handled in much the same way by all papers. She reported:

While the man and his image were widely discussed, his professional capabilities were slighted. Ability in foreign affairs, race relations, or relations with the public received scant mention. Other vital abilities were ignored entirely. Remarks concerning political philosophy of the candidates and their plans for organizational changes also were barely touched upon.³²

Graber contended that newspaper personnel seemed to share the same notions of newsworthiness and news presentation. Even letters to the editor and editorials displayed the same news coverage patterns as the press in general.³³ Graber concluded:

. . . in its efforts to be impartial, the press offered little opinion leadership. It provided an extensive forum for the contentions of major candidates. But it was largely the reader's perplexing burden to choose from the conflicting claims.³⁴

In 1972, Graber replicated her 1968 study. She again found that coverage among general circulation dailies was strikingly uniform.³⁵ However, the 1972 study showed a reduced emphasis on personality characteristics of candidates and increased emphasis on professional qualifications. This finding supported her hypothesis that races involving incumbents would generate more coverage of candidates' records and platforms than would races among non-incumbents. Unlike the 1968 race, the 1972 campaign involved an incumbent president, thus reporters had his recent political record to report in lieu of mere personality clashes among unknown candidates.³⁶

This finding is especially noteworthy for purposes of this thesis examining the 1986 Bellmon-Walters gubernatorial race. Neither Bellmon

nor Walters was an incumbent. In fact, Walters had never held an elective office. Bellmon was Oklahoma governor from 1963 to 1967, then served two consecutive terms as U. S. senator, but he had been out of election politics for nearly six years before the 1986 race.³⁷

Another study of the 1972 election, which was conducted by Robert G. Meadow, showed campaign events and strategy received more coverage overall than issues.³⁸ Meadow also found that issues were emphasized in relatively the same way across all media, both print and broadcast.³⁹ He noted, however, that TV networks agreed more with each other than did newspapers on non-issue news compared with issue news, while newspapers had a higher agreement score than networks with respect to issues.⁴⁰

Citing Gallup poll results, Meadow stressed an apparent "reemergence of issue-oriented voting behavior."⁴¹ He discussed the trend as it relates to journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness:

Some editors may report, to a very limited extent, the issues which they perceive to be of concern to their audiences, while others choose the issues which make the most exciting copy. In either case, given that the Gallup data accurately reflect issue concerns, the public hears or reads about the issues with which they are most concerned in nowhere near the proportion that their interests would suggest.⁴²

He cautions that voters who are interested in issues will become increasingly discontent when their concerns are not addressed in the media.⁴³ Meadow concluded that

if the resurgence of issue voting suggested by recent findings is genuine--and democratic theorists insist that issue orientations must exist to assure the maintenance of democracy--then the media must begin to emphasize the issues during election campaigns.⁴⁴

In 1979, John M. Russonello and Frank Wolf published a study similar to Meadow's and Graber's. It examined 1968 and 1976 presidential

election coverage in the New York Times, Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times.⁴⁵ Like Graber, Russonello and Wolf found that coverage of the 1968 race contained more news about the contest, or horse race, than substantive news of issues and candidates' personal qualities.⁴⁶ In line with Graber's contention that races involving an incumbent receive more substantive coverage, Russonello and Wolf reported that newspaper coverage in the 1976 race between Jimmy Carter and incumbent Gerald Ford emphasized substantive news more than in 1968.⁴⁷ They also reported, "The character of the campaign coverage and the changes in the pattern of coverage were surprisingly uniform across the three newspapers examined."⁴⁸

Russonello and Wolf focused primarily on distinctions between contest-oriented news and issue-oriented news. They identified the major theme of each article and each paragraph, then coded themes into four categories: horse race, issues, candidates' personal qualities, and other. Issues and candidates' personal qualities were considered "substantive" news.⁴⁹ Russonello and Wolf were interested mainly in examining the attention given to substantive news as opposed to horse race news, which depicted the campaign in terms of a "dramatic contest."⁵⁰

Russonello and Wolf's methodology became the basis of a study by Steven J. Riggs examining coverage by news magazines of the 1980 presidential primaries.⁵¹ Riggs hypothesized that Newsweek, U. S. News and World Report and Time would be more interested in entertaining than informing and thus would focus coverage on horse race news instead of substantive news.⁵² He found that 61% of paragraphs were classified horse race; 19.3% candidate qualities; 10% issues; and 9.5% other. Thus, the

horse race category contained more than twice as many paragraphs as the substantive category.⁵³ Riggs contended:

Since the magazines did practice 'horse race' content emphasis over 'substantive' emphasis in their coverage of the candidates and the campaign, it seems that they were more interested in the dramatics of the whole process of selecting party nominees. Entertainment, then, was more substantial for the magazines than adequate information for the readers.⁵⁴

Riggs noted a lack of studies aimed at content emphasis as opposed to content bias. "The question of bias," he asserted, "may not be as crucial because it is so hard to avoid, but the question of content emphasis may be emerging as very important."⁵⁵

This thesis follows the methods set by Riggs and Russonello and Wolf, but goes further. It too compares the amount of substantive coverage to the amount of contest-oriented coverage, but it breaks the latter category into two distinct types: horse race and mudslinging. Contest-oriented coverage has taken a new twist as politicians, aware of the media's fascination with conflict, have staged colorful negative campaigns against their opponents. In turn, the media provide, as Riggs puts it, "the coliseum for the candidates to battle it out."⁵⁶

Few, if any, studies have been targeted specifically at measuring coverage of the negative campaign. The controversy following the 1986 elections, however, suggests a need to dissect content to determine what topics are being emphasized. Is conflict so appealing that mudslinging and campaign speculation have become more newsworthy than comparisons of candidates' political records and stances on public policy issues? Is business competition forcing newspapers to focus coverage on the same events and story angles as each other, to avoid real investigation in an effort to be like the competition, to sacrifice solid issue coverage for the sake of entertainment? This thesis does not determine the causes nor

motives involved in election news presentation. It does, however, reveal patterns of coverage, so journalists may begin to answer these questions on their own.

ENDNOTES

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³Ibid., p. 111.

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⁶Jules Becker and Douglas A. Fuchs, "How Two Major California Dailies Covered Reagan vs. Brown," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 44 (1967), p. 645.

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⁸C. Richard Hofstetter, "Perception of News Bias in the 1972 Presidential Campaign," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 56 (Summer 1979), p. 374.

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¹⁰M. E. McCombs and D. L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 36 (1972), p. 177.

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¹⁴V. O. Key, Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York, 1961), p. 54.

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¹⁸Hunter S. Thompson, Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72 (New York, 1973), p. 93.

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²³Ibid.

²⁴John W. Windhauser, "A Comparative Content Analysis of How the Ohio Metropolitan Press Reported the 1971 Ohio Municipal Election Campaigns: An Index of Press Coverage" (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1975).

²⁵Timothy Crouse, The Boys on the Bus (New York, 1972), p. 8.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Charles K. Atkin, John Galloway and Oguz B. Nayman, "News Media Exposure, Political Knowledge and Campaign Interest," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1976), p. 231.

²⁹Ibid., p. 237.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 235-236.

³¹Doris A. Graber, "Press Coverage Patterns of Campaign News: the 1968 Presidential Race," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn 1971), p. 502.

³²Ibid., pp. 506-507.

³³Ibid., p. 512.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Doris A. Graber, "Effect of Incumbency on Coverage Patterns in the 1972 Presidential Campaign," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Autumn 1976), p. 500.

³⁶Ibid., p. 499.

³⁷Nancy Mathis, "Walters: Everything 'Wrong' But Victory," The Tulsa Tribune (Sept. 17, 1986), pp. A1-A4.

³⁸Robert G. Meadow, "Issue Emphasis and Public Opinion: The Media During the 1972 Presidential Campaign," American Politics Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 1976), p. 183.

³⁹Ibid., p. 189.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 186.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 177.

⁴²Ibid., p. 188.

⁴³Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 190-191.

⁴⁵John M. Russonello and Frank Wolf, "Newspaper Coverage of the 1976 and 1968 Presidential Campaigns," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Summer 1979), p. 360.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 364.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 360.

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⁴⁹Ibid., p. 362.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 360.

⁵¹Steven J. Riggs, "A Content Analysis of Newsweek, U. S. News and World Report and Time's Coverage of the 1980 Presidential Primaries" (unpub. M. A. thesis, Ball State University, 1980), p. 32.

⁵²Ibid., p. 31.

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⁵⁶Ibid., p. 59.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study employs content analysis to determine patterns of emphasis on substantive and surface news* in three Oklahoma dailies during the 1986 gubernatorial campaign. Bernard Berelson formally defines content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication."¹

Guido H. Stempel III puts it more simply:

Content analysis is a formal system for doing something that we all do informally rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observations of content.²

During the 1986 campaign, many people drew conclusions from their personal observations of newspaper content. As noted in earlier chapters, election coverage was criticized for what some people perceived to be overemphasis on the contest and underemphasis on the issues. In such cases, Stempel states that content analysis is a more effective research method "than merely recording the impressions of all those who have impressions about a given kind of content."³

Berelson recommended content analysis for evaluating the degree to which the media meet their own standards,⁴ one such example being the social-responsibility standards cited in Chapter I. He states, "Poten-

*See definitions on Pages 38-39.

tially, at least, content analysis can provide objective data on performance to compare with the agreed-upon norms stated in the form of communication standards."⁵

Scope of the Study

Because of the widespread criticism of newspaper reportage, it was hypothesized that a content analysis of 1986 gubernatorial campaign coverage would indicate more emphasis on surface news than substantive news. As Berelson states, however, "content analysis proceeds in terms of what-is-said, and not in terms of why-the-content-is-like-that (e.g., 'motives') or how-people-react (e.g., 'appeals' or 'responses')." ⁶ Thus, it seems desirable to state again that this study's purpose is to ascertain patterns of imbalanced coverage, if any, and not to speculate about biases of journalists or effects of such coverage on actual voting behavior.

Newspapers Selected

This thesis examines 1986 gubernatorial campaign coverage in Oklahoma's three largest daily newspapers--The Tulsa Tribune, Tulsa World and The Oklahoman. They were chosen because they are the highest-circulation metropolitan dailies with statewide readership. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, as of Sept. 30, 1986, the total average paid circulation of The Daily Oklahoman was 235,308; Saturday Oklahoman and Times, 221,713; and The Sunday Oklahoman, 325,137.⁷ All are morning papers. The Tulsa World's average morning paid circulation was 131,816, with the Sunday edition totalling 231,473. The Tulsa Tribune, an evening paper with no Sunday edition, had a circulation of

75,405.⁸

Time Frame

The research period was the entire general election campaign, from the day after the Democratic primary runoff (Wednesday, Sept. 17) through election day (Tuesday, Nov. 4). Examined were all news stories, news analyses, editorials and letters to the editor related to the Walters-Bellmon race. Letters to the editor and editorials were included because they reflect the controversies editors deem newsworthy. Photographs, cartoons and political advertisements were excluded.

Many researchers, including Riggs, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet,⁹ have selected sample time periods within a campaign and/or sample stories for analysis. However, in a 1967 study of the California gubernatorial race, Jules Becker and Douglas A. Fuchs questioned whether their three-week sample was representative of the entire campaign. They recommended that future studies cover the entire period.¹⁰ Therefore, this study examines all coverage for the entire general election campaign.

Editions Studied

Becker and Fuchs further recommended that all editions of each issue be studied (i. e., home-delivered and newsstand editions). As they stated:

Although the reader generally sees only one edition each day, the shift in 'play' from one page to another, and the changing of stories from one edition to another as the candidate makes news throughout the day, can affect the total over-all coverage presented by the newspaper.¹¹

While this recommendation has merit, the researcher believed that daily

analysis of one edition of each paper would be adequate for the purposes of this study. Thus, to avoid undue time and cost constraints, only the mail-delivered editions of the Tribune and World and the home-delivered "North" edition of the Oklahoman were studied.

Selection of Articles

After all issues were collected, articles were selected for analysis. To be selected, an article had to contain one or more specific references to the candidacy of Walters or Bellmon. The fact that neither candidate was a current public official made selection simpler, because the possibility was slim that either would appear in a non-campaign-related article, as neither was making news in other areas. The unit of analysis was the paragraph.

Coding by Judges

Definitions

Coding was conducted by a panel of three judges. Each held a bachelor's degree in journalism and had worked in news positions at daily papers. Judges together read each paragraph then decided by consensus upon the single most-dominant theme, classifying the paragraph into one of the following categories according to that theme:

1. Surface News

- a. Mudslinging: news containing specific references to negative comments about a candidate that were unrelated to issue stances or political records (i. e., charges against a candidate's integrity based solely on his age, socio-economic status or political allies).
- b. Horse Race: news of campaign strategy or election outcome speculation unrelated to specific mudsling-

ing charges (i. e., descriptions of TV commercials and pre-election poll results).

2. Substantive News

- a. Platforms: news detailing candidate's proposed programs or stances on issues.
- b. Qualifications: news of candidate's formal education, political record or other professional experience.

3. Other

News containing neither surface nor substantive elements (i. e., news of other candidates, other races, campaign schedules).

The panel method of discussion to pinpoint and classify the major theme of each paragraph eliminated problems that could arise with individual coding. For example, many paragraphs, like the following one, potentially contained multiple themes:

Bellmon, who won the governor's race in 1962 and then twice won U. S. Senate races, said, 'I realize I face an uphill battle. I know I'm the underdog.'¹²

In this example, references are made to Bellmon's political experience (Substantive News: Qualifications) as well as his standing in the "battle" against Walters (Surface News: Horse Race). The paragraph potentially could fall into both categories and classification would be confusing if individuals were forced to choose just one. By reaching a consensus on a single dominant theme, panel members avoided confusion and the need for coder reliability testing. This point is further discussed on Page 40, Orientation of Judges.

Coding Sequence

It should be noted that the panel judged items chronologically for all three papers at one sitting. For example, all relevant articles for

each newspaper's Wednesday, Sept. 21, issue were judged first, then all relevant articles for each newspaper's Thursday, Sept. 22, issue were judged next, and so on. By judging coverage of events chronologically across all three papers, coders received the information in much the same way that first-time readers received it. It was believed that first judging all issues of just one paper could slant coders' perceptions of the events when it came time to judge the other two papers. Knowledge received from one paper as to how campaign events unfolded and how new issues evolved might influence coders' judgments when they retraced the events in the other papers.

Orientation of Judges

Although the panel method lessened some problems of reliability, a judging orientation session still was necessary. Each judge was provided definitions of the categories and an explanation of research objectives. In essence, judges were told, surface news described the progress of the race and strategies used to win it, while substantive news provided the reader with information by which he could draw comparisons between candidates' political records and platforms.

In an explanation of definitions, judges were instructed that many paragraphs may contain multiple themes and they should look for the dominant one. They were given as an example the paragraph, which was cited on Page 39, in which Bellmon calls himself "the underdog." They were shown how it contains substantive elements (Bellmon's political experience) as well as surface elements (the "battle" against Walters). However, Bellmon's political background, in this case, is parenthetical to the broader theme describing his perceived position as the underdog.

On the whole, then, this paragraph ideally would be classified Surface News: Horse Race.

After judges were familiarized with the definitions, they conducted a trial coding session using articles about the U. S. Senate race between Republican Don Nickles and Democrat Jim Jones. The Nickles-Jones race had coincided with the Walters-Bellmon race and focused upon many of the same issues, including economic growth, political ethics and mudslinging. Because of this, judges were able to pretest the definitions and coding procedures using samples similar to, but removed from, the actual articles to be analyzed.

Refining the Categories

It was difficult to construct mutually exclusive categories, because they inherently overlapped. For example, use of mudslinging often is reported as a campaign tactic, part of the candidate's overall strategy. In this context, it could be classified Horse Race. For instance, a paragraph may simply list mudslinging alongside TV commercials and poll manipulation as a means to win the race. Here, the broader theme would be campaign strategy (Horse Race). A preview of the articles indicated that mere mention of mudslinging as a popular tactic was common. As noted earlier, many items criticized the practice as a way to win votes. It thus was necessary to qualify the Mudslinging subcategory, using it only for paragraphs containing references to specific charges and countercharges against candidates. This distinguished the actual reiteration of charges and countercharges from mere use of the terms "mudslinging" and "negative campaign." It is this media practice of reiterating and generating these non-issue-related

charges that this thesis aims, in part, to analyze. In past studies, the mudslinging element has been incorporated as just one determinant of the more general Horse Race category. Here, content is being further dissected, so Mudslinging becomes a separate classification.

Introduction of the separate Mudslinging subcategory posed other hurdles of overlapping. For example, some paragraphs may contain negative comments about a candidate's former political record or stances on current issues. Without qualified definitions, such a paragraph could fall under Mudslinging, Platforms or Qualifications--a combination of Surface and Substantive. Therefore, in this study, as long as the negative comments included references to specific political records or issue stances, they were classified under the respective Substantive subcategory. In short, the Mudslinging subcategory was further qualified to include only negative comments unrelated to issue stances or political records, such as charges against a candidate's character on the basis of his age or political allies.

For coding, each item was Xerox-copied onto a separate sheet of paper and labeled according to newspaper title, issue date and page number. Each paragraph was classified into one of the following subcategories: Mudslinging, Horse Race, Platforms, Qualifications. If it did not apply to any of the above as defined, it was classified Other and eventually discarded from analysis.

Statistical Method

Hypotheses 1 through 5 were test first.* After every paragraph

*See Hypotheses on Pages 12-13.

was labeled according to the subcategory in which it was classified, raw scores and percentages for each subcategory were totalled for each article. Paragraphs classified Other were discarded. Then scores for Mudslinging and Horse Race were combined to form the Surface category. Platforms and Qualifications were combined to form the Substantive category. Figures for each newspaper as a whole were similarly calculated. Finally, these figures were totalled for an overall measure of content emphasis across all three newspapers.

With data compiled in the above procedure, the simple Chi Square (χ^2) was employed to test Hypotheses 1 through 5. The simple Chi Square was conducted for each hypothesis on each newspaper, then on all newspapers as a whole.

The next series of hypotheses (6.1 through 6.5) predicted no differences among the newspapers regarding Hypotheses 1 through 5. In other words, Hypothesis 6.1 predicted no difference among the papers regarding Hypothesis 1; 6.2 predicted no difference regarding Hypothesis 2; 6.3 regarding Hypothesis 3; 6.4 regarding Hypothesis 4; and 6.5 regarding Hypothesis 5. Thus, Hypotheses 6.1 through 6.5 called for comparisons of the three papers' content emphases. However, because each paper differed in size of newshole, time of publication and number of issues each week, they could not be compared on raw scores alone. Therefore, the complex Chi Square calculated expected frequencies for each paper based on its total number of paragraphs in each category and subcategory. From this, it was possible to compare the three papers' coverage patterns regarding predictions in the first five hypotheses.

The complex Chi Square measured significant differences, if any,

among all three papers. Then, two-by-two Chi Squares showed where those differences, if any, existed--between the Tribune and World, Tribune and Oklahoman, or World and Oklahoman.

In all Chi Squares, significance was sought at the .05 confidence level or above.

Finally, the following Contingency (C) Coefficient was employed in cases where the overall complex Chi Square was significant:

$$C = \frac{\text{Observed } x^2}{\text{Observed } x^2 + \text{Grand Total}}$$

The C Coefficient indicated the strength of any relationship. The square of C indicated the percentage of variation accounted for by the independent variable in each case.

While other statistical tests were considered, it was decided the Chi Square and C Coefficient would best suit the purposes of this study.

ENDNOTES

¹Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (facsimile of 1952 edition, New York, 1971), p. 18.

²Guido H. Stempel III and Bruce H. Westley, eds., Research Methods in Mass Communication (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1981), p. 119.

³Ibid., p. 120.

⁴Berelson, p. 52.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 16.

⁷"ABC Audit Report: Newspaper" for The Daily Oklahoman, Saturday Oklahoman and Times and The Sunday Oklahoman as of Sept. 30, 1986 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 1987).

⁸"ABC Newspaper Publisher's Statement" for Tulsa World (morning and Sunday) and The Tulsa Tribune (evening) as of Sept. 30, 1986 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 1986).

⁹Steven J. Riggs, "A Content Analysis of Newsweek, U. S. News and World Report and Time's Coverage of the 1980 Presidential Primaries" (unpub. M. A. thesis, Ball State University, 1980), pp. 33-35; and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign (New York, 1968), pp. 110-111.

¹⁰Jules Becker and Douglas A. Fuchs, "How Two Major California Dailies Covered Reagan vs. Brown," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 44 (1967), p. 653.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²John Greiner, "Mudslinging Ruled Taboo By Top Two," The Daily Oklahoman (Sept. 18, 1986), p. 1.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Data Collection

The problem analyzed in this study was whether The Tulsa Tribune, Tulsa World and Oklahoman, in their coverage of the 1986 Oklahoma gubernatorial race, published more surface news than substantive news. Each of the first five hypotheses focused on a different aspect of the problem, providing a comprehensive view of content emphasis. The last series of hypotheses predicted there would be no differences among the papers in regard to the first five hypotheses.

A panel of three coders classified each paragraph, according to its dominant theme, into one of four subcategories--Mudslinging, Horse Race, Platforms, Qualifications. Those paragraphs whose themes did not apply to the subcategories were classified Other and discarded from analysis. The Mudslinging and Horse Race subcategories made up the Surface category. Platforms and Qualifications made up the Substantive category.

Every news story, news analysis, editorial and letter to the editor for the entire general election campaign was analyzed as long as it included some reference to the candidacy of Walters or Bellmon. Because many of the articles were "round-ups" of several races, many paragraphs were unrelated to the gubernatorial race. For this reason, a relatively high percentage of paragraphs in the articles studied were classified

Other. In all, 341 articles contained references to Walters or Bellmon. Of those articles, the Tribune published the most--149 (44%). The World published 101 (29%) and the Oklahoman published 91 (27%). Paragraphs totalled 6,060, of which 2,215 (37%) were published by the Tribune, 1,835 (30%) by the World, and 2,010 (33%) by the Oklahoman. Of the total paragraphs, 1,680 (28%) were classified Other. The Tribune had 536 (24%) of its total paragraphs classified Other; the World, 539 (29%); and the Oklahoman, 605 (30%). This left 1,679 applicable paragraphs for the Tribune, 1,296 for the World, and 1,405 for the Oklahoman--a combined total of 4,380.

Table I illustrates the breakdown of applicable paragraphs into subcategories for each newspaper and all papers combined.

TABLE I
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS IN
THE MUDSLINGING, HORSE RACE, PLATFORMS,
AND QUALIFICATIONS SUBCATEGORIES

	Mudslinging	Horse Race	Platforms	Qualifications	Totals
<u>Tribune</u>					
Raw Score	651	536	360	132	1,679
Percent	39%	32%	21%	8%	
<u>World</u>					
Raw Score	736	380	148	32	1,296
Percent	57%	29%	11%	3%	
<u>Oklahoman</u>					
Raw Score	648	487	223	47	1,405
Percent	46%	35%	16%	3%	
<u>Total</u>					
Raw Score	2,035	1,403	731	211	4,380
Percent	46%	32%	17%	5%	100%

The raw scores in Table I clearly show a pattern in content emphasis across the three papers. Every paper devoted most of its paragraphs to Mudslinging, followed by Horse Race, then Platforms, then Qualifications. Of the three papers, the World devoted the highest percentage of paragraphs to Mudslinging (57%) compared with the Oklahoman (46%) and Tribune (39%). Altogether the newspapers devoted 46% of applicable paragraphs to Mudslinging, 32% to Horse Race, 17% to Platforms and 5% to Qualifications.

Table II shows the breakdown of applicable paragraphs after sub-categories were combined to form the Surface and Substantive categories.

TABLE II
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS IN
THE SURFACE AND SUBSTANTIVE CATEGORIES

	Surface	Substantive	Totals
<u>Tribune</u>			
Raw Score	1,187	492	1,679
Percent	71%	29%	
<u>World</u>			
Raw Score	1,116	180	1,296
Percent	86%	14%	
<u>Oklahoman</u>			
Raw Score	1,135	270	1,405
Percent	81%	19%	
<u>Total</u>			
Raw Score	3,438	942	4,380
Percent	78%	22%	100%

Overall, 78% of the paragraphs analyzed were determined to be Surface and 22% Substantive. The raw scores indicate little difference in content emphasis among the three papers. Although the Tribune devoted fewer of its paragraphs to Surface than did the World and Oklahoman, it still had more than 70% in the Surface category.

Hypothesis 1

Raw scores alone appear to support Hypothesis I, which predicted more Surface paragraphs than Substantive in each paper and all papers combined. To statistically test the significance of the differences between the number of Surface and Substantive paragraphs, a simple Chi Square (x^2) was conducted on each paper and all papers combined using figures shown in Table II.

The tests revealed that all three papers individually and combined published significantly more surface news overall than substantive news. Results of the tests are below.

At one degree of freedom (df = 1):

Tribune ($x^2 = 287.7 > .001$)

World ($x^2 = 676 > .001$)

Oklahoman ($x^2 = 532.5 > .001$)

Combined ($x^2 = 1,422.4 > .001$)

It can be concluded then that the papers devoted significantly more paragraphs overall to news about mudslinging and the horse race than to news about candidates' platforms and qualifications. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported for each paper and all three combined.

Hypothesis 6.1

As noted, Hypothesis 6.1 predicted there would be no difference among the papers in the number of Surface and Substantive paragraphs each published. However, although all the papers published significantly more surface news, a complex Chi Square showed they did differ in the number of paragraphs each devoted to each category. Table III shows the breakdown of expected frequencies for each paper in each category according to its share of total paragraphs.

TABLE III

COMPLEX CHI SQUARE FREQUENCY TABLE--
SURFACE VERSUS SUBSTANTIVE*

	Surface	Substantive	Total Observed
<u>Tribune</u>	Observed 1,187 Expected 1,317.90 Difference -130.90 x^2 13.00	Observed 492 Expected 361.10 Difference 130.90 x^2 47.45	1,679
<u>World</u>	Observed 1,116 Expected 1,017.27 Difference 98.73 x^2 9.58	Observed 180 Expected 278.73 Difference -98.73 x^2 34.97	1,296
<u>Oklahoman</u>	Observed 1,135 Expected 1,102.83 Difference 32.17 x^2 .94	Observed 270 Expected 302.17 Difference -32.17 x^2 3.43	1,405
Total Observed	3,438	942	4,405

*At $df = 2$, combined $x^2 = 109.37 > .001$.

The combined Chi Square at $df = 2$ is 109.37, which is significant at the .001 level. Thus, null Hypothesis 6.1 is not supported. While all the papers stressed Surface over Substantive, the distribution for each category differed significantly among the papers. It can be said, therefore, that there was a relationship between newspaper and paragraph category. However, the Contingency (C) Coefficient of .1561 indicates that the relationship was weak. About 2% of the variation in paragraph category was accounted for by newspaper, leaving other unknown variables to account for the rest.

Finally, Chi Squares were conducted between papers to find where the differences existed. At $df = 1$, the tests showed significant differences between the Tribune and World ($x^2 = 99.39 > .001$), Tribune and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 41.83 > .001$), and World and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 13.78 > .001$).

Hypothesis 2

Although it was shown that the papers published significantly more Surface paragraphs than Substantive paragraphs, Hypothesis 2 focused on another angle of content emphasis: whole articles. That is, Hypothesis 2 predicted there would be more articles that contained some surface news but no substantive news than articles that contained any substantive news at all. The basic question raised by Hypothesis 2 was whether the newspapers tended to devote entire articles to the surface angle and, if so, to what extent.

It was found that 203 (60%) of the total 341 articles contained some Surface paragraphs but no Substantive paragraphs. The remaining 138 (40%) did contain some Substantive paragraphs, but 98 of those

articles also contained Surface paragraphs.*

Table IV shows the breakdown of articles in the All-Surface category and Some-Substantive category.

TABLE IV
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS IN THE
ALL-SURFACE AND SOME-SUBSTANTIVE CATEGORIES

	All-Surface	Some-Substantive	Totals
<u>Tribune</u>			
Raw Score	80	69	149
Percent	54%	46%	
<u>World</u>			
Raw Score	69	32	101
Percent	68%	32%	
<u>Oklahoman</u>			
Raw Score	54	37	91
Percent	59%	41%	
<u>Total</u>			
Raw Score	203	138	341
Percent	60%	40%	100%

*For the record, raw scores showed that 40 (12%) of the total articles contained substantive news, but no surface news. The Tribune published more (17% of its total articles) All-Substantive articles than did the World (9% of its total) and the Oklahoman (5% of its total). The point should be made that if stories containing a mixture of Surface and Substantive paragraphs were weeded out, and the number of All-Surface articles was compared with the number of All-Substantive articles, the difference would be much greater (60% All-Surface compared with 12% All-Substantive).

Though the raw scores in Table IV show that all the papers published more All-Surface articles than Some-Substantive articles, Chi Squares were conducted to determine whether the differences were significant or simply due to chance.

The Chi Squares indicated that Hypothesis 2 was supported for the World ($x^2 = 13.55 > .001$, at $df = 1$), but not for the Tribune ($x^2 = .81 < .30$) or the Oklahoman ($x^2 = 3.18 < .05$). The World, therefore, was the only paper of the three that published a significantly higher number of All-Surface articles than articles containing all substantive news or even a mixture of surface and substantive news.

While Hypothesis 2 was not supported for the Tribune or Oklahoman, it should be noted that the Chi Square for the Oklahoman lacked only about seven-tenths of a point to be significant at the .05 confidence level. Therefore, although the difference was not statistically significant for the Oklahoman, it was closer to being so than for the Tribune. This point is further illustrated below in the testing of Hypothesis 6.2.

In regard to individual newspapers, only one--the World--was found to have a significantly higher number of All-Surface articles. However, when scores for all the papers were combined, the Chi Square indicated that their total coverage contained a significantly higher number of All-Surface articles ($x^2 = 12.39 > .001$, at $df = 1$). So, for the three papers as a whole, Hypothesis 2 was supported. This finding was likely due to the relatively high number of All-Surface articles in the Oklahoman, as noted in the previous paragraph.

Hypothesis 6.2

Hypothesis 6.2 predicted no difference among the papers regarding Hypothesis 2. As illustrated by Table V, the combined Chi Square supported the null hypothesis ($\chi^2 = 5.35 < .05$, at $df = 2$).

TABLE V
COMPLEX CHI SQUARE FREQUENCY TABLE--
ALL-SURFACE VERSUS SOME-SUBSTANTIVE*

	All-Surface		Some-Substantive		Total Observed
<u>Tribune</u>	Observed	80	Observed	69	149
	Expected	88.70	Expected	60.30	
	Difference	-8.70	Difference	8.70	
	χ^2	.85	χ^2	1.26	
<u>World</u>	Observed	69	Observed	32	101
	Expected	60.13	Expected	40.87	
	Difference	8.87	Difference	-8.87	
	χ^2	1.31	χ^2	1.93	
<u>Oklahoman</u>	Observed	54	Observed	37	91
	Expected	54.17	Expected	36.83	
	Difference	-.17	Difference	.17	
	χ^2	.001	χ^2	.001	
Total Observed	203		138	341	

*At $df = 2$, combined $\chi^2 = 5.35 < .05$.

It can be concluded, then, that although Chi Squares for the individual papers showed mixed results, the difference in coverage among the three papers was not significant. This means that when all three papers were taken into account, there was no relationship between news-

paper and the number of All-Surface or Some-Substantive articles each chose to publish.

However, Chi Squares conducted between papers, showed that a difference did exist between the Tribune and World. The World published a significantly higher number of All-Surface articles relative to its total than did the Tribune relative to its total ($x^2 = 5.58 > .02$, at $df = 1$). No difference was found between the Tribune and Oklahoman ($x^2 = .73 < .30$) or the World and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 1.68 < .10$).

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 elaborated on points raised in Hypothesis 2. Referencing the same articles, the third hypothesis predicted that articles containing any Substantive paragraphs would still contain more Surface paragraphs overall. In the testing of Hypothesis 2, it was found that, as a whole, the newspapers devoted more entire articles to surface news with no mention of substantive news. The basic question raised in Hypothesis 3 was whether surface news outweighed substantive news even in articles containing substantive news.

Table VI shows the breakdown of Surface and Substantive paragraphs in the articles earlier classified Some-Substantive. Raw scores in the table comprise only those paragraphs from articles containing substantive news. The figures indicate that not only did the Tribune publish more total paragraphs (957, 46% of combined total) in its Some-Substantive articles than did the World or Oklahoman, but it was the only paper that devoted more of those paragraphs to Substantive (51%) than to Surface (49%). Thus, it was clear, through raw scores alone, that Hypothesis 3 could not be supported for the Tribune. However, a Chi Square still was

conducted to determine whether the Tribune published significantly more Substantive paragraphs than Surface paragraphs in these articles. The test revealed no significant differences ($x^2 = .76 < .30$, at $df = 1$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Tribune carried a balance of Surface and Substantive in articles that contained substantive news.

TABLE VI
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS IN THE SURFACE
AND SUBSTANTIVE CATEGORIES FROM ARTICLES
CONTAINING SUBSTANTIVE NEWS

	Surface	Substantive	Totals
<u>Tribune</u>			
Raw Score	465	492	957
Percent	49%	51%	
<u>World</u>			
Raw Score	336	180	516
Percent	65%	35%	
<u>Oklahoman</u>			
Raw Score	330	270	600
Percent	55%	45%	
<u>Total</u>			
Raw Score	1,131	942	2,073
Percent	55%	45%	100%

The World and Oklahoman, on the other hand, each devoted a significantly higher number of paragraphs to Surface than to Substantive. The World had 336 Surface and 180 Substantive ($x^2 = 47.16 > .001$). The Oklahoman had 330 Surface and 270 Substantive ($x^2 = 6.00 > .02$). Hypo-

thesis 3 was therefore supported for the World and Oklahoman.

When all newspapers were combined, the Tribune's differences apparently were absorbed by the others'. So, for the three papers as a whole, Hypothesis 3 was supported ($x^2 = 17.23 > .001$).

Hypothesis 6.3

Hypothesis 6.3 called for a comparison among the papers in regard to Hypothesis 3. The complex Chi Square illustrated in Table VII addressed the main question posed by Hypothesis 6.3: Do the Tribune, World and Oklahoman differ in the number of Surface and Substantive paragraphs each publishes within articles containing substantive news?

TABLE VII

COMPLEX CHI SQUARE FREQUENCY TABLE--SURFACE VERSUS SUBSTANTIVE
IN ARTICLES CONTAINING SUBSTANTIVE NEWS*

	Surface	Substantive	Total Observed
<u>Tribune</u>	Observed 465	Observed 492	957
	Expected 522.13	Expected 434.87	
	Difference -57.13	Difference 57.13	
	x^2 6.25	x^2 7.50	
<u>World</u>	Observed 336	Observed 180	516
	Expected 281.52	Expected 234.48	
	Difference 54.48	Difference -54.48	
	x^2 10.54	x^2 12.66	
<u>Oklahoman</u>	Observed 330	Observed 270	600
	Expected 327.35	Expected 272.65	
	Difference 2.65	Difference -2.65	
	x^2 .02	x^2 .03	
Total Observed	1,131	942	2,073

*At $df = 2$, $x^2 = 37.00 > .001$

Table VII illustrates the breakdown of expected frequencies in the categories for each paper, depending on its share of the total paragraphs. At $df = 2$, a Chi Square of 37 showed that the three papers did differ significantly in the number of paragraphs each devoted to surface news versus substantive news within articles containing substantive news. Hypothesis 6.3 was therefore ^{not} supported.

The significant Chi Square indicated there was a relationship between newspaper and paragraph category, but a C Coefficient of .1324 showed the relationship was weak. The square of C (.0175) indicated that only about 2% of the variation in paragraph class could be accounted for by newspaper. Other unknown variables accounted for the other 98%.

The complex Chi Square revealed there were differences among the papers regarding Hypothesis 3. Subsequent two-by-two Chi Squares were conducted to determine where those differences existed. In short, significant differences were found in all comparisons as shown below.

At $df = 1$:

Tribune and World ($x^2 = 36.92 > .001$)

Tribune and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 6.06 > .02$)

World and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 11.81 > .001$)

For what it may be worth, the smallest difference, as noted above, occurred between the Tribune and Oklahoman. The World differed more with the Tribune than with the Oklahoman. All differences, however, far exceeded the required .05 confidence level.

Hypothesis 4

It has so far been established that the papers generally emphasized

surface news more than they emphasized substantive news. The remaining hypotheses dealt with distribution of paragraphs into subcategories. Hypothesis 4 predicted that more Surface paragraphs would fall into Mudslinging than Horse Race. Hypothesis 6.4 stated there would be no difference among the papers in regard to Hypothesis 4. In other words, based on contentions that negative campaigning is increasing, it was expected that news detailing mudslinging would outweigh news about the actual progress of the race--who was ahead, behind, etc.

Table VIII illustrates the breakdown of Surface paragraphs into the Mudslinging and Horse Race subcategories.

TABLE VIII
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS IN THE
MUDSLINGING AND HORSE RACE SUBCATEGORIES

	Mudslinging	Horse Race	Totals
<u>Tribune</u>			
Raw Score	651	536	1,187
Percent	55%	45%	
<u>World</u>			
Raw Score	736	380	1,116
Percent	66%	34%	
<u>Oklahoman</u>			
Raw Score	648	487	1,135
Percent	57%	43%	
<u>Total</u>			
Raw Score	2,035	1,403	3,438
Percent	59%	41%	100%

The raw scores in Table VIII indicate that the three papers as a whole devoted 2,035 (59%) of the total 3,438 Surface paragraphs to Mudslinging compared with 1,403 (41%) to Horse Race.

The outcome was similar for the individual newspapers. Every paper published more Mudslinging paragraphs than Horse Race paragraphs, although the margin was much greater for the World (66% to 34%) than for the Tribune (55% to 45%) or the Oklahoman (57% to 43%), whose scores were fairly comparable to each other.

The raw scores suggested, then, that although every one of the papers published a higher percentage of Mudslinging paragraphs, the Tribune and Oklahoman each published a greater balance of Mudslinging and Horse Race than did the World. To test this theory, Chi Squares were conducted on each paper, then all of the papers as a whole, to determine whether differences between the number of Mudslinging and Horse Race paragraphs were significant. The results of those Chi Squares are below.

At $df = 1$:

Tribune ($x^2 = 11.14 > .001$)

World ($x^2 = 113.56 > .001$)

Oklahoman ($x^2 = 22.84 > .001$)

Combined ($x^2 = 116.18 > .001$)

While the statistics show a much higher Chi Square for the World than for the other two papers, all the Chi Squares were well above the required .05 confidence level. In fact, all the differences were significant at the .001 level. It can thus be concluded that conditions other than chance caused all the papers to publish more mudslinging news than horse race news. Hypothesis 4 is therefore supported for each paper individually and all three combined.

Hypothesis 6.4

Tests for Hypothesis 4 showed all the papers published significantly more Mudslinging than Horse Race. While the papers clearly were similar in this respect, it was still unknown whether they differed in the number of paragraphs each allotted to each subcategory. Hypothesis 6.4 predicted there would be no difference among the papers in regard to Hypothesis 4. The complex Chi Square made it possible to determine expected frequencies in each subcategory for each newspaper depending on its share of the combined total Surface paragraphs. From this, it was possible to compare the observed frequencies to reveal significant differences, if any, among the papers' content emphases. Table IX shows the combined Chi Square of 32.46, which is significant at the .01 level.

TABLE IX
COMPLEX CHI SQUARE FREQUENCY TABLE--MUDSLINGING VERSUS HORSE RACE*

	Mudslinging		Horse Race		Total Observed
<u>Tribune</u>	Observed	651	Observed	536	1,187
	Expected	702.60	Expected	484.40	
	Difference	-51.60	Difference	51.60	
	x^2	3.79	x^2	5.50	
<u>World</u>	Observed	736	Observed	380	1,116
	Expected	660.58	Expected	455.42	
	Difference	75.42	Difference	-75.42	
	x^2	8.61	x^2	12.49	
<u>Oklahoman</u>	Observed	648	Observed	487	1,135
	Expected	671.82	Expected	463.16	
	Difference	-23.82	Difference	23.82	
	x^2	.84	x^2	1.23	
Total Observed		2,035		1,403	3,438

*At $df = 2$, combined $x^2 = 32.46 > .01$.

Because the Chi Square shows a significant difference among the papers in the amount of news they devoted to Mudslinging versus Horse Race, it lends no support to null Hypothesis 6.4. However, while Table IX indicates a relationship between newspaper and the amount of Mudslinging versus Horse Race, the C Coefficient (.0967) shows that the relationship was weak. When squared, the C Coefficient reveals that only about 1% of the variation in paragraph distribution was accounted for by newspaper. The other 99% resulted from unknown variables.

Knowing there was a significant difference among papers made it desirable to analyze further to determine between which papers the differences existed.

Results of the Chi Squares between newspapers showed significant differences between the Tribune and World ($x^2 = 29.62 > .001$, at $df = 1$) and between the World and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 18.64 > .001$). However, no difference was found between the Tribune and Oklahoman ($x^2 = 1.189 < .20$).

Once again, the two-by-two Chi Squares showed the greatest differences to be between the World and Tribune and the smallest difference to be between the Tribune and Oklahoman.

Hypothesis 5

Just as the Surface category was divided into the subcategories of Mudslinging and Horse Race, the Substantive category was divided into Platforms and Qualifications. As stated in Chapter 1, Hypothesis 5 predicted that journalists would consider Walters' and Bellmon's platforms more timely, and thus more newsworthy, than the candidates' past political experiences. Because neither candidate held an office during the

campaign, reporters had the choice of dwelling on decades-old political achievements and educational honors or reporting the candidates' stances on salient 1986 election issues. For this reason, Hypothesis 5 stated that the newspapers would devote significantly more Substantive paragraphs to Platforms than to Qualifications. Finally, Hypothesis 6.5 predicted there would be no difference among the papers in the amount of Platform news each presented relative to the amount of Qualifications news.

As shown by raw scores and percentages in Table X, the papers individually and combined devoted more Substantive paragraphs to Platforms than to Qualifications.

TABLE X
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS IN THE
PLATFORMS AND QUALIFICATIONS SUBCATEGORIES

	Platforms	Qualifications	Totals
<u>Tribune</u>			
Raw Score	360	132	492
Percent	73%	27%	
<u>World</u>			
Raw Score	148	32	180
Percent	82%	18%	
<u>Oklahoman</u>			
Raw Score	223	47	270
Percent	83%	17%	
<u>Total</u>			
Raw Score	731	211	942
Percent	78%	22%	100%

The raw scores show that each paper devoted more than 70% of its Substantive news to Platforms. When all papers' scores were combined and analyzed as a whole, 78% of total Substantive paragraphs were in the Platforms category. There was little doubt, then, that Hypothesis 5 would hold true and Chi Squares supported it for each paper and all papers combined. The results are listed below.

At $df = 1$:

Tribune ($x^2 = 105.67 > .001$)

World ($x^2 = 74.76 > .001$)

Oklahoman ($x^2 = 114.73 > .001$)

Combined ($x^2 = 287.05 > .001$)

Hypothesis 6.5

Clearly, the Chi Squares showed that every paper published significantly more news about candidates' platforms and stances on issues than candidates' past records and qualifications. But, while all papers appeared to distribute the different types of substantive news similarly, was there a difference among them in the amount of news devoted to Platforms relative to the amount devoted to Qualifications? The complex Chi Square results in Table XI show that the papers did differ significantly. The combined Chi Square of 11.64 at $df = 2$, indicates a difference significant at the .01 level. This means there was a relationship between newspaper and paragraph distribution. Therefore, Hypothesis 6.5 was not supported.

Because a significant relationship was found among papers, a C Coefficient was conducted to determine the strength of that relationship. The C of .0122 indicated a weak relationship. Only about .01% of var-

iation in Substantive subcategory emphasis was accounted for by newspaper. The rest was unexplained variance.

Although the complex Chi Square results in Table XI indicate a significant difference among the papers, further Chi Square analysis was designed to pinpoint where those differences existed between the papers.

TABLE XI
COMPLEX CHI SQUARE FREQUENCY TABLE--
PLATFORMS VERSUS QUALIFICATIONS*

	Platforms		Qualifications		Total Observed
<u>Tribune</u>	Observed	360	Observed	132	492
	Expected	381.80	Expected	110.20	
	Difference	-21.80	Difference	21.80	
	x^2	1.24	x^2	4.31	
<u>World</u>	Observed	148	Observed	32	180
	Expected	139.68	Expected	40.32	
	Difference	8.32	Difference	-8.32	
	x^2	.50	x^2	1.72	
<u>Oklahoman</u>	Observed	223	Observed	47	270
	Expected	209.52	Expected	60.48	
	Difference	13.48	Difference	-13.48	
	x^2	.87	x^2	3.00	
Total Observed		731		211	942

*At $df = 2$, combined $x^2 = 11.64 > .01$.

The Chi Squares conducted between papers showed that the Tribune differed significantly from the World ($x^2 = 5.85 > .02$, at $df = 1$) as well as from the Oklahoman ($x^2 = 8.6 > .01$) in the amount of platform news it published relative to qualification news. On the other hand, there was no statistical difference found between the World and Okla-

homan ($\chi^2 = .0097 < .90$).

In summary, the tests showed that the papers as a whole carried more surface than substantive news. There were, however, noteworthy differences between papers. These differences and their implications are further explored in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Summary

This study was inspired by complaints during the 1986 Oklahoma gubernatorial race that politicians and the media were denying voters substantive facts about the candidates. Instead, critics charged, voters were subjected to mudslinging sideshows and media charades that were entertaining but offered no in-depth issue information.

This thesis was written on the premise that newspapers have a social responsibility to publish information upon which readers may base knowledgeable voting decisions. It was contended that such decisions require exposure to a balance of "surface" news about candidates' images and campaign strategies and "substantive" news detailing their platforms and qualifications for office. It was predicted that newspapers do not offer a balance of coverage at all, but rather publish a disproportionately high amount of contest-oriented surface news in relation to issue-oriented substantive news.

Content analysis was employed to examine 1986 Oklahoma gubernatorial campaign coverage in the state's three largest daily newspapers-- The Tulsa Tribune, Tulsa World and The Oklahoman. The analysis was confined to coverage of the race between Democrat David Walters and Republican Henry Bellmon. Analyzed were all news stories, analyses, editorials and letters to the editor published during the general elec-

tion campaign and referring specifically to the Walters-Bellmon race. The unit of analysis was the paragraph.

A panel of three journalists coded each paragraph according to its main theme into one of the following subcategories: Mudslinging, Horse Race, Platforms, Qualifications. Mudslinging and Horse Race were then combined to form the Surface category. Paragraphs that were unrelated to the Walters-Bellmon race or did not apply to any of the subcategories were classified Other and discarded.

Table XII summarizes how Hypotheses 1-5 fared for each paper and all papers combined. The X's indicate supported hypotheses.

TABLE XII
SUPPORTED HYPOTHESES FOR EACH PAPER
AND ALL PAPERS COMBINED

	Hypotheses				
	1	2	3	4	5
<u>Tribune</u>	X			X	X
<u>World</u>	X	X	X	X	X
<u>Oklahoman</u>	X		X	X	X
<u>Combined</u>	X	X	X	X	X

As noted in Table XII, all five hypotheses held true for the World, four held true for the Oklahoman and three for the Tribune. When figures for all papers were combined, all five hypotheses were supported.

This means that the World not only devoted more of its paragraphs overall to surface news, but more whole articles as well. Even in its articles that contained some substantive news, the World published significantly more surface news. When the Surface and Substantive categories were broken down, the World predictably published more Mudslinging than Horse Race and more Platforms than Qualifications.

Conclusions were the same for the Oklahoman with one exception: It did not publish a significantly higher number of All-Surface articles relative to articles containing some substantive news.

Finally, the Tribune, like the others, published more Surface than Substantive paragraphs overall. It, however, did not devote more of its whole articles to Surface as did the World. Nor did it have more Surface than Substantive paragraphs in those articles that contained some substantive news. The Tribune did, as predicted, publish more Mudslinging than Horse Race and more Platforms than Qualifications.

The individual scores indicated that the Oklahoman provided somewhat more balanced content emphasis than did the World, and the Tribune provided more balance than did both other papers. However, the papers' combined figures supported all five hypotheses, indicating that, on the whole, content emphasis was imbalanced in favor of surface news.

The testing of null Hypotheses 6.1-6.5 was two-fold. First, among-paper differences were sought, taking into account each paper's share of the combined totals. Second, between-paper tests indicated more specifically where the differences, if any, existed.

In contrast to the predictions, the three papers were fairly dissimilar regarding Hypotheses 1-5. Significant differences among papers were found in all cases except Hypothesis 6.2. Thus, the among-paper

tests did not statistically support the contention that media tend to converge and report news in much the same way as their competitors.

However, it should be noted that the among-paper tests examined only the distribution ratio of paragraphs in categories being compared. For example, figures for all three papers individually supported Hypothesis 1, which predicted more Surface paragraphs than Substantive paragraphs. However, the among-paper Chi Square showed that the papers differed significantly in how each distributed news across the categories. Thus, it was possible for the among-paper Chi Square to indicate a significant difference even when all papers supported the same hypothesis. Because of this, the second series of testing--the between-paper Chi Squares--was more telling.

These tests extracted differences between papers regarding each of the first five hypotheses. Table XIII shows the between-paper results. The X's indicate instances in which the null hypotheses were supported, hence where no differences existed.

TABLE XIII
SUPPORTED NULL HYPOTHESES FOR
EACH PAIR OF NEWSPAPERS

	Null Hypotheses				
	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5
<u>Tribune-World</u>					
<u>Tribune-Oklahoman</u>		X		X	
<u>World-Oklahoman</u>		X			X

As Table XIII illustrates, the Tribune and World differed significantly in regard to every hypothesis.

The Tribune and Oklahoman did not differ in the amount of whole articles each devoted to All-Surface and, incidentally, neither did the World and Oklahoman. So, in regard to Hypothesis 2, the Oklahoman was somewhere between the Tribune and World.

The Tribune and Oklahoman did not differ in the way each distributed news across the Mudslinging and Horse Race subcategories. But the World and Oklahoman differed in this area, as did the World and Tribune.

The World and Oklahoman did not differ in regard to Hypothesis 5. This indicates they were similar in their distribution of news across the Platforms and Qualifications subcategories.

Perhaps the clearest conclusion that may be drawn from the testing of Hypotheses 6.1-6.5 is that the Tribune and World differed sharply in every area while the Oklahoman seemed to fall somewhere between them.

This finding may be especially noteworthy when market factors are considered. The Tribune and World, both thriving Tulsa papers, may differ in their coverage out of necessity. For the Tulsa papers to survive in their competitive market, it would seem logical for each to find its own niche. In this case, it appears the Tribune catered to a "thinking" readership by offering more details of candidates' political records and platforms than its competitor did. The World apparently geared its coverage more to readers who preferred the "human interest" angle to the issue angle, thus targeting its own share of the market.

Meanwhile, Oklahoma City's Oklahoman, which had no daily competitor,

seemed to take a middle-of-the-road approach to distributing news across the subcategories. In almost every instance, raw scores and percentages for the Oklahoman fell between those for the Tribune and World. This does not mean that the Oklahoman had a greater balance of surface and substantive news; it means that, in regard to news distribution, it more closely resembled the Tribune and World individually than they resembled each other.

Regarding balanced coverage, the Tribune generally provided a more proportionate number of Surface to Substantive paragraphs than did the other papers. It would seem then that the Tribune was more concerned than the others with informing its readers about candidates' qualifications and actual stances on issues. Be that as it may, the Tribune still tended to emphasize Surface over Substantive.

The World published the least balanced coverage of the three papers in every comparison. In other words, the margins between categories and between subcategories were wider for the World in every instance than for the Tribune and Oklahoman.

The World also was the only paper that published significantly more All-Surface articles than articles containing even one Substantive paragraph. It thus is reasonable to conclude that the World was the worst offender of surface reporting--sacrificing solid issue coverage for entertainment. The Tribune, guilty as it was of reporting more surface news overall, still practiced the most balanced content emphasis.

Recommendations

Clearly, the Tribune, World and Oklahoman emphasized the mudslinging and horse race elements of the campaign more than public policy

issues and candidate platforms. This finding in itself was not surprising, given the widespread use and criticism of the negative campaign.

Perhaps more enlightening were the definite patterns of emphasis that emerged for each paper. In every test, the World and Tribune were far apart with the Oklahoman situated between them. This indicated definite role-playing by competing papers, each catering to a different segment of the market.

Future researchers may wish to study the effect of newspaper competition on surface-versus-substantive content emphasis.

Another topic worth exploring would be the effect of non-incumbencies on content emphasis. As noted on Page 27, Doris A. Graber reported increased coverage of platforms and qualifications in races involving incumbents. The findings of this study seem to support Graber's theory. It could be that the Bellmon-Walters race generated more surface than substantive news because neither candidate had a recent political record to discuss. It would be beneficial to repeat this methodology on a race involving an incumbent or current holder of another political office.

This study was designed to measure the amount of issue-oriented substantive news published during a campaign relative to the amount of contest-oriented surface news. It found, in part, that Oklahoma's three largest newspapers published at least three times more surface than substantive news about the 1986 gubernatorial race. This indicated that readers received a lot of information about campaign tactics, such as mudslinging and advertising blitzes, but very few facts about candidates' positions on real public policy issues.

Granted, a candidate's media savvy, appearance, age, political

friends, even his love life, may be valid indications of his ability to serve. But are they more valid than his political record, proposed legislation and issue stances? It seems that, in the future, responsible journalists might well demand more substance from politicians and more balance from themselves.

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