

Citizen or Comrade?: Terrorist Threat in Election Campaigns in Russia and the U.S.

By Sarah Oates and Monica Postelnicu

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Sarah Oates
Politics Department
University of Glasgow
Glasgow, Scotland G12 8RT
United Kingdom
Email: s.oates@socsci.gla.ac.uk

Monica Postelnicu
College of Journalism and Communications
University of Florida
Post Office Box 118400
Gainesville, FL 32611
U.S.A.
Email: pmonica@ufl.edu

Abstract:

Terrorist acts have created more awareness of terrorism and fear of terrorist violence in countries around the world. This paper examines the role of terrorist threat in election campaigns in Russia in the 2003-2004 election cycle as well as in the 2004 Bush-Kerry race in the United States. The study discusses messages about terrorist threat disseminated by candidates and political parties; coverage on nightly television news during the campaigns; and focus-group findings about the reaction to the framing of terrorism in elections. What emerges is that fear tends to drive support for “strong” leaders. While this is unsurprising in the face of emerging authoritarianism in Russia, it is a more intriguing finding in the case of the United States. This study considers how the climate of fear may have influenced the tenor of political messages as well as vote choice in two very different regimes. It discusses differences in how major television channels presented messages about terrorism during elections. In addition, it analyses how the electorates felt about the political spin on terrorism as well as media coverage through focus groups in both Russia and the United States.

Introduction

The threat of terrorism has become a major theme in both Russian and American politics since 9/11 and the escalation of terrorist attacks related to the Chechen War in Russia. This paper, part of the New Security Challenges Project funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council, examines the role of terrorist threat and security concerns among voters in the 2004 U.S. presidential election as well as in the most recent round of parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia (2003 and 2004). The paper uses a content analysis of party platforms and paid political advertising; a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the nightly election news on the major television networks; and focus groups with citizens to discuss their reaction to the framing of terrorism threat. There are several central questions to this inquiry. First, do parties and candidates engage in the issue of terrorism in a way that offers rational policy suggestions or is anti-terrorism merely conflated with nationalism? What sorts of images, words and policies relating to terrorism were used in paid political advertising in both countries? Is there a difference in the ways in which various candidates or political parties discussed terrorism, particularly in statements on the nightly news? Is there variation in the way in which major news channels (state-run versus commercial in Russia and network versus cable in the U.S.) choose to cover or “frame” the issue of terrorism? Finally, how did the voters (as expressed in focus groups in Moscow, Ulyanovsk, Florida, Missouri and the D.C. area) react to these tactics? Did they perceive differences in the ways candidates, parties or the news media presented their plans for combating terrorism? How important were these impressions and the general concerns about terrorism in determining their vote choice? Do they react more as comrades in an authoritarian state or citizens in a free society? This research relates to several broader issues in comparative political communication, notably whether elections are used as a time of political learning and societal consolidation or whether elections actually serve to harden lines of dissention and fear within countries. This project is being conducted with colleagues at the University of Florida, Virginia Tech and the University of Missouri.¹

Context of the Study

Benson (2004) and Gitlin (2004) point to comparative media and politics as the most promising area in which to develop useful models of media behavior that are more analytical than descriptive. In particular, Benson feels that comparative work lifts political scientists away from considering the media as a dependent variable: “The challenge, then, is to bring the same sophisticated analysis to bear on understanding media as an *independent* variable, as part of the process of political meaning making rather than just a convenient indicator of the outcome. This is a worthy, but difficult task” (p. 276, emphasis in original). There have been some useful studies that have compared media in foreign countries, particularly in times of elections, which have offered important comparative analysis and influenced the study in this paper (particularly Semetko et al. 1991 as well as Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995). This study is an attempt to look at how the politicians talk about terrorism and security issues; how major television networks cover these issues in the campaign; and how the audience responds in both Russia and the United States.² The study lacks a large public opinion survey that could trace the statistical relationship among viewing patterns, attitudes and vote choice. However, this study does offer important

¹ Lynda Kaid, John Tedesco, Mitchell McKinney, Andrew Williams. The authors would like to thank members of the U-Vote team at the University of Florida (including Kristen Landreville and Hyun Jung Yun) for their work collecting and coding U.S. television news.

² The final component of the project, also funded by the ESRC New Security Challenges Programme will look at these issues in the 2005 British parliamentary elections.

qualitative comments from citizens in two countries about their reaction to terrorism coverage in elections, as well as works to develop a body of knowledge and analysis about the form of that coverage. In other words, this project is seeking the right questions to ask of an audience when considering how they evaluate and use messages about terrorism and international security in elections.

If the traditional view of the relationship between media and terrorism has been the dangerously symbiotic relationship of the two (Wilkinson, 1997), this study looks at how the public reaction to terrorism is reflected in voting behavior. This thrusts the study into a large and complex literature regarding the relative balance among party identification, context, the influence of political advertising, the reach of campaign news and other factors. Terrorist threat can pervade this model at every level – it can reinforce or challenge partisan identification if people feel particularly threatened or angry. The specter of terrorism will introduce issues and topics into elections, particularly in places such as the United States and Russia in which terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon for the public (as opposed to countries such as the United Kingdom or Spain). Candidates and parties may choose to use a ‘fear factor’ in their advertising or messages or they may appeal to feelings of nationalism. Candidates and parties may choose to moot particular policies, such as more policing of immigrants or laws limiting hate speech. The voters themselves may seek different messages or react in unexpected ways in the wake of a terrorist attack.

The most relevant link between a terrorist attack and elections was on March 11, 2004, just three days before Spain’s parliamentary elections. More than 200 people were killed and 1,500 wounded when bombs were detonated in three commuter trains (Van Biezen, 2005). Before the tragedy, it had been assumed that the incumbent center-right party would consolidate its predominant position. However, the Socialist Party had a surprise victory, seeing its share of the votes rise substantially to dominate the center-right party (Van Biezen, p. 102). Were voters reacting viscerally to the event or even to the ruling party’s initial attempts to point to ETA rather than Islamic terrorists, who were eventually deemed responsible? As Van Biezen points out, it is not so clear: “To interpret the election result as a victory for terrorism, as some observers could not resist, and to insinuate that voters who supported the Socialists somehow showed a reluctance decisively to reject terrorism, would be grossly unfair” (p. 108).

The evidence is quite strong, however, that there was a significant effect on the 2004 Spanish election outcome from the March 11 attacks. Most intriguingly of all, Van Biezen cites evidence that while most Spanish voters felt the terrorist attacks had not affected *their own* voting behavior, the overwhelmingly majority reported that they felt the attacks had affected the voting behavior of *others*. In a post-election survey in *El País* on April 4, 2004 (cited by Van Biezen, p. 104-5), almost 70 percent of the respondents said the attacks on March 11th had not influenced their own vote choice. On the other hand, almost 86 percent of the respondents felt that it had influenced the rest of the electorate. This would seem paradoxical, although Van Biezen suggests that the explanation is that the attacks mobilized a group of voters who otherwise would not have bothered to vote (rather than changed the minds of those already committed to voting). Only about seven percent of the respondents felt that the attacks had not affected the Spanish electoral outcome.

This single survey underlines the difficulty in analyzing how terrorist acts can change the behavior of actors throughout the electoral process. In Spain, evidence suggests

that the attacks motivated a significant segment of the electorate who had planned to abstain from voting. The assignment of blame in the attacks by the ruling party initially to a Basque group also no doubt had consequences in how people perceived the ruling party (Van Biezen; Chari, 2005). Models of voting behavior (and other political phenomenon) are not useful in all political situations. One of the main criticisms of the classic funnel of causality in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960) is that it was generated at a time of relative calm and consensus in the United States. On the other hand, if you discard models and view elections outside the context of powerful tools such as partisan identification, you risk descending to the level of description rather than analysis. Yet, as the Spanish elections show, there can be a demonstrable effect of terrorism on elections. This effect can be considered at every level in the electoral process, from the messages generated by political parties, to the coverage of issues relating to terrorism on the nightly news during the campaign, to how much voters base their decision on concerns about terrorism. Ironically, the U.S. electorate has been relatively safe from major terrorist attacks since 9/11. Yet, there is no doubt that American psyche and concern about personal security in terms of terrorism has changed fundamentally, as public opinion polls show that Americans continued to be preoccupied with a personal threat from terrorists.

Project methodology

The project discussed in this paper has three main components for elections in Russia (2003 parliamentary and 2004 presidential), the United States (2004 presidential): :

1. An examination of how terrorist threat is framed by candidates and political parties. In Russia, this includes an examination of party platforms as well as political advertising. For the United States, this is approached via an analysis of paid political advertising.
2. An analysis of how the main nightly news during the campaign framed the discussion of issues involving terrorism. In Russia, this is mostly about Chechnya, including the war. For the United States, this is primarily about Islamic terrorism and the war in Iraq. Of particular interest is the contrast between how various television networks cover terrorism and war.
3. Evidence from voters on how they perceive political messages related to terrorism as well as the campaign news. Of particular interest is their reaction to these messages and how it affects their voting behavior.

In Russia, much of the work was carried out by Russian Research Ltd., under the direction of the first author (Oates). This included taping the election news coverage and running 10 focus groups in Moscow and Ulyanovsk. The tapes were analyzed and coded by the author and a team of researchers in Glasgow. For the U.S. side of the project, the authors worked in conjunction with the University of Florida and a team of scholars to tape, analyze and code two months of election news coverage in 2004 (from Labor Day to Election Day). The taping project in the U.S. was coordinated by the second author (Postelnicu). In addition, these scholars in the U.S. (listed above) facilitated or oversaw 12 focus groups in Virginia, the District of Columbia, Missouri and Florida.

Russia and the United States are widely disparate countries, in some ways virtual opposites in terms of political culture and history. Yet, both countries have found themselves facing a fundamental change in terrorist threat to its citizens. While the U.S. experience has been essentially one single, devastating attack in 2001, the threat

from Chechen terrorists is on-going for Russia. The idea behind the project was a 'most different' case study, one in which the variable of terrorism threat could be examined against divergent types of parties, elections, media and citizen attitudes.

Hewitt (1992) is one of the few authors to highlight the unevenness in coverage of terrorist groups by country. For example, the German media have "exaggerated the dangers of terrorism and supported government countermeasures wholeheartedly" (p. 174). In Italy, coverage of terrorism changed significantly in 1970s, as a tolerance for the Red Brigade as a type of modern Robin Hoods gave way to "virtually unanimous" condemnation of terrorism in wake of escalating assaults and violence (pp. 174-5). Hewitt cites bias and unfairness in coverage of terrorists in democratic countries, particularly by the British media in Northern Ireland. Despite the variation in coverage among countries, Hewitt found certain parallels, such as extensive coverage including dead bodies, funerals, grieving relatives and physical destruction. He saw the tendency in North America and Great Britain for the media to ignore the social causes and goals of terrorism (p. 177). However, his research found that the media did not "invariably reflect the official perspective" (p. 177). Hewitt also found that "terrorist" was not necessarily a negative term for all audiences. For example, up to 95 percent of Palestinians had a positive view of the PLO "terrorists", while in South Africa only 38 percent of blacks had a positive image of the ANC terrorists. Most of the research cited by Hewitt suggests that the level of support respondents in various countries felt for terrorists was much more closely linked to their own proximity to terrorist attacks rather than media coverage of terrorism. Although Hewitt wrote this chapter almost a decade before 9/11 and the spate of terrorist attacks in Russia, the point he makes is very salient to the present situation: The public respond more intensely and more emotively when terrorism ceases to be abstract and becomes concrete. Hewitt ends his chapter with a call for more research and – echoing Benson – a need to establish the media as an independent variable: "The cross-national variation in public attitudes is suggestive. To what extent does it reflect experience with terrorism and to what extent is it a result of differences in how the media portray terrorism?"

Russian elections and terrorist threat

The Russian approach to terrorism coverage is best understood within the context of the highly polemical Russian media. Russian journalists adhere to neither the notion of balance nor non-biased reporting; rather their news is presented through the prism of political or commercial preferences. While this is not the Soviet style of propaganda, it is rapidly approaching a Soviet-style chorus of approval for Putin and his policies. As Putin and his administration are pursuing war against Chechnya, there is no attempt to analyze or understand the enemy. Rather, the bulk of the Russian coverage of terrorism is devoted to news from the scene of the latest atrocity and statements from leaders on how they will pursue the terrorists and re-impose order. That being said, Wilkinson suggests that the commercial media may use the intensity and drama of terrorist attacks as fodder for compelling coverage and notes that studies have shown increases in viewer ship during terrorist attacks (2003). The Russian case offers an excellent opportunity to see the differences in terrorism coverage in state-run and commercial television, serving as a measure of how much autonomy and variety remain in the media sphere in which freedom has narrowed rapidly.

This project was designed to build on existing research on campaign coverage in state-run and commercial television in Russia (Mickiewicz, 1999; Helvey and Oates, 1998; Oates and Roselle, 2000; Oates, 2004; EIM, 1995; EIM, 1996; EIM, 1999; EIM,

2000; OSCE/ODHIR, 2004). This paper will provide a relatively brief overview of the findings.³ However, research in Russia over the past year has found little linkage between elections and terrorism because both the parliamentary and presidential elections were driven by personality and power as opposed to actual issues. At the same time, however, terrorism and security issues remained extraordinarily important to Russian citizens. There are three central questions to consider. First, what did Russian parties and candidates suggest in terms of security policy to deal with terrorism? In terms of television news during the campaign, did the prime-time news shows on state-run television and commercial television cover terrorism differently? Finally, what did the Russian focus-group participants think of the coverage of elections and terrorism – and were their concerns about terrorism an important factor in their vote choice?

The project looks at the 2003 parliamentary campaign, rather than the presidential campaign the following year, in terms of determining various political messages about terrorism. Although the post of president is far more powerful in Russia, there was very little doubt that Vladimir Putin would be re-elected by a landslide in March 2004. As a result of Putin's political dominance, there were no serious contenders in the race and even the Communist Party candidate finished a very distant second in 2004. In the Duma campaign, however, there remained much more political competition, even though the Kremlin's hold on parliamentary politics has increased steadily. What did the political parties say about terrorism in the 2003 campaign? As it turns out, they said very little indeed in either their party platforms or in the limited coverage they received on the nightly news (discussed in more detail below).

Russian party policies on terrorism and security

Political parties play a distinct role in elections to the Duma, the 450-seat lower house of the Russian parliament elected every four years since 1995. Through the 2003 elections, half of the 450 seats were given to winners in 225 single-member districts and the other 225 were divided among parties that won five percent or more of the party-list vote.⁴ Although the state has backed several pro-regime parties over the years, nationalists and communists often fared better in Duma elections. By 1999, however, the state had become far more efficient at creating attractive parties and undermining opponents on both the Right and Left. Part of this was done through better marketing, but it is important to note that the regime also became more nationalistic, less market-friendly and more socialist – in its rhetoric, if not always in its policy.

By the Duma elections on December 7, 2003, there was little discussion of policies, platforms or even ideology in the campaign. Rather, the campaign was dominated by the agenda of Putin, a small circle of Kremlin elites and messages of Russian solidarity and nationalism. In the 2003 elections, party-list seats were won by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party (37.6 percent of the party-list vote), the Communists (12.6 percent), the Liberal Democrats (11.5 percent) and a new nationalist party called Motherland (9 percent). The liberal Yabloko just missed winning party-list seats for the first time in a Duma election. Pro-regime forces also were very successful in the single-member districts, which have since been phased out of the Duma electoral process. By March 2004, Putin enjoyed a commanding dominance in Russian politics

³ For a more in-depth discussion of the framing of terrorist threat in Russian elections, see Oates 2004 or Oates (forthcoming) 2006.

⁴ The law has been changed and in the future all seats will be allocated by the party-list race.

and won with 71 percent of the vote.⁵ None of the Russian presidential campaigns have been a time for a meaningful dialogue with the Russian voters (Oates, 2004; Oates, forthcoming 2006; EIM, 2000b). Neither Boris Yeltsin nor Putin has run under party labels, although they have made clear their preferences for the pro-government parties in the Duma races held a few months before each presidential contest.

Political parties and candidates did not provide a central, meaningful discussion about terrorism or Chechnya in the 2003 Duma campaign. From the platforms of the main political parties, it was impossible to identify a definable political spectrum. Out of 82 pages of party platform material filed with the Central Elections Commission, only 15 paragraphs mentioned terrorism and it was cited in widely divergent contexts.⁶ The dominant, pro-regime United Russia party noted the importance of co-operation with the United States in the fight against terrorism and called for the recognition that terrorism everywhere (i.e. Chechnya) was equally evil to terrorist groups targeted by the United States (pp. 10-11). By contrast, the nationalist Liberal Democrats blamed the rise in terrorism on American expansionism and ambition to take over the world (page 4 of its platform). The Liberal Democrats devoted the most attention to terrorism, mentioning it in seven paragraphs in their 17-page platform. In addition to concerns about American expansionism, the Liberal Democrats suggested the death penalty for terrorists as well as significantly expanding Russian security forces to deal with terrorists and other criminals. The Liberal Democrats tempered their criticism of America by pointing out that co-operation with this strong country was important in the struggle against international terrorism (p. 9). The lone mention of terrorism in Motherland's platform was a demand for the end of violent television or 'on-screen terrorism' (p. 11, *ekrannovo terrorizma* in Russian). The liberal Yabloko complained that the police were not protecting people from either crime or terrorism and gave a rare plea for peace in Chechnya: "In Chechnya both soldiers and peaceful civilians continue to perish" (p. 3). A review for this study of 99 paid advertisements during the Duma campaign reveals little reference to terrorism or international security, beyond some predictable comments from nationalist Liberal Democratic leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy about a need for victory in the Caucasus.⁷

Terrorism and television news content in Russia, 2003-4

Has campaign coverage of security issues on Russian television changed in the wake of 9/11 and the second war in Chechnya? This project compared coverage of security issues and terrorism in the 2003 campaign with coverage in the 1999/2000 election cycle. In all of the elections, the methodology for examining the news content is the same. The author and collaborators have used a coding frame listing approximately 100 different topics and subcategories to label stories in the nightly news. Each news segment is timed and labeled with one or more codes, relating to the economy, the election campaign, the military, social issues, entertainment, etc.⁸ In addition, time devoted to newsmakers and political parties was tracked as well. We were then able to

⁵ Under Russian law, presidents can serve only two four-year terms. So far, no president has attempted to overstay this limit.

⁶ Based on a review by the first author of party platforms filed with the Russian Central Electoral Commission for United Russia (25 pages), the Communists (7 pages), the Liberal Democrats (17 pages), Rodina (15 pages), Yabloko (4 pages) and the Union of Right Forces (14 pages). These parties were the six most successful parties in the party-list vote in 2003.

⁷ This was only one of several of the party's ads, however, which featured slogans ranging from ethnic cooperation to the need for government monopolies in the energy sector.

⁸ For details on the coding scheme, see Oates forthcoming or Oates 2004 (available for free download on the web, see the bibliography for instructions).

define how much of a particular news program was devoted to specific topics, newsmakers or political parties. This is useful not only for looking at how programs handle the daily news, but it is particularly helpful for comparing coverage across different channels.

Since coding started in 1993, several important trends have been noted on state-run Channel 1⁹ and commercial channel NTV (coded since 1995). In particular, their flagship news programs have shown markedly different patterns of news coverage. Although commercial news had become noticeably more docile by 2003, it was still providing some criticism of government policy, notably in the first war in Chechnya. However, neither state-run nor commercial television has managed to develop into a watchdog of the state, as their support for particular interests of the elites has distorted their coverage. The *Vremya (Time)* news program on state-run Channel 1 is particularly biased, devoting inordinately large amounts of coverage to those already in power and friendly to the Kremlin's interest. Those who challenge the Kremlin are either ignored or maligned with unfair reporting, rumor and innuendo (see also reports by the European Institute for the Media and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights).

The project analyzes coverage on *Vremya* (9 p.m. weekday edition) and *Sevodnya* (7 p.m. weekday edition) from November 7 through December 5, 2003.¹⁰ Channel 1 has virtually global reach in Russia and surveys have shown it to be the most popular channel. NTV is the most popular commercial channel and the only commercial channel with any notable news content. NTV reaches about 75 percent of the Russian population, mostly in or near urban centers. The central themes on Channel 1's *Vremya* during the 2003 parliamentary elections could be described as the efficacy of President Putin; the prominence of top leaders of the pro-government United Russia party and their close political relationship with the president; how the central government strives to fix problems in the region; and Russia's role in the international sphere. The main international story for Russia at the end of 2003 was the political turmoil in Georgia, which led to the ousting of Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze. NTV's *Sevodnya (Today)* presented somewhat more of the Russian political spectrum and less of Putin, yet the Russian president was still the dominant Russian personality on the newscast. NTV was less focused on the international role of Russia and more in general news item. While there was relatively little news on Chechen warfare on *Vremya*, *Sevodnya* still carried some news from the front, although it was only a shadow of the more aggressive war coverage during the 1995 Duma campaign. *Vremya* was generally more serious and didactic; *Sevodnya* was more relaxed, sometimes a bit sensational and more ironic. The most apparent difference was in the choice of which stories to run and how close to the top of the newscast the items appeared.

Despite the government pressure that led to a forced ownership change in 2001, NTV remained distinctive in its 2003 election coverage from state-run Channel 1.¹¹ *Sevodnya (Today)* showed that it had markedly different content from *Vremya* on

⁹ The media entity that broadcasts on Channel 1 has undergone reorganisation and changed its name twice since 1993. For simplicity's sake, the current First Channel will be referred to as Channel 1 throughout.

¹⁰ While the main nightly news is just a fraction of the daily television output, it is the most important show relating to politics on the daily schedule.

¹¹ The official campaign period is one month before the elections, with a ban on campaign reporting 24 hours before the ballot officially starts at midnight election morning.

Channel 1. In fact, there were times when it was difficult to tell whether the news teams were covering the same country on the same day.¹² Although news segments were very similar in length, the varying approaches to news topics, individuals and parties were distinctive. As in earlier years, *Vremya* focused to a greater degree on the campaign. Campaign characteristics were mentioned in 16 percent of *Vremya*'s stories, compared with 13 percent for *Sevodnya*. Meanwhile, *Sevodnya* had a heavier emphasis on crime. In addition, *Vremya* had twice as much coverage of the role of the president. There was more coverage of Chechnya on *Sevodnya*. The commercial news show paid little attention to political parties, with just six mentions of parties over the entire course of the campaign, compared with 38 mentions on *Vremya*. The broad and uneven comments about terrorism in the party platforms were not particularly reflected in the coverage of political parties during the 2003 Duma campaign because there was barely any coverage at all. As in earlier years, political parties received a negligible amount of coverage and there was virtually no discussion of policy

Terrorism was one of the leading topics on the news, not surprising given both the public interest in the problem in general and the terrorist attack on a train in Southern Russia that left more than 40 people dead just two days before 2003 Duma elections. Major terrorist attacks in Russia also have included the seizure of hostages at a Moscow theatre in late 2002 that left at least 170 dead and the mysterious explosions in apartment buildings in Moscow and other Russian cities in 1999. Altogether, nine percent of the news was devoted to terrorism during the Duma campaign. About half of the items (28) on terrorism related to Chechnya and the rest (26) were on other terrorism topics. While there was not an enormous difference in the total number of stories on each news program – 25 on *Vremya* and 29 on *Sevodnya* – the emphasis was quite different. *Sevodnya* focused more heavily on terrorism as it related to Chechnya, perhaps not surprising in that NTV has offered more coverage of the war and Chechen affairs in general. On the other hand, *Vremya* had more coverage (15 items compared with 11 on *Sevodnya*) of terrorism that was not related to Chechnya.

Vremya's approach at limiting the scenes from the train explosion and spending a lot of airtime showing officials dealing with the problem is closer to the news preferences of viewers expressed in Russian focus groups in 2000 and 2004.¹³ Many Russian viewers said that they seek solace and comfort from the television in times of national crisis, especially after terrorist attacks in Russia. They often are distressed by the repetition of grisly scenes of destruction and many find interviews with victims distressing as well as a violation of good taste. At the same time, many respondents admitted that this sort of coverage makes for compelling viewing. This need for 'leadership reassurance' is certainly not unique to Russia. A study of appearances by U.S. President George Bush by Erik Bucy (2003) found that viewers felt the president's appearance was reassuring when paired with low-intensity images of traumatic news, although the palliative effect of seeing the president lessened with more high-intensity images. In addition, the appearance of nationalistic images – such as the reliance of *Vremya* on staged cabinet meetings held in the Kremlin – is not limited to Russia. Hutcheson et al. (2004, p. 27) found that journalists responded to

¹² The nightly news shows *Vremya* (The First Channel) at 9 p.m. and *Sevodnya* (NTV) at 7 p.m. were taped weekdays during the month-long campaign in Moscow. Due to technical problems, *Vremya* for November 17, 2003, is missing from the analysis.

¹³ This project has data from 24 focus groups held in Moscow, Ulyanovsk and Voronezh in spring 2000, also organised and moderated by Russian Research Ltd. The groups were divided into age groups with each had eight participants. The groups lasted about two hours each. The groups were moderated by Igor Galin and Tatyana Burchakova of Russian Research.

the renewed emphasis on “American core values” in their language in *Time* and *Newsweek* in the wake of 9/11.

The Russian Audience

The respondents in ten focus groups held in Moscow and Ulyanovsk in early spring 2004 found little connection between terrorism and the recent round of elections. There was very little recall of any discussion of terrorism in either the Duma or presidential campaigns. “Well, they made a lot of noise during the campaign, and now it’s come to an end and none of them are giving an account of themselves of what they have done,” said Sergei, a 40-year-old metalworker from Ulyanovsk. As there was little policy discussion in the Duma campaign and virtually none in the presidential campaign – in which Putin made no use of free time or paid advertising – this response is not surprising. Oksana, 38-year old stay-at-home mother from Moscow, labeled watching the campaign on television a “waste of time”, a sentiment shared by many in the focus groups. When asked whether terrorism played a role in their vote choice, most were unable to make any particular connection. While there was barely any mention of their vote choice in the Duma campaign, the participants were more ready to talk about their decision to vote for Putin in the more recent presidential contest. Indirectly, Putin’s stand on terrorism was relevant here, in that many of the participants perceived Putin as a strong, decisive leader, a man who once commented that he would “flush the Chechen terrorists down the toilet.” Many participants made a link between finding Putin “strong” and “effective” and feeling that he could deal with Russia’s myriad problems, particularly terrorism. In this way, terrorism affected the way in which these respondents analyzed the political situation and voted in Russia.

They also felt that the lack of control under democratic regimes – as opposed to Russian policy – was responsible for terrorism in both Chechnya and elsewhere. They were frustrated by the apparent inability of the state to control or stop terrorism (either Chechen-related or in the international sphere). They quickly equated this to a lack of state effectiveness in other areas, such as providing employment, pensions or health care. Several times the policies of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin were praised as particularly effective. However, terrorism itself did not emerge as a distinctive issue in the election campaign.

Elections aside, what did the respondents think of the media’s coverage of terrorism in general? Their responses paralleled comments in Russian focus groups held in 2000 that decried a lack of taste and decorum on television. They were particularly upset by disturbing film from the Moscow theatre siege and the bloody scenes after the Moscow metro bombing. In addition, the respondents were concerned about the balance among the public’s right to know, the people’s need to know and security concerns. Many respondents felt that it was better to avoid publicizing details about the events not only to lessen possible offence to the public, but also to stop tipping off terrorists or giving them more publicity. They acknowledged that there was a fine line between informing the public by giving details of a terrorist attack and frightening the public with the same details. Many respondents felt that there should be more ‘news you can use’ in regard to terrorism, such as instructions on what to do in the aftermath of a large terrorist attack, but still others felt this would merely engender fear and panic in people. Most focus-group participants were not, however, offended by any racist comments or insinuations. In fact, many of the participants were openly racist, some even suggesting that clearing Moscow of anyone who even looked Chechen was a good idea. Concerns over security clearly won out over concerns for tolerance,

although a few participants protested the overtly racist views. There was a general sense of despair over how to end terrorism, especially as it was so difficult to uncover the real roots of the problem in a multi-lateral world.

Terrorism Frames in Political Advertising in the U.S.

A record number of television ads were aired in the 2004 presidential campaign by Bush, Kerry, their respective national parties and independent groups supporting one candidate or the other. (Kaid, 2004; Kaid and Dimitrova, 2005). An analysis of 351 ads that appeared in the general election campaign alone indicates that almost one-fifth (19 percent) of these ads concerned “terrorism” and/or “homeland security.”¹⁴ In addition, 82 ads (23 percent) specifically mentioned the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. Of the ads that specifically mentioned terrorism and homeland security ($n = 65$), Table 1 shows that Bush was much more likely to mention terrorism in his ads (34 percent) than was Kerry (16 percent).

(Table 1 about here)

Overall, Table 1 also shows that the majority of ads addressing terrorism were negative ads (57 percent), focused on criticism of the opponent. Bush and groups sponsoring Bush were particularly quick to use the terrorism issue as a basis for criticizing Kerry. Pro-Kerry groups were swift to return fire, taking a negative tone against Bush in all of their ads on terrorism, while Kerry himself took a positive tone about himself and his own approach to the terrorism issue in 61 percent of his terrorism-related ads. The findings in Table 1 also indicate that Bush, Kerry and their supporting groups used a mixture of logical and emotional appeals in their ads. It is also clear that pro-Bush groups employed a large number of emotional appeals in their terrorism related ads. One particularly evocative ad was “Ashley's Story,” an ad about President Bush's offer of comfort to a young girl who lost her mother in the September 11 bombings at the World Trade Center. This ad, sponsored by the Progress for America Voter Fund, ran repeatedly during the last six weeks of the election campaign. As discussed below, focus-group respondents claimed to dislike this ad, finding it emotionally manipulative.

However, the Bush campaign itself was more likely to use fear appeals (35 percent) than was the Kerry campaign (6 percent). For instance, many voters will recall the Bush campaign ad that aired late in the campaign called “Wolves.” The ad's sinister and threatening tone was accompanied by visually disturbing video of wolves in a symbolic representation of threats to American security. Other Bush ads used visual images to emphasize the emotional and fear appeal aspects of the ads. Bush and pro-Bush groups used scenes and symbols of the 9/11 disasters in 11 different commercials. Kerry did not take advantage of such visuals in his ads. Similarly, 14 of the ads of Bush and pro-Bush groups used scenes of the war in Iraq or Afghanistan to emphasize their terrorism messages. Only a few (3) Kerry or Kerry group ads used such scenes.

U.S. Television News and Terrorist Threat in the 2004 Election

¹⁴ A content analysis of the ads was conducted by trained coders who viewed the ads on videotape or DVD. A codebook and coding sheet were developed for the content analysis using the principles of Kaid and Johnston, 2001. Intercoder reliability for the analysis averaged +.87 across all categories.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2004) confirmed that television remained the dominant source of campaign news for Americans, preferred by 76 percent of the voters. Fox News had the biggest audience for election news (about 21 percent of voters), followed by CNN with 15 percent. The traditional broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) together reached about a third of the electorate (Pew, 2004). The coverage of the 2004 U.S. presidential elections by the three broadcast networks and by the two cable channels mentioned above was recorded daily, except during the week-ends, from Labor Day in September until Election Day in November for this study. The following analysis is a preliminary examination of the sample. The data presented here was obtained by the content analysis of newscasts from ABC's *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, CBS's *Evening News with Dan Rather*, and NBC's *The Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* during a randomly constructed week. This sampling procedure resulted in 15 newscasts (five for each network) composed of a total of 136 news stories, divided almost equally among the networks: 44 news stories were aired by ABC, 45 by CBS, and 47 by NBC. A little less than half (about 43 percent) of all stories were connected to the election (see Table 2).

(Table 2 about here.)

Terrorism was a frequent buzz word in 22.4 percent (or 18 items) of all election stories, and it was the second most talked about issue after the war in Iraq. Moreover, it was often mentioned in connection with the war in Iraq. Since many voters reported that these were among the most important factors affecting their candidate preference (Pew, 2004), an analysis of how television handled these issues is well justified. ABC and NBC aired the bulk of stories on terrorism (eight stories in a week each). In contrast, CBS's *Evening News with Dan Rather* allocated only two stories to this topic, one story covering an Arab terrorist group in France and the other dedicated to Bush's stance on terrorism. All stories had an average length of 162 seconds (SD = 73.16). CBS also run an atypical coverage of the war in Iraq; not only did they have the smallest number of stories (11, compared to 15 for NBC and 12 for ABC), but the stories also were considerably shorter. However, CBS was distinctive in its coverage in showing 20-second profiles of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq under the title *Fallen Heroes*. One such report was aired every night before the first commercial break of each newscast.

Sixteen of the 18 news stories related to terrorism were campaign reports in which Bush, Kerry, the journalist or another source interviewed in the story mentioned the issue. Seven stories referred to specific terrorist groups: five mentioned Al-Qaeda, one mentioned Hamas, one covered the attack of a Russian school by a Chechen group while another was a chilling interview with the head of an unknown Muslim terrorist group in France, whose face hidden to protect his identity. None of the stories connected terrorism with the 9/11 attacks.

Overall, terrorism was the preferred line of attack for both candidates. About half of the news stories that mentioned terrorism included negative statements from both Bush and Kerry. In several cases, President Bush criticized his opponent for being too "soft" and for the lack of a coherent plan for the "war on terror": *John Kerry's the wrong man for the wrong job at the wrong time*, said Bush (NBC, 10/29/2004). The President's attack was almost always followed by a promise by Kerry that he "will not waver" and "will hunt down the terrorists wherever they are." This attack and defense exchange became quite repetitive after the first televised presidential debate on September 30 and defined the way both candidates talked about terrorism for the rest

of the election. Bush also employed low to medium fear appeals to undermine Kerry's attempts to build an image of strong leader.¹⁵ On the other hand, Vice-President Cheney was less moderate in expressing his belief that Democrats would let terrorists "attack our cities" if they won the election. Cheney's critique of Kerry became very acid and, in one instance, he used the word "nuts" to describe the Senator's remark that he planned to reduce terrorism to a "nuisance."

Despite the frequent appearance of terrorism frames in news stories related to election, ABC, CBS and NBC failed to provide viewers with substantial information about the candidates' platforms for dealing with the issue. Although 67 percent of the stories referred to the terrorist issue stands of Bush and Kerry, such references were vague rather than about specific policy proposals. The following quote from Kerry speaking at a campaign stop in Wisconsin is illustrative of the vagueness of the candidates' statements: *Let me just make it clear- crystal clear -as Americans, we are absolutely united in our determination to hunt down and destroy Osama bin Laden and the terrorists. They are barbarians. And I will stop at absolutely nothing to hunt down, capture, or kill the terrorists wherever they are, whatever it takes. Period.* (NBC, 10/29/2004). Using a similar rhetoric, President Bush stated that: *Let me make this very clear. Americans will not be intimidated or influenced by an enemy of our country.* (NBC 10/29/2004). References to the concrete strategies and methods they planned to use to achieve the goal of making America safe again was completely missing from the messages from both candidates. Their talk of terrorism during the election was a combination of nationalistic statements, attacks against their opponent and occasional fear appeals.

An interesting difference that emerged from the study is that Bush talked about terrorism with significantly higher frequency than Kerry. He is quoted in 44.4 percent of all stories about terrorism, while Kerry appears in only 22.2 percent of news reports. The length of sound bytes is almost the same for both candidates: Bush's quotes averaged 7.15 seconds (SD=4.0), while Kerry's were about 7.8 seconds (SD=4.32). Well it is clear that an incumbent president might be called on to discuss a national issue such as terrorism more frequently, it still means that the viewer had far more opportunities to link Bush with the reaction to terrorism. In a few cases, the reporters also speculated about the influence of terrorism on the outcome of the election. About six percent of terrorism-related stories focused specifically on the personalities of the candidates and their leadership abilities. In these situations, reporters tended to agree that the threat of terrorism did not help either candidate and actually hurt both of their campaigns equally. Only one news story run by NBC hinted that terrorism might increase Bush's chances of re-election by scaring voters away from voting for Kerry. In contrast, this feeling of nervousness about how Kerry would handle national security was relatively strong among focus-group participants for this study (see below).

The coverage of terrorism and election by the networks was almost devoid of visual elements. For instance, the news about the Chechen attack on the Russian school was read by the anchor in the studio, without any supporting video footage. Statements by candidates about terrorism were part of daily campaign reports and only showed the candidates speaking on podiums surrounded by crowds of supporters. The only terrorism-evoking scenes were shown in reports connecting terrorism with the Iraq war. These images typically would involve U.S. soldiers fighting with Arab men carrying guns in the streets in Baghdad.

¹⁵ Please briefly define 'fear appeal' here

U.S. Focus Groups: Terrorism and the Campaign

There did not appear to be a rational approach by the focus-group participants to an assessment of terrorism policy of both candidates in the 2004 U.S. presidential elections. On the other hand, there was evidence from the focus groups that emotions relating to 9/11, primarily fear, played a role in the choice of president. While most focus-group participants were quick to identify Kerry as the candidate who appeared more intelligent (particularly in the debates) there was an overwhelming consensus that Bush was “stronger.” It is not surprising that Republicans and Bush supporters would feel this way, particularly about an incumbent president during 9/11 and two wars. What was surprising, however, was that Kerry supporters consistently voiced this opinion, even when they clearly disagreed about the decision to invade Iraq in 2003. When voters were undecided, they often cited the problems of Kerry’s “weakness” and the appeal of Bush’s “strength” as determinants in their choice. It is particularly interesting in that the general climate of fear, which the focus-group participants discussed and worried over to a large extent, was a new part of the political landscape for younger Americans who could barely remember the Cold War.

It should be noted that there was some debate in the groups as to what was meant by “terrorism”. Generally, people took it to mean 9/11 and Islamic extremism and the conversation focused on that type of terrorism. However, many respondents correctly pointed out that it was important to define the nature – and scope – of “terrorism” under discussion as global issues of terrorism, anti-American terrorism and Islamic extremism were not the same issues.

What did people think of the media’s coverage of terrorism, whether in general or in the campaign? Three inter-related themes appeared consistently across 10 focus groups in the United States:

Theme 1: There was some frustration that the media tended to focus on events relating to terrorism rather than the causes of terrorism, both during the campaign and at other times. There was plenty of coverage of terrorism – as a student in Missouri put it, “it was terrorism, terrorism, terrorism” on television – but little that was in-depth or analytical. An adult respondent in D.C. said, terrorism reports had become so common that they now seemed like weather reports. As a result, many respondents felt that there was little meaningful discussion about terrorism – and little dialogue or ability to resolve the problem of terrorism. As another adult in D.C. said, the media “do a very good job of explaining all the ways that we’re not safe.” Overall, there was a feeling of helplessness, dread and sometimes fear that the world was simply a more dangerous place for Americans and that there was little that could be done about it. As a student in Missouri phrased it: “Like, you know, why are the terrorists blowing themselves up and killing people, you know? I mean, they are not doing it just because they hate Americans and they want to be spiteful. There’s a reason behind what’s happening, you know?”

This feeling generally carried over to the campaign. Even Bush supporters complained that the events of 9/11 were used to evoke feelings of patriotism to support the president -- and they disliked what they perceived as manipulation. Most respondents denied that their anger over 9/11 translated into particular voting strategies. A few, however, saw a direct link: “I have this feeling of like the whole election was based on ‘we’re under alert, we’re under alert, it’s happening.’ I feel like that was almost like a political advertisement you know, and maybe that’s just me, but

I feel like it's still always going to be a threat and I'm never going to know from the media or a person that I am safe" (D.C. student). While many of the participants did not make an explicit link, it was clear that issues of strength and security were important to them in their vote choice.

Theme 2: Taste tended to trump the desire for more detail or coverage of violence relating to terrorism or war. For participants with some links to the sites attacked in 9/11 (such as the District of Columbia or New York City), there was anger over what some perceived as exploitation of the victims. Some in the D.C.-area focus groups felt particularly harassed by stories about possible future targets or attacks in the capital. There was a strong dislike of the various alert colors, especially as people felt they invoked fear without providing any useful information. The participants felt the media didn't provide any answers while increasing their feelings of threat, fear and discomfort. A minority of participants wanted more information on the causes of terrorism in an attempt to work toward a reduction of threat. Both groups – those who wanted less 'in your face' reporting of terrorism and those who wanted more details – felt television was doing a poor job in general. There was some praise for more in-depth coverage on the Internet (especially non-U.S. sites) or in newspapers such as *The New York Times*.

Theme 3: The tolerance of the focus-group participants for extreme images of violence relating to terrorism and war tended to be somewhat limited. Part of this was due to the notion of taste and a concern for what children might see on the news. Yet, this attitude extended beyond a protection of children viewing the news: Many people felt that extreme violence such as beheadings being shown on television was an offense to U.S. viewers. The view emerged in most groups that this sort of imagery fed into the hands of terrorists as it did in fact 'terrorize' the viewers. The focus-group participants acknowledged that they wanted to be informed, even about the negative side of war, but that it was important to put the images into context. For example, most of the respondents felt that flag-draped coffins should be shown on television. The prevalent reason, however, was not the liberal idea that the public has a right to see that soldiers are killed in wars. Rather, most respondents who supported the showing of U.S. coffins felt that this was honoring the war dead and that a flag-draped coffin was a mark of respect (rather than evidence of the number of Americans dying in the conflict). There was less concern about seeing explicit scenes of violence against American enemies, or as man in Gainesville expressed it: "I think that the U.S. people have a very high tolerance for dead Iraqis."

General Findings from the U.S. focus groups

If the focus-group participants did not tend to directly link concerns about terrorism with choosing a particular candidate, what were the main reasons people picked Bush or Kerry? When talking about the elections, most people were quick to say that they came into the elections with relatively fixed political preferences. This is not surprising, in that partisan identification continues to dominate in U.S. national elections. It is interesting that it appeared to remain fixed at a time when the U.S. had undergone a major threat. There were a handful of participants who admitted that they made up their minds at the last minute (one young woman in Florida said she flipped a coin in the voting booth). However, there was no clear pattern to how these last-minute deciders chose to cast their ballot. They certainly didn't think it was advertising appeals. Overall, the participants had very poor recall of political advertising. Only a minority of respondents could remember any ads at all. The two that were most often recalled were ones that had attracted controversy and media

attention (the Swift Boat Veterans against Kerry and the ‘wolf’ ad from Bush supporters). In addition, there was some dislike of the pro-Bush “Ashley’s story” mentioned above. Those who mentioned this ad said that they resented the attempt at manipulation with the image of the grieving child. Still, many acknowledged that this sort of emotional appeal could be effective: “It angers me but it works” (Missouri adult). Even when shown a series of two Bush ads and two Kerry ads during the focus group, the respondents had little to say about political advertising and admitted they merely tended to favor the ads with their chosen candidates.

On the other hand, there was more recall of the debates, which an overwhelming amount of participants said that Kerry clearly dominated. Overall, however, they perceived Kerry as relatively weak and without a clear policy for terrorism or other issues. Although Kerry won on technical points and clarity, the feeling of weakness lingered – and this arguably made fear of terrorist threat very relevant in the elections. For example, a Missouri adult said: “You know, I really wanted to vote for Kerry, because I agreed with more of his issues politically in terms of policy for domestic issues. But I had to think of my kids and I thought Bush could keep our country safer. So I voted for Bush.” There was a general level of frustration that important issues, particularly unemployment, Social Security changes and problems with Medicare, were rarely covered by the media: “It’s like blah, blah, blah, and nothing really concrete” (female adult in Clermont, Florida).

The discussion about war coverage, as compared with terrorism, was livelier for the participants. There were mixed feelings about whether the war in Iraq (Afghanistan was not really mentioned) helped or hurt Bush in his campaign. Many respondents felt that Kerry picked up support from those who opposed the war, but still others felt that the war gave Bush added patriotic support: “I think the war probably did help Bush because it gave somebody somewhere a marvelous thing to spin” (Missouri adult). Just as with the terrorism coverage, however, there was uneasiness with the tone of the coverage. Many of the participants felt that the war coverage should be more patriotic and include ‘upbeat’ stories such as help provided to the citizens of Iraq. About an equal number were more concerned that the war not be whitewashed or sanitized; that the American people really see the realities of war: “I believe that . . . the importance of protecting our nation from just being oblivious to facts of the war is far worse than having some people be offended by what they see. What concerns me most is that . . . the war is very often portrayed as something glorious, something great, something wonderful, it’s a liberation. And I think that it really important to grab people and remind them that war is costing lives. And civilians are being hurt. Soldiers are getting killed and it not something that we just should take lightly” (student in Missouri).

The critical question was whether the advent of a large terrorist event on U.S. soil had changed the voting calculus for Americans. Although the sample here is far too small for conclusive evidence, it is interesting to see the link between a general fear and a strong value of “strength” in a candidate. One respondent in Gainesville articulated the feeling that issues surrounding terrorism became a part of his political calculus rather than transforming it: “It’s difficult for me because I knew pretty much from the get go who I was voting for. There was never a question in my mind on which candidate I would support and it was a whole range of issues and for me the terrorism was just another thing that makes me define why I support one over the other.” Or, more pragmatically, as a woman in the Gainesville, Florida group said: “I’m not sure I

like being the bully, but I'd much rather be the bully than the guy being picked on all the time."

Conclusions

What have we learned through our study of the framing of terrorist threat in Russian and U.S. elections? First, it is very clear that parties and candidates in both countries did not engage in the issue of terrorism in ways that offered rational policy suggestions or solutions to the problem. There is a great deal of rhetoric about strength, firmness and pursuit of enemies. In both the Russian and American systems, this meant little chance for a useful policy discussion or even an exploration of how the public feels about terrorism. This leads into one of the major frustrations with the media audience, during elections and no doubt outside these times as well, in that they feel threatened but in no way reassured by the discussion about terrorism. During elections, the news media transmit messages from candidates and political parties, but these messages are relatively free of meaningful content. By the same token, could parties and candidates said to be using 'scare tactics' in an effort to get the vote? Anti-Chechen messages seemed more or less universally popular in Russia, so much so that it was rarely discussed or debated. Messages of anger, hate and threat against the Chechens now overwhelm the political 'debate' in Russia and this seems to be accepted by most members of the Russian public. In the U.S., the picture is not so clear, but it is clear that there was heavy use of messages about terrorism and the war in Iraq by the Bush campaign. It also was covered heavily in the news, appearing in almost half of the election news stories examined for this analysis.

This leaves us with two questions. What sort of job is television doing in these two very different systems to moderate the debate? And, finally, what do the viewers think about their campaign messages and how did it affect their vote choices? In Russia, there is still some variation in television and different coverage is offered between state-run and commercial television. However, neither one offers a real challenge to the hegemony of the Kremlin and its policy against terrorists or in Chechnya. While many Russians in the focus groups echoed the desire for extreme methods against Chechen terrorists, it is clear that there was no space in the Russian media sphere for any sort of debate on the issue. In the far more liberal U.S. media sphere, one might expect a more informed and intelligent debate on terrorism in a key national election. However, neither Kerry nor Bush sparked this sort of campaign about possible alternatives to the current U.S. policy and actions on terrorism. Nor did a range of different television networks seem to offer it. It was only a single network (NBC) that offered a distinctive 'human' element to the costs of the war in Iraq with a nightly profile of a slain U.S. soldier. The election news coverage involving terrorism and war left viewers and voters worryingly aware of terrorism threat, but without the information to have a meaningful debate on the future direction of policy or even on how to feel more secure. Like Russian voters, it would appear that U.S. voters often acted more like comrades than citizens, motivated by fear and helplessness rather than by a sense of political participation and efficacy.

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Table 1
Content and Style of 2004 U.S. Presidential Commercials on Terrorism

	Kerry	Pro-Kerry Groups	Bush	Pro-Bush Groups	Total
Total ads examined	111	129	59	52	351
Ads with terrorism content	18 (16%)	11 (9%)	20 (34%)	16 (31%)	65 (19%)
Of the ads with terrorism content ...					
Pro- Candidate/Positive	11 (61%)	0	10 (50%)	7 (44%)	28 (43%)
Opponent/Negative	7 (39%)	11 (100%)	10 (50%)	9 (57%)	37 (57%)
Logical Appeals	17 (94%)	9 (82%)	13 (65%)	7 (44%)	46 (71%)
Emotional Appeals	12 (67%)	8 (73%)	14 (70%)	14 (88%)	48 (74%)
Fear Appeals	1 (6%)	2 (18%)	7 (35%)	8 (50%)	18 (28%)

Source: Research at the University of Florida under the direction of Prof. Lynda Lee Kaid.

Table 2
Election coverage on traditional networks in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election

Type of news story	Network			Total
	ABC	CBS	NBC	
Presidential Election Story	22	17	19	58
State/Local Election Story	1	2	1	4
Non-Election Story	21	26	27	74
Total	44	45	47	136

Source: Research at the University of Florida. . Number of stories dedicated to the U.S. presidential election during a constructed week sample.