



Republicans rail at 'grotesque' bias in coverage

By Andrew Ward in Miami and Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson in,New York | November 4, 2008

If John McCain loses today's election, many of his supporters will already have identified the culprit. Anger has been building for weeks among Republicans over what they view as one-sided coverage of the presidential race in the mainstream media.

"The media has done our country a grave disservice," said Thadd Buzan, a Republican at a recent McCain rally in Virginia. "A lot of people believe in an Obama that has been created by the media but doesn't exist in reality."

Accusations of liberal media bias are nothing new but conservatives believe that the favouritism has been more egregious than ever this year. Their complaints have been given substance by several studies showing that Mr. Obama has received much more positive coverage than his Republican rival.

According to the non-partisan Center for Media and Public Affairs, coverage of Mr. Obama has been 65 per cent positive on the three main nightly network newscasts by ABC, NBC and CBS, compared with 31 per cent for Mr. McCain. Analysis of newspaper coverage found similar results. The disparity spread even to late-night comedy shows, with one study showing that Mr. McCain was the butt of seven times more jokes than was Mr. Obama.

"The media has been grotesquely irresponsible," says Judd Gregg, a Republican senator for New Hampshire. "There's been no attempt at any time to aggressively pursue the policies of Senator Obama in a forthright and honest way."

Timothy Groseclose, a University of California political scientist who has studied media bias, says slanted -coverage reflects the lack of ideological diversity in US newsrooms, with Democrats outnumbering Republicans more than nine-to-one, according to some studies. "Journalists by and large try to be objective but the bias creeps in through decisions about what stories to cover," says Mr. Groseclose.

Liberals argue that the leftward slant of some in the media is offset by the conservative influence of Fox News, the highest rated cable news channel, and talk-radio hosts, such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, who broadcast anti-Obama propaganda to millions of listeners.

Mr. Obama recently claimed that hostile coverage by Fox was costing him two or three percentage points of support. But Mr. Groseclose argues that any negative impact from conservative media has been heavily outweighed by the broadly positive coverage in mainstream outlets.

Paul Waldman, a senior fellow at Media Matters, a left-leaning media monitoring group, says crying foul over media bias is a decades-old ploy to intimidate news organisations into more sympathetic coverage. He argues that favourable treatment of Mr. Obama stems from journalists' fixation with the "horse race" nature of the presidential contest. "Coverage is naturally more positive about the candidate who is leading," he says.

Another factor is the ground-breaking nature of Mr. Obama's candidacy, which has made his campaign a more exciting story than Mr. McCain's second shot at the White House. Until this year, the Republican was famously popular with the media because of his maverick style, but the relationship has soured as he adopted an increasingly negative campaign.

(Article Cut)

Additional reporting by Kenneth Li in New York

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