

US election: Media accused of 'liberal bias'

The constant charge levelled at the American media by conservatives during the election campaign was one of "liberal bias".

By Catherine Elsworth in Denver
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Critics cited the tone and quantity of coverage devoted to the Illinois senator, counted the times his face appeared on magazine covers, the number of newspapers that endorsed him and accused television reporters of becoming "Barack Obama's media groupies".

No doubt many disappointed John McCain supporters will be blaming the media for influencing the outcome of the race. The Arizona senator's campaign was among those who accused reporters of unfairly attacking him, running mate Sarah Palin and even "Joe the Plumber".



A Democrat supporter holds a copy of the music magazine Rolling Stone featuring Barack Obama on its cover
Photo: REUTERS

Studies and opinion polls on the media's election coverage offer differing answers on bias in newspaper and television reporting and its potential influence on the electorate.

The non-partisan Centre for Media and Public Affairs last week declared in an analysis of the media that Mr. McCain received far more negative news coverage than his rival during the campaign.

The Pew Research Centre also detected slightly more positive coverage of Mr. Obama in the six weeks between the conventions and the last presidential debate (36 per cent positive to 29 per cent negative). By contrast, reporting on John McCain was "substantially negative" - 57 per cent to just 14 per cent positive.

Its report "concluded that this, in significant part, reflected and magnified the horse race and direction of the polls".

Studies by other groups, however, dispute the existence of "liberal bias".

A Harris Poll last week found Republicans tend to be much more critical than Democrats of bias in the media's election coverage with 65 per cent of Republicans believing coverage to have unfairly favoured Mr. Obama and only 16 per cent believing it fair. Some 54 per cent of Democrats meanwhile thought press coverage was fair while 12 per cent thought it unfairly favoured Mr. McCain.

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