

The Washington Times

Obama's positive press sets record

McCain coverage negative

Jennifer Harper, Saturday, December 6, 2008

It's a record-setting press honeymoon.

President-elect Barack Obama has received the most positive campaign news coverage on the main network news shows in the 20-year history of such studies by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**.

Mr. Obama received 68 percent positive evaluations from the four major networks, according to the study released Friday.

"Obama's positive press is the strongest showing CMPA has ever recorded for a presidential candidate since we began monitoring election news in 1988," said **Robert Lichter**, director of the nonpartisan research group affiliated with George Mason University.

By contrast, his Republican rival almost set the record for hostile press coverage.

Just 33 percent of the stories on Sen. John McCain were positive in nature -- "the worst showing" since former President George H.W. Bush received only 29 percent positive press in 1988, Mr. Lichter said.

The study analyzed 1,197 election stories from Aug. 23 to Nov. 4 on "ABC World News Tonight," "NBC Nightly News," "CBS Evening News" and the first half-hour of "Fox Special Report."

The findings counter previous CMPA research trends somewhat. On average in the last 20 years, Democratic presidential hopefuls received coverage that was fairly balanced: about half positive and half negative. However, over the same period, Republicans received 34 percent positive and 66 percent negative press.

Mr. Obama also trumped coverage garnered by former presidential hopeful Sen. John Kerry. The Massachusetts Democrat received 59 percent favorable press in a similar study conducted during the 2004 election.

NBC was the most Obama-friendly of the four networks, with 73 percent of the coverage being favorable. Fox News was the sole network to mix it up with Mr. Obama, with only 37 percent of the stories on him positive in tone, although that was only slightly less favorable than the 41 percent favorability of the network's McCain coverage.

Fox also took him to task for some lofty trappings.

"President-elect Barack Obama is looking very presidential these days. When he makes an announcement, he is ringed by American flags and stands behind a lectern that has a very presidential-looking placard announcing 'The Office of the President-Elect.' But the props are merely that. Under the Constitution, there is no such thing as the Office of the President-Elect," a recent Fox News op-ed piece said.

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Other research has revealed an Obama-centric press. A Pew Research Center survey released in late October found, for example, that 70 percent of voters agreed that journalists "wanted" Mr. Obama to win the White House; the figure was 62 percent even among Democratic respondents. A Harvard University analysis in early November revealed that 77 percent of Americans say the press is politically biased; of that group, 5 percent said it skewed conservative. Even The Washington Post's ombudsman, Deborah Howell, offered evidence of an "Obama tilt" in her own newspaper in a recent op-ed piece.

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