

The New York Times

Who's Watching News Scorecards on Obama?

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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NEW YORK (AP) -- As President Barack Obama passed his 100th day in office last week, two studies judged that the news media has given him more coverage, and more positive coverage, than his two predecessors at the same point in their terms.

What is that information really worth?

"It's always good to know what you're doing," said Bob Lichter, director of the Center for Media and Public Affairs at George Mason University. "Journalists get critiques from all sides at all times. Instead of throwing up your hands and ignoring critiques of your work, you can focus on reliable critiques."

Lichter's group did one of the studies, looking at evening news coverage and stories in The New York Times over 50 days. It found the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts devoted nearly 28 hours to the new Obama administration, more than they did during the same stretch in the Bush and Clinton presidencies combined.

The tone of comments by reporters and sources on the three networks reflected positively on Obama in roughly the same proportions, 57 percent on ABC, 58 percent on CBS and 61 percent on NBC. Bush faced a two-thirds negative reaction, and Clinton 44 percent in the same period.

Obama's policies have come in for more criticism than the president himself, the center said.

Another independent think tank, the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, did a more extensive look at media outlets and judged 42 percent of news stories, editorials and columns were pro-Obama. Clinton was 27 percent positive and Bush 22 percent positive in a similar evaluation.

News organizations are focusing more on Obama's leadership style and personal qualities than they did for his immediate predecessors, the Pew Center said.

"My eyes are always open to everything, including studies like these," said Jon Banner, executive producer of ABC's "World News." "I do not program the news by studies or by anything else, for that matter. I program it by the news of the day and what our journalistic guts tell us."

He doesn't pay much attention to the studies parsing his newscast, particularly when done by organizations with a clear point of view.

Given a new president trying to change the direction of two wars and restart the economy, "if we are covering the news, we are covering this administration," Banner said. "There's really no way around that."

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