THE FRAMING OF A CANDIDATE: NEWSPAPERS, PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS, AND THE IMAGINARY PRIMARY

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ABSTRACT

In this examination of an election’s pre-nomination period, it becomes evident that the media have created the “imaginary primary” as a way of making the race seem dramatic, interesting, and “in the news.” The imaginary primary is defined as the media-created contest that pits potential candidates against one other, using viability and electability as the measuring sticks to determine who is winning and losing in the months and years leading up to the primary season. This early speculation about potential candidates is the result of two recent trends: the emergence of soft news coverage and the front-loading of nomination primaries. The media have developed and employed three dominant news frames as a way to cover these presidential hopefuls during the imaginary primary. These frames focus on the celebrity aspect of possible candidates, campaign strategies, and public opinion poll results as a means of discussing the upcoming presidential election even when there is no hard news.

The pervasiveness of this early election coverage begs some important questions. When there are no declared candidates what news is the media actually
reporting? How does the amount and prominence of coverage vary among possible candidates? Perhaps most importantly, what are the possible consequences for this early press attention, both on the potential candidates and the American public?

During this imaginary primary, national newspapers and smaller local newspapers are paying close attention to possible candidates for the presidency. The frontrunner for the nomination dominates press attention, in terms of the amount and prominence of this coverage. Characteristics of candidate-specific reports are also affected if a candidate is a current elected official. However, all potential candidates are subjects of the three news frames, with the largest proportion of coverage being dedicated to campaign strategy.

The consequences of this constant coverage during the imaginary primary can be significant both for electorate and the potential candidates themselves. The media attention can create a bandwagon effect, bolstering support for the frontrunner and making a “comeback” more difficult for late entrants and lesser-known candidates. The media sets the agenda by telling voters who to think about as viable 2008 candidates, while the media’s emphasis on character traits during this time can cause voters to make superficial decisions about candidates before knowing where they stand on issues. Finally, the media emphasize electability, which cues voters to consider candidates’ political actions as a means to achieve popularity en route to a
higher office. This could prime audiences to focus on potential candidates’ strategy and not the real reasons that the candidates have staked out these policy positions.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. The Road to 2008.............................................................. 1
  Outline of Study.............................................................................. 5

Chapter 2. The Modern Media.......................................................... 8
  The Rise of New Media.............................................................. 8
  Hard vs. Soft News Coverage.................................................. 13
  The Rise of Tabloidization and Infotainment............................ 15
  Public Opinion Polls .............................................................. 21
  Reporter-centric Coverage....................................................... 24
  Chapter Summary..................................................................... 26

Chapter 3. Framing the News........................................................... 28
  The Media as Joan Rivers....................................................... 30
  The Media as Karl Rove.......................................................... 37
  The Media as Willie Shoemaker............................................ 43
  Chapter Summary..................................................................... 48

Chapter 4. The Modern Nominating Process..................................... 50
  The Front-Loading Problem ................................................... 50
  Visiting Iowa, New Hampshire and Beyond......................... 52
  The Invisible Primary............................................................ 55
  The Imaginary Primary .......................................................... 57
  Chapter Summary..................................................................... 58

Chapter 5. The 2008 Presidential Election....................................... 61
  The Candidates......................................................................... 63
  The Rock Stars......................................................................... 64
  The Familiar Faces................................................................. 69
  The Dark Horses...................................................................... 71
  Chapter Summary..................................................................... 79

Chapter 6. Research Plan and Methodology..................................... 82
  Choosing the Democrats ....................................................... 82
  Choosing Newspapers............................................................ 85
Chapter Summary ....................................................................... 149

Chapter 9. Findings and Analysis: Characteristics of Candidate Coverage....151
   Headline Mentions ................................................................. 151
   Front Page Articles............................................................... 155
   Article Type ........................................................................... 158
   Joan Rivers Coverage........................................................... 163
   Karl Rove Coverage................................................................ 168
   Willie Shoemaker Coverage............................................... 174
   Chapter Summary ................................................................... 178

Chapter 10. Possible Consequences............................................. 181
   Politics of Momentum............................................................. 181
   Politics of Viability................................................................. 184
   Politics of Electability............................................................ 189
   Chapter Summary ................................................................... 192

Chapter 11. Conclusion............................................................... 194
Chapter 1. The Road to 2008

Over the last several election cycles, intensive coverage of the presidential primary season has become a staple of the mainstream media in the United States. Scholars Judith Trent and Robert Friedenberg contend that the national media have “discovered the glamour, the excitement, the ‘gamelike’ stakes of the presidential primary.” The road to the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination was undoubtedly a major focus of media coverage during much of 2005 and 2006. Consider the major storylines: Will the former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton seek the Democratic nomination, and if so, could she be the first female major party candidate with a legitimate shot to win on Election Day? Will Al Gore or John Kerry resurrect their campaigns for second presidential bids? Will former Virginia Governor Mark Warner really remain watching from the sidelines? Who will be the dark horse candidates – Indiana Senator Evan Bayh or New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson? Will the Democrats’ newest “rock star” politician, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, test the presidential waters and make a run at the nomination? Finally, does anyone know Mike Gravel, the only Democrat to officially declare his/her candidacy before October 2006? Does he have any chance to garner the nomination as a total unknown just one year away from the first nomination primary?
It is this set of complex, budding storylines which makes an investigation of the 2008 Democratic primary coverage such an interesting case study. Tellingly, with two years to Election Day 2008, many media outlets already have begun the speculation and the soap opera is underway. In its October 23, 2006 issue, *Time* featured Barack Obama on its cover with the headline “Why Barack Obama Could Be the Next President.” A month earlier, the publication’s cover story probed the presidential ambitions of Hillary Clinton. The magazine’s cover encouraged readers to choose: love her or hate her. Obama and Clinton also faced off on the front page of the *Washington Post*’s Outlook section on November 12, 2006. The headline read: “Americans Are Too Racist for Barack. Americans Are Too Sexist for Hillary. Discuss.” The *Concord Monitor* regularly tracks potential candidates’ visits to New Hampshire, a state that will play an integral role in the 2008 nominations process. The *Wisconsin State Journal*, *Madison Capitol Times*, and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* feature stories on Wisconsin Senator Russell Feingold’s criticism of the Bush Administration’s policies and speculate as to how those may bolster his credibility among party loyalists in seeking his party’s nomination for president. In short, it is nearly impossible to pick up an American newspaper and not get some sense of who may be considering a run in 2008.
The pervasiveness of this early election coverage begs some important questions. When there are no declared candidates, what “news” is the media actually reporting? How does the media’s focus on 2008 affect possible candidates? Are some presidential hopefuls garnering significantly more media attention than others? Perhaps most importantly, what are the possible consequences for this early press attention, both on the potential candidates and the American public?

In this examination of an election’s pre-nomination period, it becomes evident that the media have created the “imaginary primary” as a way of making the race seem dramatic, interesting, and “in the news.” The imaginary primary is defined as the media-created contest that pits potential candidates against one other, using viability and electability as the measuring sticks to determine who is winning and losing in the months and years leading up to the primary season. This early speculation about potential candidates is the result of two recent trends: the emergence of soft news coverage and the front-loading of nomination primaries. The media have created and employed three dominant news frames as a way to cover these presidential hopefuls during the imaginary primary. These frames focus on the celebrity aspect of possible candidates, campaign strategies, and public opinion poll results as a means of reporting on the upcoming presidential election even when there is no hard news.
The development of this concept of the imaginary primary is seminal to this study and is this project’s greatest contribution to existing scholarship on presidential elections and the way in which the media cover them. While there is an abundance of research about media coverage during an election and the jockeying of candidates shortly before and during the first primaries, no in-depth study has been conducted to examine the media’s coverage of candidates prior to the nomination season. The notion of the imaginary primary is particularly important to consider as the media’s fascination with pre-nomination activities increases.

The consequences of this constant coverage during the imaginary primary can be significant for electorate and the potential candidates themselves. The media attention can create a bandwagon effect, bolstering support for the frontrunner and making a “comeback” more difficult for late entrants and lesser-known candidates. The media sets an agenda by telling voters who to think about as viable 2008 candidates, while the media’s emphasis on character traits during this time can cause voters to make superficial decisions about candidates before knowing much about where they stand on issues. Finally, the media emphasize electability, which cues voters to consider candidates’ political actions as a means to achieve popularity en route to a higher office. This could prime audiences to focus on potential candidates’ strategy and not the real reasons that the candidates have staked out these policy positions.
Outline of Study

In examining the media’s 2008 election coverage in pre-primary stages, I begin by exploring the theoretical context surrounding the media’s coverage of presidential elections, and specifically nomination contests. In Chapter 2, I take a look at the modern media and investigate the effect of New Media. In particular, soft news coverage, with its emphasis on the tabloidization of the news and infotainment, will be discussed. Other techniques, such as the use of public opinion polls and reporter-centric journalism, are critical to this study and will be examined in greater detail. From there, in Chapter 3 this study will discuss the definition and implementation of news frames in election coverage. In this section I will define the three news frames – the media as Joan Rivers, Karl Rove, and Willie Shoemaker – employed by the media when covering the 2008 election in pre-primary stages. I will also provide examples of how the media implement each frame in its articles about the 2008 election. Next, in Chapter 4, I detail the current nomination process, with a particular focus on the front-loading problem, the importance of Iowa and New Hampshire, and the media’s creation of the imaginary primary in covering the “news” during this period. Finally, in Chapter 5, I finish laying the theoretical foundation for this study as I explore the political landscape heading into the 2008 nomination contests, and give a brief look at the 15 possible candidates for the Democratic nomination.
In Chapter 6, I detail my methodology and research approach. In this section I examine my three research questions. I also introduce my conceptual hypothesis, which is that \textit{perceived frontrunners during the imaginary primary will receive more prolific and prominent coverage, but all potential candidates will be written about using the three dominant media frames employed during pre-primary stages of an election.} I also detail my 13 operational hypotheses before discussing my data collection parameters and variables. I will discuss why I chose to focus on each of the five Democrats selected as subjects in this study and why I tracked newspaper coverage. This chapter also looks at this study’s limitations.

Next, in Chapter 7, I introduce this study’s statistical findings and offer an analysis of their significance in investigating the phenomenon of the media’s 2008 election coverage. I take a closer look at the research question: What are the \textit{characteristics} of newspapers’ 2008 election coverage during the pre-nomination stages of the election? This study finds that the frequency of 2008 coverage is comparable between national and non-national newspapers. However, articles tend to be longer in national newspapers. In addition, evidence shows that the campaign strategy news frame makes up much of the pre-primary coverage and that this frame appears most frequently in editorial/opinion articles.
In Chapter 8, I look at the research question: How will the amount of newspapers’ coverage of potential 2008 candidates vary among candidates? This study finds that potential candidates who no longer hold public office are more likely to appear in articles specifically about 2008 and receive less homestate coverage than current office holders. Then in Chapter 9, I conclude my findings and analysis and address perhaps the most important question in this study: How will the characteristics of newspapers’ coverage of the 2008 election vary among candidates? Data demonstrate that the frontrunner, Hillary Clinton, is garnering the most front page articles and the most headlines, particularly in national newspapers. The frontrunner also was the focus of more editorial/opinion articles than other candidates. Finally, potential candidates that were featured in articles were subjects of all three media frames. Candidates who did not hold public often were most likely to receive larger portions of Joan Rivers-style coverage, while the candidates received nearly equal percentages of coverage featuring the Karl Rove and Willie Shoemaker news frame.

In Chapter 10, I conclude by outlining the possible consequences of this type of media coverage – both for voters and the candidates themselves. In this chapter, I investigate the primary implications of coverage focused on the politics of momentum, viability, and electability. In doing so, this study touches on issues associated with the bandwagon effect, agenda setting, and priming.
Chapter 2. The Modern Media

Before delving into the media’s early 2008 election coverage, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the modern media, particularly in the broader context of existing scholarly research. Essential to this study is examining how the coverage of presidential elections is a just part of larger modern media trends. The rise of New Media has had a significant impact on the way in which news is covered by the Old Media. The prevalence of soft news, infotainment, and tabloidization has had dramatic impacts on election coverage. This shift in the modern media gives clues into how and why the mainstream media reports election news, particularly in pre-primary stages.

The Rise of New Media

For more than 100 years the Old Media reigned supreme in the delivery of news to the American public. The hometown newspaper and the network nightly news worked as a gatekeeper, providing the polity with pertinent information about current events and the issues of the day. However, the advent of the New Media is changing the way in which Americans receive their news and the content of those news reports. The New Media, which began in the late 1980s, has been defined as mass communication forms with primarily non-political origins that have acquired political roles. According to media scholars, New Media encompass a variety of new and old
news venues including talk radio, television talk shows and news magazines, Internet web logs, trade publications, and print giveaway tabloids, to name a few.

In investigating the role of the New Media, it is necessary to emphasize their ability to provide a bevy of news options and choices to American citizens. The advent of cable and satellite television, which now has 92.2 million subscribers nationwide,\textsuperscript{ii} is bringing audiences more voices and a greater diversity of political offerings through the abundance of program choices. The talk radio phenomenon has also opened a series of dialogues even if it is largely more partisan and one-sided than mainstream news media.\textsuperscript{iii} According to media scholars Richard Davis and Diana Owen (1998) talk or news/talk formats on radio have increased dramatically since the early 1990s. Radio stations began opting for this news talk content, which has been a key to listeners returning to AM radio.\textsuperscript{iv} By 2002, a Gallup survey investigated “Frequent Use of Traditional and New Media” and found that twice as many people listen to talk radio everyday than read national newspapers. Additionally, talk radio is generally more accessible than other media, as the public possess more radios than televisions and listening requires less effort.\textsuperscript{v} As First Amendment scholar Cass Sunstein (1995), who despite an often pessimistic view of the media’s role in democracy, claims, “it does seem clear that to an increasing degree, both attention to public issues and diversity can
be found in light of the dazzling array of options made available by modern
technology.\textsuperscript{vii}

In addition, as a result of the “news for profit” environment of the New Media, a larger public, as well as special audiences, has greater access to news and information. Today, in addition to its wide reach in cable television and radio programming, New Media are now catering to smaller audiences that have common ideologies and values.\textsuperscript{vii} For example, some scholars believe that New Media are erasing the digital divide, allowing citizens, political leaders, and journalists to connect in networks that cut across socio-economic boundaries.\textsuperscript{viii} Perhaps media scholar Robert Entman summed up this notion best when he implored media outlets to “ask clients, much smaller audiences, what information they need to make their jobs and lives easier and more productive. Design news products for specific consumers.”\textsuperscript{ix}

The government has also been active in assisting New Media outlets increase the diversity of audience access points. Licenses for Low Power FM stations are an appropriate example. The goal of the program was to “offer a communications mechanism to small, local bodies with shared interest, especially racial and ethnic groups with linguistics and cultural similarities, schools seeking to enrich their conventional curricula and civic organizations that were not adequately supported by commercial, full-power radio.”\textsuperscript{x} The reach of New Media into more marginalized
communities in society allows these groups to be part of an essential political dialogue. Clearly, populism and grassroots organization, both possible by-products of New Media’s citizen journalism, promote discourse and action. But perhaps most importantly, the sheer volume of media outlets can provide citizens seeking hard news with an array of points of view, increasing the opportunities for public, political discourse.

The result is increasing pressure on the Old Media. The competition with the New Media for viewers and readers, and thus dollars, has taken its toll. In *All the News that’s Fit to Sell*, James T. Hamilton (2005) states bluntly, “news about government will be underproduced and underconsumed, even if those trends are noted and bemoaned. The high fixed costs of putting together the news (the cost of that first newspaper copy) limits the variety offered…The chase for new consumers means that content will often reflect the preferences of those least interested in hard news, rather than interests of loyal readers and viewers more interested in public affairs.”

Importantly, the battle the Old Media wage against the New Media essentially conflates the two institutions. Because New Media do not have the same conventions when it comes to reporting the news, the gate-keeping role of the Old Media is seriously weakened when information appears in New Media channels before appearing in newspaper and magazine pages. According to W. Lance Bennett, this is
“material that may prove irresistible to competitors in the world of nonstop cable news channels that now occupy important niches in the press food chain.” As Old Media continue to adopt New Media reporting styles and priorities, often times “the differences between the two forms of media are a matter of degree.” Interestingly, despite the competition between the Old and New Media, journalists from traditional outlets get news cues and content from New Media sources, thus “creating many pathways for information to flow from micro to mass media.” Therefore, New Media are playing an increasingly critical role in changing the journalistic content of the news. Here the Old Media are taking news cues from New Media sources.

This shift is particularly important to this study because it affects the way in which the Old Media cover the 2008 election. Given the free-for-all nature of New Media, speculative stories and commentary about the 2008 election are often passed off as “news,” which becomes particularly problematic for possible candidates when “pathways for information flow from micro to macro media.” In newspaper pages, rumor begins to trump issues and news event coverage. The public is then primed to think about 2008 candidates in terms of political speculation rather than political reality. In sum, as speculative stories seep from New Media sources to the Old Media, the result is, as Hamilton puts it, “the death of hard news.”
Hard vs. Soft News Coverage

In his News: The Politics of Illusion, Bennett (2005) delineates the distinction between soft news and hard news. As he explains, “a common journalistic hard news standard is what an informed person in society should know.” Bennett argues that soft news is “emotional and immediate. It requires no justification beyond grabbing the attention of the audience and, ideally, getting them talking the next day about what they saw…” These stories have little relevance beyond entertainment and emotional appeal.xvii Scholar Thomas Patterson goes one step further claiming that hard news contains public policy content or other useful public information.

Patterson dissects the concept of soft news further in The Vanishing Voter (2002). According to Patterson, by the early 1990s, public affairs coverage was being squeezed by an emergence of soft news stories. Patterson argues that the shift occurred as Old Media began trying to compete with cable television. As news organizations cut costs, often by eliminating foreign news bureaus, the result was a market strategy that focused on dramatic stories about crime, celebrities, medical breakthroughs – in short, the spectacular. Media scholars Robert Lichter and Jeremy Tobin have claimed, “public affairs used to be at the core of the news. Now it is one niche in a news agenda oriented more toward features and lifestyle issues.” By the time Bill Clinton was re-elected in 1996 the shift was clear: traditional hard news, such as breaking events and
major issues became an endangered, though not fully extinct, species in many of the nation’s most prominent publications.

This transition is apparent through a vast majority of 2008 election news coverage. Even in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, two of the country’s foremost media opinion leaders, articles rarely, if ever, cover the potentially important issues of the 2008 election within the context of pre-primary coverage. Instead, news reports about 2008 candidates focused in part on the celebrity aspects of each candidate. For example, stories report on how much money Hillary Clinton could raise, what campaign staff John Edwards is hiring, and what Hollywood celebrities are backing Russ Feingold. Even in articles that feature issue coverage, reporters often choose to frame the news in terms of a campaign strategy and whether a particular policy position would be an asset or hindrance during a 2008 presidential run.

However, it is necessary to point out that the news media’s penchant for soft news can contribute to attention to public issues. The New Media’s coverage of the Terry Schiavo case is an excellent example. The Schiavo case featured the dramatic video of the movements of the brain-damaged Florida woman, movements that were essential to the ongoing debate of her right to life. The Schiavo videos and debate saturated New and Old Media programming for more than two weeks. This constant news coverage accentuated scandal, human-interest angles, and the dramatization of
news events. But despite the media’s 24-hour focus on the actions of the protesters, emotional reactions of the families involved, and the animated rants of politicians in Washington D.C. and Florida, a meaningful political dialogue emerged. Personal experience and anecdotal evidence suggests that Americans engaged in important debates about the separation of church and state, the government’s separation of powers and the right to life/death -- all thanks to the ubiquity of the Shiavo media coverage. Therefore, as the New and Old Media converge, there is not always a distinct line between hard and soft news. This trend becomes apparent throughout the media’s coverage of the 2008 election.

The Rise of Tabloidization and Infotainment

The press’ reliance on soft news coverage has been illustrated by recent campaign coverage. This soft news plays out in two primary ways relevant to this study. First, is the media’s tabloidization of the news. Larry Sabato (1991) has studied this phenomenon extensively. Sabato describes the media’s “feeding frenzy” as coverage “attending any political event or circumstance where a critical mass of journalists leap to cover the same embarrassing or scandalous subject and pursue it intensely, often excessively, and sometimes uncontrollably.” Sabato contends the trend corresponds to “the news cycle without end.” Furthermore, scandals, especially those involving sex do better than dispassionate discussion of policy issues.
Tabloid-style journalism emphasizes infotainment format, accentuating scandal, human interest angles, and the dramatization of news events. In sum, entertainment and news are now fused as is commentary and news. In the New Media era, as scholar W. Lance Bennett writes, “the big picture of world economic and political affairs that might make sense of these personal stories was literally squeezed out of the news by editorial choices to feature, instead, a world of chaos, disaster, famine, flood, and other biblical epics. In the calmer moments between fires and floods, the precious news space was given to social scares such as an over-dramatized twenty-year crime wave, the serial disorders of the tragic Princess Di, or the endless year that was devoted to the unappealing sexual appetites of Bill Clinton.”

Bennett links this type of infotainment, drama-focused coverage to the need for media companies to turn a profit. “The programming focus on the corporate bottom line promote more drama and mayhem to attract readers and viewers.” Furthermore, Bennett argues, “low budget people centered, dramatized news is not so much the result of popular demand as it is the most profitable product to produce. Other information formats turn out be popular but not as profitable.”

Today’s journalists take seriously the charge of government and corporate watchdog. As Washington Post editors Leonard Downie Jr., and Robert G Kaiser proclaimed, “The best journalism digs into it, makes sense of it and makes it accessible
to everyone.” For many journalists “digging in” and uncovering and exposing scandal are synonymous. This is the investigative reporting that ABC anchor Ted Koppel sneered at when he once remarked, “People shouldn’t expect the mass media to do investigative stories. That job belongs to the ‘fringe’ media.”

However, these in-depth, behind-the-scenes stories have become a staple of contemporary news content. Television magazine shows and the Sunday edition of newspaper in particular, routinely run feature stories designed to unearth scandal, sometimes of a political nature. The Bill Clinton-Gennifer Flowers alleged affair saturated the media news coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign. Additionally, the media’s obsession with high-profile court cases, such as the O.J. Simpson double murder trial, is just another example of journalists’ push to uncover undiscovered storylines, personalities, and institutional failures. More recently, the Congressman Mark Foley scandal involving instant messages sent to former House pages dominated coverage by all forms of media. The tawdry details of the situation sent political ripples to the far corners of the United States thanks to the constant coverage by a variety of Old and New Media outlets.

The trend continues in 2008 election coverage. Russ Feingold’s second divorce became fodder for political pundits and writers as they assessed the effect it would have on his candidacy. Hillary Clinton often cannot escape mention of the Monica
Lewinsky scandal and the fact that she is married to a man who is often accused of being a womanizer. Even potential candidate Bill Richardson is alleged to have played a role in the Lewinsky saga. It is rumored that Richardson once offered Lewinsky a job as a favor to President Clinton. Articles about Hillary Clinton’s war of worlds with Karl Rove turned into a he-said, she-said that played out over the course of several days. Once again, this candidate-centric coverage, particularly stories that focus on personalities and scandal, shift focus away hard news that may better equip voters to make informed electoral decisions about candidates.

The media’s dramatized news coverage does have its consequences. As scope and scale of the media’s news reach has expanded, quality remains an issue. Lance Bennett describes this concern lucidly arguing, “the relaxation of socially responsible program and advertising standards enhances profits, but it adversely affects the quality of political information content delivered to citizens…society is portrayed in often chaotic and threatening ways in both news and entertainment….Thus in ‘the race to the bottom’ to capture audiences with more dramatic news and more spectacular entertainment formats, those audiences become suspicious of being hyped and manipulated, even as they follow the breathless stories and media spectacles of the day.”xxv
In today’s big media era, the importance of the bottom line cannot be overlooked. Editors, journalists, and news producers must constantly ask themselves, “What will sell to audiences?” Author James T. Hamilton articulates this concern simply, writing “news coverage is sold to the highest bidders, with bidders including readers, advertisers, and politicians.”

Economic logic-based news judgments that are the result of the media’s need to turn a profit often draw harsh critiques from critics. Many scholars contend that these news judgments produce some of the most harmful effects of poor news coverage including media bias, soft news, and celebrity/personality-driven news. Because the cost of producing soft news stories is significantly less than producing hard news, many critics, such as Bennett, argue that the media is not equipping citizens with the proper information tools to foster an effective and sound democratic system. Among the most disconcerting critiques involves the media’s blatant disregard for accuracy and journalistic precision. In addition, advertising has diminished market competition and, by just appealing to certain target audiences advertisers, quell the media’s lofty goal of providing relevant information to the American public.

An anecdote in The Way to Win: Taking the White House in 2008 (2006) demonstrates the lax standards that plague the modern media in soft news coverage. It
also reveals the extent to which Old Media often follows the New Media’s lead, especially in tabloid-style coverage. In January 2004, speculation swirled that presidential hopeful John Kerry had used Botox injections to freshen his appearance. Prominent blogger Matt Drudge ignited a full-fledged debate when his *Drudge Report* ran a story with before-and-after photos analyzing Kerry’s “new and improved” look. Kerry’s spokesperson denied Drudge’s claims, but the story took hold anyway. Authors Mark Halperin and John F. Harris recall, “Former *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee once described a certain type of especially delicious story: ‘Too good to check!’ Kerry’s alleged Botox treatments fell into this category. Whether true or not, it fit so neatly into the existing image of Kerry as a popinjay that the story scurried through the news. CNBC, MSNBC, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* – all of them, and a lot of others did Botox stories.”xxviii

Another point to consider is that while the media speculating and reporting on the personal lives of politicians is not a recent phenomenon, the degree and pervasiveness of which these topics are being reported is alarming. This trend is brought about by the advent of New Media in the United States. However, as demonstrated with the John Kerry Botox scandal, these stories are increasingly appearing in publications that were once thought to be the news gatekeepers. Important to this study is that this coverage has become a staple of campaign coverage. Who
could forget the media’s obsession with Bill Clinton’s alleged draft dodging, pot smoking, and various extra-marital affairs in 1992? The media’s fascination with the prospect that George W. Bush used cocaine and had been arrested for a drunk-driving charge was evident throughout his 2000 presidential campaign. This celebrity-focused journalism in elections mirrors the kind of news coverage devoted to corporate scandal. Instead of covering the issues, the majority of news implemented the tabloid-style frame which focused on personalities, their excesses, and personal relationships. Here entertainment and news are conflated.

The question remains: what will be the Botoxgate of 2008? Will an accusation that Hillary Clinton has paid for plastic surgery become front page news? Will the media continually point out that Joseph Biden uses hair plugs? In sum, these stories have little value beyond entertainment. In fact, one can argue that they border on character assassination. However, what cannot be denied is that this type of coverage should have little impact on voters. But in reality, if the Old Media continue to take cues from the New Media, these stories have the potential to have lasting impacts on potential 2008 candidates.

**Public Opinion Polls**

Another soft news reporting technique is the public opinion poll. The use of these polls has become a staple in the newspaper pages during the last couple of
decades. News organizations got into the business of conducting their own polls thanks to technological changes that reduced the cost of polling. As telephones penetrated nearly every American home and microcomputers became readily available to collect and compute data, media outlets began their own independent data-collection activities. News organizations claimed that this polling data gave them increased editorial control and contributed to objectivity in producing news.\textsuperscript{xix} Scholar Thomas Patterson offers a different explanation for the media’s recent focus on public opinion polls. Patterson argues that modern reporting is shaped by news routines and an emphasis on what’s new: “The news is not a mirror held up to society. It is a selective rendition of the events told in story form. For this reason the conventions of news reporting include an emphasis on the more dramatic and controversial aspects of politics. Above all else reporters are taught to search for what is news and different in event of the past twenty-four hours.”\textsuperscript{xxx} Given their pervasiveness, public opinion polls often give reporters that fresh, new angle they are looking for.

Although there are many types of public opinion polls reported by journalists, election polls, even ones conducted several years away from when the votes are actually cast, are wildly popular. Most relevant to this study is the type of poll that is conducted for media organizations that is designed to provide news content. As Michael Traugott and Paul Lavrakas argue in \textit{The Voter’s Guide to Election Polls}
(2004), news organizations use pre-election polls to explore “how popular support for the candidates crystallizes or shifts as Election Day approaches.” Furthermore, “while the range of analytical possibilities is great, most poll-based reporting focuses on who is ahead and behind.” In his book *Mobocracy*, Matthew Robinson (2002) expands on this notion when he argues that the media reportage of elections largely follows perceived winners and the polls shape that coverage. The result is heavy emphasis on the horse race. As Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter argue in *The Nightly News Nightmare* (2003), “Over time, this ‘politics as sports’ focus – a concentration that does not appear to be shared by voters – is becoming a steadily more dominant part of the political world as seen through the distorted prism of network television.” Increasingly, the same can be said of newspapers. In sum, polls provide journalists with a short-hand way of assessing candidates’ viability and draw attention away from hard news stories.

A brief review of the media’s coverage of the 2008 race shows that the use of public opinion polls is still rampant. The horse race coverage has been evident since shortly after the 2004 presidential election. For example, in a two-week span in late August and early September in 2006, the media widely reported on the results of three different polls conducted about possible candidates for next presidential election. A CNN poll showed Hillary Clinton with a sizable lead over her potential Democratic
rivals. A Fox News/Opinion Dynamics survey showed that Hillary Clinton and Al Gore would lose to Republicans Senator John McCain and former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani in hypothetic races. The Fox News poll also mirrored the results of the CNN poll: Hillary Clinton had a 17-point lead over her next closest competitor, Al Gore. Clinton also dominated a Cook Political Report/RT Strategies poll released just days later. Much of the reporting confirmed what many have been saying for months: Hillary Clinton is the frontrunner among the Democrats, but she struggles in general elections against more moderate Republicans. Despite the fact that the polls offered little new insight, their results found their way into media reports during much of September of 2006.

**Reporter-centric Coverage**

Another staple of modern media’s news coverage is journalists’ insistence on becoming part of the story. The technique has inserted the reporter between the government and the citizen, which at least in part helped give rise to the celebrity journalist. The “talking heads” and opinion columnists that appear on talk radio, television talk shows, and political news shows like MSNBC’s *HardBall with Chris Matthews* are celebrity journalists and political personalities. Barbara Walters is a fine example of today’s interviewer-turned-celebrity. In many instances, these pundits stop reporting the news. They become the news.
It has been well-documented among media scholars that journalists have recently begun the practice of focusing on campaign strategy in their reports. As scholar Thomas Patterson has written, “In its coverage of a presidential campaign, the press concentrates on the strategic game played by the candidates in their pursuit of the presidency, thereby de-emphasizing questions of national policy and leadership.”xxxv Couple this with another journalistic trend: reporters as part of the story. Research shows that a major facet of campaign coverage is the self-referential nature of coverage.xxxvi The result is a story about a story. By paying lip service to the issues and concentrating on campaign strategy, these journalists only further exacerbate the growing trend of ignoring the issues and instead focusing on how candidates should approach each issue. The New York Times’ Anthony Lewis once remarked, “My concern is for our business. There were times in this campaign when we looked like theatre critics – critics interested only in the artfulness of the scenery, not in the message of the play.”xxxvii In this respect, the media prime audiences by essentially telling them not what to think about, but how a given issue is presented by the candidate. Some argue that by offering up their own campaign advice, journalists are taking away precious media space/time for discussion of more substantive matters. As Farnsworth and Lichter have discovered, policy proposals are more likely to be given media attention when reporters can attack them as unrealistic.xxxviii
This kind of reporting is critical to this study because it demonstrates how the media mediates the relationship between possible candidates and the voting public. Very clearly, reporters and editorial boards, alike, paint vivid pictures of White House hopefuls, and the electorate is often at the mercy of these depictions. Potential candidates are forced to communicate with reporters rather than directly with voters which can skew messages and divert attention away from issues that the public is most concerned about. Importantly, this is one key journalistic device used in telling the public about a candidate’s electability.

**Chapter Summary**

The rise of the New Media is changing both the way in which Americans receive their news and the content of those news reports. Thanks to the proliferation of outlets and ability to reach niche segments of the public, the New Media is creating a competitive news environment with the Old Media. In many ways the values of the New and Old Media have converged, particularly with regard to the emphasis on profit and what constitutes as “news.” This focus on the bottom line has fostered an environment that has given rise to soft news coverage. This type of news coverage plays out in three primary ways: in tabloid-style coverage of events and people; opinion poll-oriented stories; and reporter-centric news reports. All three have a significant impact on news content, and important to this study, the makeup of election
news coverage. Increasingly, candidates are covered in terms of personal scandal, character flaws, and notions of the celebrity. In short, the coverage is largely candidate-centric. The modern media’s coverage of the campaign and political strategy largely has supplanted traditional issues coverage. This style of election coverage shifts the power to reporters as they play the role of all-knowing campaign consultants. Horse race coverage of primaries has also become a staple of contemporary campaign news reports. The result is a journalistic brew of coverage that at its heart is all about candidates’ viability and electability. Importantly, this attention to candidate viability and electability gives birth to the three primary news frames employed by the media in 2008 coverage.
Chapter 3. Framing the News

Perhaps most important to this inquiry is the use of media frames by media organizations. In this study, I borrow Todd Gitlin’s (1980) definition of media frames: journalistic devices that “largely, unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports. Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual.” Scholar Shanto Iyengar (1991) further categorizes media frames in terms of episodic and thematic coverage. As defined by Iyengar, an episodic news frame “takes the form of a case study or event-oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instance.” By contrast, the thematic frame “places public issues in a more general or abstract context and takes the form of a ‘takeout’ or ‘backgrounder’ report directed at general outcomes or conditions.” Diana Owen has also suggested that media use the “serial frame,” which is used to provide a framework for following a long-term story in a way that keeps the audience interested. It is the use of this serial frame that makes up the vast majority of pre-primary media coverage.

In election coverage, a principal way media outlets sell the sensational is through the use of frames that dramatize the candidates, their policy positions, and
their actions, both personal and political. As Davis Merritt and Maxwell McCombs (2004) note in *The Two W's of Journalism*, today’s journalists rely on the repetition of master narratives or “journalistic cookie cutters” that are largely written in terms of political, financial, and sexual scandal.xli In this study I argue that the presidential hopeful frame is a journalistic shortcut that can be aptly termed as Merritt and McCombs’ cookie cutter. It allows the media to create news in simple terms. In short, news coverage becomes homogeneous and the public debate spurred by potential candidate coverage is confined with the boundaries of the single frame.xlii

Poll coverage is a second type of technique the media employs to frame coverage in election campaigns. In his book *Mobocracy*, Matthew Robinson argues that the media reportage follows perceived winners and the polls shape that coverage.xliii However, “all the small obstacles and challenges in the way of getting a good sample add up, nowhere is this more apparent than in the Holy Grail of polling: the quest for solid reliable primary polling.”xliv In fact, primary polling is the most inaccurate in early primary stages. What makes horse race coverage even more problematic is that reporters make unreflective use of polls in an attempt to get a feeling of voter sentiment even when that sentiment is largely unstable. While dominating early primary coverage, it establishes a competitive environment as candidates vie for funds, media attention, and support.xlv One key failure in this style of
coverage is that it does not provide a context for events and revelations that would help readers and viewers understand why this reporting matters.\textsuperscript{xlvi} It is my contention that the shift in style from issue-oriented news to a soft news focus, has allowed the presidential hopeful news frames to not only emerge, but to become a dominant feature in campaign coverage.

These two staples of campaign coverage, the candidate-centric focus and the persistence of public opinion polling, produce three significant news frames that provide ways for the mainstream media to cover elections in pre-primary stages. These frames are widely pervasive and serve as the most convenient and most effective way for keeping the 2008 election in the news even when there is very little hard news to report. Whether it is a candidates’ vote against Supreme Court justice Samuel Alito, their ability to fundraise, or their finish in a June 2006 straw poll in Iowa, the news media consistently employ three serial news frames as its vehicle to deliver “news” in pre-primary stages of a presidential election. Significantly, all three create a narrative about the 2008 election by focusing on potential candidates’ viability and electability.

\textbf{The Media as Joan Rivers}

First, the press works as Joan Rivers, a famous American comedian known for her celebrity gossip. This frame asks the all-important question: what kind of candidate does it take to win the presidency? The Joan Rivers frame is the essence of the
candidate-centric news coverage. And using W. Lance Bennett’s definition of hard news where a policy component must be present, the Joan Rivers frame exists totally in the soft news realm. This common device occurs when the media implements the presidential hopeful frame to merely gossip and speculate about candidates’ personal lives, relationships, and whereabouts. In this frame, potential candidates are treated like celebrities, with their personal activities and lives on full display. This soap opera-style coverage often produces controversies, like the Bill Clinton-Gennifer Flowers scandal and John Kerry’s Botoxgate, that open dialogue about character issues. Where these potential candidates eat, what their hairstyle is, and with whom they choose to associate can fill newspaper columns and stories.

Jennifer Harper’s Washington Times story “Gore Contends with Lawsuits, Protests” illustrates nicely this use of the Joan Rivers frame. Harper’s lead paragraph states: “Al Gore seems to be leading a complicated life these days, replete with noisy but mixed messages. In recent weeks, Mr. Gore has alternately been sued by a public radio affiliate and an Internet provider, and then picketed by environmentalists.” In describing Gore’s mix-up in this trademark infringement suit, Harper paints Gore, either intentionally or unintentionally, as potentially engaged in unethical business practices. While the story does not delve into Gore’s personality or any personal habits, it clearly does focus on scandal. A more unusual type of Joan Rivers, celebrity-centric
focus occurred when newspapers around the country covered Madame Tussauds’ wax museum’s unveiling of the “Hillary Rodham Clinton” life-sized wax figure. The reason for the inclusion of Clinton in the museum? “President’s Day and the buzz surrounding Clinton’s possible 2008 presidential bid sped up her addition to the collection.”xlviii

Interestingly, the story appeared in newspapers around the country, including the *Harford Courant, St. Louis Dispatch, South Florida Sun,* and *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette.* Another atypical story with the Joan Rivers frame appeared in the *Washington Times*’ news brief “Inside the Beltway.” There, author John McCaslin pointed out that the first “Hillary Clinton for President 2008” thong had been spotted. McCaslin even noted that it was modestly priced at $9.xlix

The Joan Rivers news frame also promotes bickering among potential candidates and other prominent politicians. This tabloid-style coverage creates a politics-as-the-Jerry Springer Show feel as the media describe in elaborate detail the often exaggerated “war of words.” Hillary Clinton’s verbal back-and-forth with GOP strategist Karl Rove became fodder for newspapers during early March of 2006. Clarence Page of the *Chicago Tribune* captured the spat this way: “What’s with Karl Rove and Hillary Rodham Clinton? President Bush’s brain and the former first lady have been sounding like chattering teenage candidates in a hot student council race.” Page then covered the “chattering” between Rove and Clinton in excruciating detail.
Rove first claimed that Hillary would never win the White House because she is too “liberal” and she has a “brittleness” about her. Clinton responded and Page described it this way: “Well, the sun did not set before Clinton was all over WROW-AM radio in Albany, heaving a sigh about how Rove ‘spends a lot of time obsessing about me.’ Oh.” Page then littered the rest of the article with phrases like “Karl and Hillary sittin’ in a tree/F-E-U-D-I-N-G” and “oh Snap!” One can only wonder what value that article had for voters. Similar pieces ran in newspapers throughout the United States, including the Orlando Sentinel, St. Louis Dispatch, Seattle Times, and Deseret News based in Salt Lake City.

The Joan Rivers news frame also allows journalists to become hecklers poking fun and berating candidates for their statements and behavior. In these instances, the candidates become caricatures more than officials seeking a higher office. As Farnsworth and Lichter (2003) have argued, “important to individual candidates are the ways they are defined through media frames regarding character. Unfortunately for some of them, every now and then a candidate seems to attract an extra measure of ridicule from the campaign press pack.” The media’s coverage of Howard Dean’s “I Have a Scream” speech is an excellent recent example of just how devastating this ridicule can be. Furthermore, this manufactured frame provides reporters the opportunity to describe candidates in the simplest terms, allowing them to avoid a great
deal of homework or initiative. In many press accounts, a candidate is dumb, too smart, too stiff or just plain crazy.

An example of this kind of Joan Rivers frame appears in “The Night Hillary’s Funny Bone Went Missing.” The Orlando Sentinel’s Kathleen Parker begins her opinion piece by saying flatly “Hillary blew it.” The article then goes on to chide Hillary for not smiling or laughing when President George Bush tossed her husband a valentine before the 2006 State of the Union address. Parker claimed Hillary missed her cue to “smile and show the nice people that you’re a human being and that you have a sense of humor.” Parker’s piece portrays Hillary as a stoic, calculated politician. At the article’s conclusion Park blasting the former first lady: “I don’t know what was going through Clinton’s mind in that moment, but her expression said ‘Bug off,’ or sentiments to that effect. What we do know is that Bill Clinton would have loved it. And laughed. And reminded Americans of his humanness and his ready sense of humor. His wife, by defining contrast, showed the world that she is something else. That thing – what is it? It is what she isn’t: human, gracious, and humorous.” The criticism seems remarkably harsh considering it is based on the observation that she didn’t laugh at what was, by most measures, a silly joke. Yet, the article demonstrates a key type of coverage within the Joan Rivers frame.
In addition, this coverage has turned the nomination primaries into Oscar-style events, with the media observing just beyond the red carpet. The media speculate as to what potential candidates are traveling to key states with early primaries. Campaign events for other politicians, speeches, and meetings with constituents all become newsworthy events, as commentators speculate about the intentions of these presidential hopefuls. Dan Barrick and Meg Heckman’s article “Democrats See a Bass Backer” in the *Concord Monitor* exhibits characteristics of this style of Joan Rivers news frame. The authors address which presidential hopefuls are traveling around New Hampshire. Their “quick rundown of which potential presidential candidates have bulked up their New Hampshire date books” included a short bit on John Edwards. Barrick and Heckman explained that he “had one heck of a schedule this weekend; He was at Lou D’Allessandro’s birthday party in Manchester Friday night; stops in Bow, Plymouth, and Gorham yesterday; and a visit to Swanzey today.” Other candidates held fundraisers and attended local events like pig roasts. However, not all Joan Rivers articles focus on the travels of potential in terms of Iowa and New Hampshire. For instance the *Tacoma News Tribune* covered John Edwards’ visit to Seattle for the Democratic Party’s 12th Annual Warren G. Magnuson Awards. Edwards attended the $100-a-plate event as keynote speaker. The *News Tribune*, of course, made mention that Edwards was a potential 2008 candidate in the first sentence of the article.
A candidate’s ability to fundraise is also a staple of the Joan Rivers news frame. These stories often mention what celebrities and politically influential figures attended the candidate’s fundraisers and/or donated to his/her campaign. A story that embodies this aspect of the Joan Rivers frame is “Feingold Star is Rising in Hollywood,” which appeared in the *Wisconsin State Journal* on February 19, 2006. Author Frederic Frommer leads off the article writing, “On the television show ‘The West Wing’ Bradley Whitford plays the campaign manager for a fictional Democratic presidential candidate. In real life, Whitford is helping Sen. Russ Feingold build support for a potential presidential run.” Frommer later details other Hollywood types who are supporting a Feingold run, including Lila Garrett of Los Angeles, a former director and head of comedy for Aaron Spelling Productions, and Edward Gladstone, a partner in Rising Talent Management in Beverly Hills. Not only does Frommer list their monetary contributions, but he has both Garrett and Gladstone on the record lauding Feingold. Gladmore remarks, “A lot of people in my industry want to know get to know Senator Feingold more.” Here Feingold’s celebrity is on full display. His ability to garner donations from Hollywood proves his incredible appeal and his willingness to rub elbows with entertainment industry elites.

Finally, the Joan Rivers frame allows the media to focus on which big-name staffers presidential hopefuls are hiring and where campaign offices are setup. In many
articles there is a “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” tone. Adam Nagourney of the
New York Times covered this aspect of the Joan Rivers news frame in an August 25, 2006, article “It’s Never Too Early (Even in ’06) to Gear Up for Presidential Race.” Nagourney comments that John Edwards, Mark Warner, and Hillary Clinton had built “the closest to full-formed skeletons of national campaign organizations.” According to the article, each had signed-on fundraisers, pollsters, media advisers, communications directors, policy advisers, and Web specialists. Hillary’s roster, it is noted, includes Terry McAuliffe, the “former Democratic national chairman and close friend of her and her husband, President Bill Clinton.” A potential GOP candidate is said to have four full-time staffers in Iowa and three in another early primary state, South Carolina. Nagourney continues to list adviser after adviser, famous strategist after strategist. It is borderline hero worship and something that could easily have appeared in US Weekly or Star if the article focused on Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake, instead of Hillary Clinton and John Edwards.

The Media as Karl Rove

In the Karl Rove (a renowned GOP strategist who helped propel George W. Bush to two presidential election victories) news frame the media focus exclusively on political strategy. At the root of this news frame is the question: What kind of positions and strategies will a candidate need to implement in order to win the nomination and
the general election? Essentially these news stories are speculating as to whether the candidate/s will employ an appeal-to-political-centrists Bill Clinton strategy or a George Bush strategy of catering to the party’s base.

The Karl Rove frame can take four forms. First, this frame features journalists playing detective as they attempt to decode the policy motives of potential candidates. Here the emphasis is not on the issue itself, but rather on how the potential candidate arrived at his/her particular policy position. In this frame, journalists opt to try to interpret rather than just report, drawing attention away from issues and toward how candidates arrive at their policy decisions. In short, issue and policy positions become a means to an end. Sentences like “For a lot of Democrats, particularly those who have thoughts of presidential politics, this vote could pose a dilemma” are common. Taking it one step further, in opinion pieces, journalists often praise or criticize these policy stances in the context of the 2008 race for the presidency.

An example of this implementation of the Karl Rove frame is apparent in a variety of stories leading up to the first 2008 primaries. One example is in “Clinton Walking Tightrope on Iraq.” This article is written by Judy Holland of Hearst Newspapers and appeared in the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Holland characterizes Clinton as “carefully tweaking her views on the Iraq war” in the months leading up to her Senate re-election bid. But then Holland makes a jump that is emblematic of the
Karl Rove frame: “But because polls show that she is a leading prospective Democratic presidential candidate, Clinton has to calibrate her position on the war with 2008 in mind.” Holland continues, “It’s a moving target, replete with murky ambiguities that protect her from Republican criticism that she is a ‘cut-and-run Democrat’ coupled with rhetorical hints that she actually is a closet dove.” The article then uses election scholar Larry Sabato and pollster John Zogby, among others, to assess the supposed Clinton strategy.

Other Karl Rove articles focus more on party politics. Dan Balz of the *Washington Post* touches on this in his story about how the Democrats were strategizing their votes on Chief Justice John Roberts’ confirmation. In the final quarter of the article Balz explains that 2008 presidential politics will play a role in the debate, saying that Democrats eyeing the White House would be “faced with a choice of opposing Roberts to placate left-leaning constituencies that will be important in the nomination battle or supporting Roberts to appear less obstructionist and therefore more appealing to swing voters in a general election.” The author points out that Senators Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Joseph Biden, Evan Bayh, and Russell Feingold will be the players to watch.

Second, this frame is implemented by a reporter/writer acting as an all-knowing campaign strategist. These articles primarily investigate if a particular candidate does
or does not have a chance to win the nomination or presidency and advise potential candidates on how to lay their campaign’s foundation. Factors such as the results of the 2006 midterms or another potential candidate’s decision to run/not run play heavily into giving a candidate the thumb’s up or thumb’s down. In short, this frame makes it possible for reporters, talking heads, and editorial boards to speculate as to whether a potential candidate plans to run or not.

Ezra Klein’s opinion piece from August 2006 exemplifies this style of Karl Rove news coverage. Klein, whose opinion article was written for the Los Angeles Times and appeared in the Times Union of Albany, New York, argues fervently that Hillary Clinton should not run for president despite the fact that “conventional wisdom” has it that her “presidential campaign is an absolute certainty.” He, instead, asserts that Clinton should set her sights on the Senate Majority/Minority Leader position. Klein’s premise is based on a rumor perpetuated in Steve Clemons’ blog, the Washington Note, that quoted “highly placed sources” as saying that Minority Leader Harry Reid has tried to convince Clinton to succeed him in 2009. Klein insists that Clinton’s skills set would be perfect for the job. He concludes, in a near plea, “her path to the Senate leadership is a safer road, ensuring that Clinton’s trailblazing migration from first lady to senator remained unmarred by a catastrophic defeat in a presidential campaign. She would be the first woman to occupy the august body’s leadership
position, and she would remain resolutely in the public eye, ready and waiting were the
ground to shift and 2012 to look more inviting.” Here Klein functions as the all-
knowing strategist, a classic characteristic of the Karl Rove news frame.

In the Karl Rove frame, there is often a particular focus on the positioning of
nomination primaries, especially with respect which early primaries benefit which
potential candidates. David S. Broder employed this Karl Rove frame in his August 31,
2006, commentary “The Democrats’ Dysfunctional Calendar.” This *Washington Post*
article’s lead sets the tone: “Well, the Democrats have gone and done it again.” Later
in the column Broder delves further into the strategy behind moving up South Carolina
and Nevada up in the primary calendar. Broder writes, “So Nevada, with a growing
Hispanic population, was inserted before New Hampshire, thanks also to a boost from
Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, Nevada’s senior senator. And South Carolina was
an easy choice to fill the need for a state with lots of black voters, pleasing native son
and former North Carolina senator John Edwards, an unannounced contender for the
nomination that eluded him last time.” This passage is at the very heart of the Karl
Rove news frame.

A fourth and final noteworthy item in the Karl Rove frame is the discussion of
which national candidates the presidential hopefuls support, and what those candidates
mean to their run in 2008. “Top Democrats Hedge on Lamont, Lieberman” by David
Lightman of the *Hartford Courant* provides a nice view of this type of Karl Rove news frame. Lightman outlines the key Democrats who support Connecticut Democratic senatorial candidate Ned Lamont. Near the conclusion of the article, Lightman writes, “many top Democrats have been unequivocal in their support for the anti-war candidate, notably possible presidential candidates John Edwards, John Kerry and Hillary Clinton, whom Lamont visited at her house Friday, and who offered to have her longtime political adviser, Howard Wolfson, help with the campaign.” While the article is focused on Lamont and his election bid, it very clearly addresses the campaign strategy of potential 2008 Democratic candidates. Here the importance of aligning oneself with an anti-war candidate is evident. By backing Lamont, and not his opponent, former Democrat and outspoken supporter of the Iraq War, Joseph Lieberman, 2008 hopefuls Edwards, Kerry, and Clinton demonstrate that an anti-war position is necessary to appealing to the party’s base in the race for the nomination.

This news frame exemplifies how the “watchdog” role of the media can run amuck as the press regularly tries to “unveil” the true political intentions of public figures. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman note in their book *The Press Effect* (2003) that “the veil-ripping process focuses not only on private words and behaviors but also on psychological profiling that seeks patterns in these private and public moments and from them draws inferences with a broad brush.” The frame may also
be the most blatant example of the way in which reporters have sought to insert themselves into the campaign stories. Interestingly though, the Karl Rove frame can become a nexus of hard and soft news when reporters focus peripherally on the issues while addressing campaign strategy.

**The Media as Willie Shoemaker**

Quite simply the Willie Shoemaker (a world renowned horse jockey) news frame exists when the media use any one of a variety of public opinion polls when discussing the 2008 election. These polls come from a wide range of sources including private polling firms, universities, political campaigns, and the media outlets themselves. In the majority of these articles the press works as a jockey, riding the horse leading in the polls. In many cases, for the dark horse candidates, this is only type of story in which they will get media attention. In most poll-oriented stories lesser-known candidates are mentioned merely in terms of what percent of the vote they received in the polls. These stories largely re-enforce the frontrunner’s position and reiterate that dark horse candidates have a lot of work to do. Some polls, however, can be used to show a “chink in the armor” of the anointed frontrunners if a particular candidate does worse than expected. This frame essentially addresses viability by asking: How popular among the public is a particular candidate?
One example of the Willie Shoemaker news frame is Stewart M. Powell’s piece “Gallup, Looking ahead to 2008, Predicts GOP Win,” which appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* on August 4, 2005. With the first nomination primary still two and a half years away, the *Houston Chronicle* gave Powell 205 words to discuss the Gallup Poll results, which were the focus of the entire story. Powell wrote, “Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., would do better than Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., against potential 2008 Republican presidential rivals John McCain and Rudy Giuliani – but would still lose, a Gallup Poll showed Wednesday.” Powell then proceeds to describe the poll results in great detail. To his credit, Powell provided some of the specifics about the poll itself, including how it was conducted and the margin or error. This article highlights one important staple of the Willie Shoemaker news frame: poll results being reported without any context as to their meaning or significance to voters and the candidates themselves.

While Powell’s piece was focused entirely on reporting pre-nomination poll results, other instances of Willie Shoemaker-type coverage are more subtle. For example, consider David Lightman’s *Hartford Courant* article “Dodd a Passing Flash over Iowa Political Skies.” This September 2006 story described Senator Christopher Dodd’s efforts to jumpstart an early campaign in Iowa to capture a win in the nation’s first Democratic caucus. Lightman delineates much of the constituent-focused
activities of Dodd as he tries to connect with Iowans. Lightman declares, “Dodd’s biggest immediate hurdle is explaining his roots.” However, later in the piece Lightman looks at how Dodd is fairing in pre-caucus pools. “(John) Edwards and New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton topped the last Iowa poll, and Dodd was not even on the list of candidates mentioned.” This simple statement is the essence of the Willie Shoemaker frame. While the poll is not the focus of the whole article, it lucidly informs the reader of the frontrunners, and at the same time dooms the lesser-known candidates, in this instance Dodd.

A more uncommon way in which the media cover the horse race is in discussing the odds of candidates winning the presidency. Bob Roberts addressed the topic in his column on the sports page of the Cleveland Plain Dealer on February 16, 2006. In the piece Roberts examines his “slow start” in wagering on the Winter Olympics in Torino Italy. After describing a series of bets he’s placed and the longshots that have failed him, Roberts offers readers a taste of what, besides the Winter Olympics, you can bet on in Torino. “If you think betting on the games in Torin [sic], Italy, is peculiar, how about some of the other propositions that are offered. For instance one site has Hillary Clinton at a little better than 3-1 to be elected president in 2008. Condoleezza Rice is 13-1. Al Gore is 51-1. Sharpshooter Dick Cheney. His odds would have been higher had he been on the U.S. biathlon team.” While this article is
not specifically about the 2008 election and clearly does not represent the traditional reporting-of-opinion-polls style horse race coverage, it still frames the 2008 election in terms of who is ahead. A similar article “A Sure Bet?” appeared in the *Sacramento Bee* on August 7, 2005. Author Jill Jess-Cahir informed readers about paddypower.com, a website that gives odds on who will be the next president of the United States. Jess-Cahir’s piece mentions several Republicans and three Democrats including Clinton, John Edwards, and John Kerry. These more unusual, though not totally uncommon, examples of the Willie Shoemaker frame give some indication at just how pervasive horse race coverage can be.

However, the implementation of the Willie Shoemaker frame in horse race coverage can create problems in reporting poll results. Too often the media cover the poll results as solid indicators of public opinion. However, these opinion polls rarely provide accurate data that reveal meaningful representations of how people are likely to vote, especially early on in the pre-primary period. In fact, primary polling is the most inaccurate in early primary stages. According to Traugott and Lavakas (2004), problems in conducting pre-election polls can hamper the accuracy of poll data in several fashions. First, it is difficult to generate a good estimate on who is going to vote. Polls also often fail to capture the volatility that appears in the electorate. This volatility further decreases the worth of pre-primary polls that merely offer a snapshot
of voter preference years before election day. Robinson concurs. He contends that what makes horse race coverage even more problematic is that reporters make unreflective use of polls in an attempt to get a feeling of voter sentiment even when that sentiment is largely unstable. Robinson also finds that one key failure of horse race coverage is that it does not provide a context for events and revelations that would help readers and viewers understand why this reportage matters. In addition, Merritt and McCombs (2004) argue that journalists’ reliance on “scientific surveys” can distract the press from “other important ways of public listening and rob our reporting of one level of authenticity” and that journalists are frequently “tempted to reduce complex issues and ideas to convenient and glib sound bites and headlines when they have in hand a big glob of numbers that purports to be a ‘scientific survey.’”

Early polls are not insignificant, however. As Larry Sabato notes in his September 21, 2006 Crystal Ball column, “the early frontrunners in the ubiquitous surveys of presidential preferences frequently get nominated. This is good news for Hillary Clinton on the Democratic side, who leads almost all her party's polls.” But as Sabato points out, there are recent exceptions, all on which appear on the Democratic side. Ted Kennedy led the polls leading up to 1972, 1976 and 1980, but did not secure the nomination in any of the three elections. In 1988, Michael Dukakis defeated Senator Gary Hart after Hart led early in the nomination race 1988. Finally, Bill
Clinton trailed New York Governor Mario Cuomo and New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley by wide margins in 1992, but neither of the two candidates ran. Clinton then came from relative obscurity to win the nomination and then the White House.\textsuperscript{lxxi}

**Chapter Summary**

An integral part of this inquiry into the way in which newspapers cover the 2008 election is the use of media frames by media organizations. Media frames are journalistic devices that organize news both for journalists and the audience reading the news report. Media frames can be episodic, thematic, and serial. The serial frame, which is most important to this study, is used to provide a framework for following a long-term story in a way that keeps the audience interested. It is the use of this serial frame that makes up the vast majority of imaginary primary media coverage. These master narratives or “journalistic cookie cutters” provide reporters with a simple way to discuss the 2008 election and the election’s potential candidates.

Two staples of campaign coverage, the candidate-centric focus and the persistence of public opinion polling, produce three significant news frames that provide ways for the mainstream media to cover elections in pre-primary stages. These frames, the media as Joan Rivers, Karl Rove and Willie Shoemaker, are widely pervasive and serve as the most convenient and most effective way for keeping the 2008 election in the news even when there is very little hard news to report. First, the
press works as Joan Rivers when it asks the all-important question: what kind of candidate does it take to win the presidency? The Joan Rivers frame is the essence of the candidate-centric news coverage. In the Karl Rove news frame the media focus exclusively on political strategy. At the root of this news frame is the question: What kind of positions and strategies will a candidate need to implement in order to win the nomination and the general election? Essentially these news stories are speculating as to whether the candidate/s will employ an appeal-to-political-centrists Bill Clinton strategy or a George Bush strategy of catering to the party’s base. Finally, the Willie Shoemaker news frame exists when the media use any one of a variety of public opinion polls when discussing the 2008 election. In the majority of these articles the press works as a jockey, riding the horse leading in the polls. This frame essentially asks: How popular among the public is a particular candidate? Significantly, all three create a narrative about the 2008 election by focusing on potential candidates’ viability and electability.
Chapter 4. The Modern Nominating Process

Before delving into the media’s early coverage of the 2008 Democratic nomination contest, it is necessary to take a brief look at the current presidential nomination process. The subtleties of this process offer insight into the importance, pervasiveness, and potential effects of early campaign media coverage. The role of the public and media in the presidential nominating process has changed significantly over the last 40 years. The McGovern-Fraser Commission, established in 1968, changed the nomination process in profound ways. The Commission’s report called for the process to be open, timely and representative. The new structure allowed average American citizens, not just party elites, to participate in the early stages of the race for the presidency. In 1976, another group, the Winograd Commission, made an equally revolutionary change to the process: the Commission shortened the “primary season” by restricting all caucuses and primaries to a three-month period from early March to early June. Its decision to limit the length of the primary season has helped give birth to perhaps the most indelible trait of the current nominating process – front-loading.

The Front-Loading Problem

According to presidential campaign scholars Andrew Busch and William Mayer (2004), “front-loading is the name that has been given to an important recent
trend in the presidential nomination process, in which more and more states schedule their primaries and caucuses near the very beginning of the delegate selection season.”

The result is a primary calendar in which a significant proportion of the delegates are selected in the first couple weeks of the nomination phase. This new phenomenon allows a candidate to be anointed the winner of a party’s nomination shortly after the process formally begins, as opposed to having meaningful primaries and caucuses toward the end of the process.

Busch and Mayer contend that a single explanation lies behind most states’ decision to move their primaries up in the calendar: “New Hampshire envy.” In the most basic terms, these scholars define New Hampshire envy as the perception that New Hampshire, because it holds the first primary in the nation, generates an array of political and economic benefits from its unique positioning. There is little doubt that New Hampshire can play a critical role in deciding which candidates win the nomination and which candidates fold. Bill Clinton’s “comeback kid” performance in 1992 demonstrates the impact of this single primary on the entire nomination process. Other states have recognized New Hampshire’s profound influence and want their own piece of the political pie. The benefits of holding a prominent, early primary include an increase in press coverage, attention from the candidates, influence in the nomination
race, economic benefits, and special policy concessions. By moving up its nomination contest, a state hopes to become a major player in the race for president.

The Democrats’ 2004 primary calendar epitomized this new problem of front-loading. Iowa’s caucus was held in January and New Hampshire’s primary followed a week later. Then came the avalanche of nomination contests – 21 states scheduled primaries and another nine scheduled caucuses, all occurring by mid-March. There was little doubt that a Democratic nominee would emerge by early spring at the latest. As 2004 unfolded, just two serious candidates remained on Super Tuesday, March 2. For all practical purposes, the entirety of the most pertinent Democratic nomination contests played out in less than two months. The Democratic nomination process in 2008 seems to be taking a similar shape, a prospect that will have immediate and lasting impacts on the race and the media coverage it garners. Media have already begun speculating as to which early primaries will benefit which possible candidates as states jockey for position in the nomination calendar.

Visiting Iowa, New Hampshire and Beyond

From observation, anecdote, and statistical analysis by an array of scholars, including Hugh Winebrenner, it is obvious that New Hampshire, and now Iowa, often hold the key to a candidate’s success in securing his/her party’s nomination. However, the effect is that these two states receive a disproportionate amount of attention from
candidates, especially when considering that both states are oddities in many ways. Consider Iowa. In *The Iowa Precinct Caucuses: The Making of a Media Event*, Winebrenner (1998) notes Iowa’s peculiarities despite its dramatic impact on election contests. Winebrenner writes, “Iowa is a small, homogeneous, Midwestern farm state largely composed of small cities and rural areas. The political culture and demography of Iowa may be typical of the American heartland, but an aging population, the absence of big cities, and the small number of non-whites make it a poor mirror of the national political culture, and its political activists are not ideologically representative of primary election participants or the national electorate.”

Yet, potential candidates flock to Iowa numerous times before the first vote is ever cast. History shows that a candidate’s decision to bypass the all-important state could be costly, even for frontrunners. In 1980, Ronald Reagan enjoyed a four-to-one lead in the national polls over the next closest Republican seeking the party nomination. But after deciding not to participate in a televised debate in Iowa, Reagan fell out of favor with Iowa voters and his 30-point lead in New Hampshire dwindled to almost nothing. It took a dramatic confrontation in a debate in New Hampshire just days later for him to recover and later win the nomination. Four years earlier, the campaigns of Henry Jackson and Jerry Brown were doomed because of their unwillingness to cater to Iowa and New Hampshire voters. Jackson skipped New
Hampshire altogether and Brown entered the race two months after the first primary. Both candidates failed to defeat Jimmy Carter and, thus, made two lessons clear: to win the nomination a candidate must take the early primaries seriously and no candidate can afford a slow start.\textsuperscript{lxxviii}

Many potential 2008 candidates have made a note of these lessons and are already canvassing both Iowa and New Hampshire. This process is particularly important to this study because these visits often give energy to early speculation as to who will run for president and the strategies they might employ. A good example of the candidates’ activities and the media coverage that follows is captured in James Barnes’s piece “All’s Fair in Iowa” that appeared in the \textit{National Journal} in September 2006. In the lead paragraph of the piece, Barnes proclaims, “As White House hopefuls swarmed over this state and flocked to its iconic attraction, the Iowa State Fair, it felt more like 2007 than 2006.” Barnes then details how a variety of potential candidates spent days interacting with Iowans, because these caucus-goers “want to feel connected to the contenders before deciding whether to give them their support on caucus night.” Democratic hopefuls Joe Biden, Tom Vilsack, Evan Bayh, and Bill Richardson all stopped by the “down-home type of thing” that included 11 days of oddities such as a 1,200-pound pig, deep fried Twinkies, and a life-sized cow made of
600 pounds of butter. While Barnes’ tone is tongue-and-cheek, his message is clear: building a rapport with voters in Iowa can be a key to a successful run in 2008.

**The Invisible Primary**

The front-loading problem has had an immense impact on the way candidates run their nomination campaigns, particularly in the months and even years before the first nomination contest. The result is what academics have called the “invisible primary.” Many argue, including William Mayer, that the invisible primary begins the day after Election Day of the previous cycle. This early pre-primary phase consists of a variety of activities, including developing a network of supporters and political allies, identifying key issues, building an issue platform, participating in events that help garner national name recognition, and perhaps most significant, raising money.

Clearly, front-loading has required candidates to become nationally known figures much earlier in the process. The reason is simple: candidates must raise large sums of money early to have any chance of becoming viable candidates. This money is essential to “hit the ground running” in early primaries and caucuses. Studies have shown that the extent of a potential candidate’s success in fundraising at the pre-candidacy phase is linked to a candidate’s campaign moving from simply surviving to viability. As Michael Goff (2004) notes in *The Money Primary*, “the quest for the presidency begins – and for most candidates ends – as a quest for money during the
early campaign period appropriately called ‘the money primary.’ Goff argues media coverage of campaign fundraising serves as an echo to the actual fundraising itself, which has a significant potential for advancing an aspiring candidate’s campaign. Fundraising success in the early stages, as well as the momentum garnered from that success, have also been found to be associated with a candidate’s survival and success in the primary season.

John Kerry’s performance in 2004 did offer a glimmer of hope for candidates who do not win the invisible primary, but who recognize the importance of effective campaigning in Iowa and New Hampshire. By most accounts, Vermont Governor Howard Dean should have cruised to victories in 2004’s earliest nomination contests considering his dominance in the invisible primary. Dean was the frontrunner on three different fronts: he had raised an impressive $41 million before the first caucus; he constructed a vast network of supporters thanks to a grassroots Internet campaign; and he led his competitors in nearly every public opinion poll. Dean clearly had mastered the invisible primary. However, it was John Kerry, and not Howard Dean, who scored important wins in Iowa and New Hampshire. In fact, Dean finished a distinct third in Iowa, trailing Kerry and the little-known John Edwards. Kerry invested significant resources in Iowa, then stunned pollsters and pundits with his win. He rode the momentum through another victory in New Hampshire and eventually to the
nomination. In six weeks Kerry had gone from long shot to winner of the Democratic nomination.\textsuperscript{84}

The Imaginary Primary

The increasingly important role of pre-candidacy work demonstrated here is particularly significant when investigating media coverage of nomination contests years before votes are actually cast. As laying the campaign foundation has moved up earlier and earlier in the election calendar, so too has the media’s campaign coverage. Significantly, a candidate’s success in achieving early media coverage, whether it be in horse race style coverage or attention to successful fundraising, is also associated with candidate viability and survival.\textsuperscript{85}

I define the imaginary primary as the media-created contest that pits potential candidates against one other, using viability and electability as the measuring sticks to determine who is winning and losing in the months and years leading up to the primary season. This imaginary primary period begins the day after Election Day 2004 and ends when the first primary ballot is cast. The imaginary primary is marked by political speculation which is given life and a venue in the form of soft news coverage. Like much soft news, these candidate reports often focus on the dramatic and the personal, wrapped in a tabloid-style package. The most significant aspect of early campaign coverage is the use of the three dominant news frames. These serial media frames are

57
implemented to keep potential candidates in the news, ensuring audiences stay tuned to the unfolding storylines over the next three-plus years between Election Day and following election’s first nomination primary or caucus.

An important distinction between the imaginary primary and the invisible primary is that the former is a total media creation. During this time the media pit candidates against one another on a variety of different levels, creating a media primary long before Iowa or New Hampshire. Often the media give fundraising scorecards which provide voters with an indication of what candidates are most viable based on their ability to raise large sums of cash. Public opinion polls also are a means to keep candidates in the news during this imaginary primary. Some candidates are anointed frontrunners, while others are declared also rans or almost totally ignored. In succeeding in the imaginary primary, or at the very least being lucky enough to participate in it, candidates are labeled “viable” and “electable,” thus, their national campaign is underway.

Chapter Summary

The role of the public and media in the presidential nominating process has changed significantly over the last 40 years. The McGovern-Fraser Commission, established in 1968, changed the nomination process by making it more open, timely and representative. Later the Winograd Commission shortened the “primary season”
which helped give birth to perhaps the most indelible trait of the current nominating process – front-loading. According to presidential campaign scholars Andrew Busch and William Mayer, “front-loading is the name that has been given to an important recent trend in the presidential nomination process, in which more and more states schedule their primaries and caucuses near the very beginning of the delegate selection season.” This new phenomenon allows a candidate to be anointed the winner of a party’s nomination shortly after the process formally begins, as opposed to having meaningful primaries and caucuses toward the end of the process. By virtue of their position on the primary calendar, New Hampshire and Iowa often hold the key to a candidate’s success in securing his/her party’s nomination.

The front-loading problem has had an immense impact on the way candidates run their nomination campaigns, particularly in the months and even years before the first nomination contest. The result is what academics have called “invisible primary,” which consists of a variety of activities, including developing a network of supporters and political allies, identifying key issues, building an issue platform, participating in events that help garner national name recognition, and perhaps most significant, raising money. The imaginary primary is also a result of the front-loading problem. The imaginary primary is defined as the media-created contest that pits potential candidates against one other, using viability and electability as the measuring sticks to determine
who is winning and losing in the months and years leading up to the primary season. It is marked by political speculation which is given life and a venue in the form of soft news coverage. The most significant aspect of early campaign coverage is the use of the three dominant news frames. These serial media frames are implemented to keep potential candidates in the news, ensuring audiences stay tuned to the dramatic storylines before the first primary contest. An important distinction between the imaginary primary and the invisible primary is that the former is a total media creation.
Chapter 5. The 2008 Presidential Election

The political landscape for the 2008 presidential election is perhaps the most unique since the early part of the 20th Century. In every sense, the race is wide open. For the first time since 1928, neither political party will have an incumbent president or sitting vice president making a serious run at the nomination. The result has been that both potential candidates and their parties are actively strategizing early in the process. Many political scientists and pundits believe that it is unlikely that Congress will produce much meaningful legislation during the 110th Congress, because both parties will be looking ahead to Election Day 2008. Cal MacKenzie, a political scientist at Colby College, said bluntly, “What’ll happen is positioning for 2008. Not just candidates but the two parties as well.” Without question, the stakes for both parties are tremendous.

The historic 2006 midterm election results could provide the best political barometer as the 2008 primary season inches closer. The Democrats’ gains and subsequent control in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate serve notice to potential candidates that a long-term electoral shift might well be underway. Voters clearly signaled for a new, bipartisan approach to doing business in the nation’s capital, with a particular focus on cleaning up politics. Exit polls suggested that voters were as concerned with partisanship, negative attacks, and government corruption as with the
In addition, the indication is that voters have placed a premium on elected officials’ willingness to reach across the aisle and abandon rigid party-line voting. Joe Gaylord, a top Republican strategist, said following the 2006 midterms, “This is an upheaval in American politics. Now the public has made a change and they’ll see how this works out. Neither party has a long leash. I don’t find the public very tolerant.”

The Democrats, in particular, saw an important trend develop on Election Day 2006: the party won big by recruiting more conservative candidates, like senatorial candidates Jim Webb (Virginia) and Bob Casey Jr. (Pennsylvania). Webb’s victory, along with that of Jon Tester in Montana and Claire McCaskill in Missouri, proved that Democrats could still appeal statewide to voters in “red states” that President George W. Bush won in 2000 and 2004. The result could be a shift in primary campaign strategy. Traditionally, Democratic presidential primaries have forced candidates to move to the political left to cater to the party’s base. The midterm elections suggest that presidential hopefuls may feel less compelled to drift left and could focus on winning over moderate voters even during the primaries. The question remains: Does this leave centrist candidates in the best position with a little over a year left before the first nomination contest?
The Candidates

An important aspect of understanding how the media cover potential 2008 Democratic candidates is becoming acquainted with the 2008 Democratic field. Though it is generally understood among political insiders and the media what possible candidates are exploring the idea of running for president, White House hopefuls regularly deflect questions about their intentions to run. In an interview with the *Harvard Crimson*, former Vice Presidential candidate John Edwards skirted the issue saying, “my campaign right now is a campaign against poverty in America.” New York Senator Hillary Clinton routinely avoided questions about 2008 by claiming she was only focused on her bid for Senate re-election. She even forbade her staff from talking to reporters about anything related to 2008. Others, like Joseph Biden Jr. and Christopher Dodd, have admitted to considering a run in 2008, though doing so without explicit detail.

Despite candidates’ reluctance to go on the record with their specific political intentions, most pundits have identified a core group of 15 Democrats who could run for president in 2008. It is this group of 15 that is receiving early media attention in the pre-primary stages. These 15 hopefuls are broken into three tiers. The “Rock Star” tier consists of Hillary Clinton, 2000 Democratic nominee Al Gore, and Illinois freshman Senator Barack Obama. These candidates would likely be considered frontrunners if they officially declare as candidates. They have a series of qualifications that include
widespread name recognition, the ability to fundraise, and a network of supporters. In addition, these potential candidates possess a celebrity status that transcends politics. The “Familiar Faces” include 2004 Democratic nominee John Kerry, his running mate John Edwards, and General Wesley Clark, who also launched a bid for the White House in 2004. While each has some level of national name recognition, the public’s knowledge of them exists exclusively in the political sphere. Each member of this tier is generally not considered a popular culture icon. And finally there are the “Dark Horses”: retired Virginia Governor Mark Warner, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, Indiana Senator Evan Bayh, Wisconsin Senator Russell Feingold, Delaware Senator Joseph Biden Jr., Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd, former Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, outgoing Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, and retired Alaska Senator Mike Gravel. These Dark Horses are lesser-known candidates who lack familiarity with voters on a national level. As of late 2006, they also do not boast a vast collection of influential supporters or large coffers of money necessary to run a nationwide campaign.

The Rock Stars

Former First Lady Hillary Clinton is at the top of the list of Democratic “Rock Stars” heading into the 2008 election cycle. According to most press reports, the fight for the nomination for president appears to be hers to lose. Among pollsters, political
pundits, journalists and politicians alike, Clinton has been anointed as the early frontrunner in the race for the nomination. Clinton won election to the Senate in 2000 with 55 percent of the vote and then topped the feat in November 2006 when she won re-election with 66.5 percent. In her first term in the Senate, Hillary Clinton built an impressive resume which included demonstrating the ability to work with Republicans on a variety of issues.

In their 2006 book, *The Way to Win*, Mark Halperin of ABC News and John F. Harris of the *New York Times*, enumerated a series of assets Clinton would bring into the 2008 race if she chooses to run. Several require attention here. First is her ability to fundraise. In the 2006 election cycle Hillary Clinton raised more money than any other Democrat. Importantly, the residual funds left over from her 2006 Senate re-election could be used to fuel a 2008 run at the White House. Her on-hand cash immediately makes her the most viable candidate in the field. Second, are what Halperin and Harris call “conventional political advantages.” These include a solid record as a legislator; a command of policy issues; strong ties to interest groups, activists, prominent political strategists and elected officials; and perhaps most significantly, she is in “full control of the fame game.” Halperin and Harris also argue that Clinton has a key advantage because she is the only woman in the race. The sole female candidate has an instant brand, making it easier for her to stand out in debates and in advertising. In addition,
Clinton’s ability to draw from the campaign experience of her husband and her proven ability to master the circus-like media atmosphere will serve Clinton well if she seeks her party’s nomination.

Despite high positives, Clinton does carry with her some negatives that some pundits fear could cost her the nomination. Famed election analyst Charlie Cook believes that Clinton is far from a shoe-in because she is so polarizing, creating a fear among some Democrats that she could not win in the general election if she wins the Democratic nomination.\textsuperscript{xcii} Time magazine’s cover recently gave readers two options for Clinton: love her or hate her. There is also the concern that voters are suffering from Clinton fatigue, after enduring eight years of a Clinton White House in the 1990s. Finally, there are hints that Senator Clinton has fallen out of favor with many members of the Democratic Party’s far left who have accused her of moving to the political center to make herself more electable. Clinton’s record in the Senate has received jeers from some party loyalists. She voted to give Bush the authority to use military force in Iraq and by the time of her Senate re-election in November 2006 had not advocated for a timetable for troop withdrawal. In a January 2005 speech, Senator Clinton called abortion a “sad, even tragic choice.”\textsuperscript{xciii} She also co-sponsored a bill with Utah’s Robert Bennett that would have banned flag burning. “I wish she hadn’t come out against flag burning,” said one supporter. “The worst mistake she can make is to move
to the right. She's going to lose a lot of the enthusiasm of the people who can get her elected.” Even with a list of concerns, no one can deny that Hillary Clinton is, as President Bush called her, “formidable.”

Perhaps the only member of the Democratic Party who can rival Hillary Clinton’s mass appeal is first-term Illinois Senator Barack Obama. Obama’s meteoric rise into national prominence can be traced back to his riveting keynote speech delivered at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Just three months later, Obama easily won his Senate election with 70 percent of the vote. Senator Obama once categorically denied any desires to run for president in 2008, but in October 2006 admitted on the Sunday morning political talk show “Meet the Press” that he would consider a White House run in this election. He clearly is building a significant backing. Obama is being lauded by celebrities, party loyalists, and outside interest groups, while amassing noteworthy campaign coffers. His federal political action committee raised $4 million in 2006 alone. But Obama does have his critics. Like Clinton, he is accused of trying to portray himself as a moderate, while his voting record indicates otherwise. In his first year in the Senate, Obama voted against renewal of the USA Patriot Act, opposed John R. Bolton's nomination as U.N. ambassador and sided with other Democratic Senators who opposed limiting judicial filibusters – all of which indicate his liberal leanings. Republican Senator Trent Lott has said that Obama
“needs to be a little more of a leader in the center if he really wants to have an impact beyond being an Illinois senator.”\textsuperscript{xcv} Obama’s resume is not nearly as extensive as his potential 2008 rivals. “After more than a year in the Senate, Obama is not identified as the solo owner of an issue. He is very untested. He has never even had a tough, adversarial press conference,” wrote Lynn Sweet of the Chicago Sun-Times.\textsuperscript{xcvi}

Despite his defeat in the 2000 election, Al Gore has re-emerged as a party favorite. Gore’s newfound celebrity is due in large part to his role in the feature-length documentary \textit{An Inconvenient Truth} and book by the same title. Gore’s familiarity among Democrats and his proven ability to fundraise massive amounts of money could make him a viable candidate should he decide to run again. On March 7, 2005, MSNBC’s Chris Matthews, host of \textit{Hardball}, claimed, “The 2008 presidential campaign will not include Al Gore. I’m reporting here tonight that the former vice president and 2000 presidential nominee will not run for president in 2008. I’ve been given this scoop from a perfect source, I must say, who informed me that the purpose of this disclosure at this time is to end speculation about a campaign that will never occur.”\textsuperscript{xcvii} Yet, in September 2006, following the release of \textit{An Inconvenient Truth}, Gore admitted to a group of Australian reporters (he was there promoting his film), “I haven't completely ruled out running for president again in the future, but I don't expect to. I offer the explanation not as an effort to be coy or clever. It's just the
internal shifting of gears after being in politics almost 30 years. I hate to grind the gears."\textsuperscript{xcviii} Some pundits have compared Gore to President Richard Nixon and claim that Gore’s newfound celebrity and resurgence among party loyalists could create the comeback story Americans love. His detractors say, however, that his failed bid for the White House in 2000 and his lack of an extensive issues platform heading into 2008 may doom any presidential bid.

The Familiar Faces
A second tier of candidates, “The Familiar Faces” includes the 2004 Democratic presidential ticket of John Kerry and John Edwards. Kerry is thought to have enough name recognition and fundraising ability to challenge the former First Lady. The Massachusetts Senator raised a whopping $350 million during his 2004 run and another $6 million in the PAC funds during the 2006 cycle.\textsuperscript{xcix} Kerry has also used his Senate seat to attack the Bush Administration and a variety of its policies, including its handling of the War in Iraq. In addition, Kerry has the advantage of learning from a bevy of campaign mistakes during the 2004 election. However, success during a second Kerry run at the nomination seems unlikely according to many Democratic insiders. One Democratic insider summarized the sentiment bluntly: “Kerry had his shot, he blew it, and there won’t be a second chance. Kerry will come to his senses and not run in ’08.”\textsuperscript{xci} Kerry is also battling history. The Democratic Party has not
nominated a non-incumbent candidate in back-to-back elections since 1952 and 1956 when Adlai Stevenson captured the nomination before losing both times to Dwight Eisenhower. To make matters more difficult, Kerry committed an unforgettable gaffe when during a speech he made what he called a “botched joke” on the stump prior to the 2006 midterms. Kerry appeared to imply that American soldiers were uneducated. A war of words transpired with the White House, which demanded a Kerry apology. The result was that Democrats in key congressional races canceled Kerry campaign events appearances just before the election. “Whatever the intent, Senator Kerry was wrong to say what he said,” said Democratic Rep. Harold Ford Jr., who was running in a tight Senate race in Tennessee. It remains to be seen if a continued fallout may cause Kerry to reconsider his second bid for the presidency.

Others pundits are more optimistic about John Edwards’ chances at a second run at the Democratic nomination. Edwards continues to travel around the country, making regular appearances in key battleground primary states. Edwards has carved out a niche among a crowded field by addressing problems of class and poverty in America. One Democratic insider said of Edwards, “He built up a lot of goodwill (in 2004), is getting himself around and raising the right issues for the country and for Dem primary voters. He’s got name recognition, and he’s not running from the Senate.” Edwards also has personal appeal with charm, good looks, a rags-to-riches
story and a high-profile spouse, Elizabeth Edwards, whose fight against cancer and new book, *Saving Graces*, has captured widespread public attention. But Edwards has the albatross of being on the losing ticket in 2004. In fact, Edwards couldn’t help the ticket carry his homestate of North Carolina. Edwards also will have to overcome the fact that he will have no significant political or policy accomplishments between his run in 2004 and the present.

General Wesley Clark, whose campaign never really got off the ground in 2004, appears to be eyeing a second run as well. Clark has traveled around the country to participate in various speaking engagements and has admitted he is not ruling out a second run at the White House in 2008. He has a dearth of individual donors behind him, thanks to an effective Internet campaign in 2004. In addition, Clark’s military service as a four-star general, gives him immediate credibility in national security and international affairs. Critics claim that Clark is lacking a sufficient resume to be a legitimate presidential candidate. Clark has never held an elective office. He has also yet to draw in the Democratic Party’s biggest donors.

**The Dark Horses**

Finally, there is a third tier of lesser-known potential candidates, “the Dark Horses,” who will spend the next year trying to get on the national radar. The possible candidates in this third tier, unlike Kerry and Edwards, are not household names and
have never made a serious, sustained run for president. According to the media, the core group of potential Hillary challengers includes two governors from states George W. Bush won in 2004 – Virginia’s Mark Warner and New Mexico’s Bill Richardson. The tier also includes Senators Evan Bayh, Russ Feingold, Joe Biden, Christopher Dodd and former Senator Tom Daschle. Finally, the Dark Horse candidates include the only two Democratic figures to officially declare their candidacy - outgoing Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack and retired Senator Mike Gravel.

Governor Warner shocked most Democrats when in early October 2006 he announced he would not seek the Democratic nomination in 2008. Warner had ended a largely successful four years as Virginia governor and had started testing the presidential waters. Warner had visited 28 states during 67 trips. In addition, he headlined 86 events around the country and raised or contributed $7.3 million for 2006 Democratic campaigns.Experts lauded Warner because he is a moderate and is from a conservative southern state. Haley Barbour, the Republican Governor from Mississippi, who may run for president in 2008 as well, said, “Governor Warner is well regarded by Republicans as well as Democrats. He’s involved and informed. He’s not partisan so much as he’s interested in good policy.” Warner withdrew his name from consideration to spend more time with his family. But many critics believe his primary reason was that the political timing was just not right in 2008. Warner, only 51 years
old, still has a bright political future in front of him and there is still an outside chance he could reconsider and enter the race.

Bill Richardson first became known by some Americans nationwide in the spring of 2004 when he was reportedly in the final group in consideration to become John Kerry’s running mate. Richardson has a series of advantages. First, he cannot be accused of being a “Northeastern liberal,” a label that haunted both John Kerry in 2004 and Michael Dukakis in 1988. No Democrat has carried the “Northeastern liberal” tag to the White House since John F. Kennedy in 1960. Richardson has an extensive political experience. In November, he easily won re-election for a second term as governor. Richardson also served as President Bill Clinton’s Department of Energy secretary after a stint as United Nations Ambassador. He also represented New Mexico for 14 years in the U.S. House. He is widely popular in the Southwest, a block of states that could play an integral role in the 2008 election. And finally he is bilingual. “He is a national leader of the Democratic Party who happens to be Hispanic, and not just a major Hispanic leader,” said Simon Rosenberg, president of the New Democrat Network, a Washington D.C. centrist Democratic Party support group. “It will be significant when he runs because you will have a truly bilingual candidate.”

However, character issues could be Richardson’s Achilles’ heel. He was peripherally involved in the Monica Lewinsky scandal for reportedly offering her a job. Richardson
has also been accused of lying about being drafted as a pitcher for the Kansas City A’s.\textsuperscript{cvi}

The fiscally conservative Evan Bayh is generally regarded by the media as being a viable candidate in 2008. An unnamed perspective Democrat is on record saying of Senator Bayh, “People in Indiana have a real affinity for him. Democrats (in the state) respect and admire him because he brought the party back. Republicans and independents think he’s one of the few Democrats who get it.”\textsuperscript{cvii} Bayh will never be confused for an extreme liberal, a quality that could make him popular among the moderate wing of the Democratic Party and in states with open primaries. He has generally backed free trade, voted for a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning and has supported many proposals to prevent “partial birth” abortions, all conservative issues.\textsuperscript{cviii} Bayh also has executive experience, serving two terms as Indiana governor, and is a superior fundraiser among the Dark Horses. Bayh has $10 million on hand to begin a run at the presidency.\textsuperscript{cix}

Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold has become a darling of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Feingold was the only one of the 100 senators to vote against the Patriot Act in 2001. He has been a staunch critic of the War in Iraq and even introduced a resolution to censure President Bush for using warrantless surveillance. Feingold is also squeaky-clean in terms of ethics. He championed a campaign finance
law with Senator John McCain which passed despite the objections of both parties’ leaders. Feingold, most often called the possible Howard Dean of 2008, also has a loyal following on the Internet and particularly among the Daily Kos legions. However, in 2005 Feingold split with his second wife, a turn of events that according to experts, could seriously hurt any run at the Democratic nomination in 2008. In addition, many people believe Feingold’s social liberalism is too far out of line with middle America. His defense of gay marriage, for example, may be too liberal for voters to overcome in a general election.

Joseph Biden, the six-term senior senator from Delaware who was first elected at age 29, has hinted he is interested in running for president. He is a media favorite and a regular on Sunday morning news shows and syndicated radio show Don Imus in the Morning. Biden has always prided himself on being able to identify with middle class values, and he has some of the “ah shucks” appeal that has made George Bush and Bill Clinton so popular. But Biden has gotten very little serious coverage as a potential candidate. He did manage to find the national media spotlight in February 2005 but it was only when on Meet the Press he declared, “I think (Hillary would) be incredibly difficult to beat.” The Delaware Democrat added, “I think she is the most difficult obstacle for anyone being the nominee. She is likely to be the nominee. She'd be the toughest person and I think Hillary Clinton is able to be elected president of the
United States. Biden’s lack of national prominence may also cause him some fundraising issues. He has never faced a serious challenge in a re-election bid and Delaware is a small state with few big donors. Biden might also have a challenge shedding the “establishment candidate” label, given his 33 years of service in the U.S. Senate.

In May 2006, Christopher Dodd, the 64-year-old Senator from Connecticut, declared that he had “decided to do all the things that are necessary to prepare to seek the presidency in 2008.” Dodd’s resume is not lacking – he has served as a senator since 1981 and as chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 1995 to 1997. His Senate colleagues see Dodd as a skilled negotiator behind the scenes, with the ability to reach across party lines. Dodd has scored a series of major legislative achievements in recent years including the passage of Family and Medical Leave Act and large budget increases for Head Start and child care. Connecticut is also a state filled with wealthy donors, presenting Dodd with the opportunity to fill the necessary campaign war chest. However, in a crowded field, Dodd appears to carry the dreaded Northeastern liberal label. “Dodd's national profile doesn't position him in a way that's strikingly different,” said Iowa pollster J. Ann Selzer. Dodd also has been an outspoken supporter of opening up relations with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, a
position that would be seen as widely unpopular in the ever-important swing state of Florida.

Former Senate Leader Tom Daschle has admitted that he is considering a run at the White House in 2008, despite losing his bid for re-election to the Senate in 2004. Daschle told PBS’ Jim Lehrer just days after the midterm election, “I'm going to make a decision sometime next year.” In 2005, Daschle established a new PAC, and he spent the summer of 2006 making the rounds in Iowa and New Hampshire. Fundraising should also not be an issue, as he amassed $20 million for his 2004 Senate race. Because of his years leading the Democratic Party in the Senate and his current position at a high-powered Washington lobbying, Daschle has a deep network of influentials within his party. Daschle’s biggest obstacle to overcome is the perception that he is a leader from the past, not one of the future. After his loss to John Thune in 2004, voters may gather that the height of his influence is past him.

Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack may be in the best position to have early success in the 2008 primary season. Just three days after the midterm election, Vilsack made his announcement official through a spokesperson. He will certainly be a formidable force in his homestate of Iowa during the nation’s first caucus. In a time when voters have rejected Washington insiders’ politics-as-usual style, Vilsack claims to be an outsider critical of the D.C. establishment. Vilsack, 55, was first elected governor in
1998, and was the first Democrat voted to Iowa’s highest office in more than 30 years. Vilsack, like many Dark Horse candidates, is barely on the national radar. While the pertinence of pre-primary opinion polls can be debated, there is little doubt that Governor Vilsack has a lot of work to do to be mentioned with the likes of Clinton, Gore, and Kerry. “What I'm wondering is, considering people don't know where Iowa is in the first place, how would they know who he is?” said Lisa Fender, an Iowa City Democrat. “It makes it all the more important for him to be seen.” Even in his homestate Vilsack is not viewed as much as a viable candidate as the Democratic Rock Stars and Familiar Faces. The *Des Moines Register* polled likely Democratic voters in Iowa in June 2006, and the results showed Vilsack trailing John Edwards, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. Fundraising may also serve as a significant hurdle for Vilsack who after announcing his candidacy told the *Washington Post*, “I don't have the advantage that others may have to roll over resources they've collected from Senate or other campaigns.”

And, finally, there is Mike Gravel, perhaps the most interesting figure in all of the early 2008 presidential field. Emerging from total obscurity, Gravel was the first member of either party to announce their candidacy for president in 2008. Gravel is a retired two-term senator from Alaska and has not been on the national political scene since leaving office in January 1981. His mid-April 2006 announcement shocked
many, including former constituents in his homestate. Gravel has since been to Iowa, where he promised to dissolve the Internal Revenue Service and give voters a direct say in new laws if elected. Despite needing to overcome a total lack of national recognition, Gravel has been accused of being anti-Semitic. After announcing his intentions to run for president, Gravel’s beliefs were dissected by bloggers for his participation in a 2003 conference sponsored by groups that deny the Holocaust of six million Jews in World War II. Heidi Beirich, of the Southern Poverty Law Center also attended the conference and proclaimed, “It was anti-Semite central.” Beirich said that it looked at first glance like an academic conference, but that tables prominently displayed books about Aryan values and the evils of Israel. Despite obvious denials by his campaign staff, Gravel will likely be pummeled with questions and accusations about his involvement, if his campaign ever gets off the ground.

**Chapter Summary**

The political landscape for the 2008 presidential election is perhaps the most unique since the early part of the 20th Century. For the first time since 1928, neither political party will have an incumbent president or sitting vice president making a serious run at the nomination. The result has been that potential candidates and their parties are actively strategizing early in the process. The historic 2006 midterm election results could provide the best political barometer as the 2008 primary season
inches closer. The Democrats’ gains and subsequent control in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate serves notice to potential candidates that a long-term electoral shift might well be underway. The Democrats, in particular, saw an important trend develop on Election Day 2006: the party won big by recruiting more conservative candidates. The result could be a shift in primary campaign strategy. Traditionally, Democratic presidential primaries have forced candidates to move to the political left to cater to the party’s base. The midterm elections suggest that presidential hopefuls may feel less compelled to drift left and could focus on winning over moderate voters even during the primaries.

An important aspect of understanding how the media covers potential 2008 Democratic candidates is becoming acquainted with the 2008 Democratic field. Though it is generally understood who may run for president, most potential candidates regularly avoid questions about a possible bid. Most pundits have identified a core group of 15 Democrats who could run for president in 2008. It is this group of 15 that is receiving early media attention in the pre-primary stages. These 15 hopefuls are broken into three tiers. The “Rock Star” tier consists of Hillary Clinton, 2000 Democratic nominee Al Gore, and Illinois freshman Senator Barack Obama. The “Familiar Faces” include 2004 Democratic nominee John Kerry, his running mate John Edwards, and General Wesley Clark, who briefly had a bid for the White House in
2004. And finally there are the “Dark Horses”: retired Virginia Governor Mark Warner, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, Indiana Senator Evan Bayh, Wisconsin Senator Russell Feingold, Delaware Senator Joseph Biden Jr., Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd, former Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, outgoing Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, and retired Alaska Senator Mike Gravel.
Chapter 6. Research Plan and Methodology

In this chapter I introduce this study’s methodological approach, including research questions, hypotheses, data collection parameters, and variables. I will discuss why I chose to focus on each of the six Democrats and newspaper coverage, and then will detail some of the characteristics of the specific print publications in this case study. This chapter also looks at this study’s limitations. Understanding these components is essential to making sense of this study’s findings and analysis that I address in the next three chapters.

Choosing the Democrats

Before delving into the specific parameters of my data collection and content analysis, it is important to address my decision to follow newspaper coverage of five members of the Democratic Party: Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, John Edwards, Russ Feingold, and Mike Gravel. Due to the sheer volume of press reports about the 2008 election, it was first necessary to focus on one party’s battle for the nomination. I chose to concentrate on the Democratic nomination contest for two primary reasons.

First, the storylines emerging from the Democratic nomination race are arguably richer than those associated with the Republican race. Hillary Clinton is perhaps the seminal figure and biggest celebrity in American politics today. The mere fact that she could be the first woman of a major party to be nominated for president is
an intriguing story by itself. Combine that with her being a former First Lady and you have the makings of a race to remember. Barack Obama’s possible entry into the fray adds another facet. He is perhaps American politics’ brightest young star and only African-American seriously considering a run at the presidency. Two years ago it seemed almost incomprehensible that a member of the Democratic Party could rival Hillary’s celebrity. Now, Obama has indicated he may be poised to make a run at the White House very early in his young political career. John Kerry’s, John Edwards’, and Al Gore’s impending decisions to resurrect their campaigns also could create a dramatic few months leading up to the Democrats’ first primary in Iowa in January of 2007. In short, the Democratic race is intriguing on many levels, particularly considering the cast of politicians who may enter the race.

Second, I chose to follow Democrats because their party, by all indications, seems to have much more riding on a victory in 2008. Following Bill Clinton’s exit from the White House, many of the party’s loyalists have been waiting for their next icon and leader to emerge. Al Gore and John Kerry both failed in their efforts to defeat the Republican candidate in 2000 and 2004. The face of the GOP has been President George W. Bush, who has won two consecutive terms and kept the Democrats out of the White House for this entire decade. Many pundits believe that given the wide open nature of this election, this may be the Democrats’ best shot of re-claiming the White
House. Following its strong showing in the 2006 midterms, the Democratic Party may be poised to do so. But another loss in 2008 would be a tremendous set back. It is this backdrop that makes the Democratic nomination race so interesting and as a result, the focus of my study.

While it would have been preferable to track news coverage of all 15 possible Democratic candidates, the time invested in coding all the data was unrealistic for the scope of this project. Therefore, I settled on five candidates. I chose Hillary Clinton because by most accounts she is the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. In many ways she is the measure stick for media coverage during the imaginary primary. Second, I selected Al Gore because his celebrity is on par with Hillary’s and many pundits believe that he is casting a shadow over the entire pre-nomination positioning of candidates. He would provide a second measure in this Democratic Rock Stars category. Third, is John Edwards. He represents the second tier of candidates, the Familiar Faces. I chose to include him in this study because many election analysts believe he is a more viable candidate than John Kerry or Wesley Clark, the other members of this tier of candidates. John Edwards’ win in a preliminary media poll in Iowa shows that he could be a formidable candidate. Fourth, I selected Russ Feingold, one of only two representatives of the Dark Horses tier. He was chosen because his label as an extreme liberal adds a unique mix to this sample group of Democrats.
Finally, Mike Gravel was made part of this study because he was the only declared candidate for president during the time periods examined in this study. As evidence shows, Gravel was not mentioned in a single article in this sample.

**Choosing Newspapers**

My choice to track newspaper coverage was two-fold. First, measured by several standards, the public still holds newspapers in high regards. The Pew Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) found that 80 percent of people gave their daily newspaper coverage a favorable rating, while 71 percent gave major national dailies a favorable score. In addition, although newspapers scored lower public confidence levels than other civic, political, business, and health organizations, the public gave newspapers high grades for “factualness.” This was particularly true when compared to other types of news outlets. According to PEJ, 54 percent of Americans said that their local newspaper mostly reported facts about news events rather than giving their opinions about the news. Only local television scored higher in surveys. Forty-five percent of respondents said that national newspapers presented facts over opinions.\(^{\text{cxviii}}\)

The second reason I chose to investigate newspapers is that newspapers still do most of the original reporting. In a larger proportion of U.S. cities and towns, it is the newspaper that sets the agenda.\(^{\text{cxix}}\) Given this notion combined with PEJ’s survey
results, one could conclude that audiences may give more credence to speculative stories about the 2008 election if they appear in a newspaper. In addition, as Thomas Patterson argues in the *Mass Media Election* (1980), newspapers play a critical role in the “fullness” of voters’ image of candidates during the campaign. Patterson writes: “The newspaper, then, is more instrumental in the formation of images. Underlying that is the fact that impressions are created mainly by words rather than pictures…[Voters’] thoughts about a candidate’s primary victories or his political record, for example, depend mostly on verbal communications, and in this the newspaper excels.”xxx In addition, newspapers, especially the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, are generally regarded as the U.S. history of record.

The selection of the specific 76 newspapers tracked in this study was brought about by finding a balance among availability, prominence, and diversity. Newspapers were first selected based on the availability within the ProQuest database. Twenty-one of the nation’s top 25 newspapers by circulation were available and included as samples in this case study. Diversity was also a key. This sample of newspapers represents a geographic slice of the American landscape. In all, this sample of newspapers comes from 32 different states and from the District of Columbia. Publications were selected from both coasts, and the variety of regions throughout the United States. In terms of ideology, newspapers come from large and midsized cities in
both red and blue states. Finally, newspapers were selected taking into account the homestate of the candidates of the five candidates being tracked. Each of these candidates has at least one newspaper from their homestate included in the sample.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

As I have demonstrated in my literature review sections, existing research indicates that the amount of media attention potential candidates receive has a dramatic impact on their viability. Coupled with the ability to fundraise large amounts of capital, media attention in the imaginary primary helps candidates establish national recognition that is essential before the first nomination primaries. It is clear that the constant media coverage of the “race” promotes and fosters a political dialogue. The conversations play out at water coolers, in classrooms, on the pages of the nationally prominent newspapers, on blogs, in chat rooms, and during heated debates on a plethora of cable television shows.

However, what is important to consider is not just the amount of coverage, but rather how the pre-campaigns are being covered. My conceptual hypothesis is:

*Perceived frontrunners during the imaginary primary will receive more prolific and prominent coverage, but all potential candidates will be written about using the three dominant media frames employed during pre-primary stages of an election.* In using the term “perceived frontrunners,” I am referring to candidates who are viable by
several different measures. These include, but are not limited to: the ability to fundraise large amounts of cash, an existence of an influential network of supporters, an array of political qualifications, and an extensive issues platform.

In investigating coverage during the imaginary primary, three important research questions emerge. Each features a series of operational hypotheses. The first question deals with the phenomenon of the pre-nomination media coverage of the 2008 election: What are the characteristics of newspapers’ 2008 election coverage during the pre-nomination stages of the election?

H1a: National daily newspapers will feature longer articles about the 2008 race than non-national newspapers.
H1b: A higher percentage of articles in national daily newspapers will be specifically focused on 2008 than in non-national newspapers.

H2a: The Joan Rivers news frame will be present in more articles than the Karl Rove news frame.
H2b: The Joan Rivers news frame will be present in more articles than Willie Shoemaker news frame.
H2c: There will be more emphasis on the Joan Rivers frame in the first date frame than in the third date frame.

H3: Editorial/opinion articles will feature the highest percentage of stories employing the Karl Rove news frame.

The second and most substantial part of this study involves the specific candidates who are being covered as possible 2008 contenders for the Democratic nomination. This topic presents two research questions: First, how will the amount of newspapers’ coverage of potential 2008 candidates vary among candidates?
H4a: Hillary Clinton will appear in more articles than all other candidates.
H4b: Hillary Clinton will appear in more articles in the major national daily newspaper than all other candidates.

H5a: Russ Feingold will receive a higher percentage of homestate coverage than the other candidates.
H5b: Al Gore will receive a lower percentage of homestate coverage than other candidates.

H6a: The Rock Star candidates will appear in longer articles than the Familiar Faces candidates.
H6b: The Rock Star candidates will appear in longer articles than the Dark Horses candidates.

H7a: A higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles will have a 2008 focus than Hillary Clinton’s articles.
H7b: A higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles will have a 2008 focus than Russ Feingold’s articles.
H7c: A higher percentage of Al Gore’s articles will have a 2008 focus than Hillary Clinton’s articles.
H7d: A higher percentage of Al Gore’s articles will have a 2008 focus than Russ Feingold’s articles.

The final question to be addressed, and the one that is perhaps most important to this study, is: How will the characteristics of newspapers’ coverage of the 2008 election vary among candidates?

H8a: Rock Star candidates will appear in more headlines than Familiar Faces candidates.
H8b: Rock Star candidates will appear in more headlines than Dark Horse candidates.

H9a: Hillary Clinton will appear in more front page articles than Al Gore.
H9b: Hillary Clinton will appear in more front page articles than John Edwards.
H9c: Hillary Clinton will appear in more front page articles than Russ Feingold.
H9d: Al Gore will appear in more front page articles than John Edwards.
H9e: Al Gore will appear in more front page articles Russ Feingold.
H9f: John Edwards will appear in more front page articles than Russ Feingold.

H10a: Hillary Clinton will appear in more editorials/opinion articles than Al Gore.
H10b: Hillary Clinton will appear in more editorials/opinion articles than John Edwards.
H10c: Hillary Clinton will appear in more editorials/opinion articles than Russ Feingold.

H11a: The Joan Rivers news frame will compose a higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles than Hillary Clinton’s.
H11b: The Joan Rivers news frame will compose a higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles than Al Gore’s.
H11c: The Joan Rivers news frame will compose a higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles than Russ Feingold’s.

H12a: The Karl Rove news frame will be used in a higher percentage of Hillary Clinton’s articles than Al Gore’s.
H12b: The Karl Rove news frame will be used in a higher percentage of Hillary Clinton’s articles than John Edwards’.
H12c: The Karl Rove news frame will be used in a higher percentage of Hillary Clinton’s articles than Russ Feingold’s.

H13a: Russ Feingold will have a higher percentage of Willie Shoemaker news coverage than Hillary Clinton.
H13b: Russ Feingold will have a higher percentage of Willie Shoemaker news coverage than Al Gore.
H13c: Russ Feingold will have a higher percentage of Willie Shoemaker news coverage than John Edwards.

**Data Collection Parameters**

To understand exactly how the mass media employs presidential hopeful news frames, this study investigated Old Media news coverage – specifically newspapers –
during three different four-week times periods: July 18 to August 15, 2005; February 2 to March 2, 2006; and August 18 to September 15, 2006. These sets of dates were chosen to represent a typical slice of news coverage, given that during each four-week period there was no seminal electoral event. Using the ProQuest media database, I tracked articles from 76 newspapers and five possible candidates in the Democratic field: Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, John Edwards, Russ Feingold, and Mike Gravel. These publications and candidates will serve as my sample in this case study.

First, using the ProQuest database, I searched for stories containing the names of each of these five Democratic presidential hopefuls and the terms “2008” or “’08.” Two candidates, Russ Feingold and Hillary Clinton, were searched two different ways. For Feingold I searched “Russ Feingold” OR “Russell Feingold” AND “2008” OR “’08.” For Clinton I found articles by entering “Hillary Clinton” OR “Hillary Rodham Clinton” AND “2008” OR “’08.” Using two styles of search names for both Clinton and Feingold maximized results. Some publications, when referring to Feingold, used Russell while others opted for the more common, Russ. Newspapers varied on citing the former first lady as Hillary Clinton or Hillary Rodham Clinton. This variation was present even within the same publication.

The search results produced a series of articles about each candidate that mentioned 2008 or ‘08. The results were then combed to determine if “2008” was
indeed used in reference to the figure being a possible 2008 presidential candidate.

This search produced a significant number of false positives. There were many instances in which articles mentioned both a potential candidate’s name and 2008, but did so in a way that had no relation to the 2008 presidential race. For instance, an article about Russ Feingold and his position on the Bush Administration’s tax cuts may have appeared on ProQuests’ search results for “Russ Feingold” and “2008.” However, upon review it would become clear that at no point in the article was it mentioned that Feingold may run from president. The 2008 reference, instead, appeared when the article states, “the tax plan was to go into effect in 2008.” Therefore, the article was discarded and not used in the study’s sample. Another example might be if Al Gore’s name appeared in an article with the term ’08. Upon review it would become evident that the article focused on John Edwards’ campaign strategy approaching the primaries in 2008. Al Gore may only briefly be mentioned at the conclusion of the article when the author writes, “Al Gore used a similar strategy in his unsuccessful bid for the White House in 2000.” Again, Al Gore’s name appears in the same newspaper article as the term ’08, but does so in a way that bears no significance to Al Gore as a possible candidate in upcoming election. Other types of search results that were eliminated included letters to the editor, dissertations, and book reviews.
Key Variables

After I determined if the article met the qualifications of being considered about the 2008 election, I recorded a series of variables. These included dates, newspaper, candidate, candidate tier, article type, Joan Rivers/Karl Rove/Willie Shoemaker news frames, only mentions, and focus 2008. See the Appendix for a description of all the variables recorded.

Dates

The dates variable represents the frame of dates from which the article was collected. The first date set is July 18 to August 15, 2005; the second is February 2 to March 2, 2006; and third August 18 to September 15, 2006. Only the date cluster, not individual dates and days of the week, were recorded. The use of this variable makes it possible to investigate if the characteristics of this early coverage change over a year and a half period before the first primary contest. Tracking dates is important in determining if the substance of articles about the 2008 election and/or specific candidates changed as the first primary drew nearer.

Newspaper

This study tracks 76 newspapers from around the Untied States. This newspaper variable identifies in which of the 76 newspapers the article appeared. I also recoded this newspaper variable into two separate variables: national newspapers and
non-newspapers. The national newspapers consisted of six publications: *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*. In terms of hard copy sales, the top five U.S. newspapers account for 21.5 percent of the total circulation. Non-national newspapers, which make up the remaining 70 newspapers in this sample, generally are not consumed by readers outside of the publications’ metropolitan area or geographic region.

**Candidate**

This study followed five candidates who are possible presidential candidates in 2008: Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, John Edwards, Russ Feingold, and Mike Gravel. This variable is ordinal, with candidates being ranked from most famous/recognizable to least known. In addition, I used the candidate variable to create separate Rock Stars, Familiar Faces, and Dark Horses categories. By tracking the media coverage of candidates it is possible to determine if the amount and characteristics of these press reports vary given the level of celebrity, as well as other important factors.

**Headline Mention**

This variable measures whether the candidate being tracked in the article was mentioned in the headline of the story. Headlines often give the clear indication as to who is the focus of the article and the prominence of candidate coverage.
**Homestate**

The homestate variable records if the article appeared in a publication based in the homestate of the candidate being tracked. Here I define homestate as the state that each candidate has represented in public office. For instance, if a *Buffalo News* article discusses how Hillary Clinton is moving to the political center to position herself for a 2008 presidential run, this would be recorded as a homestate story. The *Buffalo News* is based in Clinton’s homestate of New York. Al Gore’s homestate is Tennessee; John Edward’s is North Carolina; Russ Feingold’s is Wisconsin; and Mike Gravel’s is Alaska. This variable helps indicate if coverage as a 2008 candidate is parochial in nature or if he/she is truly emerging as a national candidate. As scholarly research shows, the ability to establish oneself with a national presence is a critical factor in determining viability and electability as the first nomination contests approach. That notion is particularly important to this study because it is the question of viability and electability that is at the root of much of the 2008 press coverage.

**Article Type**

Article type is a categorical variable employed to record whether the newspaper story was one of four different article types: a news story, editorial/opinion piece, profile/feature story, or newsbrief. Each of these article types carries its own unique characteristics and generally presents disparate types of information about potential
candidates. A news story is defined as an article published in print publications discussing current or recent news of general interest or on a specific topic. A news story often contains photographs, accounts, statistics, graphs, interviews, and polls that illustrate and articulate the event about which the report is being conducted. These articles generally focus on the facts and try to answer questions like who, what, when, where, why and how. The critical characteristic is that the story focuses on recent events and/or the release of new information.

An editorial/opinion piece is defined as an article by a news organization that expresses the opinion of the editor, editorial board, or publisher. In addition, this includes op-ed and commentary columns that are usually from a guest opinion writer. These opinion articles typically appear on the page opposite a newspaper’s editorial and emphasize the author’s opinion over hard, breaking news. Editorial/opinion articles also most frequently are placed in their own section of the newspaper.

A profile/feature story is an article in a print publication that is not meant to report breaking news, but rather functions as an in-depth investigation into the issues behind a news story, often concentrating on background events, persons or circumstances. These stories add a more human touch to reporting, while sometimes taking several paragraphs to address the main topic. A common device to keep the audience reading is to employ narrative hooks. Feature stories often delve deeper into
their subjects, focusing on the details rather than trying to delineate a few key points. These articles implement a more complex narrative structure and colorful language, which can resemble the style of a nonfiction book more than a news report. Importantly, these pieces are often generally longer in length.

A news brief is defined as an article that is composed of a series of often disconnected news tidbits that are very short in length. This collection of mini-articles is a device designed to supply the reader with little bits of information about a large number of topics within a limited space. Many of the individual topics are not significant enough to garner a full story that takes up valuable room on a newspaper page. These newsbriefs also rarely include an author byline as a means to conserve newspaper space.

**Joan Rivers/Karl Rove/Willie Shoemaker News Frames**

Joan Rivers coverage is defined as an article featuring a news frame which focuses, at least partially, on candidate-centric issues. Articles where the Joan Rivers frame is present essentially ask the question: what kind of person/candidate will it take to win the Democratic nomination and presidency? Karl Rove coverage is a variable that indicates that an article features a news frame which focuses on campaign strategy. Articles that employ this frame essentially explore the question: What kind of strategy and issue platform will a candidate need to employ to win the nomination and/or the
presidency? Finally, the Willie Shoemaker coverage variable is present when an article uses a news frame focusing on polls and/or the horse race aspect of the 2008 election. This frame essentially asks: How popular among the public is a particular candidate?

It is possible for any given article to implement more than one frame or no frame at all. These articles would simply just mention 2008 and would be considered an “only mentions” article (to be discussed in the next section). These three news frame variables are perhaps the most significant of this entire study. They are critical to understanding the way in which the media is covering the 2008 election and the possible candidates.

**Only Mentions**

The only mentions variable is defined as an article which just briefly makes reference to the candidate being examined as a potential 2008 candidate. For instance, in a long story about Russ Feingold’s popularity among bloggers and his success in online pre-nomination polls, the author may write, “Feingold led all other Democrats, including the anointed frontrunner, Hillary Clinton.” At no other point does the author reference Hillary Clinton. If Clinton was the candidate being tracked, then the only mentioned variable would apply because Clinton is only briefly mentioned in the article. This variable is particularly noteworthy because it indicates on some level how much candidates are being covered. While an article may be about the 2008 election, a
candidate who is only being briefly mentioned is significantly different than if he/she had been a much larger part of the story and subject to one of the three major news frames. The only mentions variable allows me to distinguish between when a candidate is just a very small portion of the story and when he/she is a focal point.

**Focus 2008**

The focus 2008 variable records if the article being examined is predominately reporting on matters pertaining to the 2008 presidential race. In many articles, the fact that someone is a possible 2008 candidate is a mere mention in a much larger article about issues not related to the upcoming presidential election. In other cases, the next presidential race is the focus of vast majority or entire article. This variable is particularly important because it demonstrates how much attention 2008 is actually receiving in a given article.

For instance, an article about the amount of campaign funds Hillary Clinton has raised for her 2006 Senate re-election bid may briefly mention that Clinton is considering a 2008 run. However, that is not the focus of the article; her re-election as Senator of New York is. But another article that is specifically about how liberal donors will likely shy away from contributing to a 2008 Hillary Clinton campaign for president would be considered a focus 2008 article. This variable gives a much better gauge about how much coverage 2008 is receiving from my sample of newspapers. In
the instance that the article is a news brief, the focus 2008 variable was recorded as a “no.” A series of short news tidbits pieced together in a single column cannot be considered a focus 2008 article unless the majority of these smaller pieces are specifically about the 2008 election.

**Intercoder Reliability**

An important aspect of this study’s methodology is ensuring a high level of reliability in coding data that requires interpretation and the use of individual judgment. In conducting the content analysis of this subjective data in newspapers, there is a potential for individual bias. To demonstrate that this bias does not exist and to ensure that this study’s results can be replicated, I have relied on a test of intercoder reliability. In my study, intercoder reliability of the content analysis of media coverage is tested by selecting a sample of the total collection of newspaper articles analyzed in this study. A second reviewer then replicates my methodology and constructs their own data set from the sample of articles. The classification and categorization of the newspaper articles from the second reviewer are then compared with that of the principle reviewer.

In this study, the sample size for reliability testing was approximately five percent of the total number of article analyzed. This amounted to 30 articles to be coded by a second reviewer. An analysis of intercoder reliability shows that the level
of interagreement between the principal and second review. All reliability tests, with the exception of two, were above the acceptable range (Cronbach’s alpha = .90 or greater). First was the focus 2008 variable which had a Cronbach’s alpha of .883. This was just slightly below the acceptable level and was likely due to the ambiguity of the variable’s definition of being an article “predominately” about the 2008 election. What constitutes as “predominately” may vary from coder to coder. If the study was to be replicated the focus 2008 variable should have a more exact definition. Second was the coding of the Joan Rivers news frame variable, which had a Cronbach’s alpha of .826. This lower level of reliability is a bit more perplexing. It is my contention that the reliability in the Joan Rivers frame was below .900 because stories about fundraising and traveling to Iowa and New Hampshire were considered part of this frame. It is possible that the second coder believed that an article about what candidates are leading in fundraising would be considered the Willie Shoemaker news frame because it focuses on who is ahead. But by my definition a story of this kind was classified as a Joan Rivers news frame because I argue that fundraising at this early stage is a product of celebrity and popularity. The media treats it as such. This coverage lauds potential candidates for drawing crowds and big donors. Second, the Joan Rivers news frame could have caused some confusion for another coder because articles about candidates visiting early primary states are part of this frame. A second coder may have
considered these as campaign strategy articles, and thus part of the Karl Rove news frame. However, the decision to include the Iowa and New Hampshire articles as Joan Rivers cases was based primarily on the observation that most of these stories speak not of what Iowa and New Hampshire mean in terms of momentum. Instead, most of these articles focus on how voters in these key states “roll out the red carpet” for presidential hopefuls.

Despite the lower reliability of the focus 2008 and Joan Rivers news frame variables, the vast majority of variables had very high or perfect Cronbach alphas. This level of intercoder reliability demonstrates clarity with respect to the conceptualized variables and in terms of the reliability and reproducibly of the study’s findings. See appendix for reliability of each variable used in this study.

**Statistical Methodology**

To determine whether there are trends in the media’s 2008 coverage as a whole and with respect to specific candidates, I will use the statistical methodology program SPSS to compare my data among each of the three time periods. I employ two different types of statistical tests to analyze the data I’ve collected: crosstabulation and ANOVA.
Crosstabulation

The primary statistical methodology that will be used is crosstabulation or “crosstabs.” This method examines the correlation between two variables and the percentage of cases falling into specific categories. To test statistical significance, I will use the Pearson’s Chi-Square to determine whether these differences were real or occurring by chance. The chi-square test compares the expected frequencies with the values that have been observed. If the gap between the expected and observed is large, and the chi square is large, the relationship did not occur by chance, and is real. If the findings are not statistically significant or there are no differences, then this methodology will not have supported the hypotheses. Crosstabulation also takes into account the role that control variables play in the relationship of the two primary variables that are being tested.

ANOVA

I also employ a model is called a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA is concerned with differences between means of groups. I will run analyses to see what the variation is within the groups, then how that variation would translate into variation between the groups, taking into account how many subjects there are in the groups. If the observed differences are much larger than expected by chance, there is a statistical significance.
Limitations

In addition to laying out the theoretical foundation and methodological approach it is also necessary to outline some of the study’s many limitations. Despite a sound research design, three of the study’s shortcomings deserve greater detail here. The first limitation is that the sample of newspapers was not all-encompassing. By and large, this study investigated newspapers with rather large circulations. Of the 76 newspapers examined all but four had circulation numbers that exceeded 100,000. An interesting contrast could have been made between major national dailies and small local papers with circulations under 50,000. The ProQuest database added to this study’s limitations because there were several key publications that were not part of the database. For example, the *Des Moines Register* would have been a fascinating newspaper to include in this study given Iowa’s constant media emphasis on its early primary. The inclusion of *Charlotte Observer* and *Tennessean* could have given a more accurate view of John Edwards’ and Al Gore’s homestate coverage. In short, I was at the mercy of the publications on the ProQuest database and had to be realistic about the sheer volume of data I could code and analyze.

The choice to concentrate on newspapers is also a limitation of this study. Television is still a dominant force as a gatekeeper of information, particularly in the election arena. No study about the media’s coverage of the 2008 election would be complete without some investigation into the style and content of television’s 2008
pre-nomination coverage. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 85 percent of people gave cable news a favorable rating, which was higher than any other media. Local television news scored one point lower, but still topped the daily newspaper which was rated as favorable by 80 percent of people polled. Other measuring sticks confirm television’s sway among news consumers. Local television news rated the highest among survey respondent when they were asked about the medium’s ability to provide fact over opinion. Sixty-one percent of people polled said the local news provided “mostly facts.” Network news programs trailed newspapers by one percentage point on the same question, with 54 and 53 percent respectively. This simple view of public attitudes toward television demonstrates its power as gatekeeper, and confirms that television’s role in providing the public with election coverage is an important one. In addition, studying wire services’ coverage may have provided some intriguing results. Because small town newspapers rely so heavily on wire services such as the Associated Press, Reuters, and United Press International, tracking their coverage could have offered some clues into how smaller publications deal with the 2008 election during the imaginary primary.

The study’s third limitation was that only five of the 15 possible candidates for Democratic nomination were tracked, though each was carefully chosen using concrete criteria. Following Barack Obama and John Kerry would have given interesting insight
into how the media covered arguably the Democratic Party’s fastest rising and falling stars. Tracking Governors Tom Vilsack and Bill Richardson would have also provided a disparate view of how Dark Horses, and specifically Washington outsiders, are covered by the national media. Clearly given the scope of this project, tracking all 15 White House hopefuls was just not realistic. But had it been possible, the data collected could have supplied a much richer picture of how newspapers are communicating with the public about the 2008 election and the candidates who may run.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I introduced this study’s methodological approach, including my research questions, hypotheses, data collection parameters, and variables. Due to the volume of stories about the 2008 election, it was necessary to focus on one party’s battle for the nomination. I chose to concentrate on the Democratic contest because the storylines coming out of the Democratic nomination race are arguably richer than those associated with the Republican race and their party, by all indications, seems to have much more riding on a victory in 2008. My choice to track newspaper coverage was also two-fold. First, measured by several standards, the public still holds newspapers in high regards. Second, I chose to investigate newspapers because this medium still does most of the original reporting. The selection of the specific 76 newspapers tracked in
this study was brought about by finding a balance among characteristics of availability, prominence, and diversity.

What is important to consider is not just the amount, but rather how the pre-campaign period in the 2008 is being covered by newspapers. My conceptual hypothesis is: *Perceived frontrunners during the imaginary primary will receive more prolific and prominent coverage, but all potential candidates will be written about using the three dominant media frames employed during pre-primary stages of an election.* In investigating this coverage three important research questions emerge. Each features a series of operational hypotheses. The question deals with the phenomenon of the pre-nomination media coverage of the 2008 election: What are the characteristics of newspapers’ 2008 election coverage during the pre-nomination stages of the election? The second and most substantial part of this study involves the specific candidates who are being covered as possible 2008 contenders for the Democratic nomination. This topic presents two research questions: First, how will the *amount* of newspapers’ coverage of potential 2008 candidates vary among candidates? The final question to be addressed, and the one that is perhaps most important to this study, is: How will the *characteristics* of newspapers’ coverage of the 2008 election vary among candidates? To examine each of these questions, I collected a series of data based on well-defined parameters. This collection produced a host of variables that will be
addressed both quantitatively and qualitatively. This examination will lend findings and analysis as I delve into the 2008 election coverage in newspapers.
Chapter 7. Findings and Analysis: The Phenomenon

The previous chapter detailed this study’s research plan and methodological approach. In this chapter I introduce this study’s statistical findings and offer an analysis of their significance in investigating the phenomenon of the media’s 2008 election coverage. I take a closer look at the research question: What are the characteristics of newspapers’ 2008 election coverage during the pre-nomination stages of the election? Here I examine my three hypotheses associated with this research question. I present the descriptive statistics for the key variables that lend insight into the phenomenon of 2008 election coverage. I also detail the results of the bivariate crosstabulation and chi squares in testing each of my three hypotheses. Addressing both the statistical findings and anecdotal evidence, I provide an in-depth analysis of the results to address their significance in the context of the media’s early 2008 election coverage.

Overview

The first step is to examine the amount of coverage within the three time frames examined in this study. The ProQuest database search of the five candidates in 76 newspapers over three data frames produced a total of 537 articles (see Table 7.1). The first time period, July 18 to August 15, 2005 yielded 36.7 percent of the total (n=197); the February 2 to March 2, 2006 time frame produced 38.9 percent (n=205);
and the third and final period, August 18 to September 15, 2006, represented 25.1 percent (n=135) of the total number of articles collected.

Table 7.1  The Number of Articles per Date Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July-Aug, 2005</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-Mar, 2006</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-Sept, 2006</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This variation among date sets is intriguing. One might hypothesize that the number of articles about the 2008 election would increase as the first primaries drew nearer. However, my sample says otherwise. The middle time period contained more articles than those produced in the final time frame. One explanation could be that the February 2 to March 2 time period provided more prolific coverage because Washington D.C.-based politicians are generally more active during this time period. February is typically when Congress begins to undertake the year’s agenda and respond to the President’s State of the Union address. The media often investigate candidates’ activity on Capitol Hill as a means to learn more about or examine their possible candidacies in 2008. August, which represents portions of both the first and
third time frame, is generally devoid of political activity because Congress recessed for the entire month. Another possible explanation is that the media spent more time covering the midterm elections during August and September 2006, and therefore, there was less focus on the upcoming presidential election.

Upon closer qualitative review of the sample articles indicates that the spike during the second time period may have been attributable to an array of Hillary Clinton-centric stories that focused on unconnected events and occurrences. First, Hillary Clinton’s verbal back and forth with Karl Rove proved to be a hot news item during this period. Despite it being the essence of soft news and it having little bearing on Clinton’s activities in Washington D.C., the story ran in papers around the country. In addition, Clinton’s wax figure was unveiled at Madam Taussad’s museum at about the same time. Again, the topic appeared in a vast array of newspapers in different parts of the United States. Combine that with the fact that she did well in several public opinion polls, in particular one that found that the country is ready for a woman president, and you have a perfect storm of newspaper coverage about Clinton that created a significant increase across the board in 2008 election media coverage during this time period.
National Newspaper Coverage

In all, each of the 76 newspapers used in this sample featured at least one article that touched on some aspect of the 2008 presidential election. Of the 537 newspaper stories, national newspapers, which include USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and Chicago Tribune, accounted for 16.6 percent (n=89) of all the articles collected. Interestingly, these publications only represented eight percent of the total sample size. Among the national newspapers, the New York Times produced the largest number of articles (n=28), which was 5.2 percent of the total. The Washington Post featured 20 articles in this sample (3.7 percent). Of the non-national newspapers only four rivaled the prolific coverage of the New York Times: the New York Daily News (n=24), Buffalo News (n=26), Times Union of Albany, New York (n=35), and the Washington Times (n=38).

A trend clearly emerges – the newspapers featuring the most stories that focused on or mentioned the candidates who may run in 2008 are based in New York and Washington D.C. The explanation is relatively straight-forward; New York Senator Hillary Clinton is the Democratic frontrunner for the nomination. Naturally these homestate newspapers cover Clinton day-to-day, and thus the 2008 presidential election is much more salient for New York-based reporters and editors given Clinton’s standing. If Hillary Clinton was not one of the candidates tracked it could be hypothesized that the number of articles about the 2008 election among these New
York newspapers would have declined drastically. The Washington D.C.-based newspapers are more apt to cover the 2008 election because the United States’ capital city is the very epicenter of national politics, especially presidential politics. Both the Washington Post and Washington Times have teams of reporters tracking potential candidates and readily offer news stories and commentary about the prospects of potential candidates in the 2008 election. In addition, with Clinton serving as a Senator in Washington D.C. she is readily accessible to the D.C. press corps.

Examining the frequencies for the variables “section,” “page number,” and “word count,” offers insight into some of the general characteristics of newspaper coverage of the 2008 presidential race. In particular these variables provide an idea of the prominence accorded to stories addressing the 2008 election and its potential candidates. Of the 537 articles in this study’s sample, 59.2 percent (n=318) appeared in Section A of the newspaper, with 18.8 percent (n=101) in Section B. In 13.6 percent of the articles (n=73), the ProQuest database did not specify a section number (See Table 7.2).
Table 7.2 Number of Articles by Newspaper Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper section</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section B</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Others</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Articles that appeared on page one of any given section of the newspaper accounted for 20.1 percent (n=108) of all coverage, while 55.5 percent appeared in first five pages. Importantly, 11.2 percent (n=60) of all the articles sampled were located on the front page of the newspaper. It is evident from this series of frequencies that articles that feature 2008 election coverage are getting prominent attention in the pages of newspapers. In particular, the election news’ appearance on the front page suggests that newspaper editorial boards and publishers believe these stories sell newspapers and are of high interest and importance to readers.

Finally, the mean word count for articles in this sample was 734.8. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism’s 2004 annual report, the average article length of the largest papers with circulation over 750,000 was about 1,200 words. The average was just more than 800 words at midsize papers and fell to less than 600 words.
Therefore, the word mean is fairly consistent with that articles appearing in midsize newspapers, which make up the majority of the publications in this study’s sample.

However, an important question to consider is how the word counts vary between national newspaper and non-national newspapers. My hypothesis is:

\[ H1a: \text{National daily newspapers will feature longer articles about the 2008 race than non-national newspapers.} \]

In order to address this hypothesis I used a t-test to investigate difference in the mean word counts for national newspapers and local newspapers. Results from the t-test examining the mean difference in word count for national and non-national newspapers confirmed my hypothesis. In the 89 articles appearing in national newspapers the mean word count was 995.40. In the 447 articles article in non-national newspapers the word count was 684.01, creating a mean difference 311.45 (t=-5.352, p=.000). For the t-test equal variances were not assumed.

Anecdotal evidence supports this hypothesis as well. USA Today’s cover story “President’s Job Gets Harder when 10 Senators Want It” offers an example of the much longer articles about the 2008 that appear in national newspapers. In this story, author Susan Page spends 2,174 words examining how both Democratic and GOP Senators are positioning themselves for a run at the White House. As will be
demonstrated later, non-national newspaper often rely on the newsbrief in reporting 2008 news, reducing the length of 2008 election stories.

This finding is telling because it provides evidence that national newspapers are spending more space discussing the 2008 election. Not only are there more 2008 articles per national newspaper, but stories appearing in national publications are nearly a third longer. Given the increased allowance for 2008 coverage, national newspapers are able to delve further into issues of candidate viability and electability. In addition, given their national prominence and influence in terms of public opinion, the more in-depth coverage will largely shape what the electorate knows about the election and the possible candidates.

The longer articles may be a result of two important factors. First, national newspapers often give more attention to national politics over local politics. *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* have no local constituencies so each paper can concentrate solely on national politics and current events in Washington D.C. In addition, newspapers like the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* have throngs of reporters based in Washington D.C. It makes it much easier for these publications to focus in greater detail on political speculation and politics on a national scale. Second, the national papers tend to be larger in terms of the amount of space available for articles. The sheer volume of available space in larger, national papers provides editors
with more room in devoting a significant amount of attention to an election that is several years away. Among smaller local papers, editors may be forced to choose between covering a local story or the 2008 presidential election.

**2008 Focused Coverage**

As stated in the previous chapter, the 2008 focus variable recorded if the article being examined is predominately reporting on matters pertaining to the 2008 presidential race. In many articles, the fact that someone is a possible 2008 candidate is a mere mention in a much larger article about issues not related to the upcoming presidential election. In other cases, the next presidential race is the focus of vast majority or entire article.

In this area I hypothesized:

*H1b: A higher percentage of articles in national daily newspapers will be specifically focused on 2008 than in non-national newspapers.*

The 2008 presidential election was the focus of 205 (38.2%) of the 537 articles in this sample. Using crosstabulation I examined if there was a correlation between the type of newspaper and the amount of 2008 focused coverage. This bivariate crosstabulation found that there was no real difference in the number of 2008 between national and local newspapers. This finding is validated by a Pearson’s Chi-Square test (p=.788), which indicates whether the findings are real or occurring by chance. In this case, there was no significant difference between what was observed and what was
expected. The percentage of 2008-focused articles in national newspapers was 39.3 (n=35) and in non-national papers 2008-focused articles represented 37.7 percent (n=169). Therefore, my data does not support my hypothesis. There is not a statistically significant difference between national and local newspapers in terms of 2008-focused articles.

This finding is important because it gives some indication as to the prevalence of 2008 coverage. Non-national newspapers are clearly reporting on the 2008 election at a similar rate than that of national newspapers that specialize in national political coverage, even if the national newspapers’ articles tend to be longer in length. Of particular significance is that although space is more limited, local newspaper editors are still finding the 2008 presidential election important enough to address it on some level in newspaper pages.

A good example of local newspaper of the 2008 election is The Press-Enterprise’s (Riverside, California) editorial “Security Flub.” The relatively short, 339-word editorial criticizes President Bush for his reaction to public outcry on the Dubai ports deal. The piece states that the President “has handed Democrats – many of whom have proved unreliable on national security issues – the cover they need to bolster their credentials in upcoming elections.” The editorial then shifts to Hillary Clinton and her potential run in 2008. “Perhaps the first Democrat to wrap herself in
this gift blanket was Hillary Clinton. The former ‘co-president’ who will probably make a run for the White House in 2008, has slowly been cultivating a ‘centrist’ image – which includes her vote in 2003 for the war in Iraq. Though the political left that has sustained Clinton’s career is still irked by that vote, she atones by criticizing the president’s handling of the war. Fair enough. But that’s about it for the gold stars next to her national security record.” Here the editorial board links the 2008 election, Hillary’s reaction to the President, and national security policy choices, despite the fact that Clinton is only peripherally involved in the Dubai ports debate. Tellingly, while the Dubai ports issue may have some pertinence to readers, it is intriguing to consider why the editorial staff of the *Press-Enterprise* felt compelled to attack Clinton and her presidential ambitions in this particular context. This article provides a good demonstration of the way in which non-national newspapers engage the 2008 election in a more limited fashion than national newspapers.

**Article Type**

Newspapers covered the 2008 election in a range of article types. However, news stories and editorial/opinion articles represented the majority newspaper coverage (see table 7.3). News articles composed 56.6 percent (n=304) of all the articles collected, while editorial/opinion pieces made up 25.7 percent (n=138). Only 15 of the
537 articles were feature/profile articles (2.8%). Newsbriefs accounted for 77 stories (14.3%).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of data collected on article type is how the distribution varies between national and local newspapers, particularly with respect to features/profiles and newsbriefs. Results from crosstabbing article type and national newspaper indicate this disparity. In all, 80 percent (nine out of 12) feature/profile pieces appeared in national newspapers, while only 3.4 percent (three of 77) newsbriefs came from national newspapers.

**Table 7.3 Distribution by Article Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Type</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Story</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial/opinion</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature/profile</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsbrief</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This finding is notable because it is in concert with findings dealing with word count and 2008 focused articles. The national newspapers are more likely to run longer feature pieces than the succinct newsbriefs. Smaller local papers on the other hand, due to space limitations and their de-emphasis on national politics, are more apt to relegate
2008 coverage to the newsbrief section. In columns like the *Washington Times*’ “Inside Politics,” the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*’s “On the Stump,” and the *Providence Journal*’s “In Quotes,” readers are given small doses of the 2008 election and the candidates who may run. In these news tidbits, reporters and editors can still address Hillary Clinton’s fundraising numbers and John Edwards’ visit to a birthday party in Concord, New Hampshire, without requiring significant amounts of newspaper space. However, newspapers like *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* generally opt for much longer stories, and often cover stories that probe larger questions about a candidate’s possible run.

Take for instance Mark Z. Barabak’s article in the *Los Angeles Times* “A New New Democrat Looks West and Forward.” This 2697-word, front-page profile piece introduces readers to New Mexico Governor and 2008 presidential hopeful Bill Richardson. Near the beginning of the article Barabak writes, “Richardson has long been the proverbial man in a hurry, starting with his first audacious run for office 25 years ago, when, transplanted from Washington, the Democrat nearly unseated the state's veteran GOP congressman. (Richardson won his own House seat in 1982.) Lately, Richardson's exertions have been aimed at resuscitating New Mexico, the sick man of the Southwest. His ultimate design, apparently, is a White House bid in 2008.” Here the *Los Angeles Times* covers Richardson, the man, the politician, and
the White House aspirant, in great detail, often with colorful language and unique insights. The Los Angeles Times devotes a significant amount of resources to a possible candidate that is not even from California. This profile piece would likely be replicated only in a New Mexico newspaper such as the Albuquerque Journal and not in other smaller newspapers such as the Columbus Dispatch and News Journal of Daytona Beach, Florida. This article is just one of many examples of how national newspapers are willing to cover presidential hopefuls in lengthy profile pieces.

**News Frames**

Of the 537 articles in this sample, a vast majority implemented at least one of the three 2008 election news frames. These articles were coded for the presence of three frames: the media as Joan Rivers, Karl Rove and Willie Shoemaker. Joan Rivers coverage is defined as an article featuring a news frame which focuses at least partially on candidate-centric issues. Articles where the Joan Rivers frame is present essentially ask the question: what kind of person/candidate will it take to win the Democratic nomination and presidency? Karl Rove coverage is a variable that indicates that an article features a news frame which focuses on campaign strategy. Articles that employ this frame essentially explore the question: What kind of strategy and issue platform will a candidate need to employ to win the nomination and/or the presidency? Finally, the Willie Shoemaker coverage variable is present when an article uses a news frame
focusing on polls and/or the horse race aspect of the 2008 election. This frame essentially asks: How popular among the public is a particular candidate? Importantly, some articles employ more than one frame and some employed none.

I anticipated that the Joan Rivers frame would dominate 2008 election coverage.

\textit{H2a: The Joan Rivers news frame will be present in more articles than the Karl Rove news frame.}

\textit{H2b: The Joan Rivers news frame will be present in more articles than Willie Shoemaker news frame.}

By examining simple frequencies I determined that the Joan Rivers news frame was employed in 245 (45.6\%) articles; the Karl Rove frame appeared in 280 (52.1\%) articles; and the Willie Shoemaker: 116 (21.6\%). In testing if these observed differences in frequencies among the three news frame were statistically significant a Cochran’s Q test was employed. These tests revealed that significant differences occurred among all of the news frames. The difference between Joan Rivers and Karl Rove news frames was the weakest at p=.04, but was perhaps most important because it demonstrated that data did not support hypothesis 2a. The Joan Rivers news frame was, in fact, less prevalent than the Karl Rove frame by a statistically significant margin. A significant difference (p<.00) was also present for the Joan River and Willie Shoemaker frame. Here Hypothesis 2b is supported because the Joan Rivers frame appeared more frequently than the Willie Shoemaker news frame (See Table 7.4).
Table 7.4 Distribution by News Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Frame</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent in Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joan Rivers</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl Rove</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willie Shoemaker</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings are particularly important because they demonstrate to what extent campaign strategy has begun to dominate election coverage, especially in pre-primary stages. Very early in the presidential election cycle one would assume that the media would be predominately preoccupied with individual candidates and their viability. It was my assumption that matters of fundraising, traveling to Iowa and New Hampshire, and other candidate-centric activities would represent the focus of much of the pre-campaign newspaper coverage. However, the data say otherwise. In this case study it is apparent that even several years away from an election, reporters and editorial staffs are already examining how certain political strategies and policy positions will aid a run at the White House. Whether a candidate supports a minimum wage increase or how he/she voted on the administration’s detainee legislation is clearly fodder for political speculation, the hallmark of the Karl Rove news frame.
Another facet of newspapers’ use of news frame that must be addressed is how these frames vary among the date sets. My hypothesis states:

_H2c: There will be more emphasis on the Joan Rivers frame in the first date frame than in the third date frame.

In order to determine if the data support this hypothesis, I ran crosstabulations on the correlation between dates and each of the three news frames. I then ran a Pearson’s Chi-Square test, which confirmed that hypothesis 2c is somewhat supported and that the variation is statistically significantly in the Joan Rivers news frame (p<.000). The differences in dates in the Karl Rove and Willie Shoemaker were not significant, with (p=.246) and (p=.356), respectively. Data shows that the Joan Rivers frame was more prevalent in the first frame (n=73) than the third frame (n=55), which would indicate support for the hypothesis. However, the second date frame produced the largest number of Joan Rivers articles (n=116).

Also important to consider is how news frames vary among different articles types. My third hypothesis states:

_H3: Editorial/opinion articles will feature the highest percentage of stories employing the Karl Rove news frame._
Table 7.5 Karl Rove News Frame by Article Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Type</th>
<th># of Articles with Rove Frame</th>
<th># of Article without Rove Frame</th>
<th>Percent with Karl Rove Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Story</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial/opinion</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsbrief</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using a bivariate crosstabulation, I tested the correlation between the Karl Rove news frame and article type. I removed the feature/profile articles because there were too few cases in the sample. The Karl Rove frame appeared in 68.1 percent of editorial/opinion articles (n= 94). For news stories, Karl Rove news frame made up 54.5 percent of coverage (n=165). In only 11 newsbriefs (14.3%) did the Karl Rove frame appear (See Table 7.5). This crosstabulation demonstrates that there is support for hypothesis 3. A Pearson’s Chi-Square test confirms that the correlation is statistically significant (p<.00). Therefore, the difference is real and not occurring by chance.

This key finding indicates how pervasive reporter-centric coverage has become. Reporters, whether it is decoding a politician’s policy motives or speculating as to a particular candidate’s campaign strategy, consistently used the Karl Rove frame to engage in this kind of 2008 coverage. In all, 68.1 percent of all the editorial/opinion
pieces implemented the Karl Rove news frame. This finding dovetails with evidence that rejected hypothesis 2c, which stated that Karl Rove coverage would be less prevalent than Joan Rivers coverage. In fact, data showed that the Karl Rove news frame was most prevalent in this case study’s sample of newspaper articles. This combination of findings further cements the notion that reporter-centric, campaign strategy coverage is a trademark of journalists writing about the 2008 election. In this case, a reader is most likely to find this style of coverage on the newspaper’s editorial and opinion pages. Newsbriefs, however, rarely feature the Karl Rove frame. Clearly, these briefs are concise and infrequently show the fingerprints of the reporters who compose them.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I introduced this study’s statistical findings and offered an analysis of their significance in investigating the *phenomenon* of the media’s 2008 election coverage. I took a closer look at the research question: What are the characteristics of newspapers’ 2008 election coverage during the pre-nomination stages of the election? I examined three hypotheses associated with this research question which resulted in several interesting findings. This study finds that in terms of frequency, 2008 coverage is comparable between national and non-national newspapers. This finding indicates just how pervasive early election is in newspapers.
around the country, regardless of newspaper size. Coverage was particularly apparent in New York-based newspapers, due in large part to the notion that the state’s junior Senator, Hillary Clinton, is the perceived frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. However, the articles in this sample tended to be longer in national newspapers. One explanation is that national newspapers focus more resources on national politics over local politics. Their teams of reporters in Washington D.C. can more closely examine potential candidates based there. National newspapers also tend to print more profile/feature articles than non-national, employing fewer newsbriefs that offer information about the 2008 election. In addition, evidence shows that the campaign strategy news frame, the media as Karl Rove, makes up much of the pre-primary coverage and that this frame appears most frequently in editorial/opinion articles. This combination of findings further cements the notion that reporter-centric, campaign strategy coverage is a trademark of journalists writing about the 2008 election. In this case, a reader is most likely to find this style of coverage in the newspaper’s editorial and opinion pages. The Karl Rove news frame was least likely to be employed in newsbriefs, which rarely feature the reporter as part of the story.
Chapter 8. Findings and Analysis: Amount of Candidate Coverage

The previous chapter outlined this study’s findings with respect to the phenomenon of newspapers’ coverage of the 2008 election. In this chapter I investigate this study’s statistical findings on the amount of newspapers’ coverage about specific candidates on the road to the White House. I also offer an analysis of their significance in answering the question: how will the amount of print coverage of potential 2008 candidates vary among candidates? Here I examine each of my four operational hypotheses associated with this research question. I present the descriptive statistics for each of the key variables that lend insight into the amount of candidate-specific 2008 election coverage. I also detail the results of the crosstabulation and chi squares in testing each of my four hypotheses. Addressing both the statistical findings and anecdotal evidence, I go into an in-depth analysis of the results to address their significance in the context of the media’s early 2008 election coverage.

Overview

In this case study, during three four-week periods in 2005 and 2006, I tracked five of the 15 potential candidates who are believed to be considering a run for the Democratic presidential nomination. These candidates include Rock Stars Hillary Clinton and Al Gore, Familiar Face John Edwards, and Dark Horses Russ Feingold and
Mike Gravel. I hypothesized that the perceived frontrunner would receive the most prolific coverage:

\textit{H4a: Hillary Clinton will appear in more articles than all other candidates.}

In the 537 articles in this sample Clinton was featured in 75.4 percent (n=405), Gore in 4.5 percent (n=24), Edwards in 14.9 percent (n=80), Feingold in 5.2 percent (n=28), and Gravel, who was the only declared candidate, was not mentioned in a single article (See Table 8.1). The nonparametric Cochran’s Q test demonstrates that the differences between the article frequencies for Clinton and Gore, Clinton and Edwards, and Clinton and Feingold are statistically significant (p<.00). This finding shows support for hypothesis 4a. Differences between Gore and Edwards, and Edwards and Feingold were also statistically significant (p<.00).

**Table 8.1 Number of Articles Per Candidate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Gravel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, there was no significant difference ($p=.67$) in the frequencies between Gore and Edwards. This lack of variation might be explained by examining Al Gore’s coverage during each of the three date sets. In the first time frame, Gore did not appear in a single newspaper article that referenced him as a 2008 candidate. However, Gore was featured in 15 articles in the second time period and in nine during the final date frame. Here it would be reasonable to hypothesize that Al Gore was not considered a potential 2008 candidate until early 2006 when his film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was the subject of buzz in entertainment and political circles. Therefore, his coverage is backloaded. The press attention on Gore climaxed in the second date set and continued into the third set, without a single article in the first frame. Feingold on the other hand, has been considered a possible 2008 candidate from the earliest opinion polls. However, this lack of coverage is more likely attributable to the notion that he, unlike Gore, is still not a nationally prominent politician or known quantity outside of Washington D.C or Wisconsin.¹

In considering the amount of candidates’ national newspaper coverage in this sample, I hypothesized:

*H4b: Hillary Clinton will appear in more articles in the major national daily newspaper than all other candidates.*

¹ Subsequent to my analysis of this sample’s data, Russ Feingold officially announced that he would not run for president in 2008.
A bivariate crosstabulation of candidate and national newspapers reveals that Hillary Clinton appears in more national newspaper articles than all other candidates tracked in this sample. Of the 89 national newspaper articles, Clinton was featured in 68, which made up 12.7 percent of her total coverage. However, Clinton accounted for 76.4 percent of all the national newspaper articles. John Edwards received coverage in 13 national newspaper articles, while Feingold and Gore were featured in five and three, respectively. However, the Pearson’s Chi-Square test demonstrates that these differences between candidates are not statistically significant.

Table 8.2 Candidate Coverage in National Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent within National Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The finding that Hillary Clinton appears in more articles total, and specifically more national newspaper articles, is of no real surprise. Clinton has been anointed the frontrunner and she is regularly the subject of stories examining her lead in the polls and her strategic positioning on a variety of issues. Perhaps more significant, however,
is that Clinton is an intriguing figure whose shadow is cast over the 2008 election. Will she run or won’t she? That is the question that is on the minds of many reporters in the early stages of the run for the White House. Clinton is also a tremendously polarizing figure, and this love her/hate her conflict often produces juicy headlines. In this era in which the economic bottom line reigns supreme, newspapers stay focused on what sells. Given her national recognition and her massive celebrity, it is clear that reporters and editors alike believe that the “Hillary in 2008” story is compelling enough to attract readers.

The question is not “why Hillary?” But rather “what is the potential effect on candidates not named Hillary?” Clearly the most compelling case is Mike Gravel. Gravel was the only declared candidate from Election Day 2004 to the midterms in 2006. Yet Gravel is not even mentioned in a single article in this sample. Consider that the other four potential candidates combined for 537 articles, and none of those figures have even declared their candidacy. Gravel’s lack of newspaper coverage may be the most egregious example of the media determining who is and who is not a viable candidate. In the judgment of the media, despite his extensive political qualifications, Mike Gravel is not a serious candidate and is not worthy enough to be mentioned with the like of Clinton, Edwards, or even Feingold. For Gravel, the question remains: How can a candidate outside mainstream politics get any traction in their candidacy if the
media choose not to cover them? This study makes it clear that in the media’s pervasive celebrity-centric coverage of possible candidates, an obscure outsider has little chance to become a true contender.

**Only Mentions**

The “only mentions” variable is defined as an article which just briefly makes reference to the candidate being examined as a potential 2008 presidential hopeful. This variable is particularly noteworthy because it indicates on some level whether specific candidates are being covered in a substantive manner. While an article may be about the 2008 election, a candidate who is only being briefly mentioned is significantly different than if he/she had been a much larger part of the story and subject to one of the three major news frames. The variable provides the ability to distinguish between when a candidate is just a very small portion of the story and when he/she is a focal point.

In order to determine if there was a variation among whether specific candidates were only mentioned or covered more substantially, I crosstabulated the candidate and only mentions variables. The results showed that both Al Gore and John Edwards were more likely to be just briefly referenced as 2008 candidates in newspaper articles (See Table 8.3). Of John Edwards’ articles, he was only mentioned in 64.6 percent (n=51), while Al Gore was only mentioned in 62.5 percent (n=15) of
his stories in this sample. Clinton and Feingold’s coverage was much more substantive. Clinton received only brief mentions in 39.5 percent (n=160) of the articles in which she appeared. Feingold was only mentioned in 39.3 percent (n=11). Mike Gravel was excluded from the statistical analysis because he had no cases in the sample. A Pearson’s Chi-Square of $p=.00$ confirmed that these variations were significant.

Table 8.3 Only Mentions Coverage by Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This approximate 15 percentage-point difference in the “only mentioned” variable between Edwards/Gore and Clinton/Feingold might be explained by considering which candidates do and do not currently hold public office. Clinton and Feingold may receive more substantial coverage because as active senators their jobs require them to be more than just 2008 candidates. Edwards and Gore are not introducing legislation, interrogating witnesses at Senate hearings, voting on
nominations, securing funding for homestate projects, or conducting other official business that could garner more quality newspaper coverage.

Consider two articles that appeared in newspapers during early 2006. The first, which ran in the Chicago Tribune on March 1, focuses on Russ Feingold and his fight against the renewal of the Patriot Act. This is emblematic of coverage of current office holders, Clinton and Feingold. The article “Wisconsin’s Lonely Crusader Fights On,” begins by introducing readers to Feingold’s long battle against the Patriot Act. “With public angst high about national security, virtually every senator is lining up to vote for renewing the USA Patriot Act as early as Wednesday,” Jill Zuckman writes. But not Senator Feingold. According to the article Feingold’s defiance in supporting the Patriot Act, both times, and the War in Iraq have drawn scorn from many Senate colleagues. Zuckman then demonstrates what the larger significance of Feingold’s position is: “Political analysts say Feingold's record gives him the potential to become a factor in the 2008 Democratic presidential race--if not to win the nomination outright, then perhaps to catch fire early on and cause headaches for the front-runner.” Here the Chicago Tribune briefly investigates Feingold’s possible candidacy as it is wrapped in his day-to-day workings within the Senate. Instead of just being briefly mentioned, Feingold’s policy positions are covered much more thoroughly thanks to his seat in the
100-member body of the U.S. Senate. In this study, Clinton enjoys similar kinds of newspaper coverage.

This is in sharp contrast to press attention paid to Edwards and Gore. Both men are given far briefer coverage due in part to the fact that they no longer have a national pedestal from which to engage the media and the public. One week before Feingold’s lengthy coverage in the *Chicago Tribune*, Edwards and Gore received mentions in a Ronald Brownstein *Los Angeles Times* article that was reprinted in *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*. In his column, Brownstein addresses if holding a public office is necessary to running for and winning the presidency. Halfway through the article, Brownstein gives readers a snapshot of those politicians who are out of office who are eyeing the White House. Included in his list: Edwards and Gore. Brownstein writes: “Among Democrats, Warner (who in New Hampshire jokingly described himself as ‘unemployed’) and former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, the party's 2004 vice presidential nominee, seem virtually certain to run. Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, who is not seeking re-election this year, is viewed as a likely presidential contender, and former Sen. Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota has kept his name in the mix. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark, who sought the nomination in 2004, and former Vice President Al Gore, the party's nominee in 2000, continue to generate buzz among activists.” In this piece, Edwards and Gore are essentially buried in a roll call of other
potential Democratic White House seekers, all of whom are currently un-elected. There is no real context. There is no elaboration. From these brief mentions, the audience simply knows that Edwards and Gore may or may not be contemplating second runs at the presidency.

Clinton also has the advantage of being the focus of a variety of public opinion polls. One example is the *USA Today*-CNN-Gallup Poll released in early August 2005. The poll found that a majority of Americans see Clinton as a strong leader who would deal effectively with terrorism if elected president. The results of this poll were covered in an article appearing in the *Albany Times-Union*. Author John Machecek also wrote about the poll finding that most respondents said that Clinton was a polarizing figure who doesn't share their values. Machecek writes, “Significantly, fewer people felt compatible with her on values than when she was first lady despite her recent efforts to reach out to moderates and conservatives on health care, abortion and other issues.” The article declares the poll a “mixed verdict” on Clinton, despite her sharing an early poll lead with former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, a Republican. Machecek even uses Carroll Doherty of the Pew Research Center as a source to examine Clinton’s reputation as a polarizing figure and how it has not seemed to be diminishing over time. “Presumably, it can only get worse during a (presidential) campaign,” he said. Here, Clinton gets the lion’s share of the attention,
not only because the *Times-Union* is based in her homestate of New York, but because the poll was almost entirely about voters’ perception of her. What is reported essentially as a footnote is that the poll found 40 percent of registered Democratic voters said they would be most likely to support Clinton for the party’s 2008 nomination, and that 2004 vice presidential candidate John Edwards received 15 percent of the vote from survey respondents. In this piece John Edwards is a mere afterthought following his poor performance in the poll. This kind of coverage differs sharply from Clinton who dominated the article.

**Homestate Coverage**

Beyond a simple examination of overall candidate coverage, it is necessary to take a closer look at how homestate coverage varies among candidates. The homestate variable records if the article appeared in a publication based in the homestate of the candidate being tracked. I define homestate as the state that each candidate has represented in public office. Hillary Clinton’s homestate is New York and is represented in this sample by the *New York Times, New York Daily News, New York Newsday, Buffalo News, Syracuse Post-Standard* and *Albany Times-Union*. Al Gore’s homestate is Tennessee and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* was part of this sample. John Edwards’ is North Carolina and the *Raleigh News and Observer* was included. Russ Feingold’s homestate Wisconsin newspapers included the *Wisconsin State*
Journal, Madison Capitol Times, and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Finally, Mike Gravel of Alaska was represented by homestate newspaper the Anchorage Daily News.

With respect to particular candidates, I hypothesized:

\[ H5a: \text{Russ Feingold will receive a higher percentage of homestate coverage than the other candidates.} \]
\[ H5b: \text{Al Gore will receive a lower percentage of homestate coverage than other candidates.} \]

Hypothesis 5a was based on the fact that Russ Feingold still represents Wisconsin in the United States, but is relatively unknown to a national audience. Al Gore, on the other hand, has little connection to his homestate of Tennessee because he has not been elected by a constituency there since 1990.

Overall, 26.6 percent of the articles in this sample (n=143) were from homestate newspapers of candidates. Using the homestate and candidate variables I ran crosstabs to examine if there was a correlation between these two variables. In 24 total articles, Al Gore was not featured in a single story in his homestate newspaper. Feingold appeared in 28 articles as a potential 2008 candidate and of those half came from his three homestate newspapers (See Table 8.4). The Pearson Chi-Square test demonstrated that there was statistical significance (p<.00). These differences were real and not occurring by chance. Mike Gravel was excluded from the statistical analysis because he had no cases in the sample.
Table 8.4 Homestate Coverage by Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The variation in the homestate coverage of Russ Feingold and Al Gore demonstrate the vast differences in the way in which the media cover Rock Star candidates and Dark Horse candidates. They speak to national viability and the uphill climb in front of presumed Dark Horses. Feingold is clearly the focus of the local Wisconsin newspapers. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and *Madison Capital Times* focus on Feingold’s senatorial business in Washington D.C. and his viability as a candidate in the 2008 election. Take for instance an *Associated Press* story on Feingold and his confirmation vote on Chief Justice John Roberts, appearing in the *Wisconsin State Journal* on July 31, 2005. The headline read, “Feingold Action on Roberts to Be Interesting.” Author Frederic Frommer states, “Feingold, who is mulling a presidential race in 2008, could face a challenging situation in how he handles the nomination, because of the influence of left-leaning groups in the Democratic primaries.” Frommer
mentions that several of those liberal groups had expressed their opposition to Roberts and were looking to Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee to press Roberts on his views. The author then turns to a scholar from the American Enterprise Institute, Norm Ornstein, for the common 2008 news nugget: “For a lot of Democrats, particularly those who have thoughts of presidential politics, this vote could pose a dilemma,” Ornstein explains. This article is emblematic of homestate press reports observed throughout newspaper coverage of candidates who may be running for president. One could conclude that had Feingold not been mentioned as a candidate his vote on Roberts would have been of little news value and probably ignored; however, because Feingold was thought to be eyeing the White House, Wisconsin newspapers regularly dissected his vote and policy positions with the campaign strategy motif.

However, Feingold gets little attention in papers reaching the corners of the nation, such as the Anchorage Daily News, Orange County Register and Hartford Courant. A good example of Feingold’s exclusion is in the Omaha World-Herald’s story “Hagel’s PAC Has Strong Cash Flow.” Reporter Jake Thompson writes extensively about the campaign coffers of Senator Chuck Hagel, a GOP hopeful in the 2008 race. Four paragraphs into the article Thompson compares Hagel’s PAC funds to that of other potential 2008 candidates, including Hillary Clinton. He writes that Hagel’s PAC still “lags significantly behind” others eyeing the White House,
“including Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., at $1.9 million, and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., at $715,000.” Here Hagel’s fundraising prowess is gauged by that of national figure and anointed frontrunner Hillary Clinton. Clinton sets the benchmark. It is in these kinds of stories appearing in newspapers outside of Wisconsin in which Feingold is not being mentioned. He is off the national radar, and thus Thompson makes the decision not to include any of Feingold’s PAC numbers. It is easy for one to deduce that readers in Omaha have no interest in Feingold’s ability to fundraise, or worse yet, do not know who Feingold is. His exclusion speaks to how newspapers rate his viability compared to that of Clinton.

Al Gore, however, is a true national candidate with few ties to his homestate of Tennessee. Gore has not represented the Volunteer State since 1992, and during those 14 years, Gore has risen to national prominence as the Vice President of the United States, the Democratic nominee for president, and now world-renowned movie star and author. When Gore makes news, it gets the attention of not only the national newspapers, by smaller local newspapers around the country. The *Washington Post* and *Washington Times* still track the political and personal movements of Gore. Jennifer Harper’s *Washington Times* story “Gore Contends with Lawsuits, Protests” demonstrates the national coverage that Gore receives in this sample of articles. Harper
details Gore’s involvement in a lawsuit filed by a public radio affiliate and an Internet provider and his run-in with picketing environmentalists.

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review also found Al Gore to be intriguing enough to run an opinion piece written by conservative Pat Buchanan where Buchanan pits Gore against the frontrunner Clinton. Buchanan writes, “If Al ran, he would open with a pair of aces. To Democrats Gore was right on the war when almost everyone else was wrong, which gives him the inside track to the anti-war vote that will be crucial in the Democrat primaries of 2008 as it was in 1968 and 1972.” Tellingly, despite Gore’s lack of connection to Pittsburgh, the Tribune-Review found the prospect of a possible run against Hillary newsworthy enough to give it 688 words. Clearly both are headline grabbers as national celebrities whose intrigue extends beyond the political arena. This is where Gore differs from Feingold. To replace Gore with Feingold in this kind of opinion piece would be unthinkable. Feingold versus Hillary has little appeal outside Wisconsin state lines.

**Article Length**

Another measure of the amount of coverage candidates received is the number of words in an article. In this area, I hypothesized:

*H6a: The Rock Star candidates will appear in longer articles than the Familiar Faces candidates.*  
*H6b: The Rock Star candidates will appear in longer articles than the Dark Horse candidates.*
Interestingly, the hypothesis that newspaper coverage, in terms of article length, increases relative to a candidate’s national recognition is unfounded. A one way ANOVA of candidate tier and words reveals that there is no statistical significance in the overall ANOVA model in the difference in means of words between candidate tiers \( (p=.12) \). In fact, a simple means comparison shows that Rock Stars actually had the smallest mean among the three candidate tiers. The Familiar Faces had an average of 815.3 words per article, while the Dark Horse candidates had 790.1 words per story. The Rock Stars trailed the Familiar Faces by nearly 100 words per article with a mean of 717.5. In addition, I used Bonferroni post hoc tests for mean comparisons between each candidate tier. None of the comparisons were statistically significant.

**2008 Focused Coverage**

In many articles, the fact that someone is a possible 2008 candidate is a mere mention in a much larger article about issues not related to the upcoming presidential election. In other cases, the next presidential race is the focus of the vast majority or entire article. In this study, these articles are said to be a “focus 2008” article. This variable is important because it demonstrates how much attention the 2008 election is actually receiving in a given article. This measure is also particularly significant when studying press coverage of individual candidates because it provides an indication as to
which hopefuls are being mentioned solely as 2008 candidates. In this study I hypothesized:

\[ H7a: \text{A higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles will have a 2008 focus than Hillary Clinton’s articles.} \]
\[ H7b: \text{A higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles will have a 2008 focus than Russ Feingold’s articles.} \]
\[ H7c: \text{A higher percentage of Al Gore’s articles will have a 2008 focus than Hillary Clinton’s articles.} \]
\[ H7d: \text{A higher percentage of Al Gore’s articles will have a 2008 focus than Russ Feingold’s articles.} \]

These hypotheses are formulated based on the fact that John Edwards and Al Gore do not hold public office, and thus most often make news by participating in activities related to the 2008 election. Hillary Clinton and Russ Feingold, on the other hand, currently serve as senators in Washington D.C. and much of their work may be only peripherally tied to their possible 2008 candidacies. The same reasoning was supported by data collected on the “only mentioned” variable, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter.

In testing these hypotheses, I ran crosstabulations on the candidate and focus 2008 variables. The results provide support for each of the four hypotheses and a Pearson’s Chi-Square test indicated a strong statistical significance (p=.00). In sum, 64.6 percent (n=51) of John Edwards’ coverage was 2008 focused. Half of Al Gore’s articles, 12 of 24, were predominately about the 2008 election. Hillary Clinton and Russ Feingold saw much less 2008-specific coverage. Only 32.1 percent (n=130) of
Hillary Clinton’s articles focused on the next presidential election, while 39.3 percent (n=11) of Feingold’s did. Once again, the only declared candidate before the 2006 midterm elections, Mike Gravel, did not receive a mention or reference in any article specific to the 2008 election and was excluded from the crosstabs. (See Table 8.5).

Table 8.5 2008-Focused Coverage by Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>Percent of Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anecdotal evidence, as well, indicates that holding public office plays a key role in the whether a potential candidate is cited in articles largely about the 2008 election. Consider an example of typical Clinton and Feingold coverage. In August of 2006 the Madison Capital Times highlighted a “listening session” being held in Madison by Feingold, the state’s junior U.S. senator. According to the article, Feingold told the group of about 60 constituents that the ongoing U.S. presence in Iraq was the result of an “outrageous pile of lies.” Feingold added, “The Bush administration should take accountability for being stuck there and not admitting mistakes.” Ben Broeren,
author of the story, noted that Feingold had recently “made waves” by being one of the few members of Congress to call on the Bush Administration to create a definite timetable for U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq. Broeren also managed to turn the part of the article toward Feingold’s possible presidential run in 2008. “Audience member Dennis deNure, who sells ‘Russ Feingold for president’ shirts and buttons at the downtown farmers’ market, was on hand and sold a shirt to Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz. Feingold is often mentioned as a potential candidate for president in 2008, but he has said he will not make a formal announcement until after the midterm elections this fall.” The article demonstrates how reporters often make mention of Feingold as a 2008 candidate. However this mentions is often done so within the context of Feingold carrying out duties related to his primary job, that of U.S. Senator.

An article that is representative of the Edwards/Gore 2008 focus variety appeared in Raleigh News & Observer on August 2, 2005. The focus of the story was on how Edwards is preparing for another run at the White House in 2008. Author Rob Christensen wrote, “Former U.S. Sen. John Edwards has quietly assembled an organization to help keep him visible as he lays the groundwork for a likely 2008 presidential run. His One America Committee has been holding fund-raisers across the country, hiring staff and consultants, and otherwise finding ways to keep the former North Carolina senator before the public eye on such issues as poverty.” Christensen
also reported that the Edwards PAC raised $614,020 and spent $554,931 during the first six months of 2005, according to a report filed with the Federal Election Commission. In addition, at least half the money came from lawyers largely from fundraisers held in places as diverse as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, Virginia Beach, and Buffalo. Christensen concluded by noting, “Edwards’ PAC has a staff of eight people, including a spokeswoman, a scheduler and political staffers. One staffer, Angela Siecker, is based in New Hampshire, the first primary state. Rubey said Siecker had been assigned to help the state's Democratic legislative caucus. Edwards has also employed fund-raising consultants and his former campaign speechwriter, Wendy Button.” Unlike Feingold, it would be near impossible for the Raleigh News & Observer to report about Edwards’ potential run in any other context. Instead, the majority of Edwards’, and Gore’s, coverage is predominately about 2008. Their preparation for a run is not part of the news – it is the news.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I investigated this study’s statistical findings with respect to the amount of newspaper coverage about specific candidates on the road to the White House. I also offered an analysis of their significance in answering the question: how will the amount of newspapers’ coverage of potential 2008 candidates vary among candidates? I investigated each of my four hypotheses associated with this research
question, which produced a series of intriguing findings. Not surprisingly, Hillary Clinton, the anointed frontrunner, captured the vast majority of attention in articles in this sample. She was more likely to be covered in national newspapers and was less frequently “only mentioned.” in articles. Whether a possible candidate currently holds public office affects the amount of newspaper coverage he/she receives. Candidates who do not currently hold public office, such as Al Gore and John Edwards, were more likely to be only mentioned, but appeared most frequently in stories focused specifically about 2008. Clinton and Feingold, on the other hand, received more substantive coverage, often times in articles not specifically about the 2008 election. Furthermore, the length of these articles was not affected by the national prominence of individual candidates or groups of candidates.
Chapter 9. Findings and Analysis: Characteristics of Candidate Coverage

The previous chapter outlined this study’s findings with respect to the amount of newspapers’ coverage of the potential 2008 candidates. In this chapter I introduce this study’s statistical findings on the characteristics of candidate-specific coverage and offer an analysis of these findings. I examine the research question: How will the characteristics of newspapers’ coverage of the 2008 election vary among candidates? Here I investigate my six hypotheses associated with this research question. I present the descriptive statistics for the key variables that lend insight into the characteristics of candidate-specific 2008 election coverage. I also detail the results of the crosstabulation and chi-squares in testing each of the six operational hypotheses. Addressing both the statistical findings and anecdotal evidence, I provide an in-depth analysis of the results to address their significance in the context of the media’s early 2008 election coverage. In this section I investigate the prominence of candidate-specific coverage and how the media employ the Joan Rivers, Karl Rove, and Willie Shoemaker news frames to discuss the five potential candidates.

Headline Mentions

The headline mentions variable in this study indicates whether the candidate being tracked in the article was referenced in the headline of the story. Headlines often give the reader the clear signal as to who is the focus of the article. In addition, the fact
that a candidate is or is not being mentioned in headlines is a measure of the
prominence of coverage a candidate is receiving. I hypothesized:

\[ H8a: \text{Rock Star candidates will appear in more headlines than Familiar Faces candidates.} \]
\[ H8b: \text{Rock Star candidates will appear in more headlines than Dark Horse candidates.} \]

These hypotheses are based on the notion that Rock Star candidates are recognizable by a larger audience and their activities are more likely to garner attention from the public.

Using a bivariate crosstabulations I tested the correlation between headline mentions and candidates (See Table 9.1). In all, 32.2 percent (n=173) of articles in this sample featured at least one of the candidates’ names in the headline. Of the 429 articles that at least mentioned Rock Star candidates, 151 (35.2 percent) had a headline mention of either Clinton or Gore. In the Familiar Faces category only nine of the 79 articles (11.4 percent) featured Edwards in the newspaper headline, while Dark Horse articles mentioned Feingold in 12 headlines (42.9 percent). Once again, the only declared candidate, Mike Gravel, did not receive a single headline mention and was excluded from the crosstabs. The Pearson’s Chi-Square test demonstrates a statistically significant variation as well (p=.00). Therefore, the data support the hypotheses. Rock Star candidates appeared in more headlines than both Familiar Faces and Dark Horses.
Table 9.1 Headline Mentions by Candidate Tier

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Tier</th>
<th># of Headlines Mentions</th>
<th>Total # of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles with Headline Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rock Stars</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar Faces</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Horses</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking a closer look at Hillary Clinton’s headline mentions provides an opportunity to see just how prominent her media coverage is compared to other White House hopefuls. In all, 32.2 percent of the articles in this sample featured at least one of the possible candidates in the headline. Tellingly, Hillary Clinton was the focus of an overwhelming 84.9 percent of those articles. Russ Feingold accounted for 7 percent, while John Edwards and Al Gore made up 5.2 and 2.9 percent, respective (See Table 9.2). Here, Clinton clearly dominates the headlines. What is perhaps even more staggering is to consider Clinton’s headline mentions in national newspapers, which are largely newspapers of record in the United States. Clinton appeared a daunting 24 of the 26 (92.3 percent) of the national headlines, with Edwards and Feingold featured in just one each. Headlines about Clinton ranged from “On Podium, Some Say, Mrs. Clinton Is No Mr. Clinton” in the New York Times to “Clinton vs. Rove….Grrrrrrrrrr” in the Chicago Tribune.
Table 9.2 Headline Mentions by Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Headlines Mentions</th>
<th>% of Headline Mentions Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hillary Clinton’s pervasiveness in headlines in newspapers around the country, especially in opinion-leading newspapers like the Washington Post and Los Angeles Times, offers insight into how salient she is to audiences from coast to coast and everywhere in between. Newspaper editors clearly believe that featuring Clinton prominently in large, bold headlines draws readers in and sells newspapers. Perhaps the idea that everyone has an opinion about Hillary drives much of her high-level coverage. Few can disagree with the assessment that Clinton sparks controversy, speculation, and debate. Her every move is placed under a microscope to be examined by pundits, scholars, members of the media, and, thus, the voting public. In sum, it is often this love/hate relationship that the public has with Clinton that keeps her in
headlines and her name on the tongue of those discussing the 2008 election, reporters
and newspaper editors included.

Front Page Articles
Perhaps the most effective way to gauge the prominence of newspaper
coverage a particular candidate receives is by examining the number of front page
articles in which they appear. Much like headline mentions, front page articles are
often reserved for the most high-profile candidates and political personalities. Dark
Horses may rarely attract front page coverage outside of newspapers in their
homestate. Therefore, I hypothesized:

H9a: Hillary Clinton will appear in more front page articles than Al Gore.
H9b: Hillary Clinton will appear in more front page articles than John
Edwards.
H9c: Hillary Clinton will appear in more front page articles than Russ
Feingold.
H9d: Al Gore will appear in more front page articles than John Edwards.
H9e: Al Gore will appear in more front page articles Russ Feingold.
H9f: John Edwards will appear in more front page articles than Russ Feingold.

To determine the number of front page articles per candidate I ran
crosstabulations which also provided a view into how front page articles vary among
specific candidates. The sample yielded 60 articles that appeared on newspapers’ front
page, which accounted for 11.2 percent of all the articles collected. Clinton was
featured in 63.3 percent (n=38), John Edwards in 18.3 percent (n=11), Feingold in 13.3
percent (n=8), and Al Gore in five percent (n=3). Therefore, hypotheses 9a, 9b, 9c, and
9f were supported. Both hypotheses 9d and 9e were not because Al Gore had the lowest number of front page stories (See Table 9.3).

Table 9.3 Front Page Articles by Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Front Page Articles</th>
<th>% of Front Page Articles Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In national newspapers, Hillary’s portion is even larger as her front page coverage made up 13 of the 18 articles (72.2 percent). Edwards and Feingold each appeared in just two front page stories in national newspapers, while Gore showed up in one (See Table 9.4). Here evidence speaks unequivocally: Clinton, as a potential 2008 candidate sells, not just newspapers, but specifically national newspapers. And perhaps most significant to the 2008 election itself, the media are helping to anointed her as the only truly national candidate at this point in the race. She is the only White
House hopeful examined in this study to be worthy of a significant number of front page stories in newspapers of record in the United States.

Table 9.4 National Newspaper Front Page Articles by Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An example of the kind of media attention reserved only for Clinton is the *Los Angeles Times* front page story “Clinton is Cultivating an Image as a Centrist.” In this story, Janet Hook follows Clinton as she visits with constituents in a variety of settings. Hooks observes, “It was far from the world of national politics usually associated with Clinton. Even while speculation grows that she will run for president in 2008, Clinton spends much of her time on the more pedestrian work of representing New York: appearing at food banks, meetings on traffic congestion and – as she did last week – a Farm Bureau reception. But her twin worlds of local and national politics have something in common. In New York, where she is running for reelection in 2006, and
in the Senate, where she is shaping her national persona, Clinton is moving to shed the partisan image she acquired as first lady. Here the Los Angeles Times coverage is perplexing. Clinton’s interaction with New Yorkers as she prepares for her 2006 Senate re-election bid would likely be of little interest to Californians if Clinton was not a 2008 candidate. However, Clinton is a nationally prominent figure and commands national newspaper coverage. The question that should not be asked is, why do Californians care so much about Hillary Clinton? Rather, the most significant question, and the one most integral to this study, is why does relatively routine behavior by a freshman senator from New York become front page news for a newspaper that is generally regarded as one of America’s most elite? The answer is quite simple: the Los Angeles Times and others believe Clinton is a viable candidate heading into the 2008 election and the discussions that surround this possibility sells newspapers.

**Article Type**

This sample features four different article types: news story, editorial/opinion piece, profile/feature story, or news brief. A news story is defined as an article published in print publications discussing current or recent news of general interest or on a specific topic, which generally focuses on the facts. An editorial/opinion piece is an article written by a news organization that expresses the opinion of the editor,
editorial board, or publisher. This category of article type includes op-ed and commentary columns that are usually from a guest opinion writer. A profile/feature story is an article in a print publication that is not meant to report breaking news, but rather functions as an in-depth investigation into the issues behind a news story, often concentrating on background events, persons or circumstances. Feature stories often delve deeper into their subjects, concentrating on the details rather than trying to delineate a few key points. Finally, a newsbrief is defined as an article that is composed of a series of often disconnected news tidbits that are very short in length.

Article type is particularly important to consider because each type carries with it unique characteristics. For instance, a profile article is more likely to give readers a personal, colorful look at a given candidate, while a news article could help investigate what activities by a particular candidate are considered newsworthy. Article type also lends insight into what reporters and editors consider to be most salient. Editorial and opinion pieces, specifically, provide critical judgments made by news organizations. It is on the editorial and opinion pages where newspaper staff can exercise the most control over content. The front page is often dominated by current events and breaking news and is largely out of the control of news editors. However, there is much more license given to editors of the opinion pages. These articles provide readers a clear
Therefore, I hypothesized:

\[ H10a: \text{Hillary Clinton will appear in more editorials/opinion articles than Al Gore.} \]

\[ H10b: \text{Hillary Clinton will appear in more editorials/opinion articles than John Edwards.} \]

\[ H10c: \text{Hillary Clinton will appear in more editorials/opinion articles than Russ Feingold.} \]

**Table 9.5 Editorial/opinion Articles Per Candidate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I tested these hypotheses by using crosstabulations to determine if there was a correlation between candidates and editorial/opinion pieces. The results demonstrated support for the hypotheses. Hillary Clinton appeared in 104 editorial/opinion pieces which made of 25.8 percent of her coverage. Twenty-one editorial/opinion articles featured John Edwards (26.9 percent), while Al Gore and Russ Feingold appeared in seven and six editorial/opinion articles, respectively (See Table 9.5). However, the
Pearson’s Chi-Square test confirms that these variations among candidates occurred by chance and are not statically significant (p=.926).

An appropriate example of attention paid to Hillary Clinton in editorial and opinion pages is Michael Goodwin’s “It’s One War, Stupid.” This August 20, 2006, *New York Daily News* column represents much of the Hillary Clinton-focused editorials and opinion articles that were part of this study. In his column Goodwin argues that former President Bill Clinton has been on the stump not to express his own ideas, but to do the campaign dirty work of Hillary Clinton as she prepares for 2008. Specifically, Goodwin charges Bill Clinton with separating the War in Iraq from the larger War on Terror to give Democrats political room to declare that Iraq is just an unnecessary distraction. Secondly, Goodwin notes that Bill Clinton claimed that the Democrats who voted to give the president the authority to go to war, a group that includes Hillary, did so only to rid the world of Saddam Hussein’s brutal dictatorship. The conclusion Goodwin draws is one that is familiar in opinion pieces critical of Hillary: “But to help Hillary, (Bill) Clinton has to keep repeating the fiction because some 2008 presidential contenders, like Kerry and John Edwards, now say their vote was a mistake. Hillary hasn’t, and good for her. But she won't defend her war vote, either, being afraid she'll get a Joe Lieberman problem from the wackadoo wing. So she says, or has her husband say it for her, that she was misled. That's Bubba's game:
Separate Iraq from the war on terror, and separate Hillary from her own vote on Iraq. Presto, Democrats can fold in Iraq and still say they are tough on terror, and Hillary can lead them because her record has been laundered.” Then Goodwin appears to be a master prognosticator when he writes, “Politics-wise, the move is pure opportunism. If it fools enough people this fall, Dems will take one or both houses of Congress and Hillary will still be the front-runner for 2008.”

The New York Daily News’ decision to run a Michael Goodwin column on this particular topic is interesting on two levels. First, it is clear that Goodwin believes that the policy stance adopted by both Bill and Hillary Clinton is just a rouse. These calculated decisions are based solely on the thought that Hillary will run in 2008. Yet, she has not declared her candidacy, and some insiders even within her own party believe she would be a difficult figure to nominate. However, Goodwin is unfettered. The speculation that Hillary may already be planning for a 2008 run sets Goodwin off into a Sherlock Holmes-style adventure as he sleuths her larger political intentions.

Beyond Goodwin’s focus, the other facet of the article that is interesting to consider is why the New York Daily News finds the topic worthy enough for a 669-word column. Interestingly, despite the fact that Hillary Clinton was up for Senate re-election just two months after this article was published, the Daily News chose instead to focus on her prospects for 2008. Indeed, this judgment offers an intriguing juxtaposition: even
New York-based newspapers tend to place significance on speculation that Clinton may run in 2008, more so than on the job Clinton is doing as New York’s junior senator. Again, the bottom line for these newspapers is the bottom line: Hillary’s position as a 2008 presidential hopeful keeps readers buying newspapers.

**Joan Rivers Coverage**

During the early stages of an election, the press functions, in part, as Joan Rivers to ask the all-important question: what kind of candidate does it take to win the presidency? The Joan Rivers serial news frame is the essence of the candidate-centric news coverage. This journalistic device occurs when the media merely gossip and speculate about candidates’ personal lives, relationships, and whereabouts. Potential candidates are treated like celebrities, with an emphasis on their personal activities and lives outside of public office. The Joan Rivers frame also promotes bickering among potential candidates and other public figures. This tabloid-style coverage creates a politics-as-the-Jerry Springer Show feel as the media perpetuates these verbal exchanges by covering them in great detail. The Joan Rivers news frame allows journalists to become hecklers poking fun and berating candidates for their statements and behavior. In these instances, the candidates become caricatures more than officials seeking a higher office. In addition, this coverage turns the nomination primaries into Oscar-style events, with the media commenting behind the velvet rope as candidates
walk the “red carpet” in Iowa, New Hampshire, and other states with early primaries. Campaign events for other politicians, speeches, and meetings with primary voters all become newsworthy events, as journalists speculate about the intentions of these presidential hopefuls. A candidate’s ability to fundraise is also a staple of the Joan Rivers news frame. These stories often mention what celebrities and politically influential figures attended the candidate’s fundraisers and/or donated to his/her campaign. Finally, the Joan Rivers frame allows the media to focus on which big-name staffers presidential hopefuls are hiring and where campaign offices are stationed.

The Joan Rivers news frame is widely implemented in much of the 2008 pre-primary coverage. As candidates begin laying the campaign groundwork to test the presidential waters, the media often reports on even the most mundane details of these early preparations. Some candidates, like Al Gore, Tom Daschle, and John Edwards have not held public office since the last presidential election. This affords them the ability to engage in much of the standard pre-campaign work, and as a result, they garner a significant amount of this Joan Rivers-style coverage. Edwards has been particularly active and is generally regard as a “sure bet” to run again in 2008.

Therefore, I hypothesized:

\[ \text{H11a: The Joan Rivers news frame will compose a higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles than Hillary Clinton’s.} \]
\[ \text{H11b: The Joan Rivers news frame will compose a higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles than Al Gore’s.} \]
**H11c:** The Joan Rivers news frame will compose a higher percentage of John Edwards’ articles than Russ Feingold’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In testing each of the three hypotheses, I ran crosstabulations to examine any correlation between the candidate variable and the Joan Rivers news frame. The results indicated support for each of the three hypotheses about the Joan Rivers frame, which appeared in 45.5 percent of all newspaper articles examined in this study. This frame was implemented in 62 percent of John Edwards articles (49 out of 79). Clinton’s, Gore’s and Feingold’s newspaper coverage featured significantly lower proportions of Joan Rivers-type reporting. This frame was used in 42.5 percent of Clinton stories, 45.8 percent of Al Gore articles, and 42.9 percent of stories about Russ Feingold (See Table 9.6). A Pearson’s Chi-Square of $p=.016$ confirms the significance of these
variations among candidates. Mike Gravel did not appear in any articles in the sample and, therefore, was excluded from the crosstabulation.

In sum, John Edwards received more Joan Rivers style coverage because during the time period examined in this study he was engaged in more pre-campaign events and activities. During the same time frame, Clinton had made a routine of avoiding all things associated with the 2008 election, while Gore was only mentioned as a possible candidate after his meteoric return to the national stage during the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*. However, Edwards, who is not tethered to public office, was free to spend the bulk of his spare time traveling to swing states, frequenting Iowa and New Hampshire, and raising funds for an exploratory run at the White House.

An example of the use of the Joan Rivers news frame that made up much of John Edwards early coverage is evident in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*’s “Metropolitan Area Digest” on July 20, 2005. Edwards appeared in St. Louis for a Missouri House Democratic Campaign Committee fundraiser at the Renaissance Grand Hotel. The piece noted that Edwards was “traveling the country helping to raise money for various state Democratic legislative groups” and that he was “confident that Missouri voters – who primarily backed Republicans last fall – will return to the Democratic fold.” Edwards told local activists that the party's future rests on their commitment to “fight for our core beliefs.” According to the newsbrief, Edwards asked the crowd, “How
about if we go out there and fight for what we believe in?” which ignited “applause from dozens attending a fundraiser.” Importantly, especially when examining the Joan Rivers news frame, the newsbrief reported, “Edwards attracted the most applause, though, when he reported that his wife, Elizabeth, is doing well in her treatment for breast cancer.”

This article embodies two primary tenets of the Joan Rivers frame: focus on a candidate’s travels to key states and mention of the candidate’s family and/or personal life. This story is particularly representative of Edwards’ coverage during this time period. Given his early campaign activities it is no real surprise that the Joan Rivers news frame composed 64 percent of all of the John Edwards’ newspapers stories in this study.

It is also worth noting that although Hillary Clinton had the lowest percentage of Joan Rivers coverage in this study, she may still be most susceptible to these types of reports as the first primary draws nearer. Many skeptics believe that she carries the most personal baggage, especially considering how much the media have focused on her marriage to former President Bill Clinton. A hint of the tabloid-style coverage that may explode during a Hillary Clinton candidacy in 2008 can be found in Bill Zwecker’s February 21, 2006 article in the Chicago Sun-Times. In the 634-word piece Zwecker discusses Clinton daughter, Chelsea, and her past and current relationships. “[N]ow that Clinton has revived an old relationship with investment banker Marc
Mezvinsky (they dated briefly in the '90s), she is taking a very different approach. The couple is careful not to be photographed in public, as proved the other night. The New York Daily News reports Clinton ‘worked the red carpet alone’ after arriving at a benefit for the School of American Ballet. Mezvinsky kept his distance up until the couple jumped into a cab together, departing the event at midnight.” Then in the Joan Rivers vane, Zwecker links Chelsea’s dating habits and her mother’s possible run in 2008: “Despite her discretion, Clinton’s current flame is of some concern to her mother, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who most expect will run for president in 2008. She has no issues with Mezvinsky himself, but reportedly is none too thrilled that his father is currently in prison, serving a seven-year sentence for defrauding investors out of an estimated $10 million.” Chelsea’s decision to date a man whose father is in prison may be of the little importance now. However, if Hillary Clinton runs for president, one can only wonder how much tabloid-style media attention the relationship could draw by primary season.

**Karl Rove Coverage**

In this study, the Karl Rove news frame is implemented when the media focus exclusively on political or campaign strategy. At the root of this news frame are the questions: What kind of positions and strategies will a candidate need to implement in order to win the nomination and the general election? Will this candidate move to the
political center to win the nomination or will he/she appeal to the party’s base? The Karl Rove news frame can take four forms. First, this frame features journalists playing detective as they attempt to sleuth the policy motives of potential candidates. Here the emphasis is not on the issue itself, but rather on how the potential candidate determined his/her particular policy stance. In this frame, journalists interpret rather than just report, which often draws focus away from important issues and toward how candidates make policy decisions. Second, this frame is implemented by a reporter/writer acting as an all-knowing campaign strategist. These articles primarily investigate if a particular candidate does or does not have a chance to win the nomination or presidency. In addition, journalists advise, rather than just report, on how potential candidates lay their campaign’s groundwork. In the Karl Rove news frame, there is often a focus on the positioning of nomination primaries, especially with respect to which early primaries might benefit specific candidates. A fourth and final noteworthy item in the Karl Rove frame is discussing which local state or federal candidates these presidential hopefuls support, and what those people might mean to a run in 2008.

Of the five candidates tracked in this study, only two, Hillary Clinton and Russ Feingold, held public office from the period of August 2005 to September 2006. One could estimate that given their status of being actively engaged in public policy matters
these two possible candidates for president would garner much more Karl Rove-style
newspaper coverage. However, Hillary Clinton’s alleged “move to the center” to
appeal to moderates as she prepares for the general election has been perhaps the most
talked about aspect of the entire 2008 election. Therefore, I hypothesized:

*H12a: The Karl Rove news frame will be used in a higher percentage of Hillary
Clinton’s articles than Al Gore’s.*

*H12b: The Karl Rove news frame will be used in a higher percentage of Hillary
Clinton’s articles than John Edwards’.*

*H12c: The Karl Rove news frame will be used in a higher percentage of Hillary
Clinton’s articles than Russ Feingold’s.*

Using crosstabulation, I tested each of these hypotheses by determining the
correlation between the candidate and Karl Rove variables. In sum, the Karl Rove
news frame was used in 52.3 percent of all newspaper articles examined in this study.
The findings indicated that only hypothesis 12b, Hillary Clinton will have a higher
percentage Karl Rove coverage than John Edwards, was supported by the data
collected. This campaign strategy reporting made up 52 percent of Hillary Clinton’s
articles and 50.6 percent of John Edwards (See Table 9.7). However, the
crosstabulations did not support the other two hypotheses. Russ Feingold’s stories most
often employed the Karl Rove news frame (60.7 percent), while Al Gore’s articles
featured 54.2 percent. Importantly, though, the difference between candidates was not
statistically significant. The Pearson’s Chi-Square value of p=.82 is much greater than
the .05 value needed for statistical significance. Mike Gravel did not appear in any articles in the sample and, therefore, was excluded from the crosstabulation.

**Table 9.7 Karl Rove News Frame by Candidate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This “non-finding” indicates that *all* potential candidates that received media attention are the focus of Karl Rove news coverage and are so at similar rates. An example of a story that touches on campaign strategies for multiple candidates at once is the *USA Today* story “Hillary May be Hurt by New Demo Dates,” which ran on August 25, 2006. The story reports that when the Democratic National Committee (DNC) revised presidential nominating procedures for 2008, it may have helped create the biggest field of candidates since 1976. Earlier that month, the DNC decided that party caucuses would be held in Nevada five days after Iowa’s traditional opener and before New Hampshire’s primary. South Carolina's primary would follow a week after New Hampshire’s. Author Al Neuharth then states, “Possible candidates to be aided or
harmed most by the two new states: In Nevada, Gov. Bill Richardson, 58, of New Mexico; former U.S. Senate majority leader Tom Daschle, 58, South Dakota; and U.S. Sen. Evan Bayh, 50, Indiana, could benefit. In South Carolina, native son and 2004 vice presidential candidate John Edwards, 53, will be helped. So might former Virginia governor Mark Warner, 51; and U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, 45, of Illinois.”

Neuharth then investigates how the move will affect the 800-pound gorilla of early 2008 coverage – the possible candidacy of Hillary Clinton. Neuharth explains, “Almost certain to be hurt most in both states is U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton, 58, New York. Clinton has been counting on a jump-start with a top two or three showing in Iowa, followed by a big Northeast win in New Hampshire. But unlikely to finish in the top two in either Nevada or South Carolina, she could lose steam before the big states choose. She still is the overall favorite. But more and more leading Democrats express concern that even if she gets the nomination, she probably won't win the election. That's one reason the field of candidates is growing.” Neuharth concludes by running off a list of other “wannabes,” which includes Russ Feingold. While a series of potential 2008 candidates, including Edwards and Feingold, get mentioned as candidates within the Karl Rove news frame, it is Clinton who gets the vast amount of coverage. Tellingly, her chances to win the nomination are explored in greater detail, while the other are just listed as “wannabes.”
Another article that demonstrates the emphasis on Clinton’s 2008 strategy is the Washington Times editorial “Hillary’s HIV/AIDS Mistake,” which ran one day before the USA Today article on early primaries. Although the Neuharth story was categorized by USA Today as a news story, this editorial shares many of the same characteristics. The important difference, though, is that this piece focuses on Hillary’s policy choices and then examines their significance in the 2008 election context. In its opening sentence, the editorial immediately juxtaposes Hillary Clinton and her husband Bill. The piece begins, “While her husband addressed the World AIDS Conference in Toronto last week, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton was hard at work with her own AIDS effort, albeit significantly more political and less noble. The senator is impeding reauthorization of the Ryan White act, the bill that provides nearly $2 billion each year to combat AIDS.” However, her opposition to the Ryan White act is simply a vehicle to address what many editorial boards across the nation like to discuss: Hillary Clinton’s 2008 strategy, or in this case, the lack thereof. The editorial explains, “A new formula that distributes AIDS funding according to the current trends in HIV/AIDS infections, which Mrs. Clinton opposes, would send more money to rural communities in the South and less to New York and likely battleground states in the 2008 election, including Florida and Illinois. Whether to keep the federal funds flowing to her home state or for other electoral reasons, Mrs. Clinton should know it’s quite unbecoming of
a probable presidential aspirant to play to her corner at the expense of national interests. Here, Clinton is actually criticized for doing the job of a U.S. Senator – representing their constituents. This editorial demonstrates to what great extent newspaper will go to examine, and sometimes lambaste, Clinton’s policy positions as the first primaries approach.

**Willie Shoemaker Coverage**

The Willie Shoemaker news frame exists when the media use public opinion polls to discuss the 2008 election. In the majority of these articles the press works as a jockey, riding the horse leading in the polls. In many cases, for the Dark Horses this is only type of story in which they will get media attention. In most poll-oriented stories lesser-known candidates are mentioned merely in terms of what percent of the vote they received in the polls. These stories largely re-enforce the frontrunner’s position and reiterate that the Dark Horses have a lot of work to do.

In this area I hypothesize that the least-known candidate would be the largest percentage of horse race coverage. The assumption was that Feingold was the least visible candidate and, therefore, would only receive references in terms of his standings in public opinion polls.

*H13a: Russ Feingold will have a higher percentage of Willie Shoemaker news coverage than Hillary Clinton.*

*H13b: Russ Feingold will have a higher percentage of Willie Shoemaker news coverage than Al Gore.*

174
**H13c:** Russ Feingold will have a higher percentage of Willie Shoemaker news coverage than John Edwards.

**Table 9.8 Willie Shoemaker News Frame by Candidate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th># of Articles</th>
<th>% of Articles Within Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Feingold</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To investigate these hypotheses I used crosstabulations of the candidate and Willie Shoemaker variables. These poll-oriented reports appeared in 21.6 of the articles in this study. The results indicate support of just one of the three hypotheses: 13a. Feingold’s horse race coverage made up 21.4 of his total articles compared with 19.5 percent for Clinton. But Al Gore’s Willie Shoemaker coverage far exceeded that of Feingold, Clinton, Edwards. Ten of Gore’s 24 articles (41.7) featured opinion poll coverage. Edwards had the second highest percentage of Willie Shoemaker articles with 26.6 percent. The Pearson’s Chi-Square test confirmed that the results were significant (p=.048). Once again, Mike Gravel was excluded from the statistical analysis because he failed to appear in any articles in the sample.
Upon closer investigation of the anecdotal evidence, the prevalence of Willie Shoemaker coverage in Al Gore newspaper stories is apparent. Consider several factors. First, Gore has not participated in nearly the number of pre-campaign activities that his other rivals, including John Edwards, have. Gore is rarely mentioned in reference to fundraising and has largely traveled to places other than Iowa and New Hampshire. Second, with the exception of global warming and the occasion statement of opposition to the War in Iraq, Gore is generally not mentioned within the context of issues important to the 2008 position. Gore, however, has been one of a number of Democrats who have been the subject of public opinion polls about the 2008 election. Gore actually faired well in the most recent polls, finishing second to only Hillary Clinton in late August/early September 2006 polls conducted by CNN and Fox News. The result is that many of the articles that talk about the horse race coverage or about Gore specifically address Gore’s standing in early polls.

An example of how Willie Shoemaker coverage often mentions all potential candidates is Craig Gilbert’s “Feingold Click with Blog Fans,” which appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in late August of 2006. This article reported that in a blog poll sponsored by the liberal site DailyKos.com Russ Feingold led the Democratic presidential field with 30 percent of the vote. According to the story, 11,000-plus people visited the website and voted, with nearly a third choosing Feingold. Gilbert
later puts the poll into context and examines what other polls are saying about
Feingold’s chances against the heavy hitters in the Democratic field. “There isn't much
scientific polling data on Feingold nationally. The recent Gallup Poll asked Democratic
voters to choose from Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Al Gore, John Edwards, Mark
Warner and Joe Biden. Clinton led easily with 39%. The survey didn't ask about
Feingold, although 1% volunteered his name. In a December poll of Democrats by
Cook Political Report/RT Strategies that included Feingold in its list, the senator
received 4%, in a tie with two others behind Clinton, Kerry, Edwards and Biden.”
While Gilbert is clearly focused primarily on Feingold, all of the key Democrats in this
study are mentioned. Much like the Karl Rove news frame, horse race coverage often
touches all potential candidates, even on those like Feingold, who may not be part of
the top tier of White House hopefuls.

While Hillary Clinton received the lowest percentage of articles featuring a
Joan Rivers news frame, qualitative evidence demonstrates that her poll-oriented
coverage is more substantial. The reason, in part, is that Hillary has been the focus of
more public opinion polls during this pre-primary period. A popular device that has
received significant media attention is the hypothetical head-to-head match-up. A
series of polls have Clinton battling GOP Senator John McCain and former New York
City mayor Rudolph Giuliani. One such poll was conducted by Time magazine in
August 2006 and was the focus of a Michael McAuliff *New York Daily News* article. McAuliff introduces the poll results by writing that after going to the Senate in 2000, Clinton had made headlines by “cozying up to Republicans such as Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia on issues important to her.” Then McAuliff states that the *Time* magazine survey found that Americans don’t see Clinton as a bridge-building centrist. McAuliff writes, “Americans see New York's junior senator in a highly polarized light. More than three-quarters of Democrats told the magazine - which splashed Clinton's White House calculations on the cover - that she is a strong leader. More than two-thirds said she has strong moral values. But the survey also found that 68% of Republicans see her as a political opportunist. Only 3% of those polled said they have no opinion of her.” The article concludes by commenting on the popular hypothetical head-head match-up between Clinton and McCain. “According to the poll, Clinton’s approval rating remains at 53%, and she is the only Democrat who is giving the GOP's top contender, Arizona Sen. John McCain, a run for his money. She trails McCain by a narrow 49% to 47%.” Once again, Hillary and her viability as a 2008 candidate are on full display.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I introduced this study’s statistical findings on the characteristics of candidate-specific coverage and offer an analysis of these findings. I examined the
research question: How will the characteristics of newspapers’ coverage of the 2008 election vary among candidates? I investigated each of my six hypotheses associated with this research question. The descriptive statistics for each of the key variables as well as the results of the crosstabulation and chi squares provide an array of findings about 2008 election coverage. In sum, Hillary Clinton received significantly more prominent coverage, in national and non-national newspapers, in this sample. Of the articles which featured one of the five candidates in the headline, Hillary Clinton was mentioned in 84.9 percent of those. In national newspapers Clinton appeared in 24 of the 26 headlines (92.3 percent). Another measure of coverage prominence is the prevalence of front page stories. Again, Clinton dominated other White House hopefuls, particularly in national newspapers. Of the 18 front page articles in national newspapers featuring potential candidates, 72.2 percent at least made mention of Hillary Clinton. Most covered her substantially. Finally, Clinton is the topic of focus for editorial/opinion pieces in newspapers around the nation. What is clear is that media are anointing Clinton as the only truly national Democratic candidate during 2005 and 2006.

Despite Clinton’s more prominent newspaper coverage, all of the candidates, with the exception of Mike Gravel, who did not appear in a single article, were the subjects of each of the three news frames. John Edwards appeared in the most stories
featuring the Joan Rivers frame, due in large part to his host of pre-campaign activities. However, the Karl news frame was employed relatively equally among the candidates studied. While Hillary Clinton appeared in more press reports with a Karl Rove frame, there were not significant differences between candidates. This “non-finding” indicates that all potential candidates are the focus of Karl Rove news coverage and are so at similar rates. Al Gore received a larger percentage of Willie Shoemaker coverage than other candidates, but anecdotal evidence demonstrated that Clinton’s poll-oriented coverage was much more extensive. This finding is just one more indication of the media’s preoccupation with Clinton’s viability as a presidential hopeful in 2008.
Chapter 10. Possible Consequences

Given this study’s findings demonstrated that my conceptual hypothesis – perceived frontrunners receive the most prolific and prominent newspaper coverage – was supported, it is important to consider some of the possible consequences of this type of media coverage. While many of these implications were addressed in the analysis portions of the study, it is necessary to further elaborate on some of the overarching themes in the media’s early election coverage. To fully understand the potential effects of these press reports one must consider the issue on two levels: the impact on voters and the candidates themselves. Here, I investigate the primary implications: the politics of momentum, viability, and electability. In doing so, this study touches on issues associated with the bandwagon effect, agenda setting, and priming. What is important to note, however, is that because the 2008 election is still in formative stages and the fate of many potential candidates is still unknown, it is impossible to know the true effects of the newspaper coverage outlined in this study.

Politics of Momentum

In the modern media era, candidates, more than ever before, must work through the mass media to connect with the American public. For many the information provided by the mass media is the only contact they have with politics or politicians. As Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) argue, “The pledges, promises, and
rhetoric encapsulated in news stories, columns, and editorials constitute much of the information upon which a voting decision has to be made. However, what is paramount to this study is that during the pre-primary stages of an election almost all of the information about potential candidates is communicated to voters through the mass media. There are few exceptions. The voting public in Iowa and New Hampshire may be afforded direct interaction with some candidates and will consider their messages. Yet, most presumed candidates are doing very little true campaigning during this stage of an election. Therefore, what the public is learning about is largely speculation perpetuated by the mass media. As findings in this study demonstrate, the media almost predominately cover the frontrunners. Consider the disparity between the supposed frontrunner and the only declared candidate: Hillary Clinton was featured as a potential 2008 candidate for president in 405 articles and Mike Gravel none. Interestingly, while Gravel has officially declared his candidacy and has been traveling to key states, Clinton has yet to even speculate on the record as her intentioned as 2008 draws near.

It is clear that in this instance the media can create momentum for a candidate long before the first primary. They do so by a type of agenda setting: in context of the 2008 election, the media do not tell us what to think about, but rather who to think about. In fact, while most scholars address momentum in terms of winning in Iowa and
New Hampshire, I argue that during the media-created imaginary primary, candidates can either steam roll or sputter into the first caucuses and primaries. For a candidate like Mike Gravel and to a lesser extent Russ Feingold, the media can be judge and jury. Without the ability to canvass key states and meet with a significant number of primary voters, the candidacies of Gravel and Feingold are likely doomed because they are not national candidates. In fact, Gravel is not covered as a candidate anywhere in the country – not in his former home of Alaska, current state of Virginia, or in any key early-primary states in between.

What remains is a frontrunner or two, and then a series of candidates who face uphill battles. The lesson of Bill Clinton in 1992 demonstrates that a candidate can emerge from relative obscurity in the imaginary primary and win key states when the first votes are cast. However, 2008 is much different. In 1992, Bill Clinton was trailing Mario Cuomo and Bill Bradley in early polls. Neither have near the national prominence or sheer celebrity that Hillary Clinton already possesses. Even Al Gore, who is certainly a Rock Star-tiered candidate, does not garner nearly the press attention that Hillary does in discussions about 2008. In 12 weeks of coverage this study examined, Al Gore appeared in only 26 articles. What is evident is that Hillary Clinton is far and away the frontrunner. In this pre-primary period she has sufficient media attention to be declared the winner of the imaginary primary. When voters either seek
or acquire information about the next presidential election it is about Hillary Clinton 75 percent of the time. However, whether Clinton can translate this imaginary primary dominance into wins throughout 2008 remains to be seen.

**Politics of Viability**

This study also demonstrated that celebrity-style coverage, as well as a focus on the horse race, are key staples of 2008 election for all candidates. Rock Stars and Dark Horses, alike, are subject to much speculation about fundraising, their personal lives, and travels, in addition how they are fairing against other undeclared candidates in early opinion polls. The final product is ongoing discussion, and ultimately a total fascination, with candidate viability. The questions are consistently: Does this particular candidate have what it takes to win his/her party’s nomination? Are they popular enough? Do they have enough money? Can they keep America entertained? While the result of this kind of viability-focused coverage during the 2008 election lead-up is not yet known, it is possible to address potential implications of both Joan Rivers and Willie Shoemaker coverage.

The focus on the personal lives of candidates, and elected officials in general, does have possible consequences for all candidates, in particular for frontrunners whose celebrity makes them an easier target nationally. As Lance Bennett argues, the interplay between political images and news creates a rich source of fantasy for
viewers. Stories like Hillary Clinton’s “argument” with Karl Rove and Al Gore’s involvement in a trademark lawsuit allow audiences to form strong expressions of emotions and opinion, as well as develop vicarious relationships with political actors appearing in news accounts. Much like the Lewinsky-Clinton scandal, people engage deeply at personal levels due to the dramatic and emotional portrayal of these figures.\footnote{cxlii}

The portrayal of politicians as out of touch buffoons or conniving cutthroats is nothing new. Consider the press scorn aimed at George W. H. Bush when he reportedly didn’t know how a supermarket scanner worked or at George W. Bush when he repeatedly mispronounced words on the 2000 campaign trail. As the newspaper press accentuates the honest mistakes and shortcomings of politicians, it only reaffirms the portrayal of elected officials as buffoons and criminals on entertainment television. According to Tracey Gladstone-Sovell, on shows like Benson, Spin City, and Knotts Landing, characters representing political figures were depicted in simple, cookie cutter terms. Gladstone-Sovell argues that elected officials are rarely shown in a positive light.\footnote{cxliii} Combine that with the popularity of political cartoons and satirical shows like The Daily Show which routinely poke fun at the mistakes and misstatements of public figures. The result is an environment which creates a vicious recycling not only in entertainment television, but in the news media
as well. In many respects this kind of “gotcha” journalism is a shortcut. But it does have its effects on both candidates and the voting public. The question remains: How much more devastating to public trust and positive impressions of elected officials are entertainment television shows when similar heckles are apparent in pages of the nation’s most respected and read newspapers?

Why is this significant? In short, it begins to explain voters’ fascination with the character traits of potential candidates. This phenomenon intertwines character and viability. Instead of acquiring knowledge about Feingold’s environmental policies, readers begin to focus on how he might be an impossible husband or unsuitable companion. Voters can become fixated on whether Hillary Clinton is really deserving of a figure in a wax museum or if Al Gore is America’s next great movie star. Like other uses of the presidential hopeful frame, the result can be a lack of concentration on what really matters – issues – and a drifting toward the peripheral, non-substantive qualities of likely presidential candidates. At the very least, voters may make improper and impetuous assessments of candidates early in the process without much concrete knowledge of who they are and what they stand for. With the pervasiveness of the Joan Rivers news frame, candidates are just one scandal, one odd scream, or one miscalculated speech away from becoming a has-been or never-will-be in 2008. They can go from primed challenger and viable candidate to off the national radar in one
news cycle. A candidate like John Kerry, who had raised a significant amount of money, could survive a Botoxgate. It remains to be seen if someone such as Russ Feingold could replicate such a feat.

One such consequence of poll-oriented coverage is the possibility of the “bandwagon effect.” This notion is lucidly described in Mobocracy. Matthew Robinson (2002) argues that the perception of momentum and viability is just one of the by-products of a poll-obsessed process and that as a candidate shows strength in the polls, journalists and pundits become more likely to cover the campaign. These premature polls, which Robinson contends are largely inaccurate, begin to bolster the frontrunner and declare also-rans remarkably early in the primary process. Here the frontrunner gains momentum, albeit perceived, creating a chasm between the horse leading and those trailing. As the prevalence of polls persist, and Hillary Clinton continues to lead, potential candidates like Russ Feingold and Tom Vilsack may be relegated to the back of the pack, after barely getting out of the gates.

An important point to consider is that there is some uncertainty as to how much the public actually pays attention to early opinion polls. In the 1940s in his “Poll on Polls,” Eric Goldman found that only nine percent of respondents regularly paid attention to poll results. By 1985, that number rose to 25 percent and ballooned to 31 percent in 1996. In a 1996 Gallup survey, 76 percent of Americans in a national sample
said they had “heard or read about polls that are predicting who is currently leading in the race for President.” However, being aware of polls does not always mean that people actually have high interest in poll results. In the early 1990s, Paul J. Lavrakas found that only 28 percent of respondents indicated that they were either very interested or quite interested in opinion poll results conducted on the Bush-Dukakis race. What might be a more allusive question is the overall effect of these polls on the public. Clearly scholars now understand that the effect of these polls is present, but the effects “occur only in theoretically relevant segments of the audience rather than among all members.”

However, what is clear is that sometimes meaningless early opinion polls are replacing coverage on more relevant issue-related topics. In this case, the public thinks about candidates in terms of who is winning and losing rather than what qualifications a candidate might possess. This may be of particular consequence to Dark Horses like Russ Feingold and Mike Gravel. While another more popular candidate is doing well in opinion polls, one could contend that Gravel’s resume is much more impressive and that he may be more qualified to be president. Feingold, like Gravel, is often not listed as a choice in some opinion polls. Yet, Feingold has built an impressive rapport with some factions of the Democratic Party. Feingold is a champion of campaign finance reform, fights against a relatively unpopular Patriot Act, and is generally regarded as
one of the most ethical lawmakers in Washington D.C. He is a man who clearly stands by his convictions. Yet in newspapers, especially national newspapers, Feingold is barely a blip on the radar, due in part to the fact that he is a horse who isn’t leading the race. In fact, Feingold isn’t on the track when a close examination of Willie Shoemaker coverage is conducted.

**Politics of Electability**

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, early 2008 election media coverage is largely about electability. This focus is achieved primarily through employing the Karl Rove news frame. In this study, evidence shows that newspapers spend more time discussing campaign strategy than any other topic. Campaign strategy-related news appeared in 52.1 percent, a full 6.5 percentage points more than the Joan Rivers frame and 20.5 percentage points more than the Willie Shoemaker frame.

A possible result could media priming. Shanto Iyengar (1991) defines the priming effect as “the ability of news programs to affect criteria by which individuals judge their political leaders.” Covering possible candidates’ political actions as a means to achieve popularity en route to a higher office could prime audiences to focus on potential candidates and not issues they are fighting for. The consequences of priming audiences in this fashion could have profound effects when we consider that the press influence audience reactions to events and actors. Priming can cause
significant shifts in the criteria and standards by which people make political
evaluations. In many examples, readers are primed to take their attention off the actual
issues and focus it on how potential candidates approach the issues strategically. This
shift is remarkably important if voters use these new standards to make their decisions
in the voting booth on Election Day.

Another possible result of electability-focused coverage is rise in cynicism
among voters. Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson address this topic in
their book *Spiral of Cynicism* (1997). They write:

> The central goal of campaigns, candidates, and elections is winning. When actions are placed in this interpretative frame, the motivation for action (of any sort, whether a policy or personal choice) is reduced to a single human motivation – the desire to win and to take the power that elected office provides. In such an interpretative, all actions are tainted – they are seen not as the by-product of a desire to solve social ills, redirect national goals, or create a better future for our offspring but are instead viewed in terms of winning. Winning is equivalent to advancing one’s own agenda, one’s self-interest, so the actions stand not for themselves but for the motivational system that gives them rise – narrow self-interest. In this way, actions are reinterpretable as serving the candidate’s underlying interests.\(^{\text{cdxviii}}\)

By virtue of this style of reporting, voters are instilled with the belief that the
candidate’s sole reason for choosing a particular policy position is that it will aid in
their election. A variety of scholars, including Jamieson, have argued that excessive

190
strategy coverage could stimulate cynicism in voters, which may result in spectatorship that the strategy coverage engenders. Voters are left thinking that these candidates are driven at all costs to win, not do what is best for their city, state or nation.

The media’s emphasis on strategy has consequences for candidates as well. Clinton, in particular is viewed largely as “someone who will do anything to get elected.” Not surprisingly more than half, 52 percent, of all Clinton’s newspaper articles employed a Karl Rove news frame. When Clinton declared in a speech that abortion is a “sad, even tragic choice,” the media deemed it as a strategic move to appeal to moderates or conservatives that Clinton will need to win over in the 2008 general election. This approach by reporters is particularly odd because at this stage Clinton is not even a declared candidate, let alone her party’s presidential nominee. One could argue that in January 2005, when Clinton made the “sad, even tragic” statement she may have been actually stating her personal view. Yet, the media do not even consider this a viable possibility. Here, a vote, a statement, or a speech is a means to an end. Policy stances and positions are a means to get elected. And not only do media render that assessment, they often then cast judgment if this strategy enhances the candidates’ electability.
Chapter Summary

To fully understand the potential effects of these press reports one must fully consider the issue on two levels: the impact on voters and the candidates themselves. What is most significant to this study is that during the pre-primary stages of an election all of the information about potential candidates is communicated to voters through the mass media. As findings in this study demonstrate, the media almost predominately cover the frontrunners. It is clear that in this instance the media can create momentum for a candidate long before the first primary. They do so by a type of agenda setting: in 2008 coverage the media do not tell us what to think about, but rather who to think about. What remains is a frontrunner or two, and then a series of candidates who face the daunting challenge of becoming a nationally known figure. This study also showed that celebrity-style coverage, as well as a focus on the horse race are key staples of 2008 election for all candidates. The final product is ongoing discussion, and ultimately a fascination, with candidate viability. The pervasiveness of Joan Rivers coverage can result in a lack of concentration on what really matters – issues – and a drifting toward non-substantive qualities of likely presidential candidates. One consequence of poll-oriented coverage is the possibility of the “bandwagon effect,” which begins to bolster the frontrunner and declare also-rans early in the primary process. Finally, the Karl Rove news frame promotes a focus on electability, which cues voters to consider candidates’ political actions as a means to
achieve popularity en route to a higher office. This could prime audiences to focus on potential candidates’ strategy and not the real reasons that the candidates have staked out these policy positions.
Chapter 11. Conclusion

As Bernard Cohen argued in his seminal book, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, the “press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” I would argue, as demonstrated in this study, the media are also extremely effective in telling audiences *who* to think about. With this idea as the backdrop, the American people are getting an unhealthy slice of tabloid-style and reporter-centric, strategy-dominant news about an election that is several years away. The “presidential hopeful” frame describes early aspirants in simple terms, avoiding complexity and dwarfing important issues. In this imaginary primary, the media is largely creating the news with political guesswork, speculation, personal opinion, and amateur, unsolicited advice. While the campaign trail is far from worn in the race for the White House in 2008, the media continue its coverage as though the election is just days away. What may be a more appropriate use of space in the pages of the daily newspapers, is deeper attention to the issues of the day and in the coming months and years as Election Day 2008 draws near.

The consequences of early primary coverage have their effects on potential candidates as well. It forces them to play the media and fundraising game early so they do not fall behind in campaign resources and in the polls. Prospective candidates also
have the additional challenge of trying to get their message across while competing against the media’s reliance on the simplicity of the presidential hopeful news frame. As the media increasingly emphasize the imaginary primary phase, the impact on presidential campaigns will continue to morph how potential candidates make policy decisions and conduct their personal lives. Perhaps newspaper columnist James Reston summed it up best when prior to the 1988 presidential campaign he offered this plea: “What (candidates) need is a chance to be heard honestly and fairly in the coming three years without being diminished even before the campaign starts.”

The solutions to reversing this trend are unfortunately not obvious. The emergence and subsequent dominance of New Media news concepts, which are based largely on profit, may only be exacerbating the problem. What we can only hope is that with the proliferation of alternative forms of media, such as blogs, robust websites of political groups, sophisticated email lists, listserves, voters will be able to obtain significantly less filtered information about potential candidates and their policy positions. The health of our democratic system may rely on it.
Bibliography


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Appendix A: Thesis Codebook

Recorded Variables

Dates
1. July 18 to August 15, 2005
2. February 2 to March 2, 2006
3. August 18 to September 15, 2006

Candidate
1. Hillary Clinton
2. Al Gore
3. John Edwards
4. Russ Feingold
5. Mike Gravel

Headline Mention
0 - No
1 - Yes

Newspapers
0. No
1. USA Today
2. Wall Street Journal
3. New York Times
4. Los Angeles Times
5. The Washington Post
6. Chicago Tribune
7. New York Daily News
8. Denver Post
9. Houston Chronicle
10. The Detroit News
11. Star Tribune; Minneapolis
12. Boston Globe
13. The Atlanta Journal – Constitution
14. Newsday; New York
15. San Francisco Chronicle
16. The Plain Dealer; Cleveland
17. Seattle Times
18. Seattle Post – Intelligencer
19. Rocky Mountain News; Denver
20. St. Louis Post – Dispatch
21. St. Petersburg Times
22. The San Diego Union – Tribune
23. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
24. The Sun; Baltimore
25. The Oregonian; Portland
26. Pittsburgh Post – Gazette
27. Orange County Register
28. Columbus Dispatch
29. San Antonio Express-News
30. Orlando Sentinel
31. South Florida Sun - Sentinel; Fort Lauderdale
32. The Fresno Bee
33. The Sacramento Bee
34. Tampa Tribune
35. Sarasota Herald Tribune
36. The Salt Lake Tribune
37. Cincinnati Post
38. Buffalo News
39. Hartford Courant
40. Omaha World – Herald
41. Boston Herald
42. Austin American Statesman
43. Virginian - Pilot; Norfolk
44. Florida Times Union; Jacksonville
45. Richmond Times – Dispatch
46. Las Vegas Review – Journal
47. The Providence Journal
48. The Commercial Appeal; Memphis
49. News & Observer; Raleigh
50. Palm Beach Post; West Palm Beach, Fla.
51. The Press - Enterprise; Riverside, Calif.
52. Daily News; Los Angeles
53. The Grand Rapids Press
54. Dayton Daily News
55. News Sentinel; Knoxville
56. The News Tribune; Tacoma
58. Arizona Daily Star; Tucson
59. The Post - Standard; Syracuse
60. Tribune - Review / Pittsburgh Tribune - Review; Greensburg, Pa.
61. Daily Herald; Arlington Heights, Ill.
62. Deseret News; Salt Lake City
63. Morning Call; Allentown, Pa.
64. Albuquerque Journal
65. Wisconsin State Journal; Madison
66. Madison Capital Times
67. Times Union; Albany
68. News Journal; Daytona Beach
69. Spokesman Review; Spokane
70. Journal - Gazette; Ft. Wayne
71. Chicago Sun – Times
72. Times - Picayune; New Orleans
73. Washington Times
74. The Post and Courier; Charleston, S.C.
75. Anchorage Daily News
76. Concord Monitor; Concord, N.H

**Homestate**
0 – No
1 - Yes

**Words**
Number of words

**Section**
0 – No section/F or above
1 - A
2 – B
3 – C
4 – D

205
Page
Page number

Article Type
1. News story
2. Opinion/Editorial
3. Profile/Feature
4. Newsbrief

Joan Rivers
0 – No
1 – Yes

Karl Rove
0 – No
1 – Yes

Willie Shoemaker
0 – No
1 – Yes

Only Mentions
0 – No
1 – Yes

2008 Focus
0 – No
1 – Yes

Recoded Variables

Candidate Tier
1 – Rock Stars
2 – Familiar Faces
3 – Dark Horses

**National News**
0 – No
1 – Yes

**Front Page**
0 – No
1 – Yes
Appendix B: Variable Descriptions and Reliability

Dates
The dates variable represents the frame of dates from which the article was collected. The first date set is July 18 to August 15, 2005; the second is February 2 to March 2, 2006; and third August 18 to September 15, 2006. Only the date cluster, not individual dates and days of the week, were recorded. Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000

Candidate
This study followed five candidates who are possible presidential candidates in 2008: Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, John Edwards, Russ Feingold, and Mike Gravel. This variable is ordinal, with candidates being ranked from most famous/recognizable to least known. In addition, I used the candidate variable to create separate Rock Stars, Familiar Faces, and Dark Horses categories. Clinton and Al Gore were Rock Stars. John Edwards was Familiar Faces. Russ Feingold and Mike Gravel were Dark Horses. Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000

Headline Mention
This variable measures whether the candidate being tracked in the article was mentioned in the headline of the story. Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000

Newspapers
This newspaper variable identifies in which of the 76 newspapers the article appeared. I also recoded this newspaper variable into two separate variables: national newspapers and non-newspapers. The national newspapers consisted of six publications: USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and Chicago Tribune. Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .999

Homestate
The homestate variable records if the article appeared in a publication based in the homestate of the candidate being tracked. Here I define homestate as the state that each candidate has represented in public office. For instance, if a Buffalo News article discusses how Hillary Clinton is moving to the political center to position herself for a 2008 presidential run, this would be recorded as a homestate story. The Buffalo News is based in Clinton’s homestate of New York. Al Gore’s homestate is Tennessee; John
Edward’s is North Carolina; Russ Feingold’s is Wisconsin; and Mike Gravel’s is Alaska. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000**

**Words**
Words is defined as the number of words in a given article. ProQuest supplied the number of words for each article. For newsbriefs, words represented the total number in all the newsbriefs combined, not just the briefs about the 2008 election. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000**

**Section**
Section is defined as the part of the newspaper in which the article appeared. ProQuest did not supply sections for some articles, and these were recorded as “none.” Also recorded as “none” were tabloid-style newspapers that do not contain multiple sections. For any section beyond E, it was recorded as a “none.” **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000**

**Page**
Page number is defined as the first page on which an article appeared. A story that jumped pages would only be recorded for the first page on which it appeared. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 1.000**

**Article Type**
This variable identifies one of four different article types: news story, editorial/opinion piece, profile/feature story, or news brief. A news story is defined as an article published in print publications discussing current or recent news of general interest or on a specific topic, which generally focused on the facts. An editorial/opinion piece is an article written by a news organization that expresses the opinion of the editor, editorial board, or publisher. This category of article type includes op-ed and commentary columns that are usually from a guest opinion writer. A profile/feature story is an article in a print publication that is not meant to report breaking news, but rather functions as an in-depth investigation into the issues behind a news story, often concentrating on background events, persons or circumstances. Feature stories often delve deeper into their subjects, concentrating on the details rather than trying to delineate a few key points. Finally, a news brief is defined as an article that is composed of a series of often disconnected news tidbits that are very short in length. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .956**
Joan Rivers
This variable records if an article employs a news frame that essentially asks the question: what kind of candidate does it take to win the presidency? This journalistic device occurs when the media merely gossips and speculates about candidates’ personal lives, relationships, and whereabouts. Potential candidates are treated like celebrities, with an emphasis on their personal activities and lives outside of public office. The Joan Rivers frame also promotes bickering among potential candidates and other public figures. This tabloid-style coverage creates a politics-as-the-Jerry Springer Show feel as the media perpetuates these verbal exchanges by covering them in great detail. The Joan Rivers news frame allows journalists to become hecklers poking fun and berating candidates for their statements and behavior. In these instances, the candidates become caricatures more than officials seeking a higher office. In addition, this coverage turns the nomination primaries into Oscar-style events, with the media commenting behind the velvet rope as candidates walk the “red carpet” in Iowa, New Hampshire, and other states with early primaries. Campaign events for other politicians, speeches, and meetings with primary voters all become newsworthy events, as journalists speculate about the intentions of these presidential hopefuls. A candidate’s ability to fundraise is also a staple of the Joan Rivers news frame. These stories often mention what celebrities and politically influential figures attended the candidate’s fundraisers and/or donated to his/her campaign. Finally, the Joan Rivers frame allows the media to focus on which big-name staffers presidential hopefuls are hiring and where campaign offices are stationed. Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .826

Karl Rove
The Karl Rove variable records if an article implements a news frame that focused exclusively on political or campaign strategy. At the root of this news frame are the questions: What kind of positions and strategies will a candidate need to implement in order to win the nomination and the general election? Will this candidate move to the political center to win the nomination or will he/she appeal to the party’s base? The Karl Rove frame can take four forms. First, this frame features journalists playing detective as they attempt to sleuth the policy motives of potential candidates. Here the emphasis is not on the issue itself, but rather on how the potential candidate determined his/her particular policy stance. In this frame, journalists interpret rather than just report, which often draws focus away from important issues and toward how candidates make policy decisions. Second, this frame is implemented by a reporter/writer acting as an all-knowing campaign strategist. These articles primarily investigate if a particular candidate does or does not have a chance to win the
nomination or presidency. In addition, journalists advise, rather than just report, on how potential candidates lay their campaign’s groundwork. In the Karl Rove frame, there is often a focus on the positioning of nomination primaries, especially with respect which early primaries might benefit specific candidates. A fourth and final noteworthy item in the Karl Rove frame is discussing which local state or federal candidates these presidential hopefuls support, and what those people might mean to a run in 2008. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .930**

**Willie Shoemaker**
The Willie Shoemaker variable records when an article employs a news frame to discuss the 2008 election in terms of use public opinion poll results. In the majority of these articles the press works as a jockey, riding the horse leading in the polls. In many cases, for the Dark Horses this is only type of story in which they will get media attention. In most poll-oriented stories lesser-known candidates are mentioned merely in terms of what percent of the vote they received in the polls. These stories largely reinforce the frontrunner’s position and reiterate that the Dark Horses have a lot of work to do. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .917**

**Only Mentions**
The only mentions variable is defined as an article which just briefly makes reference to the candidate being examined as a potential 2008 candidate. For instance, in a long story about Russ Feingold’s popularity among bloggers and his success in online pre-nomination polls, the author may write, “Feingold led all other Democrats, including the anointed frontrunner, Hillary Clinton.” At no other point does the author reference Hillary Clinton. If Clinton was the candidate being tracked, then the only mentioned variable would apply because Clinton is only briefly mentioned in the article. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = .923**

**2008 Focus**
The 2008 Focus variable records if the article being examined is predominately reporting on matters pertaining to the 2008 presidential race. In many articles, the fact that someone is a possible 2008 candidate is a mere mention in a much larger article about issues not related to the upcoming presidential election. In other cases, the next presidential race is the focus of vast majority or entire article. **Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 88.3**
Notes


vii Owen, “‘New Media’ and Contemporary Interpretations of Freedom of the Press” 2.

viii Ibid 1.


x Owen, “‘New Media’ and Contemporary Interpretations of Freedom of the Press” 10.

xi Ibid. 16.


xiv Davis & Owen 17

xv Bennett 141.

xvi Ibid.


xix Ibid. 53.

xx Ibid. 55.

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xxiii Ibid. 12.


xxvi Hamilton 37.

xxvii Sunstein 63.


xxx Patterson.

xxxi Traugott and Lavrakas 11.


xxxvi Farnsworth and Lichter 94.


xxxviii Farnsworth and Lichter 103.


xliii Robinson 125.

xliv Ibid. 138.

xlv Ibid.

213


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lxx Merritt and McCombs 133.
lxxiii Ibid. 283.
lxxv Ibid. 10-11.
lxxvi Ibid. 2-3.
lxxix Barnes, James “All’s Fair in Iowa” National Journal 2 Sept. 2006, 70.
lxxxii Ibid. 144.
lxxxiii Ibid. 1.
lxxxiv Maisel 298-299.
lxxxv Goff 1.
x Halperin and Harris 381.
xii Ibid. 382

215
xcix Crawford “Field of Dreams” 2930.
di Barnes and Ball “Insiders Poll” 1281.
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dviii Ibid.
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dxiii Lightman, David “Dodd a Passing Flash over Iowa Political Skies” *Hartford Courant* 10 Sept. 2006.
dxvi Beaumont “Underdog Vilsack Opens ’08 Campaign.”

216


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