

Sacramento Television Coverage of the February 2008 Primary Election



**A Public Interest-Public Airwaves
Community Project**

**By
The Sacramento Media Group**

Background

Television reaches more Americans each day than any other information medium, with more adults naming broadcast television as their primary source of news.¹ At election time, media that inform decision-making by millions of viewers remain all the more vital to sustain a healthy democracy. Voters turn to local and national television broadcasts for news about candidates, issues and election analyses. Election outcomes are consequential to their lives, communities and country.

For 75 years broadcasters have been given free access to profit through the use of public airwaves. In exchange, broadcast news outlets are expected to serve the “public interest, convenience, or necessity.” Since the Communications Act of 1934, the broadcast spectrum has been viewed as property of the American people that exists to provide for the American people. Utilization of the nation's airwaves carries the responsibility of sustaining a public forum for national, state and community discourse — the foundation of any republic claiming democratic practices.

In 1945 the Supreme Court declared “the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society.” As the federal agency charged with regulating the mass media, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has long had rules in place to promote “the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources. These basic rules are critical to assuring media corporations do not serve solely their commercial interests, but remain obliged to serve some measure of public interest.

...Freedom to publish is guaranteed by the Constitution, but freedom to combine to keep others from publishing is not. Freedom of the press from governmental interference under the First Amendment does not sanction repression of that freedom by private interests.

Associated Press v. United States No.57

Since the 1980s, however, a series of FCC and congressional actions have eroded protections of the nation’s public square. Restrictions on media monopoly were lifted, resulting in unprecedented consolidation of control. In recent years, the number of companies owning media outlets has shrunk from more than 50 to only a handful. In addition, women and minority station owners are vastly underrepresented. As 51 percent of the U.S. population, women own only 4.97 percent of all stations; minorities, at 33 percent of the population, own only 3.26 percent of stations.²

Research findings indicate such ownership concentration has reduced localism in news coverage and diversity of viewpoint.³ A “postcard” television broadcast license renewal process, every eight years (twice as long as a term in the White House), continues to give the largest and most powerful communication corporations free use of public airwaves, with diminished obligation to the informational needs of communities from which they profit.

The nation’s future relies on a free exchange of ideas, access to information, and critical examination of those in power and the policies they promulgate. Research consistently points to

¹ *Nielsen Media Research* survey commissioned by Television Bureau of Advertising. TVNEWSDAY, posted May 7, 2008 and Broadcasting & Cable, posted May 19, 2008.

² *Out of the Picture: Minority & Female TV Station Ownership in the United States, Current Status, Comparative Statistical Analysis & the Effects of FCC Policy and Media Consolidation*, FreePress, 2006.

³ *Does Bigger Media Equal Better Media? Four Academic Studies of Media Ownership in the United States*, Benton Foundation and Social Science Research Council, 2006.

concerns over inferior political reporting and less substantive news coverage. Consequently, citizens are receiving less information to make informed decisions. While there are more media outlets than ever before, they cover less news.⁴ With countless outlets, they have not predestined a broader range of stories nor a more conversant consumer. It is not a surprise that current political coverage leaves much to be desired.

In 2004 fewer than one in five network evening news stories about the race for the presidential nomination examined the candidates' stances or voting records.⁵ The average length of an election story was 86 seconds and candidate sound bites only 12 seconds. Coverage on the presidential race dominated with 55 percent, while only eight percent focused on regional and local races (including those for the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, mayor or city council contests, judgeship, law enforcement posts, education-related officials, regional and county offices). Fewer than five percent focused on local and statewide ballot initiatives. Plus, political ads for U.S. Senate candidates outnumbered news coverage by as much as 17:1, and for U.S. House races by 7:1.⁶

In the early 2008 presidential campaign, the media had already limited the race to five candidates and provided little about their records or their plans if elected. Sixty-three percent of stories focused on political and tactical aspects of the campaign; nearly four times the number on candidates' background, ideas or policy proposals. Only one percent examined candidates' records or past public performance. The focus on tactics and polling was evident: Only 12 percent of stories explained how citizens might be affected by the election.⁷

These findings, however, are at odds with what the public says it wants from campaign reporting. A poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press conducted for the 2008 presidential primary study found eight in 10 Americans want more coverage of candidate positions on issues. A majority wants more about candidates' records, backgrounds, and who supports them, along with increased coverage of lesser-known candidates and debates.

What Topics the Public Wants Covered		
	More	Less
Candidates' position on issues	77%	17%
Candidate debates	57	32
Candidates' personal backgrounds and experiences	55	36
The candidates who are not front runners	55	37
Sources of candidates' campaign money	55	35
Which candidate is leading in the latest polls	42	45
<i>Source: Pew Research Center for People and the Press September 28 - October 1, 2007</i>		

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⁴ State of the News Media 2007, An Annual Report on American Journalism, The Project for Excellence in Journalism.

⁵ *Campaign 2004*, Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2004.

⁶ *Local News Coverage of the 2004 Campaigns, An Analysis of Nightly Broadcasts in 11 Markets*, The Lear Center, A Project of the USC Annenberg School and the University of Wisconsin, 2005.

⁷ *The Invisible Primary—Invisible No Longer: A First Look at Coverage of the 2008 Presidential Campaign*, Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

An affiliate of California Common Cause, the Sacramento Media Group comprises community members who represent the League of Women Voters of Sacramento County, Access Sacramento, the community access cable television station, and faculty members from local colleges. SMG, along with numerous state and national public interest organizations, has long expressed concern about the quantity and quality of television news and public affairs coverage. This report directs its attention to local broadcast television stations and how they carried out their public interest obligations while playing a role in the 2008 primary election cycle.

Stimulated by past meetings with local broadcasters regarding improved public affairs programming, SMG continued to monitor election news and asked television stations to pledge more substantial coverage before the February 2008 California presidential primary. SMG also extended its partnership with the Institute for the Study of Politics and Media at California State University, Sacramento, in its examination of primary election news. Under the leadership of Dr. Kimberly Nalder, local television election coverage was studied in 2006 and again at the time of the primary elections in 2008.

SMG Activities

Six corporate conglomerates – Viacom, Walt Disney Company, Time Warner, Inc., News Corporation, General Electric Company and CBS Broadcasting — control more than 80 percent of the primetime television market in the U.S.⁸ This concentration oversees what news and information consumers receive and what voices are heard or ignored. In the Sacramento region, local television broadcast stations are owned by: Hearst-Argyle Television (Channel 3-KCRA), Gannett Company (Channel 10-KXTV), CBS (Channel 13-KOVR), Univision Communications (Channel 19-KUVS), and Tribune Broadcasting Company (Channel 40-KXTL).

I. Station Visits

In January 2008, SMG met with local broadcasters to discuss plans for coverage of the February primary election and to urge them to meet a minimum standard of five minutes of candidate and election-issue programming per evening newscast for 30 days before the election. This was the third meeting between SMG and station management in the last four years. In 2004 SMG joined the national Public Interest Public Airwaves Coalition campaign to call on broadcasters across the

country to better serve the American electorate. The campaign requested two hours per week of locally produced election coverage in prime time for a few weeks prior to Election Day 2004. In

⁸ *Who Owns the Media?* Freepress, 2008.

SMG Goals

- Oppose further concentration of media ownership.
- Support local broadcasters to provide more substantive election-related programming in weeks before elections.
- Participate in local television news monitoring studies and report on station performance.
- Increase awareness of critical broadcast and Internet issues.
- Preserve funding for public, education and government access to airwaves.
- Advance public interest obligations of corporate media.

2006, SMG joined a similar coalition of the Campaign Legal Center, the Benton Foundation and Common Cause.

As before, SMG focused on five stations that produce local news in the greater Sacramento region: Channels 3 (KCRA-NBC), 10 (KXTV-ABC), 13 (KOVV-CBS), 19 (KUVS-Univision) and 40 (KXTL-Fox). Of these, four agreed to meet with SMG to discuss upcoming election coverage and answer a short list of questions submitted in advance. Management at Channel 13 (KOVV-CBS) refused and ignored requests to send a letter summarizing plans for pre-election coverage. Other stations were asked for the same and had provided letters in the past. The president and general manager of Channel 13 agreed to meet briefly only to explain his station's refusal. He asked not to be quoted in any upcoming SMG report.

2008 Primary Election Coverage Questions by SMG for Local Television

- 1) Please describe your station's plans to provide February '08 primary election coverage. Highlight locally produced programming your station will produce.
- 2) The Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcaster recommends five minutes per night of candidate-centered discourse in the month before an election. Does your station plan to meet this standard? Does your station have coverage guidelines? How are these determined?
- 3) With the advance of digital broadcasting and additional digital spectrum capacity, tell us about your use of digital channels to offer enhanced election-related and public affairs coverage.
- 4) Please outline your use of Web site technologies for greater political and civic discourse. What impact is Web-based information having on your television channel election coverage?
- 5) How will your station reach out to youth, other-than-English-speaking citizens and groups with limited involvement in the electoral process so critical to our democracy? Is this effort a priority for your station?
- 6) As an investigative effort of your newscasts, does your station plan a "Fact Check" or "Ad Watch" feature to evaluate political advertising carried on your channel? If not, why not?
- 7) What is the process your newsroom uses to present local political coverage that is balanced and fair during the election cycle? How does your station plan to cover political parties other than Republican and Democrat?
- 8) The Sacramento Media Group and California Common Cause encourages civic engagement and voter education for all community members and must retain impartiality when reviewing the election coverage by our local media. With this in mind, can you suggest ways we might help you secure greater coverage and/or candidate participation?
- 9) Other plans for the February, 2008 primary election? Concluding thoughts?

Four stations expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear from viewers and discuss their commitment to public service. While none pledged to meet the five-minutes-an-evening minimum

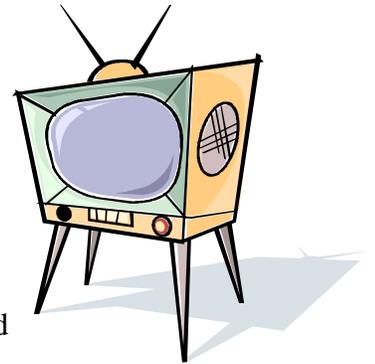
standard, each planned to provide programs approximating the measure. The stations also stressed their enhanced online resources for election information. Channel 3 emphasized its dedication to public interest programming by indicating its owner group would broadcast 10-15 minutes per day on both its stations (Channels 3 and 58).

SMG also had asked stations to send a letter summarizing their plans for election-related programming and provided each station with a copy of *"We Interrupt this Newscast, How to Improve Local News and Win Ratings, Too,"* a book based on nearly 10 years of research and teaching by broadcast professionals and scholars. The book concludes that substantive news and public affairs programming can and does draw audiences and higher ratings.

Station Responses to Questions - Summary Notes

Channel 3 KCRA (NBC Network) HEARST-ARGYLE

The station ownership group has a strong news commitment and has received Walter Cronkite-Annenberg awards. Their stations are ratings leaders. Hearst-Argyle stations share resources, political coverage strategies and personnel. The station covers political caucuses and primaries out of state and California ballot propositions. They have a commitment to political coverage of 10-15 minutes per day. Channel 3 had 15-minute interviews with presidential candidates in December 2007 and aired them commercial-free. The station plans to do more and better coverage in 2008. Primary night will be extended and bump network programming. The station provides fact checks on political ads, and its Web site has detailed candidate background information. Politicians want free airtime but don't appreciate reporters challenging them.



Reporters take seriously their responsibility to accurately cover issues and candidates. They ask for feedback from viewers and answer their emails. The station reports that it exceeds the minimum standard, averaging more than 15 minutes of local coverage each weekday. Plans are to provide political "ad watches" when they run with greater frequency. Programs have broadcast stories on voting by independents and how they impact election outcomes. Top candidates do receive most coverage but the station offers a range of political points of view. The station values diversity in content.

Channel 3 weather data is digital and broadcasts 24/7. Currently Channel 3 news is the only local station in the market to broadcast local news in high definition. The station's Web site focuses on more engagement with local newscasts. Focus is on youth, asking for feedback that station newscasts read on the air. The Web site is seen on the Internet's YouTube site, and has doubled Web staff, adding resources for both broadcasting and Internet content. The new challenge is to break news on the Web before newscast on television. The goal is to brand Channel 3 news content on all delivery platforms. The Web site is the best source for greater news detail. The station emails interested viewers with breaking news alerts. Blogs don't change what is done with reliable news sources. Journalism standards remain high.

Spanish-speaking audiences are served by other stations, particularly Channel 19. Channel 3 and 58 focus on hiring diverse, qualified reporters for on-air coverage from different communities.

Having a wide Northern California viewing area means many differences from town to town, which can be difficult to cover. The station provided coverage of the SACOG "Blueprint for Future Planning" as an important regional issue. They have a companywide philosophy to be responsible as news leaders in the market; credibility is most important.

Channel 10 KXTV (ABC Network) GANNETT

The station maintains a strong commitment to political coverage. They are moving more content to digital formats and connecting to viewers online. They provide a political Internet page with cartoons, a candidate match game and chat room. A news anchor is dedicated to "live" Web site content. The station has dedicated part of the political page to blogs written by non-station personnel. The news department wants to address all candidates and is expanding News 10 with Democratic and Republican bloggers. Channel 10 produced a political special on the presidential race after a recent Sacramento Kings game, covered the governor's state-of-state message and provided special coverage of New Hampshire presidential primary election results. The station strongly believes political coverage should be framed and should be made relevant to viewers. Plans are to cover February's primary with local and national coverage. The station doesn't subscribe to a "random number" for minimum coverage and will not use five minutes per night as standard, but agrees it is a "good starting point."



On digital, "News 10.2, News 10" runs full-screen election results on election night, but most "News 10.2" content is broadcast by another company and must run weather reporting. The station partners with Univision on community projects like blood drives. Its primary audience is viewers who speak English. No bilingual translation is provided. Culturally sensitive issues are covered, but the station has not been proactive in engaging non-English speaking viewers. Civic engagement efforts are covered and an effort to target greater youth involvement is planned with a future project with high school and other students.

Channel 10 has always aired ad watches, "Fact Check Fridays," but is not receiving much. It is dedicating resources to do more, as political advertising increases. The coverage is balanced and includes more than Democrats and Republicans. The station finds it tough to obtain information on likely candidates so they advise viewers on how to find more information. Because a major party nominee will be president, they focus on Web sites of viable candidates. Channel 10 has "Did You Know?" FAQs about candidates. The station is open to any ideas for improved candidate responsiveness. This is a source of frustration for reporters. Channel 10 also believes SMG's work is important and needs to be done; this is the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

Channel 19 KUVS (Univision Network) UNIVISION COMMUNICATIONS

The station will produce new candidate profiles and proposition coverage, if they merit coverage. On Election Day, it plans to dedicate extra time and will have "cut-ins" to news dedicated to "Destino 2008." Emphasis is on viewer education, many of whom are from countries where voting is not common. Channel 19 commits air time to explain how the voting process works. There is a major push each election with public service announcements on voter registration and citizenship. The network of Spanish language stations in California has a goal of seeing 1 million citizens register to vote. They also distribute the League of Women Voters' *Easy Voter Guides* at public

events. The station attempts to air debates inclusive of all candidates in a given election contest. Its coverage focuses on candidates and less on ballot propositions. The station produces a weekly local 30-minute political discussion program in Spanish. The station checks for accuracy in reporting, but does not fact check political ads. It depends on candidates to watchdog their opponents. There is always balanced coverage and coverage of third parties, if story is newsworthy.

Channel 19 hasn't advanced to high definition yet and is investigating how the company will use additional channel capacity. The station Web site is managed by the corporation; local management plans to develop local publications. Channel 19 believes Web content must not be a substitute for local news broadcast television coverage. The Spanish-speaking population is young and Channel 19 is pushing them to get involved. Viewers are more prone to be involved with elections. The station works with League of Women Voters and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials for on-going election education. SMG needs to pressure candidates, not just stations for participation in forums and debates.

Channel 40 KTXL (FOX Network) TRIBUNE BROADCASTING

The station offered free time for presidential candidates to appear via their Los Angeles sister station and a five-minute interview for various candidates (state and federal races, with questions from Fox 40 viewers). The station mobilized viewers with an aggressive voter registration campaign: "No Excuses; You be the Difference – Register to Vote." It believes the station is accountable to candidates and voters.



Channel 40 is not a proponent of a standard of time for political coverage because it must be balanced with "urgent" needs of the community. Channel 40 will try to reach what SMG recommends and reach out to the audience. There will be special programming related to the public affairs, including: "Our Town" (featuring small communities in the region) and "Our Roots" (celebrating diversity). Future plans involve programs on regional issues such as flood protection, the airport, a vibrant downtown, etc.

Channel 40 is responsive to viewers and creates programming based upon these perceived needs. The challenge for smaller-budget stations is to figure out a cost-effective business model for digital channels, especially with lack of cable and satellite carriage. It is a balancing act between existing resources used to broadcast current programming and finding new funding to create new programs for other broadband opportunities.

The station is reaching out to youth, but has no particular plans for non-English-speaking audiences. Political ad fact checking is already being done by others in this market. Channel 40 focuses upon fair and balanced newscasts. While many Fox 40 viewers are "independents," the station's resources cannot allow for meaningful conversations with 30 candidates. FOX 40 television is not the same as "FOX News."

The station's challenges include how to get a level of commitment from the next generation of news professionals who, often, move on to other markets after being trained. Unfortunately, too many

students don't seek commitment to journalism and work ethic; they confuse journalism and objectivity with opinion – the news skill set is disappearing. The challenge for broadcast news is how to send a message to journalism schools. Channel 40 has two scholarships, talks with high schools, and pulls-up young news reporters from other markets.

Channels 13 (CBS Network) CBS CORPORATION

The president and general manager of Channel 13 met briefly “off-the-record” to clarify the station’s decision not to participate in any discussions with SMG. He was asked if a concern about SMG’s advocacy prompted the station’s refusal to meet. SMG gave assurances information gathered from Sacramento stations would not be shared until months after the election. SMG also clarified its intent to encourage greater localism and political coverage, not to tell management “how to run the stations.” The station gave no comment.

II. Review of Station Public Files

From information available regarding the February Primary Election, political advertising revenues received from late December through Election Day on Feb. 5, 2008, were estimated at \$9 million for Channels 3, 10, 13, 19 and 40. It is noteworthy that the February primary included only the office of president and a few statewide ballot measures. Political advertising for the 2008 general election is predicted to push record revenue totals.

III. Local News Monitoring Study

SMG used its experience over the last two election cycles and news monitoring activity with Dr. Kimberly L. Nalder of California State University, Sacramento, to build on this practice. The research design centered again on content analysis of local broadcast news election-related programming, including political advertising during these programs. Dr. Nalder expanded her investigation to include both the February and June primary elections.



Coverage of California’s Primary Elections in 2008

The examination of local broadcast television election coverage required the establishment of a “media research lab” in which to perform the requisite data collection, recording and coding functions.* At the lab, recordings of local news programming from all broadcast networks in the

*Many entities at CSU, Sacramento contributed funds, resources, space and expertise, including funds from the university’s Research and Creative Activity grants, the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, Information and Resources Technology, the Department of Government, and the Institute for Social Research. Cobbling together of funds and support, including the Social Science Research Council, enabled recording and coding broadcasts from five separate periods during the 2008 election cycle.

Sacramento media market were made. This included KCRA (NBC), KXTV (ABC), KXTL (FOX),

KOVR (CBS), and KUVS (Univision). All broadcasts were monitored starting at 5 PM or later, which meant a varying number of programs from each station, from a low of one program on FOX 40, to three broadcasts per evening on the “big three” networks. Data were collected during the two-week period leading up to each primary election.

Content was coded only for election-related stories and campaign ads aired during the broadcasts. Coders entered data on dozens of variables, all focused on measuring the amount and content of relevant political information to which viewers would be exposed. Below are some results when comparing coverage of California’s two primaries in 2008. The presidential primary took place on Feb. 5, 2008, and required votes on the presidential race and a few initiatives only. The primary held on June 3, 2008 included congressional, state legislative and local races, in addition to ballot measures. This was a unique opportunity to study media behavior when a high-profile top-of-the-ticket race is being contested, and when such a race is entirely absent.

Election Coverage vs. Campaign Advertising

A first concern in this effort was the amount of relevant coverage aired each night. Data revealed almost every single broadcast contained election related stories. In fact, there were only four programs aired during the presidential primary sample with no relevant content, and only one such program aired prior to the June primary. “Stories” were defined as having content with a common topic or theme that was introduced by the news program anchors, and concluded when the anchors announced a new topic. “Teasers” or content lasting 10 seconds or less were not counted. As seen in Table 1, the mean number of election related stories per program was similar across both elections, at 2.5 for the February presidential primary, and 2.4 for the June primary (median for both was 2). These numbers are slightly inflated due to a handful of election dedicated programs that exceeded the usual amount of coverage, but nevertheless indicate a good commitment to election coverage by local television channels during this time period. The amount of time devoted to stories relevant to elections was nearly seven minutes for the presidential vs. six minutes for the second primary. Again, the median numbers are lower, indicating that a few programs provided extraordinary coverage. Nevertheless, this sort of devoted coverage is precisely what citizens need. These numbers actually exceeded prior expectations for the amount of coverage.

Citizens may also absorb relevant information from campaign advertising, though this election content is likely to be misleading and/or simplistic. The project data show that viewers were exposed to almost twice as much campaign advertising during the presidential primary run-up as opposed to the primary election in June. On a positive note, viewers were exposed to far more time devoted to relevant stories during a broadcast, versus advertising time in both time periods (see Table 1).

Election Story Content

Another concern in monitoring local television broadcast news was content of the political stories. A number of different election story “frames” were coded, and allowed for stories to possibly (though not probably) have more than one frame. In a perfect world, election-related stories would contain checked facts, an issue focus or additional content that would be useful in voting decisions.

“Horseshoe” coverage, election strategy or candidate scandal stories would be less valuable to

voters when making informed choices. This data show the vast majority of stories had some sort of “fluff” as significant content (see Table 2). The June primary was worse in this regard than the February presidential primary. Of particular note is the “scandal/personal” numbers for the June primary. This was due primarily to a contentious race for Sacramento mayor which focused on alleged personal scandals associated primarily with the eventual victor.

Which Races Received Coverage?

One niche that local broadcast television news could logically fill is reporting on local races. One would expect coverage prior to a primary election with no top-of-the-ticket race on the ballot to focus heavily on local issues and contests. This study also looked at which races were covered in election-related stories and coded accordingly. Some stories included content on multiple races. Results (see Table 3) show the presidential race dominated coverage during the early sample. However, while presidential coverage remained substantial for the June primary sample, a plurality of stories had local race content. A fair proportion of stories were also devoted to propositions and congressional races, all content that would not necessarily be covered on cable or network news programs.

Table 1. Sacramento Local TV News Coverage of 2008 Primaries: Election Stories vs. Campaign Ads

Measures	<u>Presidential Primary</u>		<u>June Primary</u>	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
<i>Average # per broadcast</i>				
Election stories	2.5	2	2.4	2
Total seconds of election stories minutes	414 (6:54)	325 (5:25)	356 (5:56)	288 (4:48)
Political ads	5.3	5	2.7	3
Total seconds of election ads minutes	193 (3:13)	150 (2:30)	98 (1:38)	90 (1:30)

Data coded for all post 5 PM broadcasts on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and Univision affiliates in the Sacramento market for weeknights during 2 weeks up to and including Election Days, Feb. 5, 2008 and June 3, 2008.

Table 2. Sacramento Local TV News Coverage of 2008 Primaries:

Election Related Story Frames

Story Frame	<u>Presidential Primary</u>		<u>June Primary</u>	
	Major Frame	Frame in story	Major Frame	Frame in story
<i>Useful to Citizens</i>				
Issue	12.5%	23.3%	16.7%	22.9%
Adwatch/ Factcheck	1.4%	2.1%	1.2%	1.9%
General election information	18%	35%	2%	6%
Total % stories w/useful frames	26.4%	60.4%	19.9%	30.8%
<i>Less Useful to Citizens</i>				
Horserace/ Strategy	56.4%	64%	53.2%	65.4%
Scandal/ Personal	4.2%	8.9%	17.5%	30.1%
Other Frames	7.6%	8.6%	9.5%	25.2%
Total % stories w/fluff frames	60.6%	72.9%	70.7%	95.5%

Data coded for all post 5 PM broadcasts on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and Univision affiliates in the Sacramento market for weeknights during two weeks up to and including Election Days, Feb. 5, 2008 and June 3, 2008. Note: "Frame in story" can be multiple. "Major Frame" is the frame given the most time in the story.

Table 3. Sacramento Local TV News Coverage of 2008 Primaries: Races Covered in Election Stories

Race (s) covered in story (can be multiple)	<u>Presidential Primary</u>	<u>June Primary</u>
	Presidential Race	65.7%
Congressional Races	2.6%	9.2%
Propositions	10%	18.1%
State Legislative Races	0%	2.3%
Local (mayor, ballot measures, etc.)	7.2%	47.8%
General election coverage (nonspecific)	16.4%	7.9%

Data coded for all post 5 PM broadcasts on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and Univision affiliates in the Sacramento market for weeknights during two weeks up to and including Election Days, Feb. 5, 2008 and June 3, 2008.

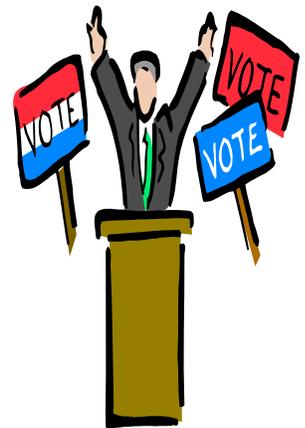
Conclusions

This analysis demonstrates that, on the whole, Sacramento television news programs aired an impressive amount of coverage relevant to the elections. However, horserace coverage still predominates, as do stories focusing on the top-of-the-ticket races. On the optimistic side, Sacramento stations did offer a relatively high amount of coverage of the Sacramento mayoral race during the June primary, and a fair amount of coverage of initiatives and other down-ballot races during the lead-up to the June primary, lending credence to the belief that when top-of-the-ticket races are not the most pressing, other races can (and did) receive more extensive coverage.

IV. Summary

In 2008 the industry's trade organization, the National Association of Broadcasters, partnered with the League of Women Voters to advise all broadcast stations to "become an election resource that informs and inspires people to vote."⁹ Their guidelines reflect urgings by SMG and numerous state and national public interest groups in recent years.

- Let voters know the election is about them and what to expect on the ballot.
- Focus on the issues, not the “horse race.”
- Cover key issues on local, state and federal levels.
- Broadcast unbiased information with candidate profiles, debates, interviews, and town hall/community forums.
- Reach larger audiences by airing political programming during peak times and rebroadcast newscasts, debates, town hall forums.
- Produce newscasts and special segments that "connect the dots" between elections and issues.
- Offer candidates free airtime with debates, town hall meetings, prerecorded interviews and unedited segments of candidate discourse.
- Produce a regular “Ad Watch” segment.



SMG commends local broadcasters for their efforts and urges higher performance. Public interest obligation of broadcasters is a summons to serve their communities by playing a critical role in helping the electorate grapple with an increasingly complicated world. Sacramento’s media market, the 19th largest in the country, contains wide-ranging diversity in population, geography and socioeconomic conditions. Local media’s power to inform civic participation is an undeniable force. Because of this, SMG is committed to advocating for enhanced broadcast responsiveness to local

public affairs, election-related coverage and community informational needs. Given the civic trust

⁹ *Election 2008, A Broadcasters Guide to Getting Out the Vote*, National Association of Broadcasters and League of Women Voters.

authorized by the FCC and held in custody by broadcasters' use of airwaves, examination of programming and public interest service must persist. This project reflects the necessity for all communities to protect healthy democratic practices by insisting and supporting media to uphold values of diversity, localism and education in news and information programming.

V. Recommendations

Fairness

SMG supports legislation and/or broadcast regulation that replicates a "Fairness Doctrine" so viewers and listeners are provided a wider spectrum of information and perspective that is balanced in presentation.

Localism and Transparency

SMG urges the FCC to adopt local broadcast enhancement proposals presented by the Institute for Public Representation to the FCC on behalf of FreePress, the National Hispanic Media Coalition, and the Center for Creative Voices in Media, and the Public Interest Public Airwaves Coalition - Campaign Legal Center, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Benton Foundation, Common Cause, Media Access Project, New America Foundation, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. These include:

➤ License renewal application processing guidelines

- Reduce station license terms to 3 years, the current 8 year term provides insufficient incentives for licensees to serve their local communities.
- Provide better notice to the public about upcoming license renewals, frequency of broadcast announcements be increased.
- Broadcasters should only receive expedited license renewal when they do four things:
 - *Air local civic and electoral affairs programming on most-watched channel as well as on any multicast channels at least 3 hours per week;
 - *Devote at least 1 percent airtime to unpaid public service announcements, including a fair proportion for local non-profit organizations, when viewers are likely to be watching.

...Stations have an obligation to serve their local community's needs and interests and to comply with certain programming and other rules. Because we [FCC] do not monitor a station's programming, viewers and listeners are a vital source of information about the programming and possible rule violations. The documents in each station's public inspection file have information about the station that can assist the public in this important role... We [FCC] encourage a continuing dialogue between broadcasters and members of the public to ensure that stations meet their obligations and remain responsive to the needs of the local community.

—The Public and Broadcasting. Federal Communications Commission, 1999

Contact Information for Sacramento Television Stations

KCRA Channel 3

KCRA 3 Television Circle Sacramento, CA 9581
916 446-3333
www.kcra.com/index.html

KXTV Channel 10

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www.univision.com/content/channel.jhtml?chid=9570&schid=9571

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