

Why Local News Matters

According to recent surveys from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 59 percent of Americans report watching local news regularly¹, a substantially higher percentage than from any other source. According to another Pew survey², the vast majority of the American public perceives local TV news as more “fact based” than any other news source. Roughly two-thirds (61 percent) of respondents indicated that local TV news reports, “mostly facts” compared to only a quarter (25 percent) who felt local TV reports “mostly opinion.” In contrast, just over half (53 percent) of respondents thought network news reported mostly facts and almost a third (31 percent) thought mostly opinion.

Local TV news is also especially important in its coverage of campaigns and elections. According to a third Pew survey, an overwhelming majority (76 percent) of Americans receive their election information from television³, again more than any other source. Given these results, it is perhaps not surprising that people who use local news as their primary source of campaign information more closely reflect the nation’s divided electorate than people who look to other news sources. Almost three-quarters (70 percent) of the respondents who rely on Fox Network News indicated a preference for George Bush and two in three (67 percent) of the respondents who rely on CNN indicated a preference for John Kerry. Among those who rely on local news, however, candidate preference was roughly even with 42 percent preferring George Bush and 46 percent preferring John Kerry. These results all point to the importance of local TV news as a trusted, primary source of news and information to citizens, particularly about campaigns and elections.

One of the reasons that local television news plays such an important role is that unlike the networks, local television news station have the capacity (if not the responsibility) to cover local and state wide elections. In a very real sense, people turn to local news because they are interested in what is going on close to home.

But what happens if most of the “local” television stations you can receive are actually based in another state? Do the stations ignore what is going on in your hometown or your home state? Do you get any coverage of your local or even statewide elections?

1 Pew Center for the People & the Press Survey Report “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized: Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse” (June 8, 2004). See <http://people-press.org>.

2 Pew Center for the People & the Press Survey Report “Public More Critical of Press, But Goodwill Persists” (June 26, 2005). See <http://people-press.org>.

3 Pew Center for the People & the Press Survey Report. “Voters Impressed with Campaign: But News Coverage Gets Lukewarm Ratings” (October 24, 2004). See <http://people-press.org>.

Why Local News Matters More in New Jersey

This report addresses these questions by looking at New Jersey, an almost unique example of a state where virtually all of the local news stations are based outside its borders. New Jersey residents living in the northern counties⁴ receive the majority of their local television news from stations based in New York City and New Jersey residents in the southern counties⁵ receive their broadcast signals from Philadelphia based stations. New Jersey is by far the largest metropolitan region in America where this occurs.

Outside of one commercial broadcast station licensed in Secaucus, New Jersey (WWOR) the only other local television stations physically located in New Jersey primarily air their news programs on basic cable or on public television, where the audience size is generally considered to be a small fraction of even the lowest rated broadcast stations⁶. To put this in perspective it is helpful to note that eight and a half million residents of New Jersey have exactly the same number of commercial broadcast stations located within its borders as the 25,000 residents of North Platte, Nebraska have within their borders.

Because of this it is often assumed that New Jersey residents receive less exposure to news coverage of New Jersey politics and elections than they would if the state had its "own" stations. In essence then, the primary goal of this study is to examine what New Jersey residents had the opportunity to see on local television news about the 2005 New Jersey elections.

The 2005 election serves an interesting case study in which to study local television coverage of New Jersey elections. With the possible exception of Virginia, the New Jersey gubernatorial race was the most watched election in 2005. It pitted two qualified, generally articulate candidates with significantly different approaches to governance. Both candidates had and spent enormous amount of money on campaign advertising and perhaps as important for news coverage, the campaign was exceedingly viscous and nasty. In addition, while Democrat Jon Corzine led in most polls throughout the campaign the race appeared to be quite competitive at times.

At the same time, 2005 also featured the race for New York City Mayor. While this race was clearly watched nationally, there was never any real doubt about the

4 The New Jersey counties of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Union and Warren are in the New York City Media Market.

5 The New Jersey counties of Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer and Salem are in the Philadelphia Media Market.

6 According to Nielsen rating data the lowest rated early evening news program in New York during the month of November was WNYW with an average rating of 1.1 and a share of 2. In comparison the highest rated New Jersey cable/UHF station for local news was NJN with an average rating of .2 and a share of less than less than .5. It is important to point out that it is the opinion of many New Jersey based broadcasters that because New Jersey does not have its own media market New Jersey residents are significantly undercounted by Nielsen.

outcome. Polls in fact, showed Mayor Bloomberg with as much as a 40 point lead during the campaign. The Mayor generally received high marks for his first term job performance and his huge advantage in campaign funds made it virtually impossible for challenger Fernando Ferrer to pose a real threat.

Given this dynamic, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that in terms of pure news value the New Jersey gubernatorial race had more to offer than the New York City mayoral race. This is not to say that stations based in New York City could or should have ignored the mayoral race. Instead it simply suggests that, if there was ever a time for New York stations to cover a New Jersey election, 2005 was it.

If anything, the 2005 election cycle seemed an even more opportune time for Philadelphia based station to focus their attention stations on New Jersey elections. The New York City stations at least had the local if uncompetitive mayoral race to cover. In contrast, Pennsylvania had almost no elections, let alone competitive or interesting ones for the Philadelphia stations to cover. It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest the only elections taking place in the Philadelphia market with any real news value occurred in New Jersey. So once again, if there was ever a time for Philadelphia stations to cover New Jersey elections, 2005 was it.

In short, the 2005 election cycle can be characterized as one that *should* have provided New Jersey residents with a considerable amount of television coverage of New Jersey elections. This report attempts to find out if it did.

Research methodology

To explore these questions highly trained coders at the University of Wisconsin, Madison's NewsLab (<http://polisci.wisc.edu/uwnewslab>) captured and analyzed 332 hours of local news programming that aired during the final 30 days (Oct 9th to November 7th) of the 2005 campaign. The programming aired on 12 local television stations serving New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia. The stations include four stations licensed in New Jersey; WWOR – a Secaucus UPN affiliate and three New Jersey cable or public television stations (CN8, News 12 and NJN). The other eight stations are the ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC affiliates in New York and Philadelphia.

On nine of the stations⁷ the 30 minute news broadcasts that aired between 6:00 and 6:30pm was chosen for capture. This time period tends to be the highest rated early evening news segment. In addition, the 11:00pm late local news was also captured. This tends to be the highest rated local news period of the entire day. Three of the stations⁸ do not air an early news program instead airing one hour of news at 10:00pm this was captured in its entirety.

Overall NewsLab captured 92 percent of the regularly schedule news time periods we attempted to capture, a notably high rate. Even so, it is important to recognize that this report is not designed to provide an analysis of **all** local news programming available to New Jersey residents, simply the highest rated news segments. Nor does it include special election news programming like debates or interview programs shown on Saturdays and Sundays. Instead the report provides a comprehensive analysis of regular election news coverage seen by people in New Jersey.

A more complete description of the data capture and content analysis procedures used by NewsLab is available in Appendix One.

⁷ These nine stations include News 12 and NJN in New Jersey; WABC, WCBS, WNYW and WNBC in New York City and WPVI, KYW and WCAU in Philadelphia.

⁸ These three stations include WWOR and CN8 in New Jersey and WTXF in Philadelphia.

The total amount of election coverage captured

Overall, we captured 664 half-hour news programs or broadcasts.⁹ As shown in Table One, a little more than one in three (37 percent) of these programs contained at least one election story of any kind. A total of 385 election news stories aired during these news programs. The results show that stations based in New Jersey and New York aired significantly more election news than stations based in Philadelphia.

Table One: Total News broadcasts and election stories captured

Market	Total broadcasts captured	Broadcasts with at least one election story (%)	Total election stories captured	Average number of election stories per broadcast
New Jersey				
CN8	52	8 (15%)	8	.15
News 12	50	33 (66%)	66	1.32
NJN	51	37 (73%)	59	1.15
WWOR	44	11 (25%)	13	.29
Market totals	197	89 (45%)	146	1.35
New York				
WABC	59	29 (49%)	38	.64
WCBS	60	34 (57%)	55	.91
WNBC	60	47 (78%)	79	1.31
WNYW	56	12 (21%)	21	.37
Market totals	235	122 (52%)	193	1.21
Philadelphia				
KYW	57	8 (14%)	8	.14
WCAU	58	5 (9%)	10	.17
WPVI	59	12 (20%)	19	.33
WTFX	58	8 (14%)	9	.16
Market Totals	232	33 (14%)	46	.14
Overall Totals	664	244 (37%)	385	.58

⁹ In the cases when a station aired a single hour of news instead of half-hour broadcast the hour was divided into two 30 minute segments.

A closer look at New Jersey Election Coverage

The results (contained in Table Two) show that of the 385 election stories captured almost seven out of ten (67 percent) focused on New Jersey. At first glance, this seems to suggest that perhaps New Jersey residents don't, in fact, suffer from a lack of coverage about their elections. A deeper examination however, paints a somewhat different and more complex picture.

To begin with, almost half (48 percent) of the 259 New Jersey focused stories we captured aired on two New Jersey based stations (NJN and News 12), which have significantly smaller audiences than any of the broadcasts stations in our sample. So while the overall results suggest that perhaps New Jersey residents had a fair amount of television coverage about New Jersey elections available to them a sizable percentage of the stories were not on the news programs of the network affiliates that capture the major portion of the television audience.

The results also show that residents of northern New Jersey received twice the amount of New Jersey election coverage than residents of southern New Jersey did. In fact, New York's market leader in terms of New Jersey election coverage (WNBC) aired almost as many New Jersey focused election stories (33) as all four Philadelphia stations combined (38). Given the lack of other elections taking place in the Philadelphia market this suggests that the residents of southern New Jersey may in fact have been underserved in terms of the amount of 2005 New Jersey election coverage they received on the broadcast television stations they watch.

It is also interesting to note that despite the fact that the New York mayoral race and virtually all other New York based elections were not competitive; all of the New York based stations still focused a majority of their election on races in New York instead of New Jersey. The New Jersey and Philadelphia based stations, of course, devoted a higher percentage of their election coverage to New Jersey elections than New York based stations did.

Table Two: Total election coverage focused on New Jersey Elections

Market	Total Stories	Stories focused on New Jersey Elections	Stories focused on New York Elections	Stories focused on other states
New Jersey				
CN8	8	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
News 12	66	65 (99%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
NJN	59	59 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
WWOR	13	10 (67%)	3 (33%)	0 (0%)
Market totals	146	142 (97%)	4 (3%)	0 (0%)
New York				
WABC	38	18 (47%)	20 (53%)	0 (0%)
WCBS	55	21 (38%)	34 (62%)	0 (0%)
WNBC	79	33 (42%)	46 (58%)	0 (0%)
WNYW	21	7 (33%)	14 (67%)	0 (0%)
Market totals	193	79 (41%)	114 (59%)	0 (0%)
Philadelphia				
KYW	8	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
WCAU	10	7 (70%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)
WPVI	19	15 (79%)	0 (0%)	4 (21%)
WTFX	9	8 (89%)	0 (0%)	1 (11%)
Market Totals	46	38 (82%)	0 (0%)	8 (8%)
Overall Totals	385	259 (67%)	118 (31%)	8 (2%)

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10 Of the eight stories focusing on other states, six were about local elections in Pennsylvania and two provided about a voting information hotline telephone numbers in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

All Governor, All the time

The New Jersey gubernatorial race was one of only two gubernatorial contests in 2005 and as such it clearly had national political implications. In addition, the two major candidates spent over 70 million dollars on the race which remained fairly competitive throughout the campaign. Moreover, the race was also characterized as being a particularly nasty and vicious campaign. As a result of all of these factors, it is not surprising that the gubernatorial race dominated New Jersey election coverage.

The results (contained Table Three) show just how much coverage of the gubernatorial race dominated. Overall almost eight out of ten (79 percent) of all New Jersey election stories focused exclusively on the gubernatorial race between Jon Corzine and Douglas Forrester. The focus on the gubernatorial race was most pronounced on the New York stations where nine out of ten of the New Jersey election stories we captured focused exclusively on the Corzine/Forrester race. In addition, all of the New York station stories coded as being about more than one race included coverage of the gubernatorial race. This means that 98 percent of stories about New Jersey elections we captured on the New York based stations included at least some coverage of the gubernatorial race.

In comparison, the stations based in New Jersey gave more coverage to New Jersey's other elections. Even so, only five percent of all New Jersey election stories or grand total of 12 stories focused on exclusively on races for the New Jersey assembly. Of these 10 aired on NJN and one aired on News 12. The only broadcast station to air a story on a New Jersey assembly race was WPVI in Philadelphia, which ran a single New Jersey assembly story. While these stations and NJN in particular should perhaps be lauded for at least paying some attention to assembly races it is important to point out that only two assembly races (the 2nd and 11th districts) actually received exclusive coverage. While neither of these elections were part of the New Jersey Clean Election Pilot Program, candidates from the two Clean Elections districts (the 6th and 13th) appeared in the same story which ran multiple times on NJN. The story focused primarily on candidates from the 6th district, but mentioned candidates from the 13th district.

The 2005 New Jersey ballot also included a ballot proposition concerning whether or not the state should have a Lieutenant Governor. Overall, seven percent of the New Jersey election stories (17 total stories) focused on this initiative. Once again, however, most of these aired on a few stations. Seven of the 17 ballot initiative stories aired on News 12. NJN and WCAU in Philadelphia each aired four of these stories.

**Table Three:
New Jersey Election Stories by Race Focus
(n=259)**

Market	NJ Governor	NJ Assembly	All other NJ offices	Multiple races	Ballot Initiatives	Voting Issues & Other
New Jersey						
CN8 (n=8)	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
News 12 (n=65)	46 (71%)	1 (2%)	4 (6%)	2 (3%)	7 (11%)	5 (8%)
NJN (n=59)	40 (68%)	10 (17%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	4 (7%)	3 (5%)
WWOR (n=10)	9 (90%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
Market Totals (n=142)	103 (73%)	11 (8%)	4 (3%)	5 (4%)	11 (8%)	8 (6%)
New York						
WABC (n=18)	14 (78%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (17%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
WCBS (n=21)	20 (95%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1(5%)	0 (0%)
WNBC (n=33)	31 (94%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
WNYW (n=7)	6 (86%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
Market Totals (n=79)	71 (90%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	6 (8%)	1(1%)	0 (0%)
Philadelphia						
KYW (n=8)	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
WCAU (n=7)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (57%)	0 (0%)
WPVI (n=15)	12 (80%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)
WTFX (n=8)	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Market Totals (n=38)	31 (82%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (13%)	1 (3%)
Overall Totals (n=259)	205 (79%)	12 (5%)	5 (2%)	11 (4%)	17 (7%)	9 (3%)

Other aspects of New Jersey Election Coverage

The dominance of the gubernatorial race means that in many respects, an analysis of New Jersey election coverage is in reality an analysis of how the gubernatorial race was covered. Even so, examining all New Jersey election coverage provides a more complete picture of what New Jersey residents had the opportunity to see on television about their elections.

When New Jersey Election Stories Aired

To begin the study examined when New Jersey election stories aired during the last 30 days of the campaign. The results, (contained in Table Four) indicate that about half of all of the New Jersey election stories captured from New York and Philadelphia stations aired during the final week of the campaign. The New Jersey based stations generally had a more even distribution over the four weeks, but even so almost four out of ten (39 percent) of the stories on these stations aired during the final week of the campaign. The results also generally show an increase in coverage between October 17th and October 24th which corresponds to a gubernatorial debate¹¹.

¹¹ NJN aired the first debate on September 20th. The second debate on October 18th was aired by WPVI and WABC – not NJN. In addition, NJN aired a subsequent debate with the “minor” party candidates. In all cases, the results show that stations airing the October 18th debate aired more stories on the debate than their comparison stations.

**Table Four: When New Jersey Election stories aired.
(N=259)**

Market	% of stories appearing in the last week (11/1 to 11/7)	% of stories appearing in next to last week (10/25 to 10/31)	% of stories appearing 10/17 to 10/24	% of stories appearing 10/9 to 10/16
New Jersey				
CN8 (n=8)	37%	25%	13%	25%
News 12 (n=65)	57%	5%	28%	11%
NJN(n=59)	15%	25%	31%	29%
WWOR (n=10)	70%	0%	20%	10%
Market Totals (n=142)	39%	14%	28%	19%
New York				
WABC (n=18)	39%	11%	29%	22%
WCBS (n=21)	57%	10%	14%	19%
WNBC (n=33)	39%	24%	18%	18%
WNYW (n=7)	71%	29%	0%	0%
Market Totals (n=79)	47%	17%	17%	17%
Philadelphia				
KYW (n=8)	13%	13%	38%	38%
WCAU (n=7)	86%	0%	14%	0%
WPVI (n=15)	40%	27%	33%	0%
WTXF (n=8)	75%	13%	13%	0%
Market Totals (n=38)	50%	16%	26%	8%
Overall Totals (n=259)	43%	15%	24%	17%

Average story and soundbite length

As shown in Table Five, an average New Jersey election story was two minutes and 19 seconds long and just over half of all New Jersey election stories contained at least one candidate soundbite. The average candidate soundbite was just under 12 seconds long.

Once again, the results indicate some variations by market and by station, although in general they are fairly consistent. An average story on a New Jersey based station was two minutes and fifty seconds. There was however, significant differences between New Jersey based stations in terms of average story length. Two stations, NJN

and WWOR had an average story length of over four minutes. It is however important to point out that the average for WWOR is inflated by the fact that they only aired a total of 10 New Jersey based stories and two of them were over seven minutes long. In comparison, the market average for New York based stations was one minute and 58 seconds and one minute 10 seconds for Philadelphia based stations. There was much less station variation in story length among New York and Philadelphia based stations.

The results also show that New York based stations were much more likely to use a candidate soundbite in their stories than either New Jersey or Philadelphia based stations. More than seven in ten (72 percent) of the New York station stories contained a candidate soundbite compared to less than half (46 percent) of the New Jersey station stories that contained a candidate soundbite. Just over a third (37 percent) of the stories on Philadelphia stations contained a candidate soundbite.

As with average story length, there appears to be more variation in average soundbite length among New Jersey based stations than with New York or Philadelphia based stations. Once again the average length of a candidate soundbite on WWOR (and hence the average of all of the New Jersey based stations) is somewhat inflated because of its low number of stories and the presence of the two long stories. Finally the results show that while New York stations used candidate soundbites more frequently than the Philadelphia stations, the average length of a soundbite was virtually identical in both markets.

**Table Five: Average Length of New Jersey Election Stories and soundbites
(n=259)**

Market	Average length of New Jersey Election stories	% of New Jersey stories with a soundbite from a New Jersey candidate	Avg. Soundbite length (sec.)
New Jersey			
CN8 (n=8)	2 min. 52 sec.	63%	10.3
News 12 (n=65)	43 sec.	15%	7.9
NJN (n=59)	4 min. 56 sec.	76%	13.9
WWOR (n=10)	4 min. 5 sec.	60%	21.8
Market Totals (n=142)	2 min. 50 sec.	46%	13.3 sec.
New York			
WABC (n=18)	1 min. 45 sec.	66%	7.2
WCBS (n=21)	1 min. 33 sec.	71%	7.2
WNBC (n=33)	2 min. 18 sec.	76%	8.8
WNYW (n=7)	2 min. 11 sec.	72%	6.5
Market Totals (n=79)	1 min. 58 sec.	72%	7.4 sec.
Philadelphia			
KYW (n=8)	55 sec.	50%	10.2
WCAU (n=7)	52 sec.	14%	12.5
WPVI (n=15)	1 min. 10 sec.	40%	6.9
WTFX (n=8)	1 min. 41 sec.	38%	6.7
Market Totals (n=38)	1 min. 10 sec.	37%	7.6 sec.
Overall Totals (n=259)	2 min. 19 sec.	52%	11.69

Story Focus

Overall, almost seven out of ten (68 percent) of the New Jersey election stories focused on campaign strategy or horserace, while just over two out of ten (22 percent) focused on substantive campaign issues. While the New York based stations aired slightly more issue based stories than the New Jersey or Philadelphia based stations, overall the breakdown is quite similar across stations and markets. The slight tendency of New York stations to air more issue-based stories is driven primarily by WNBC, which aired both more overall stories and more issue-based stories than its market competitors. Another difference worth noting is that New Jersey based stations aired more stories coded as "other" than either New York or Philadelphia based stations. This can be explained by the fact that the New Jersey based stations aired more stories about voting issues and ballot initiatives than the other markets, both of which are more likely to be coded as "other." Finally, the results show that with the possible exception of WCBS in New York, adwatch stories which dissect and critique candidate advertising were almost non-existent. These results are contained in Table Six.

**Table Six: Focus of New Jersey Election Stories
(n=259)**

Market	Strategy or Horserace	Issues	Adwatch	Personal characteristics	Other
New Jersey					
CN8 (n=8)	7 (88%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
News 12 (n=65)	43 (66%)	11 (17%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	9(14%)
NJN (n=59)	44 (75%)	12 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)
WWOR (n=10)	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Market Totals (n=142)	99 (70%)	29 (20%)	1 (<1%)	1 (<1%)	12 (8%)
New York					
WABC (n=18)	17 (94%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
WCBS (n=21)	12 (57%)	6 (29%)	3 (14%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
WNBC (n=33)	16 (49%)	14 (42%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	0(0%)
WNYW (n=7)	6 (86%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	0(0%)
Market Totals (n=79)	51 (65%)	21 (27%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)	0(0%)
Philadelphia					
KYW (n=8)	6 (75%)	1 (13%)	0(0%)	1(13%)	0(0%)
WCAU (n=7)	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
WPVI (n=15)	8 (53%)	5 (33%)	0(0%)	1 (7%)	1(7%)
WTFX (n=8)	7 (88%)	1 (13%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
Market Totals (n=38)	27 (71%)	8 (21%)	0(0%)	2 (8%)	1(3%)
Overall Totals (n=259)	177 (68%)	58 (22%)	5 (2%)	5 (2%)	13 (5%)

Story Tone

All election stories were examined to determine whether or not the story as a whole reflected positively or negatively on the election it was reporting on. For example, a positive tone is one that might lead viewers to a sense that the election process itself was worth paying attention to or participating in. A negative overall tone is one that might lead voters to a sense that the election process itself was somewhat distasteful or perhaps corrupt. A balanced tone would contain both positive and negative aspects of the campaign and a story without an overall tone is one that is essentially straight news reporting of the days events. While clearly judging overall tone is somewhat subjective, the idea or guiding question is whether or not a viewer of the story would feel the election process was worthy of their participation as a result of the story.

As previously noted the New Jersey gubernatorial race was a particularly nasty and vicious campaign. This is reflected in the assessment that not a single New Jersey focused story was characterized as having an overall positive tone. In fact, almost one in three stories (32 percent) were coded as having an overall negative tone. The stories on New York stations were the most negative as almost half (44 percent) were coded as having a negative tone. In comparison less than one in three stories (27 percent) on New Jersey based stations were coded as having a negative tone and just 21 percent of the stories on Philadelphia based stations had a negative tone. Table Seven contains these results.

**Table Seven: Story Tone of New Jersey Election stories
(N=259)**

Market	Positive Story Tone	Negative Story Tone	Balanced Story Tone	No Overall Story Tone
New Jersey				
CN8 (n=8)	0 (0%)	3 (38%)	4 (50%)	1 (13%)
News 12 (n=65)	0 (0%)	11 (17%)	18 (27%)	36 (55%)
NJN (n=59)	0 (0%)	23 (39%)	10 (17%)	26 (44%)
WWOR (n=10)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	5 (50%)
Market Totals (n=142)	0 (0%)	39 (27%)	35 (25%)	68 (48%)
New York				
WABC (n=18)	0 (0%)	6 (69%)	8 (13%)	4 (19%)
WCBS (n=21)	0 (0%)	15 (71%)	2 (9%)	4 (19%)
WNBC (n=33)	0 (0%)	10 (30%)	16 (49%)	7 (21%)
WNYW (n=7)	0 (0%)	4 (57%)	2 (29%)	1 (14%)
Market Totals (n=79)	0 (0%)	37 (44%)	31(35%)	21(20%)
Philadelphia				
KYW (n=8)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	4 (50%)	3 (38%)
WCAU (n=7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	4 (57%)
WPVI (n=15)	0 (0%)	4 (27%)	5 (33%)	6 (40%)
WTXF (n=8)	0 (0%)	3 (38%)	1 (13%)	4 (50%)
Market Totals (n=38)	0 (0%)	8 (21%)	14 (37%)	17 (45%)
Overall Totals (n=259)	0(0%)	82 (32%)	76 (29%)	101 (39%)

Conclusion and next steps

While this study cannot claim to be an analysis of all televised election coverage available to New Jersey voters, it does represent the most comprehensive analysis of local television news coverage of New Jersey elections ever conducted. As such, the results provide several important insights into what New Jersey residents are able to see on television about their elections and where they are able to see it.

The results indicate that in terms of the quantity of coverage about New Jersey elections the best place for voters to turn is to local New Jersey based stations NJN and News 12. Both stations aired significantly more New Jersey focused election stories than the major broadcast stations.

In addition, the results show that NJN and News 12 were essentially the only television outlets to cover New Jersey's down-ballot races in the 2005 election cycle. This is not to say down-ballot coverage was plentiful as almost eight out of ten of the New Jersey election stories we captured focused on New Jersey gubernatorial race. Even so, NJN aired 83 percent or 10 out of the 12 stories we captured that focused on New Jersey assembly races. It is important to note that participation in New Jersey's Clean Election Pilot program did not seem to lead to more coverage of the participating districts, although the Clean Election districts received as much coverage on NJN as two other non-participating assembly districts. To a lesser extent, the results show that News 12 covered New Jersey's ballot initiatives more than other stations, as they aired 41 percent or seven out of the 17 stories that focused on a New Jersey ballot initiative.

The results for New Jersey's only commercial broadcast station (WWOR) are at best mixed. On one hand, WWOR barely covered the 2005 elections, airing a total of just 13 election stories on the WWOR news programs captured in the study. On the other hand, 10 of these 13 stories focused on New Jersey, which was a higher percentage than any of the New York based commercial broadcast stations in the study. All 10 on WWOR's New Jersey focused election stories contained at least some information about the gubernatorial race. So while it might be possible to say WWOR showed more of a commitment to cover New Jersey elections than the New York licensed stations it is debatable how much of a commitment WWOR had to covering New Jersey elections in general.

The results also show that one New York based station, WNBC, not only provided New Jersey viewers with more coverage of New Jersey elections than its market competitors, WNBC's New Jersey election coverage was qualitatively superior to the coverage provided by the other New York based stations. For example, WNBC stories were longer, more likely to contain a soundbite from a New Jersey candidate, more likely to focus on substantive issues and less likely to have an overall negative tone than the other New York based stations. In fact, WNBC's stories were more likely to focus on issues than either NJN or News 12. So while WNBC did not match NJN or News 12 in its quantity of New Jersey election coverage it was as good or better than the two New

Jersey based stations on some aspects of quality and clearly superior on virtually all measures to the commercial broadcasts stations it competes against.

While on one hand NJN, News 12 and to a lesser extent WNBC should be applauded for actually covering New Jersey elections the overall result suggest that coverage of the 2005 New Jersey elections is far from what it could be. For example, almost half of all New Jersey election stories aired during the final week of the campaign. This suggests that with the possible exception of a gubernatorial debate, New Jersey elections generally do not warrant air time until the election draws near. In addition, the results show very little variation by station or market in terms of the amount of issue-based election coverage New Jersey resident were provided. Overall almost seven in ten stories (68 percent) we captured focused on the strategic aspects of the New Jersey campaigns, while just over two in ten stories focused on substantive issues.

It is also important to remember that if there was ever a year where New Jersey elections should have received significant election coverage it was 2005. Yet the results show that all of the New York based stations chose to focus more of their overall election coverage on uncompetitive races in New York City than they did on the highly competitive New Jersey gubernatorial race. It seems at least possible to suggest that had the mayoral race been more competitive or interesting, the overall amount of New Jersey election coverage would have decreased.

Finally, the results show a very real disparity in the amount New Jersey election coverage residents of southern New Jersey received compared to those in northern New Jersey. In a very real sense, the Philadelphia based stations ignored the New Jersey elections, despite having little else to cover during the 2005 election cycle. While it would be a stretch to say that New York based stations provided an enormous amount of coverage, they did provide the northern New Jersey residents with much more than their southern cousins received. Future research should, of course, examine whether or not this disparity holds in different election scenarios. Assuming the disparity evident in 2005 holds, then future research might explore how and if the disparity in local news coverage influences candidate decision making in terms of buying advertising and even more importantly how and if the disparity influences voter knowledge, learning, participation and perhaps even choice in New Jersey's elections.

Appendix One: The Wisconsin NewsLab <http://polisci.wisc.edu/uwnewsrab/index.asp>

UW NewsLab is a 2,500 square-foot media analysis facility located at the center of the UW-Madison campus, equipped with 35 Windows XP workstations each with the capability of digitizing video from DVD, video cassette, or other digital media. Video can be gathered, sorted, and archived automatically by the *InfoSite* analysis system developed by CommIT Technology Solutions, Inc. Wisconsin NewsLab staff then analyze each segment using coding protocols developed by researchers.

For most UW NewsLab projects, video is digitally captured through servers in each media market and sent to the Wisconsin NewsLab online overnight. Once in UW NewsLab, media content goes through three processes facilitated by the *InfoSite* system:

Clipping: In the clipping phase, all news broadcasts are divided into individual stories, given a headline (written by UW NewsLab staff), and categorized by subject - both a primary focus and all secondary foci are identified. The clipping part of the analysis enables the Wisconsin NewsLab to identify all stories mentioning a particular topic and to report how much time in a typical broadcast is devoted to each subject.

Coding: Using the foci identified during clipping, all stories that relate to a particular project (i.e. elections, health, etc) are tagged for additional analysis and are automatically sent to a queue in the coding system. Custom coding applications are built to researcher specifications, and UW NewsLab staff view and code every story online, eliminating human error in transferring hard code copy sheet to computer databases and statistical software.

Archiving: Once stories are coded, the *InfoSite* system makes them automatically available in a web-based searchable archive, which enable users to quickly and efficiently search through thousands of hours of video to find clips on particular subjects, particular stations, or particular days of the week, etc. For more information on these archives, visit our election project page. With over a terabyte of storage, the UW NewsLab servers manage data, encode and archive video, and serve content internally and externally via the internet. With the *InfoSite* web-based applications, UW NewsLab can expand outside of its physical headquarters during large-scale projects.

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Matt Hale is assistant professor at Seton Hall University, in the Center for Public Service. He brings a wealth of research experience on television coverage of elections. Prior to coming to Seton Hall, Hale served as the research director for the USC Annenberg School for Communication's Norman Lear Center and the NewsLab at University of Wisconsin Department of Political Science. Hale has studied local television news coverage of elections since 1998 when he used closed captioning to analyze coverage of the California gubernatorial race. His latest projects can be found at <http://www.localnewsarchive>.

Hale earned his Ph.D. from the School of Policy, Planning and Development at the University of Southern California, and a BA in political science from the University of California at Irvine. In addition to his academic work on local television and elections, Hale has written extensively on the adoption and use of web pages by municipalities and neighborhood groups. His co-authored work has appeared in *Political Communication, Administration and Society* as well as in several book chapters. Hale is currently exploring how the media covers nonprofit organizations and comparing election news coverage on Spanish and English language television stations.

At Seton Hall, Hale teaches a variety of course including; *The Environment of Public Service, Public Policy Analysis, Public Sector Leadership, Public Sector Ethics, Financial Management and Budgeting and Research Methods*.

Prior to his academic work, Hale served on several local, state and national political campaigns, where he worked in press and candidate advance operations and as an aide to California Senator Barbara Boxer. Professor Hale met his wife Jane while working on a presidential campaign. They have two children, a three year old girl, Eva, and a son, Zach, who is 18 months.