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OPINION RESEARCH • STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Bob Moore and Hans Kaiser
RE: The News Media – Neutral Observers or Ideologues?

In a recent national survey we asked voters their view of the news media, and whether they were “neutral observers of current events” or “more ideological than they used to be.” The results show that the majority of Americans believe it’s getting harder to find out what’s really happening because news reporters today allow their own feelings to influence the news.

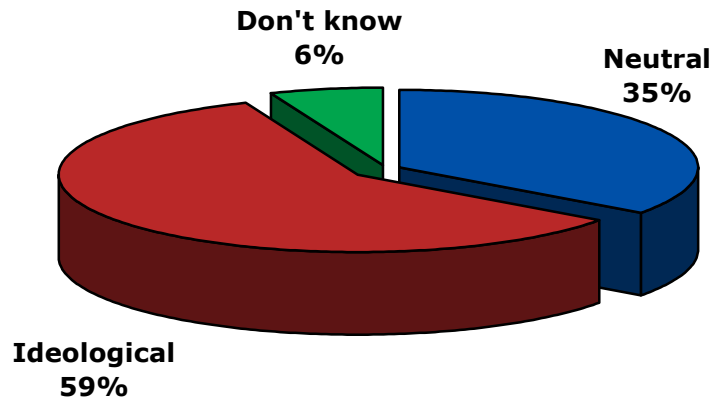
Here’s the question and results:

Views on the News Media

“Now I want to read you two statements about the news media. Please tell me which comes closest to your view.

News organizations are, for the most part, neutral observers of current events. They report the news as it happens and don’t let their own personal feelings influence how they report the news.

News organizations are much more ideological than they used to be. It’s getting harder and harder to find out what’s really happening because reporters today allow their own feelings about issues to influence their reporting.”



While a large majority (59%) felt that the media are "much more ideological than they used to be" and just over a third (35%) thought they were "neutral observers of current events," this is a significant improvement over 2003 when we found 71% of voters believing the news media was ideological and just 23% believing they were neutral observers. So what happened?

Well, the largest change that has taken place is among Democrats. They are now mixed on this question (47% "neutral observers"/46% "ideological") whereas in 2003 just 28% of Democrats felt the media were "neutral observers" and 64% felt they were ideological. This is a net shift of 35 points – most likely attributable to the fact that Republicans had controlled Congress and the White House for the last four years and have taken the brunt of the media's "in-depth" reporting. Furthermore, the days when Bill Clinton was facing withering media coverage on a myriad of issues (even after he left office with his Presidential pardon fiasco) are now distant memories and the media have yet to alight on the Democrat Congress. Give them time.

But this doesn't explain the media's image improvement among Republicans, especially "strong" Republicans (voters who vote mostly or only for Republicans). Today 22% of Republicans think of the media as "neutral observers," while 74% think of them as "ideological." Pretty overwhelming, to be sure, but a significant improvement from 2003 when just 14% of GOPs felt the media were "neutral observers" and fully 83% felt they were "ideological" (a net shift of 17 points). Furthermore, "strong" Republicans shifted 22% and are actually slightly less likely to view the media as being ideological than are "soft" Republicans (voters who vote for a few more Republicans than Democrats). With the ascendance of talk radio and the advent of conservative news shows, Republicans may sense they are beginning to gain a voice in the mass media.

Interestingly, attitudes among Independents remained almost exactly what they were in 2003. In 2003, 32% of Independents felt the media were "neutral observers." Today, 33% feel that way. In 2003, 60% of Independents felt the media were "ideological." Today, 59% feel that way.

And while most of the shift in overall sentiment can be attributed to partisanship, men and women now share similar views on this issue, while in 2003, men were less likely to view the media as "neutral observers."

Overall, while still viewed as "ideological" by a wide majority of American voters, the media has improved its image over the past four years. With Democrats now in control of both houses of Congress and under the microscope, and tough presidential campaigns beginning in earnest for both party's candidates, it is unlikely they will be able to continue this positive trend. But, hope springs eternal.

These data are from a poll conducted among a representative sample of 800 registered voters, nationwide, by Moore Information, Inc. The potential sampling error is plus or minus 3% at the 95% confidence level. The interviews were conducted February 6-8, 2007. (Party affiliation of the sample is 36% Republican, 42% Democrat, 22% non-affiliated.)