

Framing the News

The Triggers, Frames, and Messages in Newspaper Coverage

Project for Excellence in Journalism

1900 M Street NW Suite 210 | Washington DC 2009

202-293-7394 | www.journalism.org

A Study of the Project for Excellence in Journalism and Princeton Survey Research Associates

Overview

What are the narrative techniques journalists use to frame the news?

Do some stories contain discernible underlying messages?

Do these journalistic conventions of storytelling represent a set of professional predilections or biases, which contend with ideology and other personal perspectives in determining the nature of news?

The Project for Excellence in Journalism is embarked on a multi-year study to try to answer these questions. Over the next year, it intends to examine what major biases exist in the press, and to try to quantify to what extent ideological bias exists.

As a first step, the Project, along with professor Jay Rosen of New York University and Princeton Survey Research Associates, developed a pilot study to identify various narrative story telling frames employed in presenting the news.

This pilot study -- focusing mostly on framing -- was meant primarily as a learning device to aid in developing the larger bias study. Yet it did yield some interesting findings that are the basis of this report. Among them:

- Straight news accounts, the inverted pyramid narrative frame, accounted for a surprisingly small number of front page stories--only 16%--suggesting the press is becoming increasingly thematic and interpretative in the way it presents news.
- In contrast, the press shows a decided tendency to present the news through a combative lens. Three narrative frames -- conflict, winners and losers and revealing wrongdoing -- accounted for 30% of all stories, twice the number of straight news accounts. The penchant for framing stories around these combative elements is even more pronounced at the top of the front page and is truer still when it comes to describing the actions or statements of government officials.

Although newspapers increasingly talk about the need to explain and interpret, the findings suggest they do less of it than might be

expected. Explanatory frames those that reveal how things work, how they fit into larger trends, or historical context accounted for only 12% of all stories. The findings also confirm a presumption on the part of journalists that readers don't care much about policy or its impact. Policy stories accounted for only 8% of the pieces on the front page.

- Local papers tend to rely on traditional straight news accounts and try to explain how things work more. National papers are more interpretative and try to put news into a larger perspective.
- Increasingly, news originates from decisions made in the newsroom rather than by events from the outside. While statements by government officials represented the most common trigger for front page news, the next three most common were all newsroom initiated-- a decision by news organizations to show enterprise, to analyze and interpret, or to preview what comes next.
- The press is not simply negative or cynical. In those stories deemed to contain some kind of underlying message, optimism was actually the most common theme (as in suggesting perseverance pays off). But when stories were triggered by journalists' own enterprise, the message became more distrustful.

In preparation for the larger study, this prologue study analyzed front page content of seven newspapers for two months, beginning January 1, 1999 through February 28, 1999. It looked at three papers categorized as national: the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*. It looked at four papers categorized as local or regional: the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, the *Idaho Statesman* in Boise, the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, and the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*.

It tried to capture four central elements of how journalists present the news:

1. **Topic:** What story topics were played on page one.
2. **Trigger:** What triggered the news organization to cover the story. In other words, what made the event or issue news in the first place? Was a poll released? Was a bill passed? Did an official hold a press conference?
3. **Frame:** What narrative device or approach was used by journalists in composing the story. For example, was the story built around the conflict inherent in an issue? Was the story built around the points of agreement among stakeholders in an issue?
4. **Underlying Message:** This code tried to identify any underlying social or folkloric messages evoked in the story, consciously or unconsciously. Is the government inefficient? Are politicians in it mostly for power? Is the little guy usually right? This code of enduring

message was developed in part to test the question of whether the press has certain unconscious social, cultural or even political biases, such as toward establishmentarianism, negativism, etc. These are biases or predilections that go beyond narrative story telling which journalists might more readily acknowledge as a more necessary way of ordering the news to make it interesting.

Background

The debate over journalistic bias is badly divided. Critics, particularly conservatives, see strong evidence of liberal bias in the personal characteristics of journalists. Studies noting a preponderance of journalists voting for Democratic presidential candidates, or widespread secularism, are cited as proof that journalists are disproportionately liberal. Many journalists and some other academic work counter that journalistic conventions such as fairness and balance help journalists overcome these personal biases, or that these personal characteristics are overwhelmed by other journalistic predilections, such as a desire to look tough, or an orientation toward conflict.

The debate is only intensifying as the press becomes more interpretative in its coverage and as the expanding media spectrum has created new genres of communication, many of which market themselves as alternatives to the liberal media.

Little empirical evidence exists to test these competing arguments. Studies of bias tend to have taken the approach of identifying an objective record on matters where there is statistical research, and then comparing the coverage to that research.

This study is a first step in trying to approach this area by creating several variables that might together provide a picture of the predilections of the press, notably topic, trigger, narrative frame and underlying or enduring message.

Frame

The findings suggest that the notion that the press builds most stories around just a couple of story telling frames, such as conflict, is untrue. Newspapers, at least in their front pages, employ a variety of frames, and no one of them dominates.

The study identified thirteen possible frames for news stories to test our hypotheses on what we think journalists commonly use. The frames were:

- **Straight news account:** No dominant narrative frame other than outlining the basic who, what, when where, why and how
- **Conflict Story:** A focus on conflict inherent to the situation or brewing among the players
- **Consensus Story:** An emphasis on the points of agreement around an issue or event
- **Conjecture Story:** A focus around conjecture or speculation of what is to come Process
- **Story:** An explanation of the process of something or how something works Historical
- **Outlook:** How the current news fits into history
- **Horse Race:** Who is winning and who is losing
- **Trend Story:** The news as an ongoing trend
- **Policy Explored:** A focus on exploring policy and its impact
- **Reaction Story:** A response or reaction from one of the major players
- **Reality Check:** A close look into the veracity of a statement made or information given
- **Wrongdoing Exposed:** The uncovering of wrongdoing or injustice
- **Personality Profile:** A profile of the newsmaker

The most commonly employed narrative frame is a straight news account (the inverted pyramid). These are stories in which no particular narrative element dominates other than presenting who, what, when, where, why and how as in a story about a day in the war in Kosovo that takes account of various stray events that occurred that day. It is a fact-based approach to presenting the news, organized only in some random descending evaluation of importance. This straight news frame accounted for 16%, or just under one in five, front page stories.

However, this traditional straight news frame might be considered rather small, if one notes that the other frames all involve some level of interpretativeness.

Moreover, if one begins to group similar or related frames, certain patterns begin to emerge.

For instance, three frames we might call combative, (building stories around

conflict, horse race handicapping and revealing wrongdoing or injustice) when added together did account for a sizable number of all front page stories, 30%.

A fourth frame, in which the press provides a reality check or pulls back the curtain to reveal that something is not quite what it was stated to be, comprised another 7% of stories. If one believes that this reality check or ironic frame is similar and might be grouped with conflict, horse race and wrongdoing, it would raise the total of these frame to close to four out of every ten stories.

Similarly, three frames that might be grouped as explanatory because they explained how something works, its history, or placed it in the context of an ongoing trend, together accounted for 12% of stories.

Stories built around exploring policy amounted to 8% of stories.

Stories that spun the news forward and were built around speculation or conjecture about the future amounted to another 9% of stories.

Building stories around personality amounted to 7%.

Finding the points of agreement or common ground accounted for just 6% of stories.

Stories that were constructed around official responses to an earlier event made up 4% of stories.

In short, the press has taken on a decidedly interpretative cast in its presentation of the news. Building stories around conflict, winners and losers and revealing either injustice or irony has become the most common way of framing the news.

The fact based approach, through straight news accounts or the classic second-day response story, accounts for about half as many stories as the combative mode.

Building stories around explanation--of how something worked, how it relates to a larger trend or how it evolved to this point--is another common set of frames, but at 12% is perhaps far less common than might be anticipated given how often journalists now argue that the contemporary role of print is to offer analysis and explanation.

Building stories around the points of agreement where actual policy making or problem solving likely will occur is relegated to only a small portion of front page news, less than one in ten of all stories. This is true even though, in the case of say the Clinton impeachment, the Senate vote pending through

the period of the study was never in doubt and the points of agreement on this overwhelmed the areas of dispute.

Placement

If one looks at how prominently stories were played on the front page, it tends to slightly reinforce the competitive frames of horse race, conflict, and injustice. They account for 35% of all lead stories, versus their overall representation as 31% of all stories. Conversely, the three explanatory frames (history, process and trends) are placed in the lead position only 8% of the time, even though they represent 13% of all stories. They are much more likely to appear on the lower half of the page, where they make up 17%, or nearly one in five stories.

The lower half of the page was more of a mix. The competitive frames fell to just over a quarter (27%); both policy exploration (10% vs. 9% overall) and personality profiles (9% vs. 8% overall) had the slightest increases in appearance versus their general representation.

The placement of these frames might suggest that journalists tend to view conflict, wrongdoing and the winning and losing more important or urgent and therefore more deserving of lead placement. Or it could suggest that even if journalists themselves do not think the conflict is that important, they believe that a competitively framed story is more likely to appeal to readers and therefore should be near the top of the page. Whatever the reason, stories framed around competitiveness (conflict, winning and losing and wrongdoing) are placed in such a way as to convey greater news value.

Local versus National Papers

There were some noticeable differences in the way local and regional papers in the study framed stories versus the three national papers, the Washington Post, the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. The differences suggest that the front pages of local papers carry more straight forward reporting that focuses on the facts of a news event while the reporting in the nationals is more interpretative.

Local publications were twice as likely to run straight news accounts as were national papers, 21% versus 11%. Local journalists were also more likely to frame a story around the process of explaining how something works (5% versus 2%), such as a background piece about how the space shuttle flies or the steps to filing your tax return.

National papers, on the other hand, were more likely to look at the big picture when using explanatory narrative frames. They were almost twice as likely as local papers to develop stories as on-going trends or through the lense of historical outlook, (11% versus 7%).

There was little difference between national and local papers when it came to building stories around conflict, horse race or wrong doing. National papers did so 31% of the time while locals did it 28% of the time.

In addition to the overall trends, there were some interesting findings within the individual papers studied. The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, was nearly as likely to run a personality profile on the front page (9%) as they were to run a policy exploration frame (10%). Only 7% of the time did it carry a straight news frame just about half as often as it carried frames of conflict (13%). The *L.A. Times*, incidentally, ran significantly more front page stories than did any other paper in the study.

The *New York Times*, the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* were the most likely of the papers studied to run frames of conflict. They each employed this frame in roughly one out of every six stories (15%).

The *Idaho Statesman* was more than twice as likely as any other paper to develop a story that explains how something works (8% vs. 3% overall). It also framed stories around an exploration of policy more than others, 12% of the time, a level only matched by the *Atlanta Journal*. These tendencies suggest a perhaps unconscious bias in journalists toward approaching certain types of news the same way over and over. Not only can this lead to less interesting writing, it could very well cause a journalist to miss the real story or fail to serve the public as intended. If a journalist usually develops stories triggered by a government statement around conflict and horse race, there is a good chance he or she may miss an opportunity to explain the process of what's occurring or how it fits into other moments in history.

Trigger

In addition to identifying what narrative frames journalists used to present the news, the study tried to find what "triggered" each story to become news in the first place. Was a poll released? Did a news maker make a statement? Did the news organization decide to engage in enterprise on this topic? We called this factor the trigger.

We identified 19 possible triggers that would have made events into news. These ranged from statements by government news makers, anniversaries of events and new incremental facts to enterprise stories initiated by the news organization. (See appendix for complete list). Of these, five triggers dominated the news. They were:

1. Statement by government news maker
2. News organization enterprise
3. Analysis or interpretation
4. Preview of event
5. Release of report or poll

The next most common were statements by non-government news makers, followed by actions or events involving non-government news makers.

Among front page stories, we find that stories that have been triggered by similar events are often written around the same frame. This relationship between trigger and frame may be a natural one: preview stories tended to be framed around conjecture and speculation more than around other frames. Other relationships between the frame of a story and the event that triggered it, however, may be less natural and reflect attitudes inside the newsroom culture.

For instance, in stories triggered by statements of government officials (the most common single news trigger), there was a definite predilection toward combativeness and conflict. Four-in-ten of these stories focused on conflict (21%), horse race (13%) or wrongdoing (5%)--higher than for other triggers.

Stories triggered by the news organization trying to analyze or interpret events also showed a trend toward conflict. These stories were nearly three times as likely to be framed around conflict inherent in the story as around points of agreement (13% versus 5%). This is in line with how often these frames appeared overall.

Stories stemming from newsroom enterprise, where a journalist actively goes out and gets the story, had their own tendencies. Almost half of the time, they were framed as ongoing trends (21%) or in-depth profiles of an individual (24%). Only 10% of these enterprise stories were reported around frames perhaps more useful to citizens: explaining how something worked (4%) or deeply examining a particular policy issue (6%).

As might be expected, stories triggered by a released poll or report were normally framed as an explanation of how things worked (19%), ongoing trends (24%) or reality checks (17%). Although these are the most natural frames for this trigger, it may be worth journalists' time to think about whether or not these are always the most useful frames. Rarely were poll stories framed with much historical context or around exploring the policy issues on which the poll touched.

What Triggers a Frame

These findings raise another question: If we look at each narrative frame alone, how often did it stem from a particular trigger? In other words, how closely do journalists associate each frame depending on where the story originated? The study suggests some clear tendencies.

Nearly four-in-ten times a journalist frames a story around an explanation, a released research report has been the trigger. Similarly, four-in-ten times an ongoing trend frame is adopted, the newsroom has used enterprise to get

the story.

Nearly half the time a story is framed around speculation, it is either triggered as a preview story or by the journalist's own attempt at analysis or interpretation. Nearly half of all personality profile frames emerge from news triggered by the journalist's use of enterprise.

Further, journalists were much more likely to frame stories around conflict rather than agreement when they initiated through their own enterprise. Enterprise framed three times more of the conflict triggers (9%) than of the point of agreement triggers (3%).

Journalists also tended to associate the frames of wrongdoing and injustice and horse race with government action or speech. Nearly half (49%) of the horse race frames occurred with this trigger as did more than one third (35%) of wrongdoing and injustice frames.

Impeachment and Kosovo

According to this study, front page coverage of the Clinton impeachment trial at least for January and February was triggered a significant amount of the time by journalists wanting to do their own analysis and interpretation but relied much more on the actions of those involved. One-in-five impeachment stories were triggered by analysis, compared to nearly three-out-of-five (59%) that were triggered by a statement or action by a government official.

Similarly, journalists' coverage of Kosovo relied much more on news triggered by the government (63%) than it did on their own analysis and interpretation (10%).

Still, analysis and interpretation were treated with importance. A story with that trigger was more likely to be placed in the lead (1st, 2nd or 3rd) as it was to be lower on the page. The same was true of stories triggered by preview information.

Underlying Message

In addition to the elements of frame and trigger, the study sought to examine a third component: whether there are certain underlying cultural messages, broad beliefs or even folkloric morals implicit in the news. For the purpose of this pilot study, the research team developed a long trial list of such messages.

For example, "a newcomer brings a breath of fresh air;" or "big business is greedy and unfeeling;" or "bad stuff happens to good people." The question was whether these messages were evident, in what patterns and how often. Some of the trial messages were contradictory, to test whether stories

tended to one side of the scale. For instance, "advances in technology make life better" or "advances in technology make modern life worse."

In this initial attempt to create the variable in a way that would reach satisfactory intercoder reliability, a certain percentage of the stories defaulted into categories too broad to be useful in this analysis. The variable will be refined before undertaking the larger study. Yet, these limited numbers do suggest some things to look for in the next phase.

The long list of underlying messages is organized into eight broad categories. They are:

- **Protectiveness:** Protectiveness included messages such as life should be risk-free and certain groups or ideas should not be slighted.
- **Littleguyism:** The individual is favored over the system and the institution. Life outside big cities is pure and uncomplicated. Nostalgia for how things used to be: New ideas are dangerous; modern advances make life worse.
- **Optimism:** Perseverance pays off; modern advances make life better; people deserve another chance.
Anti-Establishmentarianism: The system doesn't work or judges unfairly; government can't get anything right.
- **Realism:** Nobody is perfect; we go over board protecting certain groups or ideas.
- **Distrustfulness:** Most everyone is a liar; big business is greedy; politicians are in it for the money.
- **Fatalism:** People get what they deserve; Nothing ever changes or gets done.

Even though a number of stories defaulted out of underlying message because the variable is a work in progress, a sizable number of stories—roughly four-in-ten—were still identified as having an underlying message. Of these stories with clearly identified messages, a wide variety appeared on the front pages. The most common were those with optimistic themes such as perseverance pays off or the system is working (27%). Other common messages were those of protectiveness (15%), those that support "the little guy" (15%) and those that speak against the establishment (15%).

National and local papers had similar trends in their use of enduring messages but national papers were more likely to contain anti-establishment messages (16% versus 13%) and messages of distrust such as government can't get anything right (9% versus 5%).

Triggers Associated with Messages

Examining what triggers were most often associated with particular messages suggests some tendencies among journalists. As might be expected, messages were more likely to appear in stories triggered by journalistic enterprise, or analysis and interpretation. Over half (52%) of all the stories that contained underlying messages stemmed from these triggers. And while optimistic messages were likely to arise from these triggers, the messages most often look skeptically or pessimistically at society.

Nearly half of all anti-establishment messages were developed from enterprising triggers (31%) or analysis and interpretation (16%). More than a third of messages with a bias toward the little guy or the underdog appeared in stories triggered by enterprise (23%) or analysis (13%). Similarly, a third of distrustful messages came from one of these two triggers. So did four-in-ten messages with a nostalgic overtone.

Looked at another way, over half (57%) of all stories triggered by journalists themselves (either analysis or enterprise) and carrying an enduring message, contained a tone of discontent. Only a quarter of the messages were optimistic in nature.

These findings suggest that when a story originates from a journalist's own initiative, he or she may be coloring the information provided with a subtle and even unconscious personal or professional perspective. And the messages are fairly predictable, laced with a sense of discontent about the way things are going. These preliminary findings will be explored further in the large study and will be enhanced by a refined set of message categories that can be more effectively coded.

But even these preliminary findings suggest that journalists may have a set of subtle cultural inclinations or perspectives that influence how the news is presented.

Frames Associated with Messages

As with story trigger, the interconnectedness of message and frame reveal some clear associations. Optimistic messages are likely to be paired with frames of on-going trends (23%) or points of agreement (12%). As one might expect, nearly four-in-ten messages with a protective tone (38%) are associated with stories framed around uncovering wrongdoing and injustice.

Four out of ten messages of distrust are also likely to be associated with stories framed around uncovering wrongdoing and injustice. A similar percentage (39%) of messages sympathetic to the little guy occur in frames of in-depth profiles. This might suggest that journalists tend to choose profiles that are either about someone up against the odds or a powerful

figure who treats others unjustly.

Again, some of these associations may be natural. What matters, though, is whether journalists realize their tendencies and how it might influence the way they choose to select stories, and report them.

Topic

The range of topics was spread fairly evenly. With one exception, the seven papers studied demonstrated no clear pattern as to which story topics made page one and which didn't. The most dominant topic was politics, though the study occurred at the height of the impeachment process, so this number comes as no surprise and is likely higher than it might be at another time. Politics made up 26% of all the stories on the front page in the study.

Other than this quite possibly anomalous finding, no other topic stood out. But there were some interesting associations between topic and frame.

More than four-in-ten crime stories were told through combative frames [wrongdoing (26%), conflict (14%) and horserace (2%)]. Two-in-ten (22%) had straight news frames.

Stories about defense and foreign affairs were also most likely to have a combative frame. They did so one-third of the time. This topic also tended to be framed as conjecture about what is happening (13%) or as straight news (17%).

Nearly half (48%) of all political stories, which again were largely stories about the Clinton impeachment trial, had a combative frame. Fourteen percent were written as straight news, and in only 9% did journalists follow points of agreement.

A quarter of all economic and business stories were written as ongoing trends. Another quarter (26%) were either speculative (17%) or reality checks on the veracity of information (10%). Journalists may see this as the most effective way to help readers digest and understand complex financial stories.

One-third of all soft news stories (entertainment, human interest, popular culture, news media) were framed as profiles of famous people. Another 17% were framed as on-going trends.

Journalists seem to use a wide variety of frames for the topic of education and social issues. One-fifth (22%) were combative in nature. One-fifth (20%) were ongoing trends. One-fifth (21%) were policy exploration, and the remaining two-fifths were scattered among the other frames.

The topics of health and medicine and of science and technology lent

themselves to frames of explanation (process, ongoing trends or historical outlook). Journalists used these frames 44% of the time for health and medicine stories. That is three times as often as their use overall. Journalists used these frames 39% of the time for stories about science and technology.

Conclusions

There is a multifaceted value to this approach of analyzing potential predilections in news coverage. By identifying and quantifying how the news is framed we can see one set of journalistic norms, i.e. story-telling techniques. By identifying the triggers that make events into news we can see another set of norms, i.e. the dominant sources of origination for news. Topic offers a guide to which kinds of stories attract which triggers and frames. The underlying message factor introduces yet another element--the sense of how cultural, class and even potentially political bias is interlaced with these other factors. By assessing these factors separately, we hope to be able to come to understand how the topic of a story and where it came from may influence how it is told. Eventually we hope to identify the more subliminal themes news stories may reinforce.

We do not mean to imply that there is anything wrong with framing the news. Frames are a necessary way of organizing information to make it more coherent and interesting and to put it into perspective. What ultimately deserves more reflection by journalists is whether their use of frames is balanced. The data suggests a perhaps unconscious bias in journalists toward approaching certain types of news the same way over and over. There may be too great a tendency to view the news through combative frames. Explanatory frames are underused, points of agreement are undervalued, and policy is undernourished. In addition, journalists may rely on certain frames too reflexively, especially for certain kinds of stories. News that is too formulaic and familiar becomes less interesting and less useful. Journalists framing by rote may be failing to ask the right questions, choose the right stories and serve the public as they intend. If journalists usually develop stories triggered by government action around conflict and horse race, there is a good chance they will miss an opportunity to explain the process, how policy will effect people's lives or how it all fits into other moments of history.

The element of underlying message may help journalists to begin to address the more elusive question of bias in a less defensive and more open-minded way. In the next phase of this study, we hope to refine this measurement to introduce the element of ideological tendencies. A crucial task will be doing so in a way that expands the definition of bias to one that journalists inculcated in the spirit of fairness and balance might recognize and acknowledge.

Methodology

Source Selection

Newspapers were selected to insure diversity in geography, demographics and ownership. There were also designations between national newspapers and local/regional newspapers. Nationals were defined as those dailies where national and foreign desks were fully staffed and there was no institutional reliance on the A.P. or other wire services for the production of front page stories. Locals/Regionals were defined as those dailies with substantial circulation in large metropolitan areas, with resources concentrated on their local/regional desks, and significant use of A.P. or other wire service stories on their front pages.

National Papers:

- The Los Angeles Times
- The New York Times
- The Washington Post

Local/Regional Papers:

- The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Constitution Edition)
- The Boise Idaho Statesman
- The (Denver) Rocky Mountain News
- The Minneapolis Star-Tribune

Home editions of each newspaper were received via mail subscriptions. In cases where a particular day's edition was not received, front page stories and layout were reconstructed via LEXIS-NEXIS and Library of Congress resources.

Screening and Inclusion

Front pages were screened by the project director or the coding supervisor to determine story inclusion. Stories were defined by the presence of either a byline or a dateline. Story summaries or indices reflecting content fully presented elsewhere in the newspaper were not included. When photographs with captions appeared on page one, with a reference to an interior story, such cases were also systematically excluded from this analysis.

Coding

The front page of each of these daily newspapers were screened by the project director or the coding supervisor to label the prominence of front page stories, using a right-to-left rule. The only exception to this rule was in the case of the Rocky Mountain News, which employs a tabloid layout format. For the Rocky Mountain News, all stories on Page 2 and Page 4 were included in this analysis; an inside-out rule was used to determine prominence in story position for that paper.

All other inventory variables (Source, Date, Length, Wire Service, and Dateline) were completed by members of the coding team. Each story was also coded for the content and construction variables (Recurring Leads, Topic, Story Trigger, Story Frame, and Headline/Subhead Agreement) by a member of the coding team.

The experimental variable -- Enduring Message -- was initially coded by coding team members as they reviewed each individual story. This variable was later recoded by the project director or coding supervisor. The analysis presented herein reflects recoded data.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability measures the extent to which two coders, working independently, reach the same coding decisions. Excluding the experimental variable, Enduring Message, intercoder reliability reached or exceeded 92% in all cases.

Data Analysis

Data gathered in this study was not weighted or screened to create hypothetical situations for analysis. During the time period examined (January 1, 1999 - February 28, 1999) the Clinton impeachment trial occurred and received prominent coverage on the front page of the nation's newspapers. These stories have not been filtered from the dataset to create a more "typical" picture. Rather, they are included to present a view of newspaper front page content during a time period dominated by a major news event.

Topline

All Stories N=2269
 National Papers N=1208
 Regional Papers N=1061

| 1. SOURCE | <u>All Papers</u> # | <u>Natl. Papers</u> # | <u>Reg. Papers</u> # |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Atlanta Journal</i> | 210 | - | 210 |
| <i>Boise Idaho Statesman</i> | 313 | - | 313 |
| <i>Denver Rocky Mountain News</i> | 285 | - | 285 |
| <i>Los Angeles Times</i> | 457 | - | 457 |
| <i>Minneapolis Star-Tribune</i> | 253 | - | 253 |
| <i>New York Times</i> | 373 | 373 | - |
| <i>Washington Post</i> | 378 | 378 | - |
| | | | |
| 2. DATE | <u>All Papers</u> % | <u>Natl. Papers</u> % | <u>Reg. Papers</u> % |
| January 1999 | 53 | 53 | 54 |
| February 1999 | 47 | 47 | 46 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | |
| 3. WIRE SERVICE | <u>All Papers</u> % | <u>Natl. Papers</u> % | <u>Reg. Papers</u> % |
| Staff Reporter(s) | 83 | 100 | 64 |
| AP Wire | 5 | - | 11 |
| Gannett/ <i>USA Today</i> | 1 | - | 2 |
| Hearst | * | - | * |
| Knight-Ridder | * | - | 1 |
| Reuters | - | - | - |
| Scripps-Howard | 1 | - | 3 |
| UPI | - | - | - |
| Newspaper-owned Wire Service (excluding self-owned) | 7 | - | 15 |
| Combo - Staff/News Service | 2 | - | 3 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Other Wire Service | 1 | - | 1 |
| Don't Know/Can't Tell | * | - | * |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| 4. DATELINE | | <u>All Papers</u> % | <u>Natl. Papers</u> % | <u>Reg. Papers</u> % |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| California | Los Angeles | 7 | 13 | * |
| | Sacramento | 1 | 2 | * |
| | San Francisco | * | 1 | - |
| | California - Other | 1 | 2 | - |
| Colorado | Denver | 8 | * | 16 |
| | Colorado-Other | 1 | - | 1 |
| District of Columbia | Washington, D.C. | 35 | 43 | 25 |
| Georgia | Atlanta | 5 | 2 | 11 |
| | Georgia-Other | * | - | * |
| Idaho | Boise | 7 | - | 15 |
| | Idaho-Other | 1 | * | 1 |
| Minnesota | Minneapolis/St. Paul | 7 | * | 14 |
| | Minnesota-Other | * | - | 1 |
| New York | Albany | * | * | - |
| | New York City | 6 | 10 | 1 |
| | New York-Other | * | * | * |
| Other U.S. Dateline | | 7 | 8 | 7 |
| NOT A U.S. DATELINE | | 14 | 19 | 8 |
| Total | | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| 5. RECURRING BIG STORY | <u>All Papers</u> % | <u>Natl. Papers</u> % | <u>Reg. Papers</u> % |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clinton/Senate trial | 18 | 19 | 16 |
| State of the Union speech | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Presidential Candidates - 2000 Race | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| New Year's/Millennium/Y2K | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| New Administrations/Inaugurations | 3 | 2 | 5 |

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| State Legislative Sessions | 2 | * | 3 |
| Olympic Scandal | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| NFL Playoffs | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| NBA Strike - Settlement & Season Begins | 1 | 1 | * |
| Michael Jordan's Retirement | * | * | * |
| Severe U.S. Weather Conditions | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| U.S./Iraqi Conflict | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Serb/Armenian Conflict in Kosovo | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| King Hussein of Jordan | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Intl. Currency Issues/Non-Europe | 1 | 2 | - |
| Pope's Travels | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Federal Budget/Surplus Proposals | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Balloon trips | * | - | 1 |
| Politics in Post Clinton-Lewinsky Era | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| American Airlines Pilots Strike | 1 | 1 | * |
| Kurds Leader Arrest | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Texas Racism Trial | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Not a Big Story | 53 | 54 | 50 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| 6. TOPIC | <u>All Papers</u> % | <u>Natl. Papers</u> % | <u>Reg. Papers</u> % |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Accidents/Catastrophes/Disasters/Weather | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Civic Action (non-gov't) | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Civilization/Culture/Arts | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Consumer News | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Crime | 10 | 9 | 11 |
| Defense/Foreign Affairs | 10 | 12 | 8 |
| Economics and Business | 6 | 7 | 5 |
| Environment/Development | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Health/Medicine | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Human Interest/Pop Culture/Entertainment | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Politics/Strategy | 26 | 26 | 26 |
| Policy/Legislation | 7 | 6 | 10 |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Religion | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Science/Technology | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Sports | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Social Welfare/Education | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Non-U.S. Internal Affairs | 4 | 6 | 1 |
| Other | * | * | * |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| 7. STORY TRIGGER | All Papers % | Natl. Papers % | Reg. Papers % |
|---|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Spontaneous/Unplanned News/Action | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Investigation | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Enterprise | 15 | 18 | 10 |
| Poll Results Released | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Research/Report Released | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Incremental Fact(s)/Story Update | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Anniversary News | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Trial Balloon | * | * | * |
| Analysis/Interpretation | 12 | 15 | 8 |
| Preview/Forward Look/Curtain-Raiser | 9 | 8 | 10 |
| Executive (Governmental) Action | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Govt. Agency Action (includes police/prosecutors) | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Judicial Action | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Legislative/Legislator Action | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| Newsmaker Action or Event (non-govt) | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Newsmaker Statement (non-govt.) | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Newsmaker Statement (govt. - leg. or exec.) | 19 | 17 | 22 |
| Candidate Action | - | - | - |
| New Emerging Figure | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | * | * | * |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| 8. STORY FRAME/ANGLE | All Papers | Natl. Papers | Reg. Papers |
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|

| | % | % | % |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Consensus | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Conflict | 13 | 13 | 12 |
| Speculation | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| Process | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Historical | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Horserace | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| Trend | 7 | 9 | 6 |
| Reaction/Response | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Personality/Profile | 7 | 8 | 6 |
| Policy Exploration | 8 | 9 | 8 |
| Reality Check | 7 | 8 | 6 |
| Straight News | 16 | 11 | 21 |
| Wrongdoing/Injustice | 8 | 9 | 8 |
| Other | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| 9. UNDERLYING MESSAGE | <u>All Papers</u> % | <u>Natl. Papers</u> % | <u>Reg. Papers</u> % |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Protectiveness <i>Blame assigned - someone/somthing is always at fault</i> <i>Life should be risk-free</i> <i>Certain groups/ideas should not be slighted/denigrated</i> | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Little Guy <i>Little is good, big is bad</i> <i>Little guy is just vs. big guy/system is wrong</i> <i>Newcomer is a breath of fresh air</i> <i>People/life outside big cities are/is pure or uncomplicated</i> | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| Nostalgia <i>New ideas are dangerous</i> <i>Modern advances make life worse/artificial</i> <i>Life was better in the old days</i> <i>Science and tech. make faster than can be understood</i> <i>More data is confusing and makes decisions more difficult</i> | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Fatalism <i>Nothing ever changes or gets done</i> <i>Some people iust can't be saved</i> | 4 | 4 | 4 |

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Bad stuff happens to good people People get what they deserve</i> | | | |
| Optimism <i>Perseverance pays off Change is in the air The system is working: everything is o.k. People deserve another chance Modern science/tech. is making life better</i> | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| Realism <i>We go overboard protecting certain groups/ideas Get real - it's not a big thing - nobody's perfect</i> | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Anti-Establishment <i>The system doesn't work or is on overload Government can't get anything right The system judges unfairly</i> | 5 | 6 | 4 |
| Distrustful <i>Big Business is greedy and unfeeling Politicians only after power/money/poll approval Lying/chicanery - most everyone is a liar or cheat</i> | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Sit Up/Historic <i>Pay attention - this is significant Sit up and take notice</i> | 17 | 16 | 18 |
| Others/Non-specified | 7 | 9 | 5 |
| No Message ID'd | 40 | 36 | 44 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | |
| 10. HEADLINE/SUBHEAD AGREEMENT | All Papers % | Natl. Papers % | Reg. Papers % |
| Headline/Subhead in agreement | 61 | 59 | 63 |
| Headline weakened by Subhead | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Headline/Subhead in strong disagreement | * | - | * |
| No Subhead in story | 36 | 39 | 34 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |