

Rice can be good for you

Coverage on George W. Bush in the US media 2001 – 2005

Research Links
<http://www.pollingreport.com/BushJob.htm>
<http://www.pollingreport.com/BushFav.htm>

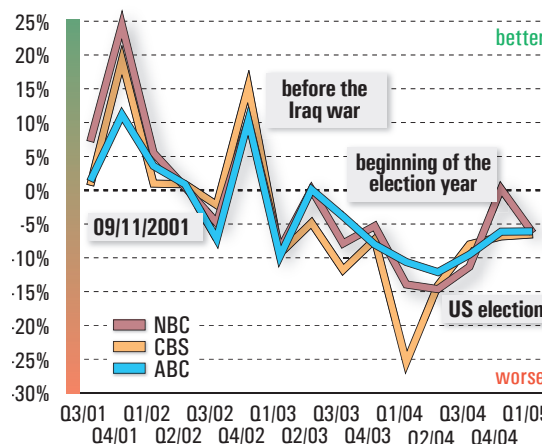
The US media have followed President Bush into the start of his second term relatively modestly, as is shown by a long-term **Media Tenor** analysis. Although coverage in the prime time news of the three big networks **ABC**, **NBC** and **CBS** continued to be predominantly negative during the first quarter of 2005, it was significantly better than a year before, at the beginning of the election year. Yet, Bush has not reached the positive media image of his first year in office, when he was evaluated very positively, in particular after the attacks of September 11th, 2001.

For this study, all statements from and about Bush were analyzed on two levels: What is the topical context in which he is described or quoted, and who evaluates him in what way. The result was nearly balanced in the first quarter of 2005, as illustrated by **graph 1**. One year ago, **CBS news** in particular had reported on Bush very critically – at that time still led by the legendary anchorman Dan Rather. The excess of negative as opposed to positive statements was 25.4% at that time. In Germany, the same number was measured for Joschka Fischer during the peak of the visa affair.

Graph 2 shows that, as early as the beginning of 2002, when Bush was scoring record high pop-

ularity ratings, **CBS** was already reporting less favorably on the President than its competitors. During the 2004 election year, **CBS** came under attack because the station had based its criticism in part on forged documents. Probably in consequence, Dan Rather retired from the anchor position this year. At the beginning of 2005, the **CBS** news did not cover the President more negatively than the competition. All told, network television

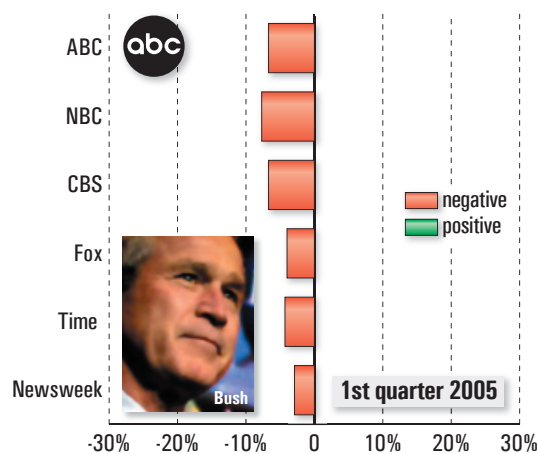
1 Evaluation of Bush in ABC, NBC and CBS news



Balance of positive and negative assessments

Source: Media Tenor 07/01/2004 – 03/31/2005 Basis: 13,605 (ABC) /16,592 (NBC) /13,867 (CBS) statements by or about Bush

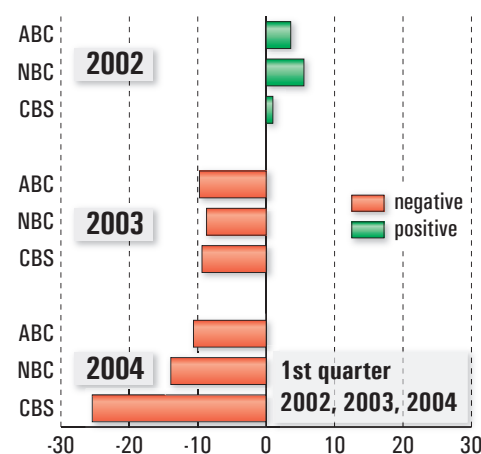
2 Evaluation of George W. Bush: 1st quarter 2005



Balance of positive and negative assessments

Source: Media Tenor 01/01 – 03/31/2005 10,255/9,186 statements by or about Bush in 6 media

Evaluation of George W. Bush: 1st quarter 2002, 2003, 2004



Balance of positive and negative assessments

Source: Media Tenor 1st quarter 2002, 2003, 2004 10,255/9,186 statements by or about Bush in 6 media

Mood swing:
 At the beginning of 2005, CBS news did not report more negatively on the President than its competitors.

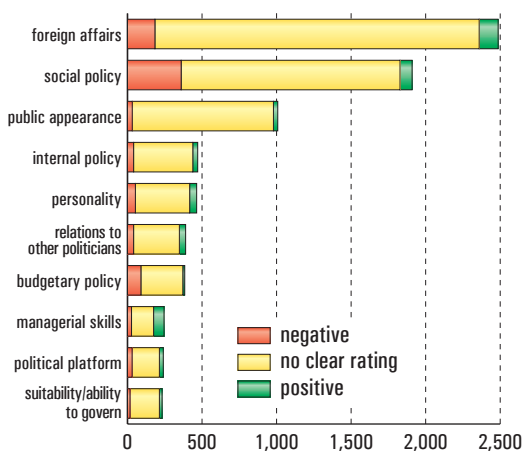
news coverage is still more critical towards Bush than the conservative **Fox News**, or the weekly magazines **Time** and **Newsweek**. The weeklies stressed the leadership qualities of President Bush more prominently and did not pass quite negative a judgment on other topics.

Ever since September 11th, foreign policy has continued to be the main focus of coverage on the US President. Among other things, his media image always depended on the outcome of military operations such as the ones in Afghanistan or Iraq. In the first quarter of 2005, his evaluation was balanced on the whole, as shown by **graph 3**. All through the 2004 election year, foreign policy had been a negative issue for Bush.

Bush was able to profit from the positive reactions on the first free elections in Iraq, as well as the appointment of his new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. In the coverage after Bush's inauguration at the end of January, Condoleezza Rice was an asset in the government's media image, when positive statements clearly outweighed the negative ones, as graph 4 illustrates. Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld were evaluated far more critically.

However, President Bush's second term also appears strongly in the light of the country's main economic and socio-political challenges: budget deficits and Social Security as the Baby Boomers begin to retire – sooner than for example in Germany. The Bush coverage gives more attention to such topics than before the 2004 elections. Yet,

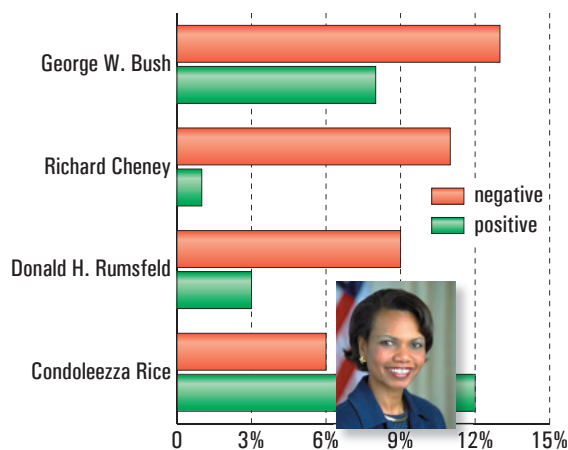
3 Topics of coverage on Bush 01 – 03/2005



Share of negative/positive assessments

Source: Media Tenor 01/01/ - 03/31/2005 7,829 statements by or about Bush on these issues on ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, Time, Newsweek

4 Evaluation of leading politicians in the Bush administration



Share of negative/positive statements

Source: Media Tenor 01/20 - 03/31/2005 Basis: 10,735 statements by or about Bush, Rice, Rumsfeld, Cheney in ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, Time, Newsweek

this is where the President's media image is at its weakest. Television news programs, in particular, give the President bad marks on his social and retirement policies: Almost one in five statements on this subject matter are negative. He appears to be similarly weak on budget deficits, although this topic is addressed less frequently.

Moreover, television stations have returned to portraying the economic situation slightly more critically than, for example, during the election month in November 2004. Every presidential election also tends to be a referendum on how satisfied US citizens are with the economic situation. In March 2005, even the conservative **Fox News** assessed the situation as critically as **ABC**, **NBC** and **CBS** prime time news. The President obviously cannot convince on the important field of economic and social policy. His current popularity rating is therefore little better than a year ago. In order to convince significantly more of his compatriots, the media image of the President would have to brighten up some more. Ret.

Basis:

Media: ABC World News Tonight, NBC Nightly News and CBS Evening News, Fox News Special Report with Brit Hume, Newsweek, Time

Time: 07/01/2001 – 03/31/2005

Analysis: All statements by or about George Bush and leading members of his administration; all descriptions of the US-economic situation

Open questions:

In the US, second-term presidents are often seen as "lame ducks". How will this affect Bush's media image?

Will Bush be able to profit from better evaluations of his foreign policy, or will economic and socio-political problems dominate?

Will Condoleezza Rice continue to be perceived as an asset in the US administration?