



League of Women Voters of Ohio
Education Fund imPACT E-Newsletter

Study shows that TV news broadcasts do little to inform voters on the issues and candidates.....

Most Americans get their news from television, but how much did TV viewers learn before they stepped into the voting booth for the 2006 elections? A recent study found that TV news failed to inform Midwest viewers about the candidates and issues central to the election.

The study, conducted by the [Midwest News Index](#), shows that in the month leading up to last year's midterm elections, local news viewers got much more information about campaigns from paid political advertisements than from actual news coverage. One in ten election stories involved a specific campaign ad, resulting in what the researchers called an "echo effect" of the ads themselves driving what television journalists cover.

Some alarming findings:

- Local television newscasts average 36 seconds of election coverage in typical 30-minute broadcast.
- By contrast, the typical early- and late-evening local news broadcasts contained more than 10 minutes of advertising, over seven minutes of sports and weather, and almost two and a-half minutes of crime stories.
- In coverage of elections, strategy and horserace stories vastly outweighed substantive issue coverage by a margin of almost 3 to 1 (63 percent to 23 percent).

The Midwest News Index is a project of the University of Wisconsin's NewsLab, funded by the **Joyce Foundation**, that captures and analyzes news archives from any media market in real time. "Although it is the single greatest source of news information for most Americans, studies have consistently shown that citizens learn little from local news," says Ken Goldstein, the political science professor who directs the NewsLab. "The results from this study show why. There must be significant substantive content for learning to take place. This study, consistent with previous studies conducted at UW NewsLab, shows that there is relatively little coverage of campaigns and elections on local news."

For the study, TV news broadcasts in Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis/St. Paul, **Cleveland, Columbus**, Madison, and Milwaukee were examined. From October 7 to November 6, 2006, an average of nearly four and a half minutes of paid political ads aired during the typical thirty-minute broadcast. But during the actual news program, just one minute and 43 seconds was devoted to news coverage of the elections. And that paltry coverage was actually a sharp increase from the average of just 36 seconds devoted to election coverage in the month following the traditional Labor Day kickoff of the 2006 election campaign.

League of Women Voters of Ohio, along with state Leagues from Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin signed on to a FCC letter in June, along with other Midwest and national organizations, requesting hearings inadequacy of local television news coverage of elections, government and public affairs in this region.

[Download the results of the latest analysis and a summary of those findings here.](#)