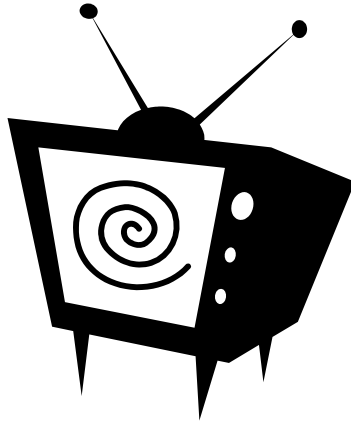


A look at 2002 election news on Columbus local television



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Summary

During the week prior to November 5, 2002, local election coverage on Columbus television stations varied widely. WBNS Channel 10 (CBS) devoted just over one hour to election coverage; WCMH Channel 4 (NBC) provided less than 50 minutes; and WSYX Channel 6 (ABC) trailed behind with under a half hour for the week. Election coverage primarily focused

on campaign strategies and polling. Viewers heard directly from candidates on Channel 4 almost one-quarter (24%) of the time. Channel 10 viewers heard from candidates approximately 20% of the time and Channel 6 viewers had the opportunity to hear from candidates 8% of the time.

On Halloween, October 31, WCMH Channel 4 viewers had the opportunity to hear from candidates for almost two minutes during the local news from 5:30-11:30 pm. WBNS Channel 10 provided almost 1 ½ minutes, and WSYX Channel 6 provided 23 seconds. Over half of the election stories included polling, strategy and predictions and did not allow viewers to hear directly from candidates or issue representatives. During the 11 pm news program, Channel 10 viewers saw two strategy stories about the election. Channel 4 viewers saw one election story about political advertising and the Supreme Court. Channel 6 did not provide any election coverage during the 11 pm news program.

There is also a notable disparity in the number ads aired by the Democratic statewide candidates and the Republican statewide candidates on October 31. Channel 6 aired eight Republican candidate ads and none from Democratic candidates. Channel 10 viewers were six times more likely to see Republican ads than Democratic ads, and Channel 4 viewers were five times more likely to see Republican ads. None of the stations aired ads from independent or third party candidates.

From November 2-November 5, 2002, Channels 4,6 and 10 generated approximately \$898,908 from political ad sales (C-MAG, 2002). All three stations aired 6,208 political ads during that period. During the week prior to Election Day (October 28-November 4, 2002), the three stations combined aired an average of 52 political ads per night during the news programs falling from 5:30-11:30 pm.

**Columbus TV stations and election stories aired
5:30-11:30 pm the week before Election Day**

| Television station | Time devoted to election stories | Time devoted to issue* | Time devoted to candidates speaking |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| | | representatives speaking | |
| WCMH Ch. 4** | 48.6 minutes | 1.7 minutes | 11.6 minutes |
| WSYX Ch. 6 | 26.2 minutes | 5 seconds | 2.1 minutes |
| WBNS Ch. 10 | 62.1 minutes | 39 seconds | 12 minutes |

Fox Ch. 28 was not included because their one-hour news program is not comparable to the three half-hour programs analyzed for the other stations. Fox also shares a news team with ABC Ch. 6.

** Issue representatives are the spokespeople for particular ballot issues. For example, a representative from the Franklin County Office on Aging comments on a ballot issue about senior services.*

***There were problems with recording on November 2, 2002. The time devoted to election stories, issue representatives and candidates is an estimate based on the highest recorded day for the week.*

Number of election stories vs. number of political ads during news programs the week prior to Election Day

| Television station | Number of election stories | Number of political ads |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| WCMH Ch. 4* | 37 | 369 |
| WSYX Ch. 6 | 28 | 359 |
| WBNS Ch. 10 | 65 | 373 |

** There were problems recording on November 2, 2002. The number of election stories and political ads for that day is an estimate based on the highest recorded day for that week.*

When the three stations are combined there are 9.5 times more political ads than election-related stories. There were 22 times more political ads than stories with time devoted to candidates or issue representatives speaking. Approximately eight hours of political ads were aired during the news programs combined, with 1,101 ads at 30 seconds each. None of the political ads aired during the news programs were from independent or third party candidates.

An overview of election stories and political ads on Oct. 31*

| Television stations | Total time | Time directly from candidates | Number of political ads |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| WCMH Ch. 4 | 7.9 minutes | 1.6 minutes | 44 |
| WSYX Ch. 6 | 1.7 minutes | 23 seconds | 52 |
| WBNS Ch. 10 | 4.1 minutes | 1.4 minutes | 53 |

**The number of political ads is based on what was aired during the three news programs at 5:30, 6:00 and 11:00 pm.*

An overview of candidate sound bites on Halloween during the 5:30, 6:00 and 11:00 pm news programs

| WCMH Channel 4 | WSYX Channel 6 | WBNS Channel 10 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gubernatorial candidate Tim Hagan: 8 sec. Congressman Dave Hobson: 73 sec. Justice Evelyn Stratton: 15 sec. | Gubernatorial candidates— Tim Hagan: 13 sec. Bob Taft: 10 sec. | Gubernatorial candidates- Tim Hagan: 14 sec. John Eastman: 19 sec. Tim Hagan: 27 sec. Bob Taft: 18 sec. Tim Hagan: 7 sec. |
| Total 1.6 minutes | Total 23 seconds | Total 1.4 minutes |

Channel 6 did not provide any election coverage during the 5:30 pm and 11:00 pm news programs on October 31, 2002. During the 5:30 pm news Channel 6 did an interview with a celebrity psychic, and during the 11 pm news they did a story on the OSU campus men “beefcakes” calendar. Channel 10 had one election story on the 5:30 pm news, but viewers did not hear directly from candidates. However, Channel 10 was the only station that gave Independent gubernatorial candidate John Eastman the opportunity to speak. On Channel 4, viewers heard from candidates on all three news programs.

*Candidate ads during news programs on Halloween**

| | Democrat Ads | Republican Ads | Democratic Statewide Candidates | Republican Statewide Candidates | Total # of Candidate Ads |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| WCMH Ch. 4 | 10 | 12 | 1 | 5 | 22 |
| WSYX Ch. 6 | 7 | 20 | 0 | 8 | 27 |
| WBNS Ch. 10 | 8 | 12 | 1** | 6 | 20 |

**Ad totals include ads paid for by the candidates and those on behalf of candidates, including independent expenditures, Political Action Committees, and political party ads.*

***This ad included all statewide candidates.*

Judicial ads during news programs on Halloween*

| | Ohio Supreme Court | Total Judicial |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| WCMH Ch. 4 | 9 | 19 |
| WSYX Ch. 6 | 6 | 19 |
| WBNS Ch. 10 | 11 | 31 |

**Ad totals include ads paid for by the candidate, those on behalf of candidates and “issue ads.”*

An overview of election stories on Halloween

| Television stations | Length of story | Summary of content |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WCMH Ch. 4 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 35 seconds 2. 58 seconds 3. 41 seconds 4. 25 seconds 5. 20 seconds 6. 28 seconds 7. 2 minutes 8. 2.4 minutes <p>Total: 7.9 minutes Time devoted to candidates speaking: 1.6 minutes</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Representative from Citizens for Safe Schools discussed school funding on the ballot. 2. Poll results for statewide races. 3. Gubernatorial polling numbers. Both major party gubernatorial candidates are accused of mudslinging. 4. President Bush is on the campaign trail for the Republicans. 5. Walter Mondale kicked off his campaign for Senate, replacing Paul Wellstone on the ballot in Minnesota. 6. Election chaos could take place in Florida again due to new ballots and equipment. 7. Dave Hobson, Republican candidate for Congress, is interviewed about why he should be re-elected. 8. Independent groups are targeting the Supreme Court with ads. Ohio Supreme Court Justice candidate Evelyn Stratton comments about the ads, and a representative from Consumers for a Fair Court responds. |
| WSYX Ch. 6 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1.7 minutes <p>Total: 1.7 minutes Time devoted to candidates speaking: 23 seconds</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governor Taft and his opponent Tim Hagan have both been accused of mudslinging in their campaigns. |
| WBNS Ch. 10 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 38 seconds 2. 43 seconds 3. 1.5 minutes 4. 55 seconds 5. 18 seconds <p>Total: 4.1 minutes</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A rally took place to support Issue 1, a ballot issue that would mandate drug treatment rather than jail. 2. Democratic candidate for governor Tim Hagan discusses the disparity of campaign funding between him and Governor Taft. |

| | | |
|--|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Time devoted to candidates speaking: 1.4 minutes | <p>3. The gubernatorial candidates are interviewed about their views on transportation.</p> <p>4. The Taft campaign is accused of distributing negative campaign literature.</p> <p>5. Supporters of Issue 3 worked the phones to get out the vote. Issue 3 provides money for schools.</p> |
|--|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Conclusion

Under funded candidates and political parties are at a disadvantage. Political ads far outweigh the amount of candidate coverage offered in the news programs, and candidates need to raise large sums of money to put out the ads. A political ad aired during *Friends* (8:00 pm Thursday) in Columbus had a price tag of \$9,000 at the end of September 2002. In Cincinnati an ad aired during *Friends* at the end of September was \$11,000. The same ad run in Columbus during an Ohio State football game was \$19,000 (The Columbus Dispatch, 2002).

All of the statewide candidates who won the election were incumbent Republicans. Governor Bob Taft generated over \$13 million while Democratic challenger Tim Hagan raised almost \$1.7 million. John Eastman, Natural Law candidate, only generated \$16,569. Eastman's total would not be enough to purchase one political ad at the end of September during an Ohio State football game in Columbus. Campaign finance scandals provided an opening for Democratic challenger Mary Boyle. However, she only generated a little over \$816,918, while the winner in the race for State Treasurer Joe Deters raised over \$3.1 million.

On all three stations combined viewers were 9.5 times more likely to see ads from Republican statewide candidates than from Democratic during news programming. Independent or minor party candidates did not run political ads. Statewide Ohio Democratic Party committees generated a little more than \$8.9 million during the 2001-2002 election cycle. Ohio Republican Party committees generated almost three times more with over \$21.2 million.

Senators John McCain (R-Arizona), Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) and Richard Durbin (D-Illinois) plan to introduce a free air time bill requiring television and radio broadcasters to provide two hours a week of candidate and issue discussion during the month leading up to the general election. The bill stipulates that one hour falls between 5:00 and 11:35 pm. The bill also creates a voucher program for candidates and political parties to purchase political ads.

WBNS Channel 10 devoted 62.1 minutes to election coverage for the week prior to the November 2002 election. This appears to meet the criteria in the bill. However, the amount of time devoted specifically to candidates and issue-centered stories fell short at 32.8 minutes. The rest of the time was used for strategy, polling and general information about the election.

Methodology

The Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund analyzed the local evening news programs from 5:30-11:30 pm during the week prior to the election (October 28-November 4, 2002). The Education Fund looked at the amount of time devoted to election stories, the amount of time candidates and issue representatives were speaking, and the number of political ads aired during the news programs. The total amount of airtime was recorded with a stopwatch. The total airtime per story is calculated by starting with the introduction by the news anchor and concluding when a new story begins.

The analysis covers WCMH Channel 4, WSYX Channel 6 and WBNS Channel 10 in Columbus. There were problems with recording Channel 4 on November 2, 2002. The time devoted to election stories, issue representatives and candidates, and the number of political ads is an estimate based on the highest recorded day for the week. Fox Channel 28 was not included in the study because it only offers one news program from 10-11 pm and shares a news team with Channel 6. Programs from 5:30-11:30 pm were included in the study to evaluate news falling within prime time viewing.

The Columbus Dispatch researched the cost of political ads during specific television programs from TV station rate books. The political ad revenue generated from November 2-November 5 for Columbus television stations was determined by C-MAG, which captures the number of ads via satellite and estimates cost based on data from the television stations. The total ad revenue is an underestimate because the cost of each ad is based on lowest unit charge. Television stations are required to apply the lowest unit charge to candidate ads. However, candidates pay more for prime spots.