

News magazine Visuals and the 1988 Presidential Election

By Sandra E. Moriarty and Mark N. Popovich

The Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates edged out the Democratic candidates in photographic coverage in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* in this study of 1988 campaign coverage. The study covered the fall campaign and measured 15 attributes of photographs (in addition to the sheer numbers), such as camera angle, whether or not the candidate was smiling or frowning, active or passive, and the manner of dress. The study found evidence that editors attempted to balance coverage between both parties. The Republican edge was not large.

►In recent years presidential elections have been monitored by scholars and research organizations to analyze the coverage of issues and agenda setting effects and to determine if there is any trace of bias in the coverage of the campaign by the press. Other analyses of that question included studies by both Meadow and Hofstetter in 1972 and a comparison by Russonello and Wolf of the 1968 and 1976 campaigns. In a study of the 1988 campaign, Ericka King also found the horse race aspects were most emphasized.¹

Bias, or preferential treatment, can be evaluated in a number of ways. Some studies look at the amount of space allocated to each candidate, others consider treatment such as position on the page, and some have evaluated the negative, positive, and neutral content. In a pioneering study using assertion analysis, Westley, et. al., investigated statements from the 1960 election and found partisan patterns in the way news magazines covered the candidates. Stempel found that George Wallace was clearly treated as a minor candidate in the 1968 election, receiving slightly more than half as much space as either of his opponents. Evarts and Stempel, however, found no identifiable bias in the coverage of the 1972 election by the networks, news magazines, or major newspapers.² For the 1988 primaries, the Center for Media and Public Affairs evaluated network broadcast coverage of candidates and found that the tone of the coverage was generally positive before the New Hampshire primary and turned negative after that point. The study found that Robertson suffered the most, while Jackson suffered the least from negative coverage.³

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This study focuses on the question of preferential treatment by looking specifically at the visual coverage of the candidates in U.S. news-magazines. It is a replication—and a continuation—of a study of news-magazine visual coverage of the 1984 campaign previously published in *Journalism Quarterly*.⁴

Visual Communication Theories

A continuing area of interest in political studies is the impact of visual communication. Is there partisanship apparent in the way visuals are used to chronicle the campaign and depict the candidates? Relevant literature is found in such diverse theoretical areas as visual communication, information processing, person perception, agenda setting, and video and film aesthetics.

Visuals are often discounted or ignored in word-oriented journalism, however, important researchers such as Doris Graber have long argued that pictures in mass communication messages convey important information that is attended to, processed, and remembered long after the words are forgotten.⁵ Visuals are more than decoration; they perform important roles in communication such as conveying realism, credibility, and attitudes. As Roy Blackwood noted in a discussion of realism and credibility, "In some cases the photos are the only representation of an event. Visuals are important as conveyers of information and shapers of attitudes."⁶

In a landmark study of the information processing of news, Doris Graber found that news pictures are invaluable for forming opinions about people, including political leaders, and that they are used to appraise credibility, attract and hold the viewer's attention, stir emotions, and produce positive and negative feelings. In terms of learning, she found that viewers believed that the pictures allowed them to form more complete and accurate impressions of people and events. She concluded that viewers in her studies confirmed what the visual communication literature suggests, namely that pictures make information transmission more realistic, accurate, and touching than is possible in purely verbal messages.⁷

Graber also found that different types of visuals command different patterns of attention. Closeups of familiar people, for example, were most likely to be noted and processed. Unfamiliar people who become noteworthy to the audience because they are in a position to express their views are also attention getting. Pictures that provide factual infor-

1. Richard Hofstetter, *Bias in the News—Network Television Coverage of the 1972 Election Campaign*, (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 1976); Erica G. King, "Thematic Coverage of the 1988 Presidential Primaries: A Comparison of *USA Today* and *The New York Times*," *Journalism Quarterly*, 67: 83-87 (1990); Joe Russonello and Frank Wolf, "Newspaper Coverage of the 1976 and 1968 Presidential Campaigns," *Journalism Quarterly*, 56: 360-364, 432 (1979); Robert G. Meadows, "Issues Emphasis and Public Opinion: The Media During the 1972 Presidential Campaign," *American Politics Quarterly*, 4: 189 (1975).

2. Bruce H. Westley, et. al., "The News Magazines and the 1960 Conventions," *Journalism Quarterly* 40: 525-531, 647 (1963); Guido H. Stempel III, "Prestige Press Meets the Third Party Challenge," *Journalism Quarterly* 46: 701 (1969); Dru Evarts and Guido H. Stempel III, "Coverage of the 1972 Campaign by TV, News Magazines and Major Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 51: 646-648 (1974).

3. "TV Study: Jackson Best, Robertson Worst," *Boulder Daily Camera*, March 15, 1988, p. 3.

4. Sandra E. Moriarty and Gina M. Garramone, "A Study of Newsmagazine Photographs of the 1984 Presidential Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly* 63: 728-734 (1986).

5. Doris Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*, 2nd ed., (White Plains NY: Longman Inc., 1988), p. 174; Sandra E. Moriarty, "The Function of Visuals in Mass Communication," IVLA Annual Conference, Madison, WI, 1986.

6. Roy Blackwood, "The Content of News Photos: Roles Portrayed by Men and Women," *Journalism Quarterly*, Winter, 1983, pp. 710-714.

7. Graber, p. 168.

mation or that further clarify verbal information, however, are largely ignored, as are establishing shots and distance shots.

Presentation

The person-perception literature focuses on self-presentation theories and techniques. When candidates use television to project themselves to voters, for example, they are primarily engaged in a form of what Kaid and Davidson call "pseudo-interpersonal communication" in which they use television's visual intimacy to portray themselves in certain ways.⁸ The presentation of a candidate's self through media is similar to an actor playing a political role, and as Nimmo and Savage explain, the role playing projects a characteristic style that reflects how the candidate wants his or her performance and personal qualities to be perceived.⁹

Jeffrey John analyzed the use of visual symbols in the television coverage of the 1988 campaign and found that both candidates used visual reference symbolism to present their campaign messages and these symbols were conveyed to readers in the network's willingness to broadcast pictures including these symbols.¹⁰

Expression, gestures, posture, setting or environment, and interaction with others are all tools used by people when they assume a role. Graber found in her studies that pictures of human beings were rich information sources—facial closeups, body cues including movements, posture, or grooming—and that these cues disclosed among other things a person's physical well being, poise and vigor, economic status, and sense of conformity. She also found that most people have learned to draw inferences from physical appearance and movements and that this is particularly valuable at election time when judgments need to be made about a candidate's character, trustworthiness, mental acuity, and physical vigor.¹¹

While image is partially under control of the candidate in terms of self-presentation, the "representation" of the image can be manipulated by the medium through its gatekeeper role. Editorial decisions about which pictures to use affect how a candidate's image is presented and perceived. This treatment can reflect whether the candidate is treated "presidentially" or not seriously. The "play" of the visual also affects reader perception. While editing is presumed to be objective in the U.S. press, it is easy to see where subtle messages can be conveyed in the way visuals are presented.

Ann Marie Barry discovered in an analysis of the CBS Reports documentary "Teddy" that the representation of an event in the media can be manipulated through the selection of content, framing, and editing of visuals.¹² Size, for example, is an extremely important cue. An agenda-setting experiment by Wanta found that the size of photos in newspapers can have an immediate influence on readers. The study found that

8. Lynda L. Kaid and Dorothy K. Davidson, "Videostyle: Candidate Presentation of Self Through Television Advertising," paper presented to the International Communication Association, San Francisco, May 1984.

9. Dan Nimmo and Robert Savage, *Candidates and Their Images* (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing, 1976).

10. Jeffrey Alan John, "Analysis of Visual Reference Associations in Television News Coverage of the 1988 U.S. Presidential Election Campaign," Visual Communication Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual conference, Minneapolis, MN, August 1990.

11. Graber, p. 167-168.

12. Ann Marie Barry, "Reading the Television Political Documentary: A Retrospective Look at the Interaction of Visual and Verbal Content and Rhetoric of 'Teddy,'" British Film Institute and International Visual Literacy Association Symposium, London: University of London, July 1990.

editors "have the power to raise their reader's salience on certain issues over a short period of time by merely increasing the size of photographs."¹³

The visual aesthetics literature is derived from studies of photography, cinema, and video. The language of film has been codified and the nuances of meaning conveyed by photographic conventions such as setting, lighting, framing, and camera angle have been analyzed extensively.¹⁴ A camera angle from on high, for example, is used to "look down" on a subject and de-emphasize importance, while a camera angle from below is used to create a monumental image. These conventions are widely understood in the visual arts.

The Original Study

The question of preferential treatment in visual coverage of the campaign was investigated for the first time in a study of newsmagazine photographs during the 1984 campaign. The research questions guiding that study—as well as this current study of the 1988 campaign—ask if both candidates and parties are given equivalent amounts of space and position, or does one candidate receive more emphasis? Furthermore, are subtle visual communication techniques being used to communicate either negative or positive images?

The original 1984 election study found that President Reagan, the incumbent, received significantly more favorable play in visuals than did the challenger, Walter Mondale. In terms of sheer quantity, Reagan photos outnumbered Mondale photos significantly. However, while Reagan was presented more favorably early in the campaign, this was reversed by the end of the campaign.

Likewise, early in the campaign Bush was presented more favorably as a vice-presidential candidate than was Ferraro; however, that changed as the amount of Ferraro coverage overtook Bush's coverage later in the campaign. Overall Ferraro photos significantly outnumbered Bush photos, undoubtedly representing her news value as the first female candidate in a presidential campaign. For both presidential and vice-presidential races, the democratic candidates received more favorable treatment at the end, possibly a reflection of the underdog or come-from-behind position of the candidates. The data, however, indicate that overall the candidates were differentially represented in the newsmagazines' visuals during the 1984 campaign with the Republican candidates receiving more favorable visual coverage.

Method

This content analysis generally replicated the previous study of newsmagazine photographs. It examined all the visuals—both photographs and illustrations—of the 1988 presidential and vice-presidential candidates printed in the three national weekly newsmagazines—*U.S. News & World Report*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* between the labor day kickoff and a week after the general election (September 5 to November 21). Every photo containing a candidate picture was included in the study, including those on the cover and the contents page. Photographs containing

13. Wayne Wanta, "The Effects of Dominant Photographs. An Agenda Setting Experiment," *Journalism Quarterly* 63: 728-734 (1986).

14. Sandra E. Moriarty, "Visual Codes and Conventions," AEJMC Conference, San Antonio, TX, 1987; Herbert Zettl, *Sight-Sound-Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 2nd. ed., 1990).

both candidates were coded twice—once for each candidate—and treated as two separate photographs in the analysis.

Coding Procedure

Coding difficulty is one of the reasons noted in the literature for the lack of attention to visual communication, although scholars noting the problem have called for more work in this area.¹⁵ This size, position, and various dimensions of visual language that can be manipulated to cue a more positive or negative interpretation. Each photo was coded to identify 15 visual attributes including activity, posture, arm position, hands, eyes, expression, interaction, camera angle, portrayal, position, size, props, setting, dress, and family association.

On the coding sheet, 11 of the visual attributes were rated more favorable (+1), less favorable (-1), or neutral (0) based upon a set of guidelines which were developed from evaluation criteria found in the literature review. For ease of tabulation and analysis, these values were changed to 3, 2, and 1. (See Table 1 for operational definitions.)

Index Construction. Three indices were constructed from the sets of variables. The "behavior" index was a total of activity, posture, arms, hands, eyes, and expression. The "context" index included props, setting, dress, and interaction with colleagues and family. The "perspective" index included the position, size, camera angle, and portrayal.

Table 1
Coding Evaluation Guidelines

attributes	more favorable	less favorable
Activity:	Dynamic behavior such as speaking shaking hands, kissing babies	Lethargic or passive activity such as listening, reading, dozing
Posture:	Standing tall and upright	Bowed, slumped, or leaning on something
Arms:	Arms head high or above	Arms at side, at rest, folded
Hands:	Gesturing or doing something	Hands at side, or at rest
Eyes:	Eyes looking directly at camera or at someone	Eyes up, down, or closed
Expression:	Cheerful or confident	Unhappy, worried, or tired
Interaction:	Cheering crowd or attentive colleagues	Candidate alone or with inattentive crowd or colleagues
Camera angle:	Looking up at candidate	Looking down on candidate
Portrayal:	Present the candidate as dignified, serious, or presidential	A presentation that made fun of the candidate, comic or goofy treatment
Position:	Top of the page	Bottom of the page
Size:	Larger than 1/2 page	Smaller than 1/2 page.

Image Attributes

Props: coded as either campaign symbols like flags, bunting and the presidential seal; or knowledge symbols like charts, graphs, or briefcases.

Setting: either monumental and formal or informal and casual.

Dress: either dignified suit and tie or sports clothes or shirtsleeves.

Family association: either with family, with spouse, or no family.

15. Doris A. Graber, "Researching the Mass Media-Elections Interface: A Political Science Perspective," *Mass Comm Review*, 14: 3-19 (1987).

Analysis. Presidential and vice-presidential attributes were tested by means of two-tailed T-Tests, and ANOVA techniques were used to determine if the candidates, newsmagazines, or the time period in the campaign interacted with the size of the pictures published by the newsmagazines.

Intercoder Reliability. One of the principal researchers coded the November 21 issue of *Newsweek* and the initial coding was tested by an independent coder to determine the coefficient of reliability in the coding process. Both coders evaluated 28 photos in the issue—a total of 420 judgments—which yielded a coefficient of .90. This compares favorably with Graber's work in which she describes a reliability index of .89 in coding of visuals.¹⁶

Findings

There were differences in the number of visuals by candidate and by party, however the pattern of newsmagazine coverage did not vary significantly. From a party standpoint, republican candidates accounted for 164 visuals, while democrats accounted for 120 visuals and the difference in visuals between the two parties was significant ($X^2 = 6.82$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). Overall, the four candidates appeared in 284 visuals during the test period. George Bush appeared in 125 visuals; Dukakis, 107; Quayle, 39; and Bentsen, 13.

Newsmagazines. *Time* published 108 visuals; *U.S. News & World Report*, 96; and *Newsweek* carried 80. The overall differences between the newsmagazines, however, were not significant ($X^2 = 4.16$, $df=2$, $p>.05$). Besides analyzing the number of candidate photos in each newsmagazine, a crosstabulation was conducted to test the pattern of coverage among the three newsmagazines during the test period. In the presidential race, George Bush was in 44% of the visuals published by all three newsmagazines, which was more than Michael Dukakis who appeared in 37%. In the vice-presidential race Dan Quayle was in 14% of the visuals, and Lloyd Bentsen appeared in a mere 5%. Of the 284 total, 38% appeared in *Time*, 34% appeared in *U.S. News & World Report*, and 28% appeared in *Newsweek*. Crosstabulation statistics did not reveal differences in coverage among the three newsmagazines.

Time Periods. To evaluate the impact of the presidential debates, newsmagazines' publication schedules were broken into three time periods to test if editors' visual selections might have changed with the debate performances of the candidates. The first time period (Time 1) included issues from Sept. 5 to Sept. 26; Time 2—October 3 to October 24; and Time 3—October 31 to November 21. Although a significant difference did occur ($X^2 = 20.72$, $df=6$, $p>.01$), closer examination of the findings revealed that it was due to differences in the number of visuals published by the newsmagazines during the three stages of the campaign.

One interesting observation, however, was that only one picture of Bentsen appeared before the vice-presidential debate, while nine appeared the two weeks immediately following the vice-presidential debate. During the last time period, only three Bentsen visuals appeared, and those appeared in the campaign wrapup issue.

16. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969); Graber, *Processing the News*, p. 26.

Size of Visuals. Besides number of photos, investigators were interested in whether the mean pica size of photo coverage received by the candidates was related to the magazine in which photos appeared or to the time period when the photos were played. A three-way ANOVA model (4x3x3) was constructed with mean pica size as the dependent variable (See Table 2). No three-way interactions (candidate x publication x time period) were found in the study.

Table 2
Mean Picture Size by Candidate, Newsmagazine, and Time Periods

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Main Effects	9002559	7	1286079.838	3.876	.001
Candidates	4394881	3	1464960.460	4.415	.005
Publications	2123499	2	1061749.420	3.200	.042
Time Periods	2580048	2	1290024.156	3.888	.022
2-Way Interaction	8768924	16	548057.736	1.652	.057
Candidate/Pubs	1491030	6	248504.920	.749	.611
Candidate/Time	2338589	6	389764.781	1.175	.320
Pubs/Time	4105320	4	1026330.053	3.093	.016
3-Way Interactions	2665011	9	296112.343	.892	.533
Can/Pubs/Time	2555011	9	296112.343	.892	.533
Explained	20436494	32	638640.429	1.925	.003
Residual	83281136	251	331797.355		
Total	103717630	283	366493.392		

One significant two-way interaction ($F = 3.093$, $\text{sig.} = .016$) was found when the relationship between publications and time periods was tested. Use of the Scheffe test¹⁷ to analyze the interaction revealed that *U.S. News & World Report* published significantly larger pictures during the final time period after the second presidential debate than did the other two magazines.¹⁸ However, the larger mean size of photos in *U.S. News* was not the result of more pictures than the other two magazines during the last time period. *U.S. News* carried only 18 photos in issues published during the last time period (*Time* carried 49 and *Newsweek* 25), but the size of those pictures was significantly larger than pictures published by the other two magazines. *Time* and *Newsweek's* coverage of the candidates during that period were virtually the same— both candidates received similar picture sizes. Over the three time periods, the mean size of pictures in *Time* increased, although not significantly, while picture size in *Newsweek* magazine fluctuated over the three time periods (See figure 1).

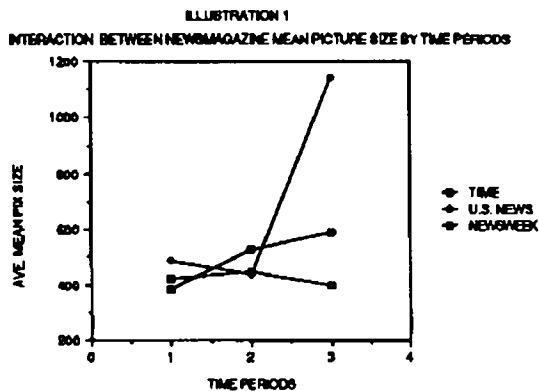
One significant difference surfaced in the main effects among the candidates ($F = 4.413$, $\text{sig.} = .005$). Among the four candidates, Bush photos were significantly larger than either Dukakis or Quayle photos. Cell sizes for Bentsen photos precluded his inclusion in the test.

Candidates. On the individual variables, three significant differences were found in the 15 comparisons between the two presidential candidates (See Table 3). On facial expression, Bush was presented more often with a cheerful, confident look ($t=3.87$, $\text{df}=225$, $p<.01$). Also Bush was presented more often than Dukakis in half page or larger visuals

17. Elizabeth Loftus and Geoffrey Loftus, *Essence of Statistics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), pp. 482-484.

18. Mean scores for the 2-way interaction and the significant main effects, and the differences between means are available from the authors.

($t=3.00$, $df=204$, $p<.01$). The camera angle for Bush more often looked up to the candidate ($t=2.16$, $df=227$, $p<.05$).



The difference in size and camera angle was reflected in the significant difference for the perspective index ($t=2.62$, $df=227$, $p<.01$) which showed Bush visuals being treated more favorably than the Dukakis visuals. The other two indices—behavior and context—did not provide any significant differences between the two candidates.

Table 3
T-Tests of Candidate Visual Attributes¹

	Bush n=125	Dukakis n=107	Quayle n=39	Bentsen n=13
Behavior				
Activity	2.53	2.65	2.54	2.54
Posture	2.70	2.60	2.59	2.77
Arms	2.14	2.12	1.97	2.00
Hands	2.52	2.56	2.33	2.31
Eyes	2.30	2.36	2.41	2.38
Expression	2.41	2.15**	2.44	2.46
TOTAL	14.48	14.43	14.28	14.46
Context				
Props	1.99	1.96	2.05	2.23
Setting	1.78	1.84	1.90	1.85
Dress	2.62	2.44	2.51	2.69
Interaction	2.01	2.08	1.95	2.46**
Family	1.98	1.94	2.03	2.00
TOTAL	10.38	10.29	10.44	11.23
Perspective				
Position	2.18	2.06	2.46	2.38
Size	1.33	1.11**	1.03	1.00
Camera Angle	2.18	2.03*	2.13	1.92
Portrayal	2.02	1.99	1.97	2.23
TOTAL	7.71	7.20**	7.59	7.5

** $p<.01$

* $p<.05$

¹ Higher values indicate more favorable treatment.

Only one difference was statistically significant in the comparisons between the vice presidential candidates. Bentsen was more likely to be

presented as the center of attention while Quayle was more frequently presented with a crowd or colleagues paying attention to something or someone else.

There was one other difference which was apparent in the content analysis but masked by the statistical tests (because of small cell size), and that occurred in the presentation of family association. Quayle was often depicted with family or spouse, while Bentsen seldom was. Mrs. Bentsen and the Bentsen family were the missing persons in the 1988 presidential campaign. This is better depicted in Table 4.

Table 4
Candidates and Family Interaction

	With Spouse	Alone/With Colleagues	With Family
Bush	8	112	5
Dukakis	7	99	1
Quayle	4	30	5
Bentsen	1	12	0

In summary, the three newsmagazines displayed few differences in how they covered the campaign. Republican candidates, however, were pictured more often than Democrats. Overall the number of pictures for each candidate differed significantly, but the presidential debates did not have any effect on the number of pictures subsequently published by each publication. *U.S. News & World Report* campaign pictures were significantly larger in the last time period after the second debate, but both presidential candidates received the same mean picture size play in that magazine during that time period.

Overall, George Bush's campaign photos were significantly larger than those of Michael Dukakis. Larger Bush photos appeared in all three publications, and the size of those photos was not influenced by the three stages of the presidential campaign. Bush received better page position; he appeared more cheerful in his visuals; and he received better camera angles than did Michael Dukakis. In the vice-presidential campaign, Lloyd Bentsen visuals were virtually absent from the coverage.

Conclusions

In the 1988 presidential campaign it appeared that the newsmagazines tried to provide balanced visual coverage of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. It was apparent during the coding that the editors were trying to match visuals as much as possible, even pairing them in many layouts, and this was particularly evident in *U.S. News & World Report* in the last time period.

However, Republican candidates, did receive more play. Bush appeared in more visuals and the visuals were larger than those used for Dukakis. Furthermore, Bush was depicted as more cheerful and confident than Dukakis and seemed to benefit from a more respectful camera angle. This Bush advantage carried throughout the 1988 campaign, which was much different from the way both his and Ronald Reagan's visual portrayal fluctuated in the 1984 campaign.

Vice presidential coverage in 1988 was in sharp contrast to coverage in 1984. The interest that Geraldine Ferraro generated as the first woman to seek the vice presidential nod was mirrored in 1984 coverage

as she was portrayed more positively and in more photos than George Bush by the end of the campaign. In 1988, newsmagazines did not seem interested in the vice-presidential campaign since they significantly underplayed both candidates. Quayle, who some seemed to think was being kept away from the cameras, did receive more coverage than Bentsen. The shots, however, were more likely to depict scenes where Quayle was an observer rather than the center of attention.

In terms of visual coverage, Bentsen went virtually unnoticed by the newsmagazines, receiving very little coverage until the vice-presidential debate. This also was reflected in the strange pattern of coverage that excluded Mrs. Bentsen and the Bentsen family from newsmagazine pages. All of the other candidates were depicted at various times with family and wives, except for Bentsen.

In all these respects, there was evidence of subtle differences in the visuals used by newsmagazines in their 1988 campaign coverage.