

- a. *Frontrunner storyline*
 - i. News initially gives considerable coverage to the front-running candidate because of poll numbers.
 - ii. Over time, positive press is replaced by negative coverage from reporters' desire to inform the public of the frontrunner's flaws.
- b. *Losing ground storyline*
 - i. Coverage of a leading candidate gets more negative as support declines.
 - ii. Press coverage frequently exaggerates the decline in support.
- c. *Bandwagon storyline*: When a candidate's poll ratings or nomination victories increase sharply, news stories increase in favorability.
- d. *Electability narrative*: Frame judges candidates by their likelihood of winning the nomination, playing up supposedly small chances of winning the nomination.
- e. *Exceeding expectations narrative*: candidates are favorably evaluated if they performed better than expected and negatively assessed if they did worse than anticipated.
- f. In all these cases, candidate viability is the major determinant of news favorability.

IV. The Issues Quandary

- A. Political journalists frequently neglect issues.
- B. Nonstop coverage of Trump's tweets minimized coverage of economic, social, and racial issues.
- C. Issue coverage is frequently limited to short soundbites.
- D. Increased coverage of issues wouldn't necessarily mean increased voter knowledge, due to time constraints, differences in motivation, and differences in ability to process the information.
- E. Coverage strategically focuses on candidate attacks and horse race stories.

V. Conclusions

- A. News covers presidential elections primarily as a horse race and strategic game.
- B. Pre-election polls are a key component of horse race news.
- C. Political news is best understood by prevailing journalistic storylines.
- D. News is imperfect, but it does cover campaigns thoroughly and endlessly.

Open-ended discussion questions are included with the corresponding supplemental slides.

Sample Multiple Choice Questions

1. The press storyline in which a candidate's poll ratings or nomination victories increase sharply, resulting in an increase in favorability in news stories is known as:

- a. The electability narrative
 - b. The exceeding expectations narrative
 - c. The frontrunner storyline
 - d. The bandwagon storyline**
 - e. The candidate schema narrative
2. The press storyline in which reporters develop mental frameworks to organization information about candidates is known as:
 - a. The electability narrative
 - b. The exceeding expectations narrative
 - c. The frontrunner storyline
 - d. The bandwagon storyline
 - e. The candidate schema narrative**
3. Which of the following is NOT a reason that reliable, scientific polls sometimes fail to predict presidential elections with precision?
 - a. Low response rate to polls
 - b. Difficulty in replacing respondents who decline to be interviewed with demographically-equivalent individuals
 - c. Social desirability effects may influence what individuals report
 - d. Polls fail to focus on likely voters**
 - e. Unexpected events can change voters' decisions late in the campaign

Sample Essay Questions

1. Write an essay in which you analyze the candidate schemas deployed by the media to understand Trump and Biden in the 2020 election. What were the core features of these candidate schemas, and how did they play out over the course of the election?
2. Apply one or several of the key media storylines/narratives to one of the primary candidates in the 2020 election besides Trump and Biden. How were these storylines used by the media to describe the candidate you selected?

Student Resources: Political Communication in the News

1. Agiesta, J. (2020a, October 8). In news about the presidential race, coronavirus overtakes nearly all else. *CNN Politics*. Online: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/08/politics/the-breakthrough-trump-biden-coronavirus-debate/index.html>. (Accessed: November 25, 2020).
2. Agiesta, J. (2020b, August 16). Here are the words defining the 2020 presidential campaign. *CNN Politics*. Online: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/16/politics/election-2020-polls-biden-trump-breakthrough/index.html>. (Accessed: November 25, 2020).
3. Cohn, N. (2020, November 10). What went wrong with polling? Some early theories. *The New York Times*. Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/upshot/polls-what-went-wrong.html>. (Accessed; November 11, 2020).
4. Edelman, G. (2020, November 4). So how wrong were the polls this year, really? *Wired*.