

THE POLITICS OF ELECTION COVERAGE:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INDIANA'S TWO LARGEST NEWSPAPERS
DURING THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Maria Platz

Dr. Wayne Wanta, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to investigate the 2008 presidential election coverage of Indiana's two largest news publications - *The Indianapolis Star* and *The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* – and determine if any statistically significant differences exist. Utilizing the theories of framing and second-level agenda setting, a content analysis focused on each newspaper's choice of topics, tone, story sources, and amount of coverage as applied to the Republican and Democratic presidential and vice presidential candidates. Each paper's national and local election articles - dated September 7th to November 4th – were analyzed and coded in accordance with the study's code guidebook.

Results indicated that despite the geographical and ideological differences of each newspaper's respective audiences, both offered statistically similar coverage of the election. The principal conclusion drawn was that while coverage was similar, both newspapers lacked stories that discussed each candidates' stances on issues, as well as local and opinion articles. This void of substantial news coverage undermines a newspaper's vital function of providing citizens essential information to make educated voting decisions. Additionally, less substantive stories limit newspapers in their agenda-setting role.