



The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is considering changes to its rules that limit how many media outlets any one company can own in a local community. The FCC will visit Chicago on September 20, 2007 to hear what the public thinks about changes to these rules. To inform that debate, the Benton Foundation highlights recently released research that shows how the media is failing to serve Chicago-area communities.

As the studies cited in this fact sheet demonstrate, local commercial television stations in Chicago are insufficiently attentive to issues of under-representation and misrepresentation of news and affairs in minority communities. At the very least, the FCC needs to monitor fulfillment of the localism principle more intently before loosening media ownership rules and, potentially, allowing increased concentration of media ownership in Chicago.

Chicago Television Stations Fail to provide Election Coverage

On June 12, 2007, the University of Wisconsin-Madison NewsLab released a study which provides evidence that Chicago's commercial television broadcasters are not adequately meeting the needs of the community.ⁱ The NewsLab Study tracked and analyzed election news coverage from September 7, 2006 to November 6, 2006 and non-election government news coverage from January 1, 2007 to March 31, 2007. The NewsLab Study focused on early and late-evening local newscasts on ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates.

The results of the NewsLab Study demonstrate that Chicagoland's English-language, commercial broadcasters are failing to provide viewers with local news election coverage:

- From September 7, 2006 to October 6, 2006, during a typical 30 minute newscast, the Chicago market aired, on average, 29 seconds of election coverage.
- From October 7, 2006 to November 6, 2006, during a typical 30 minute newscast, the Chicago market aired, on average, 2 minutes and 2 seconds of election coverage compared to 3 minutes and 57 seconds of political advertising.
- From September 6, 2006 to November 6, 2006, of 611 election stories analyzed in the Chicago market, on average, 73% were strategy frame and horse race frame coverage.
- From January 1, 2007 to March 31, 2007, during a typical 30 minute newscast, the Chicago market aired, on average, 56 seconds of election coverage.

The NewsLab Study provides evidence of the Chicago television broadcasters' failure to adequately exercise their editorial discretion in good faith and are failing in their obligation to fulfill the public interest.ⁱⁱ The study provides significant evidence that despite news coverage, local election news coverage is minimal and not meaningful.

Chicago Television Newscasts are Not Adequately Serving the Community

In July 2007, the Media Management Center at Northwestern University published an in-depth study of Chicago's local TV news experience.ⁱⁱⁱ While designed to help station managers build their audience, the report offers some important insight on how well these TV stations are serving the public.

The Media Management Center study presents evidence that Chicago stations' local TV newscasts are not adequately serving the public interest:

- Stories are short and run just over a minute on average (69 seconds).
- For every one woman who is heard in a story, there are two men.
- For every non-White person who is heard in a story, there are three White people.
- People who are White, male and official dominate news about politics – other topics vary in balance. Few of the politics stories include sound bites by ordinary people.
- Only a small portion of news stories include actionable information and they occupy less prominent positions in the lineup.
- On average, close to 50% of the stories cover planned events (such as a press conference, or hospital opening). Over a quarter are feeds from other sources, and about 14% cover spontaneous events (such as house fires).
- Less than 10% of the stories are initiated by the station^{iv} and less than 20% of enterprise stories appear in the first block of the program. Enterprise stories are also more likely to appear during the sweeps periods.
- Enterprise reporting covers mostly health and consumer issues.
- Less than half of every local news program is devoted to news stories (about 45%). Sports and weather take up between 9-10% of the time *each*, on average, and commercials take up almost 30% of the time. 5% of each newscast is devoted to promoting the newscast itself.
- Crime leads the news – it's in the first block, and stories get proportionately the most time of any story topics. Nearly one in five stories on local Chicago TV news is about crime.
- More than one-third of all news stories are about crimes, fires and accidents, while politics accounts for 15%. Health, science and environment stories comprise 11% of all stories, and weather stories 10%.

ⁱ Since September 2006, The University of Wisconsin-Madison's NewsLab has systematically monitored and evaluated local television news coverage of elections and government. Directed by political science professor Ken Goldstein, the UW NewsLab is a state-of-the-art facility that has the infrastructure and capacity to capture, clip, code, analyze and archive any media in any market—domestic or international—in real time. Under the auspices of the Midwest News Index (MNI), an initiative directed by Dr. Goldstein and funded by the Joyce Foundation of Chicago, the UW NewsLab has assembled a large and representative sample of early and late-evening local newscasts on ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates [NOTE: About 90 percent of television stations in the US (748 stations in 2005) are affiliated with one of the four large networks (CBS, NBC, ABC, and FOX)] in nine market across Illinois (Chicago and Springfield), Michigan (Detroit and Lansing), Minnesota (Minneapolis-St. Paul), Ohio (Cleveland and Columbus), and Wisconsin (Milwaukee and Madison). Due to the study's scale and duration, as well as its focus on a key region of the country, the Midwest News Index and its large archive are truly unique. To date, the Midwest News Index has generated three reports. The first two—released in October and November 2006—tracked and analyzed the volume and content of local TV election news coverage from Labor Day to Election Day. The most recent report, completed in May 2007, takes a close look at news coverage of government—federal, state and local, and is the first such systematic analysis of local TV political news outside of an election period.

ⁱⁱ As the D.C. Circuit Court has held, “despite the fact that quantity of programming is largely left to the licensee’s discretion, the program service may be so minimal in contrast to the needs of the community that it ‘create[s] a disparity so significant as to amount to a difference in kind rather than in degree.’” UCC v. FCC, 707 F.2d at 1433-34, n.70 (quoting *Alianza Federal de Mercedes v. FCC*, 539 F.2d 732, 738 (1976)).

ⁱⁱⁱ Peer, Limor, Ed Malthouse, Mary Nesbitt and Bobby Calder. “The local TV news experience: How to win viewers by focusing on engagement.” Northwestern University. July 2007. <http://www.mediamanagementcenter.org/localTV/localTV.pdf>
The content analysis portion of the study characterizes and measures the news content on the five commercial Chicago stations' night-time news programs. It is based on a random sample of programs, reconstructed into two composite weeks (no weekends) during the period of September, 2005 through February, 2006. The content analysis of local TV news programs in Chicago examined 46 randomly selected late-night news programs, on average nine programs per station, over a course of six months. The goal of this systematic content analysis is to provide an accurate and objective depiction of what is actually on the local nightly news in Chicago.

^{iv} The Media Management Center calls this “enterprise reporting.”