

## 4 *A Different Spin*

### The Media's Framing of the 2000 Republican National Convention

WHEN ATTEMPTING TO reshape their images in voters' minds, parties must remain cognizant of potential sources of countervailing information. Encountering information that contradicts the party's newly projected image enables citizens to deflect partisan appeals. For this reason, it is important to examine not only a party's campaign communication but also how other institutions in the information environment respond to the campaign. With respect to the Republican Party's attempt to reshape its image along racial lines, one such institution to consider is the media.

Studies (e.g., Steeper 1978) have found that although campaign events may have little effect on public opinion, subsequent news coverage of those events does. The probability of attending a political convention or witnessing other political events is very small, but the presence of a multitude of mass media outlets capable of relaying such events to broad audiences increases the likelihood of encountering political information. As Graber (1989) explains, news stories "provide the nation with shared political experiences, such as watching presidential election debates or congressional investigations, that then form a basis for public opinions and for uniting people for political actions" (3). Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) argue that media coverage of political events becomes especially important during elections:

Few voters attend a rally or have direct contact with the presidential candidates or their representatives. Instead, information presented in the media provides people with cues about the policy positions, qualities, and abilities of the candidates. From this infor-

mation, as well as other sources, the public forms its images of the candidates and its voting choices. (111)

As a result, the media play an important role in political elites' ability to convey their messages.

First, in determining that an event is newsworthy, the media decide the event's level of significance.

Newspeople determine what is "news"—which political happenings will be covered and which will be ignored. Their choices affect who and what will have a good chance to become the focus for political discussion and action. Without media attention the people and events covered by the news might have no influence, or reduced influence, on decision-makers. (Graber 1989, 6)

The voters are the decision makers during the election cycle, and the media weight the importance of such events for subsequent electoral decisions by covering (or not covering) a political event (see also Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

Second, the media not only serve as vehicles through which elites speak to members of the electorate but also act as interpreters of the message being sent. In their framing of political events, the media clarify and translate what political elites attempt to transmit to would-be constituents. According to Graber (1989), "Most incidents lend themselves to a variety of interpretations, depending on the values and experiences of the interpreter. The kind of interpretation that is chosen affects the political consequences of media reports" (10). In other words, the political ramifications of a campaign event are somewhat contingent on the frames the media use to discuss it.

The effect of media coverage during campaigns also includes press coverage of campaign ads. Media coverage of campaign ads may have either a reinforcing effect (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995) or a diminishing effect (Cappella and Jamieson 1997).

Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) explain the process:

Sources (government spokesmen, public affairs people, campaign managers, candidates, and officials) interpret news for reporters. They give the story a "spin" congenial with their goals, and hope to see their construction of reality incorporated into the news story. Journalists reconstruct reality for the audience, taking into account their organizational and modality constraints, professional

judgments, and certain expectations about the audience. Finally, the individual reader or viewer constructs a version of reality built from personal experience, interaction with peers, and interpreted selections from the mass media. (120)

This process suggests that the filtering of information to the public is two tiered and that any analysis of political information should include not only the original source of the message (in this case, party elites) but also the mediators of this message—the media.

Subsequent coverage of the 2000 Republican National Convention is especially important to examine given individuals' limited ability to experience the convention as it occurred. Only a tiny fraction of voting-age citizens attended the convention in person. Moreover, in 2000 the major networks limited coverage of both the Democratic and the Republican conventions. CBS, NBC, and ABC devoted less than an hour a day to the Republican convention, with the exception of the final evening, when the party's presidential nominee, George W. Bush, gave his acceptance speech. As a result, information about the convention most likely came from subsequent news coverage of the convention rather than from witnessing the convention from gavel to gavel.

Thus, this chapter seeks primarily to investigate whether the media recognized the increase in the number of African Americans present at the 2000 Republican National Convention, the amount of time the media devoted to highlighting this aspect of the convention, and the valence of this coverage. This chapter examines the dominant frames used by both the mainstream and the black media in their coverage of the 2000 Republican convention. I reveal the news media's potential role in the effectiveness of the Republican Party's strategy.

First, I determine the level of importance the media placed on the black convention attendees in 2000. To this end, I examine the amount of coverage the media devoted to the strategy relative to the amount of overall coverage. For the prevalence of blacks at the Republican convention to reshape party images, people would have to receive the campaign communication. Therefore, I examine whether the media conveyed this information. I hypothesize that the media will recognize the use of race during the convention and devote a considerable amount of coverage to this strategy. One criterion for story selection is novelty. For an event, situation, or condition to receive

media coverage, “it must be something that has just occurred and is out of the ordinary, either in the sense that it does not happen all the time . . . or in the sense that it is not part of the lives of ordinary persons” (Graber 1989, 86). The fact that the convention only occurs once every four years should make it newsworthy. With the increase in the number of visible African Americans and other minorities, the Republican convention becomes novel.

I also expect that the African American press will devote a substantial portion of their convention coverage to the Republicans’ race strategy. One theme found consistently in the black press is African American involvement in white events. For black newspapers, the only newsworthy part of white news events is blacks’ participation (Wolsley 1990). Thus, inasmuch as the black press covered the 2000 Republican National Convention, this coverage should be devoted largely to highlighting the various aspects of the Republicans’ inclusive message.

Another way to gauge the importance the media placed on the GOP’s strategy is by examining the duration of the coverage. Because timeliness is another criterion of newsworthiness, I hypothesize that when the media cover blacks at the convention, this coverage should occur both during and shortly after the convention. Overall, coverage of the Republicans’ diversity message before and after the convention should be significantly less than it is during the convention.

In addition, I look at the context in which the media discussed the convention. While the 2000 convention evidenced an increased African American presence, the party did not change its position on issues such as affirmative action. Accordingly, I determine whether the media highlighted this conundrum. Juxtaposing the Republican race strategy with its current policy positions potentially posed a barrier to the party’s ability to meet the threshold of change in citizens’ minds. I hypothesize that the media will highlight the policy positions of the Republican Party in conjunction with the overall discussion of the convention. Parties present their platforms for the next four years at the conventions; therefore, it seems only natural that the media will discuss platforms as part of their overall convention coverage. In this case, the media will act as a source of opposition without intending to do so.

Finally, I examine the valence of the convention coverage to assess how the media interpreted the convention events and whether the media opposed or supported the Republican campaign strategy. By

responding to the convention with cynicism, the media could oppose the Republican message. Likewise, praising the convention's diversity and inclusion could bolster the strategy's effect.

I hypothesize that the coverage of the 2000 Republican National Convention will be mostly positive. This hypothesis rests on the assumption that "although the media regularly expose the misbehavior and inefficiencies of government officials, for the most part [the media] display a favorable attitude toward political leaders and the American political system" (Graber 1989, 100). This phenomenon results in part from the media's reliance on government officials as news sources. One analysis estimated that public officials were the source of 78 percent of foreign and domestic news stories appearing in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (Gans 1979, 145). While trying to maintain some level of objectivity, news organizations must remain mindful of the impact of potentially alienating a news source. In describing the relationship between journalists and public officials, Gans (1979) argues that "sources have somewhat more power in the relationship than reporters, since they can punish reporters by withholding information, thereby putting them at a disadvantage with peers from competing news media" (134). In this respect, news organizations are constrained in the level of critical analysis they can publish.

I expect there to be an exception to the overall tone of the coverage when the black media are examined separately. Specifically, I hypothesize that black media outlets' coverage of the 2000 Republican National Convention will be mostly negative. The black press has a history of serving as a vehicle for protest and opposition to the status quo. Because of their experiences, African Americans tend to be more critical of American political institutions. Given the historic relationship between African Americans and the Republican Party (see Walton 1975; Weiss 1983), the black press should provide a more skeptical and negative assessment of the Republican Party's race strategy.

To test the validity of these propositions, I conduct a content analysis of the print media. Specifically, I analyze three nationally circulated newspapers—the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*—as well as a sample of African American newspapers. (See the appendix.) For each article included in the content analysis, I coded the frame used to describe the convention, the tone of the article, and when the article appeared in relation to the convention. (See the appendix for coding rules.)

*General Descriptive Findings*

Table 4 presents the total distribution of all convention-related articles during the eighteen-day period in the sample. This table indicates that of the 197 articles included in the sample, 78.2 percent were news stories, 4.6 percent were editorials, 3.6 percent were letters to the editor, 10.7 percent were opinion columns, and 3 percent were op-ed pieces.

Table 4 also indicates that approximately 60 percent of the convention-related articles appeared during the convention. In the week leading up to the 2000 Republican National Convention, 21 articles (11 percent of the sample) with “Republican convention” in the title or lead paragraph appeared in the news sources included in this study. During the convention, the number of articles increased to 118. In the week following the convention, the number of articles decreased to 58, or about 30 percent of the sample frame.

Figure 6 presents a daily account of the frequency of news coverage. A closer look at the convention coverage indicates that the majority of the coverage during the eighteen-day period occurred on the second, third, and fourth days of the convention (August 1–3, 2000). Cover-

**TABLE 4. General Descriptive Statistics**

	Number	Percent
Sources of articles in sample		
Black print media	17	8.6
Mainstream Media	180	91.4
Total	197	100
Type of print coverage		
Letters to the editor	7	3.6
Editorial	9	4.6
Opinion column	21	10.7
Op-ed	6	3.0
News articles	154	78.2
Total	197	100
Print news coverage in proximity to 2000 GOP Convention		
Before	21	10.7
During	118	59.9
After	58	29.4
Total	197	100

*Source: New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Baltimore Afro-American, Los Angeles Sentinel, New York Amsterdam News, New York Voice, Oakland Post, Sacramento Observer, Speakin' Out News, Jacksonville Free Press, New York Beacon, Philadelphia Tribune, Tennessee Tribune, Voice, Washington Informer.*

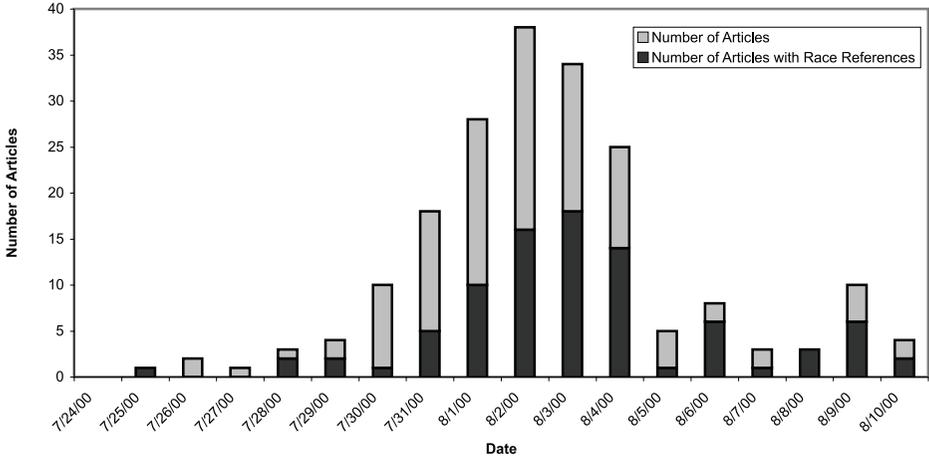


Fig. 6. Number of print media articles covering the 2000 Republican National Convention featuring race references over sample frame. (Data from *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *New York Voice*, *Oakland Post*, *Sacramento Observer*, *Speakin' Out News*, *Jacksonville Free Press*, *New York Beacon*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Tennessee Tribune*, *Voice*, *Washington Informer*.)

age seems fairly evenly distributed around those days. The number of articles about the convention appearing on any given day ranged between 0 and 10 in the week leading up the convention, between 18 and 38 during the convention, and between 3 and 10<sup>1</sup> after the convention.

### *Race References*

One of this chapter's goals is to examine whether the media recognized the increased presence of African Americans at the convention. In general, 45 percent of the articles referred to some aspect of the Republican Party's message of diversity. Seventy-six percent of the black media's convention coverage mentioned the Republican race strategy, compared to 42 percent of mainstream media. A difference-of-means test indicates that this difference is significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

1. August 4, 2000, the day immediately after the convention, constituted an exception: 25 articles appeared.

Complying with the timeliness criterion, a dramatic increase in race references occurred the day after Colin Powell's speech (August 1, 2000), with another increase on August 2, the day after Condoleezza Rice's speech. Prior to the convention, the media devoted very little attention to the strategy—that is, the media did not anticipate an increase in black participation at the convention. Nevertheless, following Powell's and Rice's speeches, the print media continued to highlight the race strategy until the day after the close of the convention (August 4). In the postconvention period, references to the GOP diversity message decreased along with overall convention coverage (see figure 6).

The frequency of race references is much smaller in coverage of previous conventions. In 1988, 13 percent of the articles coded referred to African American delegates or speakers at the convention. The coverage of the 1992 convention contained no race references, and only 28 percent of the print media coverage of the 1996 Republican National Convention contained race references. These figures seem to indicate that the increased presence of African Americans at the 2000 convention increased the media's attention on the black convention attendees as well as the convention's impact on black voters. This coverage is significantly greater than had previously been the case.

### *Valence*

To understand how individuals reacted to the message of inclusion and diversity presented at the convention, it is important to examine not only whether the media recognized the message but also the tone of the coverage. Thus, in this section I examine the valence of the print media coverage of the Republicans' race strategy. I discern whether the media reacted skeptically to the campaign, thereby undermining it, or positively framed the convention, thereby increasing the campaign's impact.

Overall, the content analysis reveals that 79 percent of the convention coverage was neutral, 14 percent was negative, and only 7 percent was positive. Table 5 indicates that the distribution of tone varied by article type. Among the articles with race references, 20 percent were negative, 73 percent were neutral, and 8 percent were positive. In contrast, 10 percent of the articles without race references were negative, 84 percent were neutral, and 6 percent were positive. A chi-square test indicates that the tone of the articles and the presence of race refer-

ences are not independent and that a statistically significant difference exists in tone between those articles with race references and those without. On average, the articles with race references tended to be more negative.

Table 6 illustrates how the valence of the 2000 coverage differs from the coverage of previous conventions. In 1988, the coverage of the Republican National Convention was completely neutral, regardless of race references. The coverage of the 1992 Republican convention contained no race references, although the majority of the print coverage was neutral. Print media coverage of the 1996 Republican National Convention varied slightly by the presence of race references. For example, 90 percent of the articles with race references were neutral, while 10 percent were positive. In contrast, 12 percent of the articles without race references were negative, 82 percent were neutral, and 6 percent were positive. A difference-of-means test, however, indicated that these differences were not statistically significant.

To get a sense of exactly how the media covered the Republican race strategy, I include a few of the dominant frames the media used to describe the convention. The positive articles tended to focus on reactions from Republican delegates. For example, an August 1 *Washing-*

**TABLE 5. Tone of Articles with and without Race References by Media Source (in percentages)**

	Race References	No Race References
Both media sources		
Negative	20	10
Neutral	73	84
Positive	8	6
Mainstream print media		
Negative	22	8
Neutral	72	86
Positive	5	6
Black print media		
Negative	0	50
Neutral	75	50
Positive	25	0

*Source: New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Baltimore Afro-American, Los Angeles Sentinel, New York Amsterdam News, New York Voice, Oakland Post, Sacramento Observer, Speakin' Out News, Jacksonville Free Press, New York Beacon, Philadelphia Tribune, Tennessee Tribune, Voice, Washington Informer.*

*ton Post* article summarized interviews conducted with a number of delegates:

But there was little talk of conservatism on the convention floor today as delegates were asked how they thought the GOP had been changed by Bush's rise to the party leadership. Open and inclusive, younger and more vigorous, were some of the words they used to describe the Bush-led party. (Walsh 2000, A11)

In addition to highlighting the excitement and enthusiasm of the black Republican delegates, an article featured in the *Baltimore Afro-American* also discussed some of the GOP's positive race-related activities:

For Black voters who would suggest that the Republican convention holds no interest to them, consider these historical facts. A Republican president issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which outlawed slavery in this country. The first Black elected officials to serve in the Continental Congress were Republicans. A Republican Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A Republican president initiated the Small Business Administration, which provides loans to minority businesses. Ironically, as important as it is, history is likely overlooked in the clamor of convention business—the platform debates, nominating speeches and state caucuses. (Erwin 2000, A1)

**TABLE 6. Tone of Print Media Coverage of Past Republican Party Conventions (in percentages)**

	All	Race References	No Race References
1988			
Negative	0	0	0
Neutral	100	100	100
Positive	0	0	0
1992			
Negative	15		15
Neutral	85		85
Positive	0		0
1996			
Negative	7	0	12
Neutral	85	90	82
Positive	7	10	6

Source: *New York Times*.

Negative references to the Republican message of inclusion either were discussed directly or could be found in articles that did not focus specifically on the race strategy. The strategy would sometimes be used to contrast other convention activities. An August 2 *Washington Post* news article pinned the Republicans' message of inclusion against the party's lavish treatment of its major financial contributors:

Even as the GOP works aggressively to project an image of inclusiveness from the convention podium, the Regents [a group of 137 people and companies that contributed at least \$250,000 each to the Republican National Committee during the 2000 election cycle] program shows how, off camera, the party provides special access and favors to its biggest givers. . . . Indeed, some GOP officials shudder simply at the group's name, which they feel undercuts the message of the minutely choreographed convention. (Allen 2000, A15)

I also assessed whether the distribution of valence differed by media source. For these analyses, the media sources were divided into mainstream media and black media. The *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* were included as mainstream media sources, while all others were included as black media sources. I hypothesized that mainstream media coverage would be largely positive, while African American media coverage would be mostly negative; however, a difference-of-means test revealed no statistically significant difference in tone between articles appearing in black media sources and those appearing in mainstream newspapers, although the mainstream media sources' coverage on average was more negative.

I then examined whether these similarities remained when the analyses separated the articles with race references from those without. Of the articles appearing in the mainstream media sources, 42 percent referred to the GOP's race strategy; of this group, 22 percent were negative, 72 percent were neutral, and 5 percent were positive. In great contrast, among the mainstream media articles without race references, 8 percent were negative, 86 percent were neutral, and 6 percent were positive. Further, the Pearson chi-square indicates that these differences were statistically significant at the  $p < .10$  level. The valence distribution of the articles differed substantially in the black news sources, where 75 percent of the articles with race references were neutral and 25 percent were positive and 50 percent of the articles with no race ref-

erences were negative and 50 percent were neutral. The Pearson chi-square indicates that these differences were statistically significant at the  $p < .10$  level.

These data suggest that a larger proportion of the mainstream media coverage of the Republican diversity message was negative. In general, the mean tone of the racialized media coverage was more negative in the mainstream media sources than in the black media sources. A difference-of-means test indicates that this difference is statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Approximately three-quarters of media coverage of the Republican race strategy was neutral, however.

Qualitatively, a closer examination of the articles indicates that the mainstream media tended to be more reactionary and overt, whereas the black media tended to be more subtle. Paragraphs from two black newspapers are illustrative. According to the *Sacramento Observer*,

Kenteclad gospel groups, harmonic R&B singers, muscle-bound wrestlers—even a scowling rock group or two was thrown in for good measure.

That was just a slice of this year's 2000 Republican Party Convention in Philadelphia attempt by the GOP's brass to update its image from the party of "old White guys" to one which makes claims of being inclusive of ethnic minorities, women and young people. ("GOP Stresses Inclusion" 2000, A4)

And an article in the *Baltimore Afro-American* noted

that Blacks vote their interests and many of their most vital interests have been opposed by Republican lawmakers. There is no sign that Blacks, who rarely give Republican presidential candidates more than 10 percent of their votes, have forgotten the legacy of Ronald Reagan, who slashed funding for social programs, attacked Civil Rights leaders and the enforcement of the laws, and attempted to foster a new generation of conservative Black Republican leaders. (Walters 2000, A5)

African American newspapers, however, appeared to have delayed their responses. An examination of convention coverage just outside of the sampling frame revealed that later articles seemed to converge with the mainstream media's coverage. For example, several black newspapers printed an article under the title "'New' GOP Unveiled at Convention . . . A Grand Oreo Party":

The Republican Convention in Philadelphia featured a rainbow coalition of African-American and other minorities elbowing each other in a mad dash to the podium to extol the virtues of petulant preppie George W. Bush and right-wing throwback Dick Cheney. The transparently pandering parade even stupefied political pundits, unprepared for the staged charade. The virtually lily-white auditorium, filled with delegates bedecked in cornball ten-gallon hats and assorted pachyderm ephemera, sat entertained by a mind-boggling troupe of pre-conditioned minstrel zombies mouthing the GOP line. (Williams 2000, A7)

In sum, the Republican Party benefited from generally neutral coverage of the convention. Although the presence of African Americans at the 2000 Republican National Convention encountered skepticism in some instances, the media—regardless of news source—generally did not pose a major obstacle when it came to the tone used to describe the convention.

#### *Symbols versus Substance*

One of the most important aspects of the media coverage of the 2000 Republican National Convention is whether the media discussed the GOP's platform as well as its convention participants. Doing so could potentially impede the Republican Party's ability to meet the criteria for becoming a "new" party. Highlighting the party's unchanged policy positions might signal to individuals that the GOP had not really changed.

In 1988, approximately 20 percent of newspaper coverage of the convention focused on the attendees. This figure decreased to 17 percent in 1992 but increased to 25 percent in 1996. In 2000, however, about 40 percent of the convention coverage focused on who attended.

In contrast, a reverse pattern occurs in the amount of coverage devoted to the Republican Party's platform. In both 1988 and 1992, 25 percent of convention coverage discussed the GOP's platform or at least its stance on specific issues. In 1996, the amount of coverage of the Republican platform decreased slightly, to 22 percent. Less than 10 percent of the 2000 coverage referenced the Republican Party's issue positions.

I also examine the number of articles that discussed both conven-

tion attendance and Republican issue positions. Less than 20 percent of the articles in 1988 discussed both the Republican Party's platform and the convention attendees. The percentage of articles discussing both issues and convention presence increased to approximately 30 percent in 1992 and remained at that level throughout the 1996 and 2000 conventions.

These analyses seek primarily to examine whether the media coverage of the 2000 Republican National Convention juxtaposed the Republican Party's outreach to African Americans with its platform. In chapter 1, I hypothesized that the success of the Republican Party's attempt to reshape its image would be contingent in part on whether the media highlighted the more policy-oriented political symbols associated with the GOP. The rationale is that the media's attention to the Republican platform would mute the effect of the Republican strategy because by bringing to readers' minds the part of the Republican Party that had not changed. The new images presented at the GOP convention would thus be less salient in individuals' evaluations of the party. To assess whether this was a possibility, I examined whether the coverage of the Republican race strategy included a discussion of the Republican Party's platform.

Table 7 presents the results. In 1988, the topic of African Americans attending the convention was discussed in terms either of their presence at the convention or of their status as potential convention viewers.<sup>2</sup> Discussion of African Americans in conjunction with the 1988 Republican National Convention did not include issues. In contrast, nearly 50 percent of the articles without race references discussed the GOP platform in some respect. As indicated in table 7, 29 percent of the articles discussed issues without mentioning the convention attendees, and 21 percent discussed both. The coverage of the 1992 Republican National Convention made no reference to race. Among the 1992 articles that did not discuss race, just over half discussed the Republican Party's issue positions—25 percent of the articles talked about the issues exclusively, and 31 percent discussed both issues and convention attendance. In 1996, the discussion of race reemerged. The articles without race references were fairly evenly distributed

2. Because of the coding rules, these types of articles appear in the excluded category, in which an article mentions neither the GOP platform nor the presence of any particular group or person at the convention.

across categories. Among the articles with references to race, 50 percent discussed the African American presence at the convention in conjunction with the Republican platform. In 2000, the discussion of African Americans and the convention focused almost entirely on their presence at the convention or on their presence at the convention in conjunction with the Republican platform. For example, 40 percent of the articles focused solely on the black presence, while only 5 percent of the articles with race references discussed Republican issue positions and 52 percent of the articles with race references discussed both the African American presence at the convention and the Republican Party's position on various public policy issues. Among the articles without reference to race, the articles were more evenly distributed across the categories. Although 40 percent of the articles focused only on who was at the convention, 14 percent of the articles discussed the Republican platform, and 19 percent discussed both.

In summary, print media coverage of Republican National Conventions shifted its focus away from discussing issues and toward examining convention attendees. That is not to say that media coverage of the Republican Party's platform completely disappeared. The results sug-

**TABLE 7. Comparison of Print Media Focus on Attendees versus Party Platform in Coverage of Republican Conventions (in percentages)**

	Attendees	Platform	Both
1988			
No Race Reference	14	29	21
Race Reference	50	0	0
1992			
No Race Reference	17	25	31
Race Reference	N/A	N/A	N/A
1996			
No Race Reference	24	22	24
Race Reference	27	21	50
2000			
No Race Reference	40	14	19
Race Reference	40	5	52

*Source: New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Baltimore Afro-American, Los Angeles Sentinel, New York Amsterdam News, New York Voice, Oakland Post, Sacramento Observer, Speakin' Out News, Jacksonville Free Press, New York Beacon, Philadelphia Tribune, Tennessee Tribune, Voice, Washington Informer.*

gest that a discussion of the issues was most likely to appear in conjunction with a description of who was attending the convention. This was especially true when the print media were covering the message of diversity featured at the 2000 Republican National Convention. Hence, by discussing convention attendance and political issues in a single article, the media might have inadvertently undermined the conveyance of the Republican Party's new image by highlighting aspects of the party that had not changed.

### *Newsmagazines*

Finally, I also examine the frames used by popular newsmagazines, although these publications did not print enough articles to include in the analysis. On the first day of the convention, *Time* featured an article covering protest activity, including the Shadow Convention (an alternative convention held concurrently in Philadelphia) and other expected protest groups. This particular article did not refer to the Republican Party's show of diversity, and the tone of both of these articles was neutral (Lopez and Desa 2000).

A week before the convention, *Time* also featured a story devoted to the image making of George W. Bush and the "new" Republican Party. The article described what observers could expect to see at the 2000 convention:

Everywhere the symbols will align to send a comfortable message. . . . Washington politicians will be shoved off to side stages and obscure time slots; and an entire classroom of inner-city school kids will spotlight Bush's education proposals. A final night devoted to testimonials to the candidate will feature an African-American preacher. (Carney and Dickerson 2000, 31)

This article thus mentioned the Republican Party's diversity message before the convention occurred. But all three *Time* articles had a mostly neutral tone, with the slightest hint of cynicism injected into the description of the convention schedule.

Two weeks after the convention, both *Time* and *Newsweek* featured a number of articles highlighting the various aspects of the Republican race strategy. In "The Ricky Martin Factor," *Newsweek* discussed the impact of the appearances of George P. Bush (the handsome Latino nephew of George W. Bush) and R & B recording artist Brian McKnight:

Battleground 2000, a bipartisan poll, found that Bush went into last week's convention down 7 points among Latinos and ended it with an 18-point lead.

Black voters weren't nearly so impressed. Bush's fellow GOP governors rejoiced that Buchanan was gone, but the scars were evident; only 86—about 4 percent—of the delegates in Philly were black, up from 53 in 1996. (Bai 2000, 26)

*Time* ran an opinion piece about Colin Powell and his role at the 2000 convention. In the article, the author described her reaction to Powell's condemnation of his party's stance on affirmative action:

Isn't killing and burying affirmative action the signature cause of the G.O.P.? . . . Forget reality. With a raucous Chaka Khan, with rappers and wrestlers and a rocking gospel choir (hey, these Republicans do have rhythm), critics had taken to comparing the convention to a Utah Jazz home game, where everyone in the stands is white and most of the performers are black. (Carlson 2000, 35)

In general, newsmagazine coverage of the Republican convention coverage tended to be neutral. The convention coverage that focused on the Republicans' message of inclusion, however, ranged from slightly critical to overtly suspicious.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, the print media recognized the use of race during the 2000 Republican National Convention; moreover, the media provided competing frames by which to interpret convention events.

In terms of recognizing the use of race during the 2000 convention, both the mainstream and black media devoted a considerable amount of coverage to this strategy. The black media, however, devoted significantly more of their convention coverage to the Republican race strategy. The proportion of coverage with race references in the black media was twice that of the mainstream media coverage.

With respect to valence, a statistically significant difference existed between the tone of the mainstream media's coverage of the Republican race strategy and that of the black media. In general, a greater proportion of the racialized coverage of the mainstream media was negative. When the comparison was limited to the racialized coverage, the

difference was even greater. Contrary to my original expectations, however, mainstream media tended to be more critical of the Republican Party than did the black media, even when the newsmagazine sources are included. However, nearly 75 percent of both mainstream and black media coverage of the Republican race strategy was neutral.

Probably more important than tone, however, is what additional information the media provided readers. For example, the analyses indicate that the media did not simply convey the presence of African Americans at the 2000 Republican National Convention. Quite a large portion of media coverage juxtaposed African American attendance with the Republican platform. Highlighting the presence of African Americans at the convention as well as the Republican Party's position on issues potentially muted the effect of the Republican race strategy, giving readers multiple bits of salient information to use in subsequent evaluations of the Republican Party.

I would be remiss if I did not address some of the possible limitations of these analyses. First, this study has been confined to analysis of print media. Although they constitute only a subset of the information channels now available to the American electorate, print media provide an interesting snapshot of the frames surrounding the 2000 Republican National Convention. Furthermore, approximately 74 percent of the American electorate read the newspaper at least once a week, and 59 percent of this group read about the 2000 campaign.<sup>3</sup> These figures suggest that the print media's framing of the convention could have reached a substantial number of people.

There is also the question of generalizability, given that this analysis has been restricted primarily to three mainstream media sources, two newsmagazines, and a collection of African American media sources. The *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* represent five of the most widely circulated news periodicals. Further, the incorporation of all African American print media sources available online gives a fairly representative sample of the black presses that exist in the major cities across the United States. Finally, scholars have repeatedly demonstrated the consistency of news across organizations and outlets (Just et al. 1996).

3. 2000 American National Election Study. See the National Election Studies ([www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org)). The 2000 National Election Study [dataset]. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor].

This study also has not addressed the causal relationship between these frames and public opinion. There is no way to guarantee that these findings affected the way the electorate interpreted the convention events or if the frames used by the media affected evaluations of the Republican Party in general. This issue will be addressed in chapter 5.

But even independent of its effect on public opinion, media reaction to the Republican convention is crucial to understanding the way political events are interpreted. It is a reflection of the norms valued by a society. As Gamson (1992) argues,

Media discourse, then, is a meaning system in its own right, independent of any claims that one might make about the causal effect on public opinion. Certain ways of framing issues gain and lose prominence over time, and some assumptions are shared by all frames. National media discourse, although only one part of public discourse, is a good reflection of the whole. We need to understand what this discourse says about an issue, since it is a central part of the reality in which people negotiate meaning about political issues. (27)

The fact that the media coverage of the convention was not uniformly positive indicates that at least part of the time, the media recognized a violation of a norm. News organizations are comprised of individuals. And as individuals, journalists bring to bear their experiential knowledge when framing the news. The cynical tone used in some of the convention coverage results from the media taking into account the Republican Party's history with respect to race. The media, like the public, have certain expectations regarding the Republican Party's behavior. When the party deviated from these expectations, the media responded by questioning its motives and sincerity. In this sense, the media do not act as a passive institution open to manipulation, as once thought (Patterson 1994). Rather, the media perform a watchdog function.