

New Zealand Media Coverage of the 2008 Election Study

Final Results

15 December 2008

Dr. Babak Bahador
School of Political Science and Communication
University of Canterbury

Research Assistants: Tessa Houghton & Emma Shaw

Comments and feedback welcomed at:

Babak.bahador@canterbury.ac.nz

Media Inquiries:

From 15 December 2008 to 4 January 2009, please contact
Tessa Houghton at (03) 364 2987 ext. 3528 or 027 367 5114

After 4 January 2009, please contact
Babak Bahador at (03) 364 2987 ext.7778 or 021 59 1919

Contents

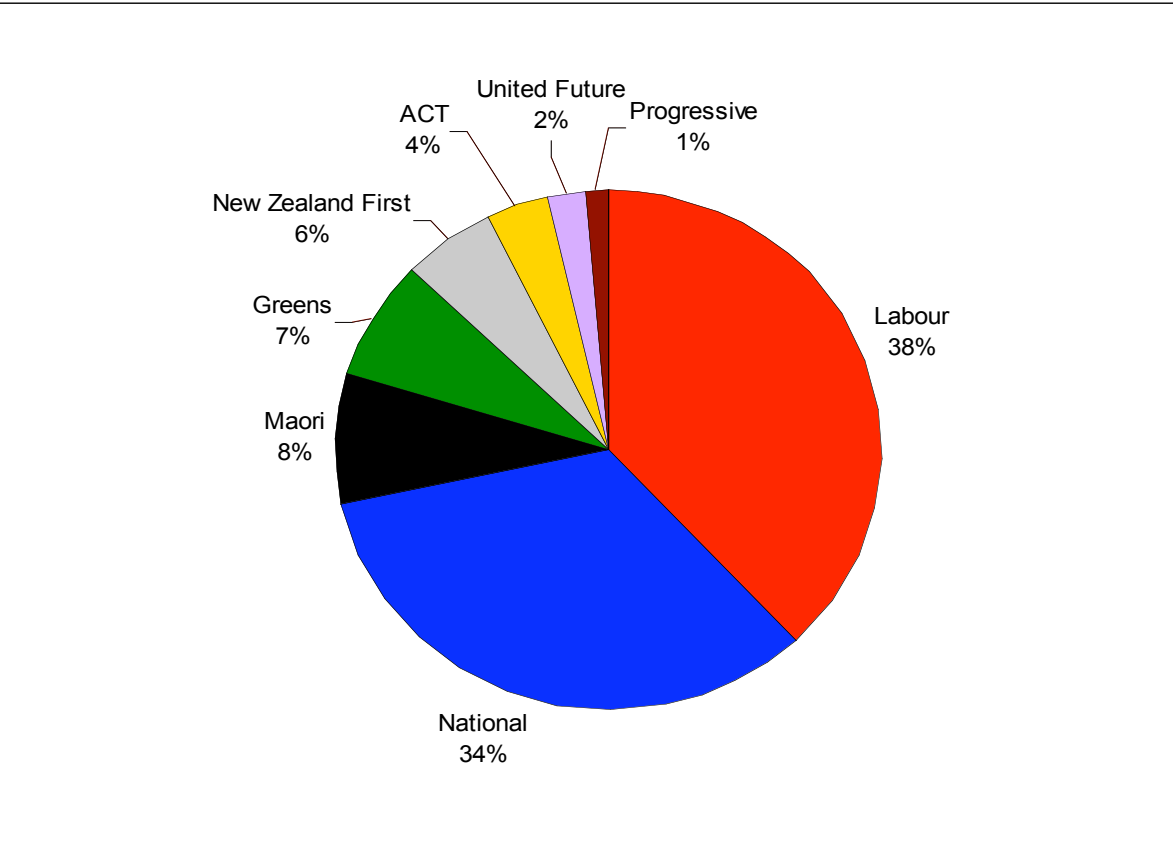
Section 1: The Parties	3
1.1 Media Coverage of Leading Parties	3
Figure and Table 1: Volume of Media Coverage of Parties	3
1.2 Tone of Party Media Coverage	4
Figure 2: Negative Party Coverage during the 2008 Election Campaign	4
Figure 3 and Table 2: Positive Party Coverage during the 2008 Election Campaign	5
1.3 News versus Analysis	6
Table 3: News Tone of Parties during the 2008 Election Campaign	6
Table 4: Analysis Tone of Parties during the 2008 Election Campaign	6
1.4 Television versus Newspapers	7
Table 5: Television Tone during the 2008 Election Campaign	7
Table 6: Newspaper Tone during the 2008 Election Campaign	7
1.5 Media Coverage of Parties versus Election Results	8
Figure 4 and Table 7: Difference between Media Coverage and Election Results during the 2008 Election Campaign	8
Section 2: The Party Leaders	9
2.1 Media Coverage of Party Leaders	9
Figure 5 and Table 8: Volume of Media Coverage of Party Leaders	9
2.2 Tone of Party Leaders Media Coverage	10
Figure 6: Negative Coverage of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	10
Figure 7 and Table 9: Positive Coverage of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	11
2.3 News versus Analysis	12
Table 10: News Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	12
Table 11: Analysis Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	12
2.4 Television versus Newspapers	13
Table 12: Television Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	13
Table 13: Newspaper Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	13
2.5 Media Coverage of Party Leaders versus Polling Support	14
Figure 8 and Table 14: Difference between Media Coverage and Public Opinion Support of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign	14
Section 3: The Issues	15
3.1 Leading Policy Issues	15
Figure 9 and Table 15: Leading Policy Issues during the 2008 Election Campaign	15
3.2 Leading Non-Policy Issues	16
Figure 10 and Table 16: Leading Non-Policy Issues during the 2008 Election Campaign	16
3.3 Policy versus Non-Policy Issues	17
Figure 11 and Table 17: Leading Policy and Non-Policy Issues during the 2008 Election Campaign	17
Methodology	18

Section 1: The Parties

1.1 Media Coverage of Leading Parties

- Labour led National 38.2% to 33.5% in media coverage devoted to parties
- Maori Party led Greens 8% to 7.4% amongst smaller parties

Figure 1 and Table 1: Volume of Media Coverage of Parties



Party	Percentage of Coverage
Labour	38.2%
National	33.5%
Maori	8.0%
Greens	7.4%
NZ First	5.6%
ACT	3.6%
United Future	2.4%
Progressive	1.3%
Total	100%

1.2 Tone of Party Media Coverage

- Overall, there was 8.2% more negative coverage related to parties than positive
- National received the most negative coverage at 37.9% of its total coverage, while Labour was close behind at 35.6%
- Green Party received the most positive media coverage at 32.6% of its total coverage, followed by the Maori Party at 29.3%
- National had 15.6% more negative coverage than positive, while Labour had 10.2% net negative coverage. Green and Maori Parties received the greatest net positive coverage at over 12.7% and 14.3%, respectively

Figure 2: Negative Party Coverage during the 2008 Election Campaign

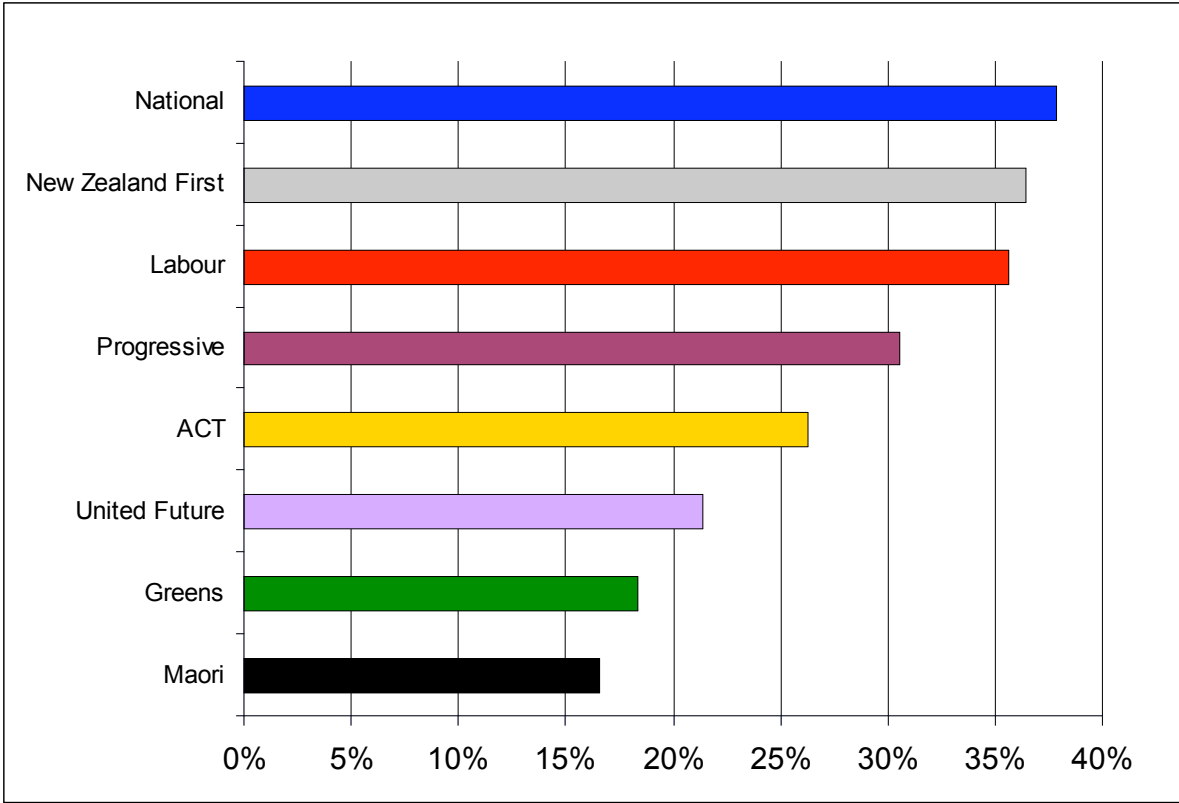
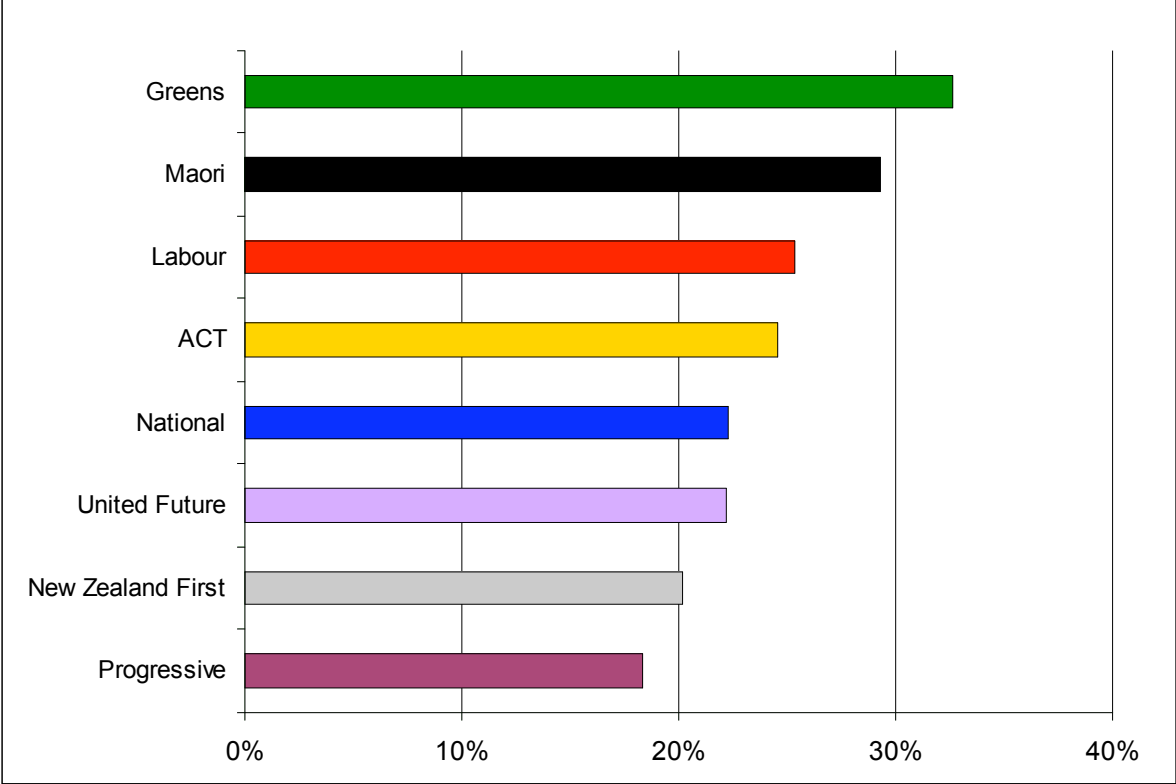


Figure 3 and Table 2: Positive Party Coverage during the 2008 Election Campaign



Party	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
National	37.9%	22.3%	39.8%	-15.6%
NZ First	36.4%	20.1%	43.4%	-16.3%
Labour	35.6%	25.4%	39.0%	-10.2%
Progressive	30.5%	18.3%	51.1%	-12.2%
ACT	26.3%	24.6%	49.1%	- 1.7%
United Future	21.4%	22.2%	56.4%	0.9%
Greens	18.4%	32.6%	49.0%	14.3%
Maori	16.5%	29.3%	54.2%	12.7%
All Parties	32.9%	24.7%	42.4%	-8.2%

1.3 News versus Analysis

- Overall, news stories accounted for 82% of coverage, while analysis stories accounted for 18%. Analysis stories made 15.1% more negative references to parties than positive, while news stories made almost 6.7% more negative references
- While National received 15.6% net negative news story coverage versus Labour at 8.2%, Labour received 18.7% net negative analysis story coverage versus National at 15.3%. This suggests that when stories were based on events and relied largely on external sourcing (including other parties and party leaders), National received more negative references. However, when stories came from journalists themselves and reflected their opinions, Labour received more negative references
- The Green Party received the most net positive coverage in both news and analysis stories at 16.5% and 5.5%, respectively

Table 3: News Tone of Parties during the 2008 Election Campaign

Party	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
National	37.3%	21.7%	41.0%	-15.6%
Labour	33.6%	25.4%	40.9%	- 8.2%
NZ First	33.8%	20.9%	45.4%	-12.9%
ACT	24.6%	25.9%	49.5%	1.3%
Progressive	24.5%	20.9%	54.5%	- 3.6%
United Future	19.4%	22.0%	58.6%	2.7%
Greens	16.0%	32.4%	51.6%	16.5%
Maori	14.7%	29.6%	55.7%	15.0%
All Parties	31.3%	24.6%	44.1%	- 6.7%

Table 4: Analysis Tone of Parties during the 2008 Election Campaign

Party	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
Labour	43.9%	25.2%	30.9%	-18.7%
National	40.8%	25.5%	33.8%	-15.3%
Progressive	61.9%	4.8%	33.3%	-57.1%
NZ First	51.9%	16.0%	32.1%	-35.8%
ACT	40.5%	13.5%	45.9%	-27.0%
United Future	29.2%	22.9%	47.9%	-6.3%
Greens	28.1%	33.6%	38.4%	5.5%
Maori	25.4%	27.5%	47.1%	2.2%
All Parties	40.2%	25.2%	34.6%	-15.1%

1.4 Television versus Newspapers

- Overall, television coverage of parties was more negative than newspapers as television had 11.9% net negative references while newspapers had 7.9% net negative references
- National had more net negative references than Labour in both the television and newspaper categories. On television, there were 20.1% net negative references to National, while in newspapers there were 14.4%
- The Green Party received the most net positive coverage in both the television and newspaper categories at 11.8% and 14.9%, respectively

Table 5: Television Tone during the 2008 Election Campaign

Party	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
National	43.1%	23.0%	33.9%	-20.1%
Labour	39.3%	25.0%	35.7%	-14.3%
Progressive	41.2%	11.8%	47.1%	-29.4%
NZ First	31.3%	23.9%	44.8%	-7.5%
ACT	29.7%	18.9%	51.4%	-10.8%
United Future	27.0%	13.5%	59.5%	-13.5%
Greens	21.7%	33.6%	44.7%	11.8%
Maori	20.8%	30.1%	49.1%	9.2%
All Parties	36.7%	24.8%	38.5%	-11.9%

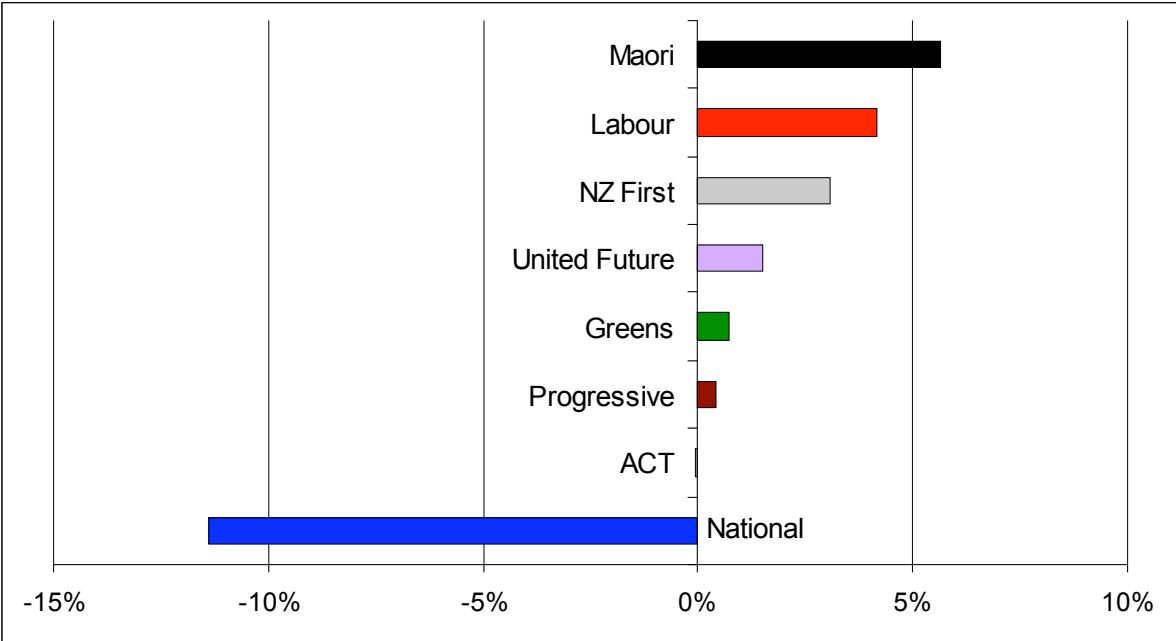
Table 6: Newspaper Tone during the 2008 Election Campaign

Party	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
National	36.5%	22.1%	41.4%	-14.4%
Labour	34.6%	25.5%	39.9%	-9.1%
NZ First	38.1%	18.9%	43.0%	-19.2%
Progressive	28.9%	19.3%	51.8%	-9.6%
ACT	25.4%	26.1%	48.6%	0.7%
United Future	20.3%	23.9%	55.8%	3.6%
Greens	17.5%	32.4%	50.1%	14.9%
Maori	15.3%	29.0%	55.6%	13.7%
All Parties	31.9%	24.7%	43.4%	-7.2%

1.5 Media Coverage of Parties versus Election Results

- Every party received more media coverage than electoral support during the 2008 election with the exception of National and ACT
- While National had 11.4% more electoral support than media coverage, Labour had 4.2% more media coverage than electoral support
- Smaller parties covered in this study had the support of 18.6% of the electorate on election night, yet received 28.3% of the media coverage over the timeline of this study

Figure 4 and Table 7: Difference between Media Coverage and Election Results during the 2008 Election Campaign



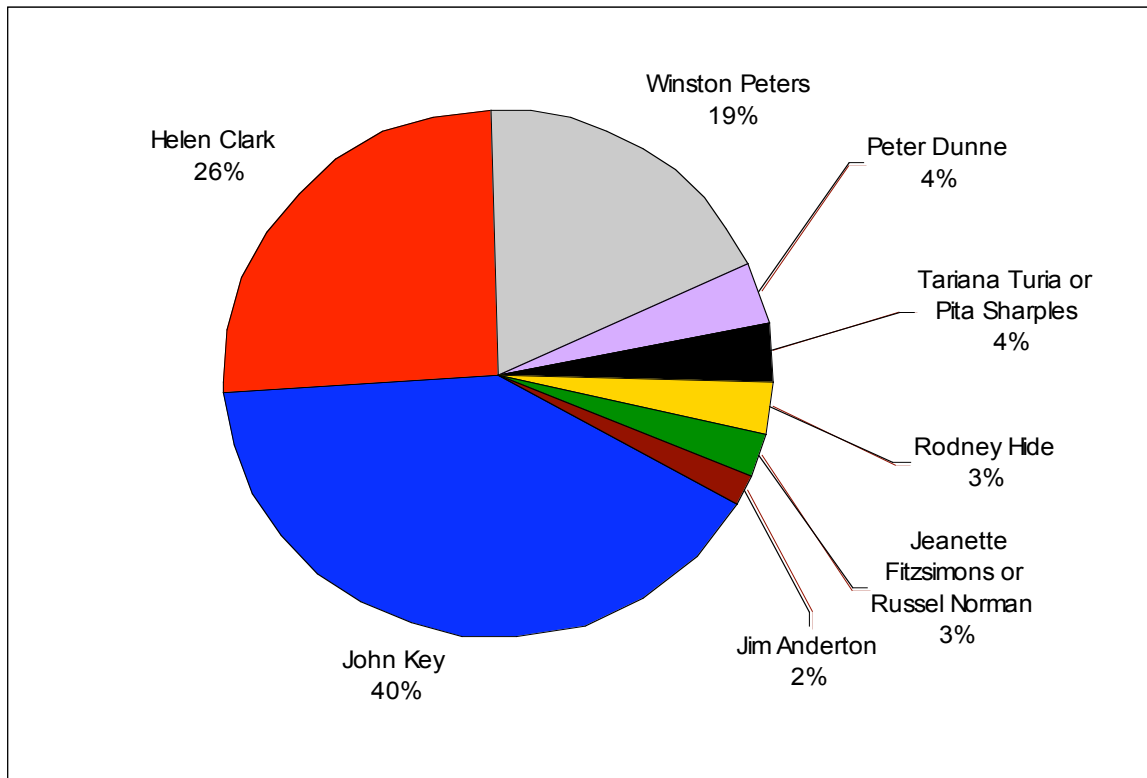
Party	Polls (Preferred Party)	Election Results	Media Coverage	Polls Difference	Results Difference
National	48.3%	44.9%	33.5%	-14.8%	-11.4%
Labour	35.3%	34.0%	38.2%	2.9%	4.2%
ACT	1.9%	3.7%	3.6%	1.7%	-0.1%
Progressive	0.3%	0.9%	1.3%	1.0%	0.4%
Greens	6.6%	6.7%	7.4%	0.8%	0.7%
United Future	0.4%	0.9%	2.4%	2.0%	1.5%
NZ First	3.1%	4.1%	5.6%	2.5%	3.1%
Maori	2.4%	2.4%	8.0%	5.6%	5.6%

Section 2: The Party Leaders

2.1 Media Coverage of Party Leaders

- John Key received the greatest media coverage amongst party leaders at 40.5%, followed by Helen Clark at 25.7% and Winston Peters at 18.6%
- Except for Winston Peters, all other small party leaders covered in this study received a combined coverage of 15.2%

Figure 5 and Table 8: Volume of Media Coverage of Party Leaders



Leader	Percentage of Coverage
John Key	40.5%
Helen Clark	25.7%
Winston Peters	18.6%
Peter Dunne	3.8%
Tariana Turia or Pita Sharples	3.6%
Rodney Hide	3.0%
Jeanette Fitzsimons or Russel Norman	2.7%
Jim Anderton	2.1%
Total	100.0%

2.2 Tone of Party Leaders Media Coverage

- John Key received 6.6% net negative coverage, while Helen Clark had 3.2% net positive coverage
- Winston Peters, Rodney Hide and John Key received the most negative coverage as a percentage of their media coverage at 41.9%, 37.1% and 32.6%, respectively
- Jim Anderton, Peter Dunne and Helen Clark received the largest percentage of positive coverage, at 38%, 30.4% and 29.8% of their total media coverage, respectively

Figure 6: Negative Coverage of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign

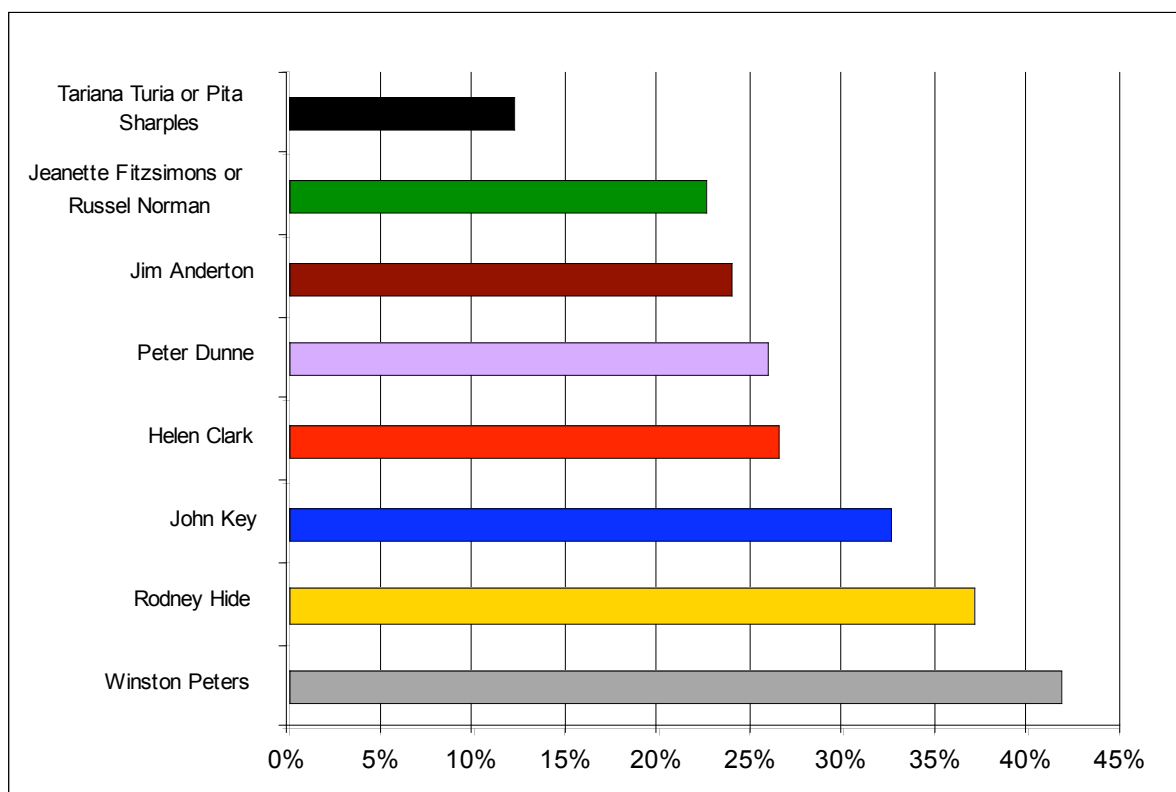
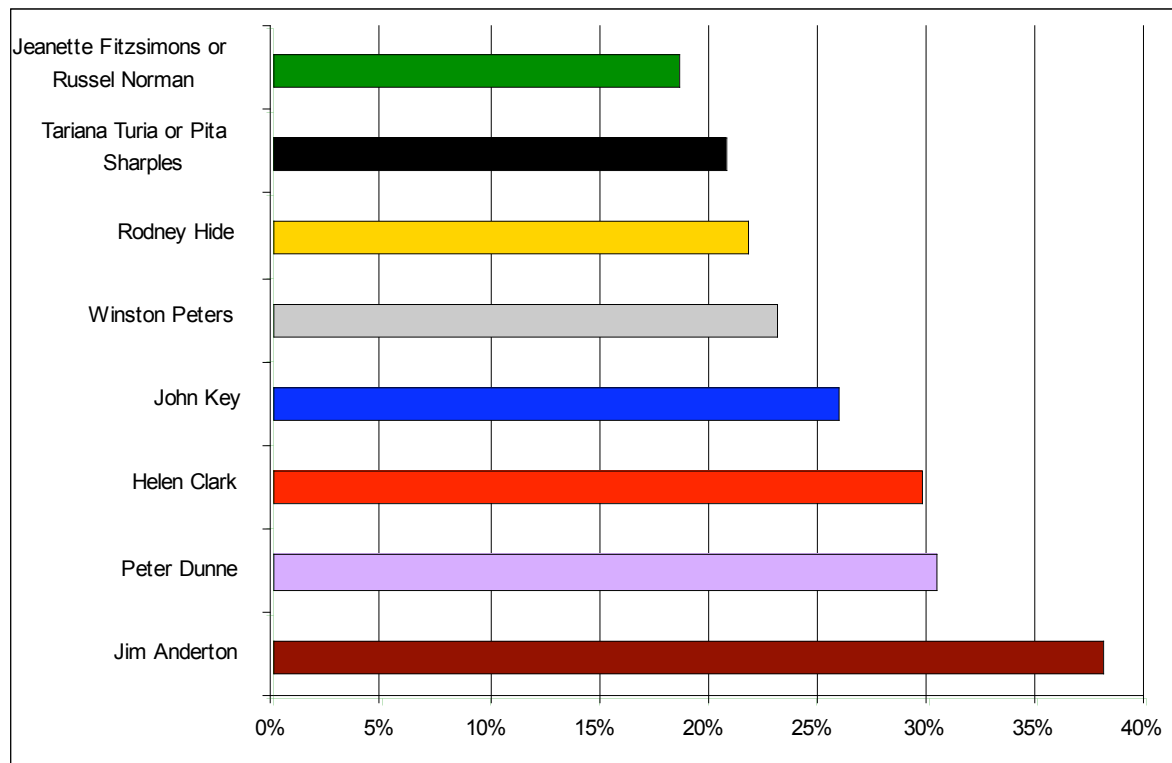


Figure 7 and Table 9: Positive Coverage of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign



Leader	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
Winston Peters	41.9%	23.0%	35.1%	-18.9%
Rodney Hide	37.1%	21.7%	41.1%	-15.4%
John Key	32.6%	25.9%	41.5%	-6.6%
Helen Clark	26.6%	29.8%	43.7%	3.2%
Peter Dunne	25.9%	30.4%	43.8%	4.5%
Jim Anderton	24.0%	38.0%	38.0%	14.0%
Jeanette Fitzsimons or Russel Norman	22.6%	18.7%	58.7%	-3.9%
Tariana Turia or Pita Sharples	12.3%	20.8%	67.0%	8.5%

2.3 News versus Analysis

- Overall, news stories accounted for 85% of coverage in terms of references to party leaders, while analysis stories accounted for 15%. Analysis stories had 7.9% more negative than positive references, while news stories were net 4.6% negative
- John Key received 7% more negative news story references than positive while Helen Clark had net 4.7% positive news story references. However, Helen Clark had net 5.2% negative analysis story references versus John Key at net 4.5% negative
- As with their respective parties, the Labour leader received more negative coverage than the National leader when journalists provided their own analysis and opinions

Table 10: News Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign

Leader	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
John Key	32.1%	25.1%	42.8%	-7.0%
Helen Clark	24.3%	29.0%	46.7%	4.7%
Winston Peters	38.9%	23.8%	37.4%	-15.1%
Rodney Hide	38.4%	19.5%	42.1%	-18.9%
Peter Dunne	27.4%	27.4%	45.1%	0.0%
Jim Anderton	25.2%	35.9%	38.8%	10.7%
Jeanette Fitzsimons or Russell Norman	22.9%	18.1%	59.0%	-4.9%
Tariana Turia or Pita Sharples	11.8%	20.2%	68.0%	8.4%
All Parties	30.3%	25.6%	44.1%	- 4.6%

Table 11: Analysis Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign

Leader	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
John Key	35.1%	30.6%	34.3%	-4.5%
Helen Clark	39.1%	33.9%	27.0%	-5.2%
Winston Peters	60.0%	18.7%	21.3%	-41.3%
Rodney Hide	25.0%	43.8%	31.3%	18.8%
Peter Dunne	20.4%	40.8%	38.8%	20.4%
Jeanette Fitzsimons or Russell Norman	18.2%	27.3%	54.5%	9.1%
Jim Anderton	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	33.3%
Tariana Turia or Pita Sharples	14.7%	23.5%	61.8%	8.8%
All Parties	38.2%	30.3%	31.5%	-7.9%

2.4 Television versus Newspapers

- Overall, television coverage of party leaders was more negative than newspapers, as television had net 10.5% negative references, while newspapers had net 3.0% negative references
- John Key had more net negative references than Helen Clark on television and in newspapers. On television, Key had net 15.2% negative coverage to Clark's net 0.5% negative. In newspapers, Key was net 2.9% negative while Clark was net positive by 4.7%
- Rodney Hide had the most net negative coverage on television at -26.2%, while Winston Peters led the pack in net negative coverage in newspapers at -20.4%

Table 12: Television Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign

Leader	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
John Key	36.9%	21.7%	41.4%	-15.2%
Helen Clark	26.0%	25.5%	48.5%	-0.5%
Rodney Hide	42.9%	16.7%	40.5%	-26.2%
Jeanette Fitzsimons or Russell Norman	36.8%	21.1%	42.1%	-15.8%
Winston Peters	38.6%	22.7%	38.6%	-15.9%
Jim Anderton	30.8%	15.4%	53.8%	-15.4%
Peter Dunne	21.6%	24.3%	54.1%	2.7%
Tariana Turia or Pita Sharples	8.0%	22.0%	70.0%	14.0%
All Parties	33.3%	22.8%	43.9%	-10.5%

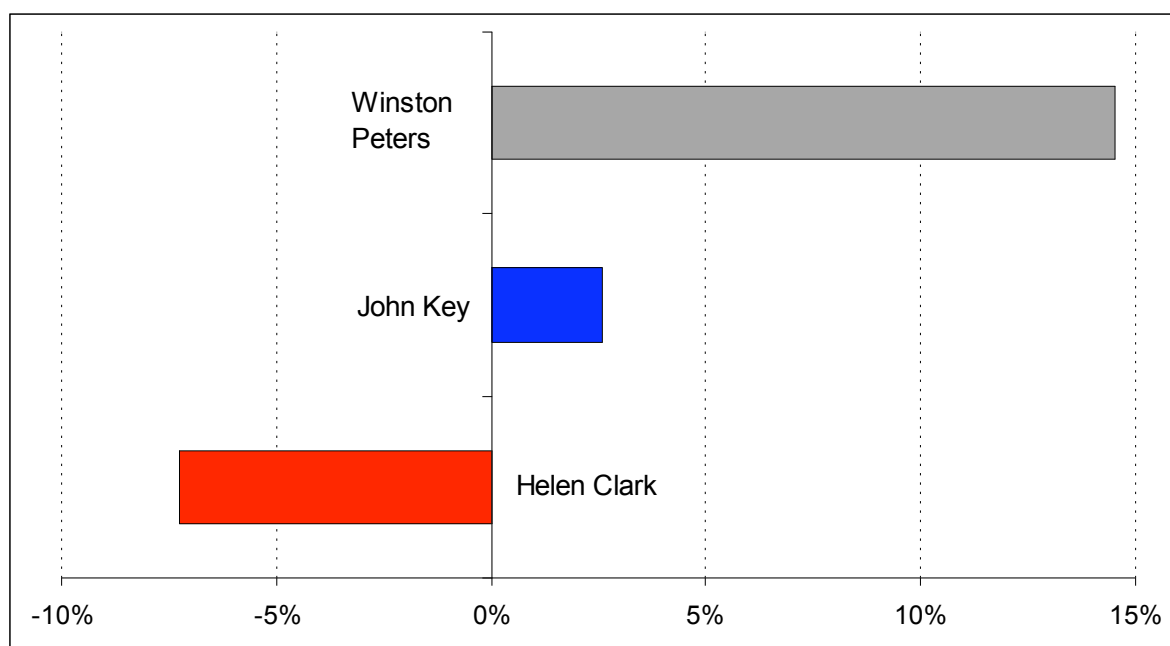
Table 13: Newspaper Tone of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign

Leader	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Positive/Negative Difference
John Key	30.7%	27.8%	41.5%	- 2.9%
Helen Clark	26.8%	31.5%	41.7%	4.7%
Winston Peters	43.6%	23.2%	33.2%	-20.4%
Rodney Hide	35.3%	23.3%	41.4%	-12.0%
Peter Dunne	26.7%	31.6%	41.7%	4.8%
Jim Anderton	23.1%	40.7%	36.1%	17.6%
Jeanette Fitzsimons or Russell Norman	20.6%	18.4%	61.0%	- 2.2%
Tariana Turia or Pita Sharples	13.6%	20.4%	66.0%	6.8%
All Parties	30.7%	27.7%	41.6%	-3.0%

2.5 Media Coverage of Party Leaders versus Polling Support

- Helen Clark received 8.8% less media coverage than public opinion support as preferred leader (as measured by polls before the election), while John Key received 1.2% more media coverage than support
- Winston Peters received 15.8% more media coverage than public opinion support as preferred leader

Figure 8 and Table 14: Difference between Media Coverage and Public Opinion Support of Party Leaders during the 2008 Election Campaign



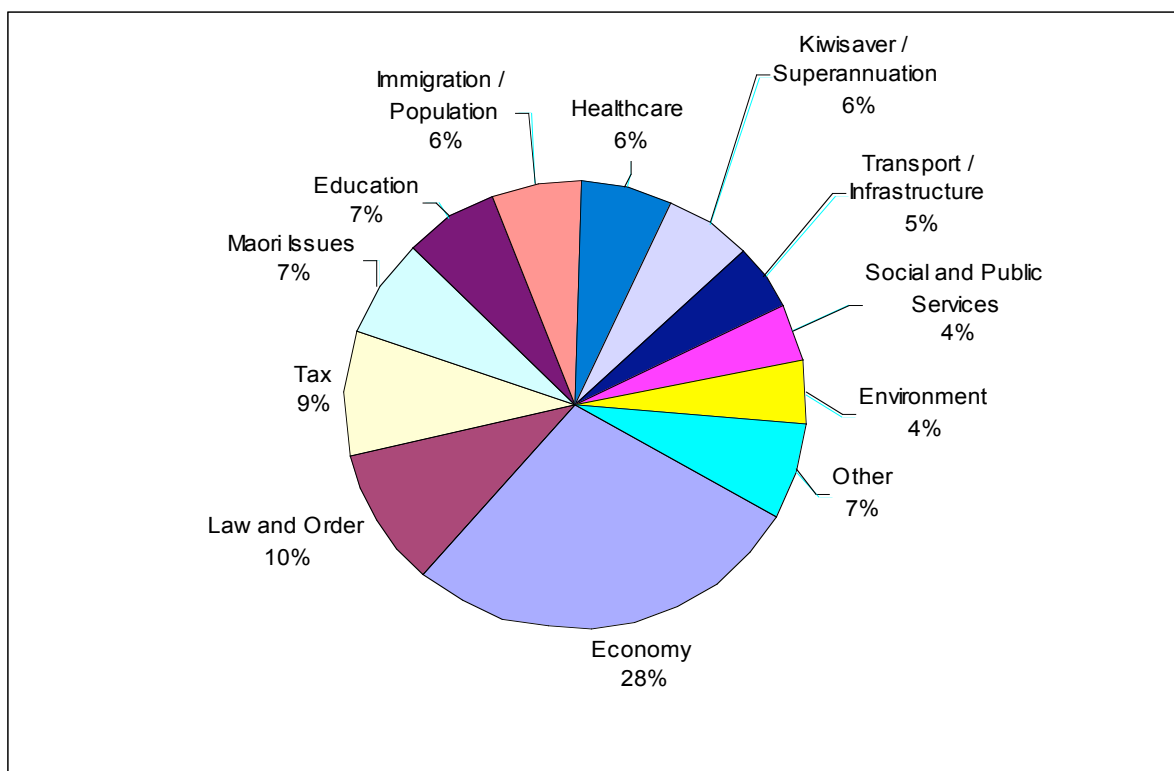
Leader	Poll Average (Preferred Leader)	Media Coverage	Difference
Helen Clark	34.6%	25.7%	-8.8%
John Key	39.3%	40.5%	1.2%
Winston Peters	2.8%	18.6%	15.8%

Section 3: The Issues

3.1 Leading Policy Issues

- The economy was the leading policy issue of the 2008 campaign, garnering 28.1% of all policy issue media coverage, followed by law and order at 10% and tax at 8.9%

Figure 9 and Table 15: Leading Policy Issues during the 2008 Election Campaign



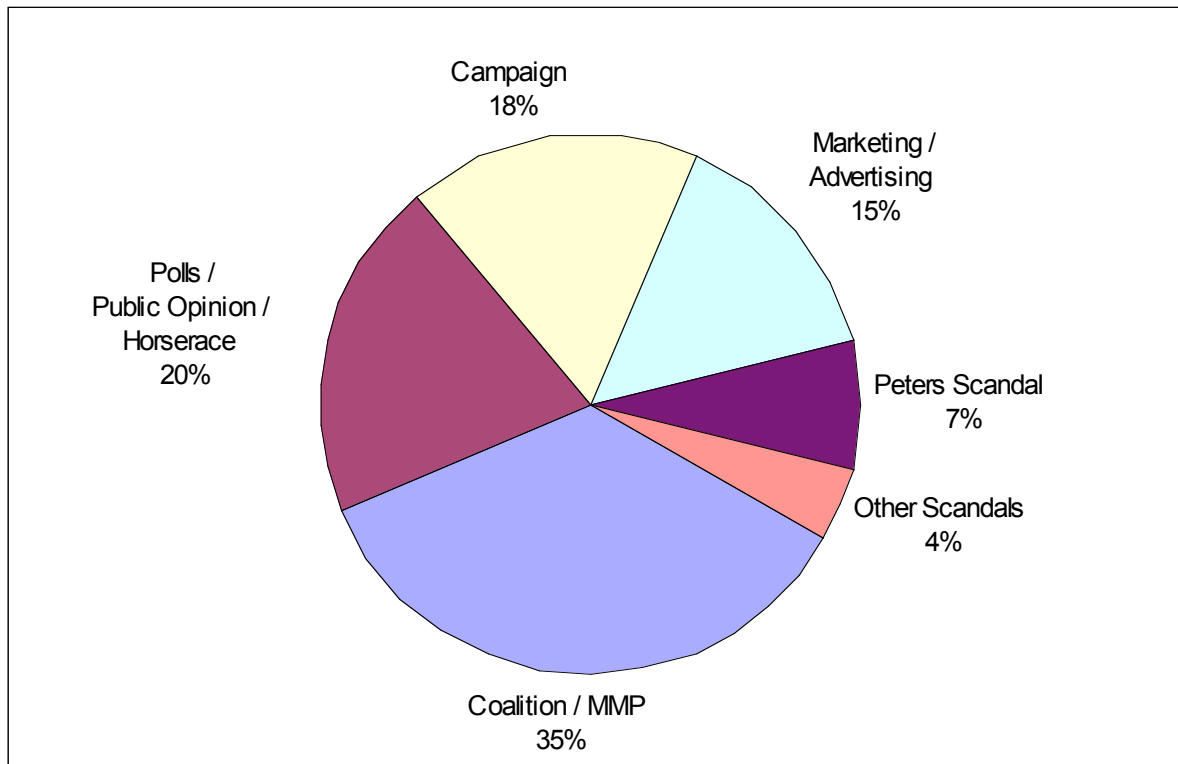
Issues	Percentage of Coverage
Economy	28.1%
Law and Order	10.0%
Tax	8.9%
Maori Issues	7.2%
Education	6.7%
Immigration / Population	6.4%
Healthcare	6.2%
Kiwisaver / Superannuation	6.1%
Transport / Infrastructure	4.8%
Social and Public Services	4.3%
Environment	4.3%
Other*	7.0%

* Other issues (all of which received under 2% coverage) included defence & security, arts, culture & sports, broadcasting & media, business issues, science, technology & innovation and state owned assets.

3.2 Leading Non-Policy Issues

- Coalition building/MMP was the most widely referenced non-policy issue of the 2008 election campaign, accounting for 35.2% of all non-policy issue coverage. This was followed by references to polls and public opinion at 20.3% and the nature of the campaign itself at 17.5%

Figure 10 and Table 16: Leading Non-Policy Issues during the 2008 Election Campaign

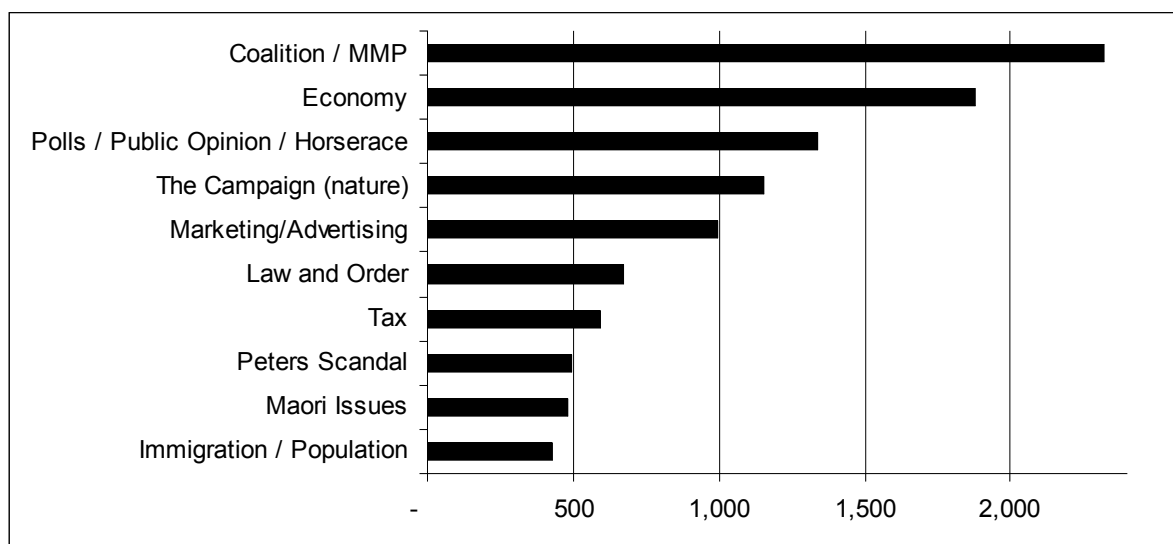


Issues	Percentage of Coverage
Coalition / MMP	35.2%
Polls / Public Opinion / Horserace	20.3%
Campaign	17.5%
Marketing/Advertising	15.0%
Peters Scandal	7.5%
Other Scandals	4.5%

3.3 Policy versus Non-Policy Issues

- Overall, the New Zealand media provided just slightly more coverage of policy issues than non-policy issues by a margin of 50.4% to 49.6% over the eight-week period leading up to the election
- When combining policy and non-policy issues, references to Coalition/MMP was the top issue of the election, followed by the economy. Four of the top five issues were non-policy issues

Figure 11 and Table 17: Leading Policy and Non-Policy Issues during the 2008 Election Campaign



Leading Issues	References	Percentage of Total
Economy	2,324	17.5%
Coalition / MMP	1,881	14.1%
Polls / Public Opinion / Horserace	1,339	10.1%
The Campaign (nature)	1,156	8.7%
Marketing/Advertising	993	7.5%
Law and Order	672	5.1%
Tax	595	4.5%
Peters Scandal	495	3.7%
Maori Issues	484	3.6%
Immigration / Population	430	3.2%
Other	2,931	22.0%
Total Policy and Non-Policy	8,397	100%

Methodology

This study is based on a content analysis of leading New Zealand daily newspapers (New Zealand Herald, Dominion Post and The Press) and daily television news programmes (TV1 and TV3 evening news). The study was conducted over an eight-week timeline beginning from Helen Clark’s announcement of the election date on 12 September 2008 and ending on the day before Election Day (7 November 2008). Over this timeline, 875 stories were analysed. Stories were selected if they met the following criteria:

- Newspapers: From front page, election/politics section or editorial. At least 50% of the content related to the election
- Television: From first 10 news stories. At least 50% of the content related to the election

Within each story, references for the following four categories were identified and coded: 1: Parties (e.g. Labour, National), 2: Party Leaders (e.g. Clark, Key), 3: Policy issues (e.g. economy, tax), 4: Non-policy issues (e.g. polls, scandals). These categories formed the “unit of analysis” for this study. In total, 17,608 references were identified based on the following distribution amongst the different sources:

Source	Number of References	Percentage
TV1	1,979	11%
TV3	2,205	13%
New Zealand Herald	6,333	36%
The Press	4,114	23%
Dominion Post	2,977	17%
Total (N =)	17,608	100%

Tone (positive, negative and neutral) was determined based on matching each reference to a media frame or frames. For example, references to a party leaders as “desperate for power” or “flip-flopper” were coded as negative frames, while references to party leaders as “experienced” or having “bold ideas” would be coded as positive frames. In total, 115 different frames were identified in this study.

While the results of this study will be weighted based on source audience size in subsequent studies, initial testing suggests that such weighting will not alter the general direction of the findings presented in this document.

For public opinion information, data from 12 different polls by five media organisations/polling companies over September and October 2008 was amalgamated, creating a poll of polls.