

Summary of the Journalists of Color Survey



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Summary of the Race and Media Survey

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INTRODUCTION

Between December 12, 2008 and January 22, 2009, representatives of UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.– a strategic alliance advocating fair and accurate news coverage about people of color – completed an online survey commissioned by The Loop 21 (www.theloop21.com). This research represents an initial evaluation of the attitudes of journalists of color and their experiences with mainstream media during one of the most significant presidential campaigns in American history on the following topics:

- Coverage of issues affecting people of color during the 2008 presidential campaign
- Professional experiences of journalists of color in mainstream media
- Use of experts of color for analysis
- Opportunities for advancement at news organizations
- Suggestions to improve/increase coverage of issues important to people of color

The sample consists of 552 respondents to the online survey.

COVERAGE of the 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

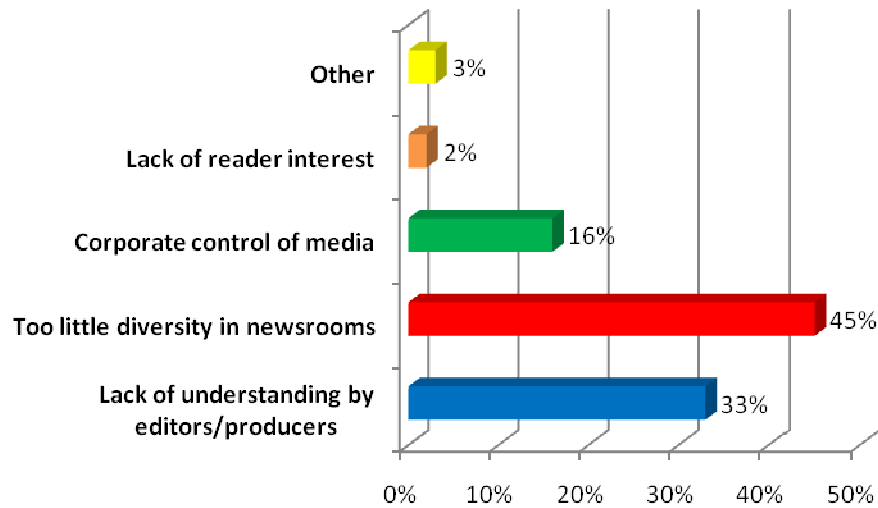
In 2008, mainstream media set a record for its continuous coverage of the candidates and personalities,¹ while more independent bloggers and Internet sites diversified the opinion landscape in cyberspace. Despite all the additional media coverage, from the perspective of the respondents, mainstream media's coverage of issues important to people of color was marginal at best.

COVERAGE of RACE and ETHNICITY

- When asked to rate mainstream media's presidential campaign coverage as it relates to "issues affecting racial minorities in general" more than 3 out of 4 respondents rated the coverage as "fair/poor" and only 22% thought coverage of "issues affecting racial minorities in general" was "good/excellent". When asked to consider coverage of issues affecting each racial group separately, respondents rated presidential campaign coverage of African American issues the highest. The percent of respondents that rated coverage "good/excellent" for issues affecting African Americans was 42%, compared to 22% for Latino issues, 11% for Asian American/Pacific Islander issues, and only 7% for Native American issues.
- An overwhelming majority – 92% - of respondents did not believe that mainstream media "adequately cover stories about race relations in a multiracial society."
- Of the 92% of respondents who believed that coverage of race relations was inadequate attributed the cause to first, a "lack of understanding by editors/producers" and second, "too little diversity in newsrooms".
- Respondents who were self identified as either a Editor/Manager/Producer or a Reporter/Photographer were the most likely to attribute the inadequacy of mainstream media coverage of race relations to "a lack of diversity in newsrooms" at 50%. Of the five media types, respondents employed in the Internet sector of the industry were least likely to identify the cause of inadequate coverage to "a lack of diversity in newsrooms" at 38%.

¹ "Americans More Tuned In Than Ever to Political News," GALLUP, September 22, 2008.

Which of the following responses best describes why you think mainstream media does not cover more stories about race relations in a multiracial society?



COVERAGE of RACE, GENDER and RELIGION

Journalists of color rendered a split verdict on mainstream media’s coverage of racial tolerance, religious tolerance, and the understanding of women’s issues during the 2008 presidential campaign. Most indicated that mainstream media enhanced racial tolerance and the discussion of race, but disagreed that it “contributed to religious tolerance” or “improved understanding of women’s issues.”

Please rate how well the mainstream media’s election coverage did the following:

	Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	Strongly/ Somewhat Disagree
Promoted conversation among people of different races	62%	35%
Improved understanding on women’s issues	40%	57%
Contributed to racial tolerance	50%	47%
Contributed to religious tolerance	24%	71%

IMPACT of INDEPENDENT BLOGGERS and INTERNET SITES

From the perspective of 51% of the journalists, independent bloggers and web sites “improved the coverage of race” in the 2008 presidential campaign. Twenty-six percent (26%) were undecided about the role of independent bloggers and web sites in the presidential campaign.

BIASES in the PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

A series of questions were posed around the concept of media bias towards the candidates and campaign controversies. The data shows that most respondents believed that there were either positive or negative biases in the coverage of each candidate .

TOWARD the CANDIDATES

According to the survey respondents, the mainstream media demonstrated a distinct bias against some candidates during the presidential campaign. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the journalists said President Barack Obama was the recipient of positive coverage from the media. A majority rated the media coverage of his running mate, Vice President Joe Biden, as neutral (59%); Senator John McCain’s media coverage was equally divided between negative (34%) and neutral (35%).

In contrast to the male candidates, the respondents perceived a more negative media environment for the female contenders; 66% said vice presidential candidate and Alaska governor Sarah Palin received a negative bias and 53% said presidential candidate and now Secretary of State Hillary Clinton received a negative bias.

For each of the candidates listed, please indicate whether the mainstream media coverage had a positive bias, a negative bias or no bias:

	Positive	Negative	No bias	Don't Know
John McCain	25%	34%	35%	5%
Barack Obama	66%	16%	15%	3%
Hillary Clinton	22%	53%	21%	4%
Sarah Palin	12%	66%	18%	4%
Joe Biden	21%	11%	59%	9%

THE REVERENDS WRIGHT and HAGEE CONTROVERSIES

Seventy two percent (72%) of survey respondents were critical of mainstream media indicating that they spent “too much time” covering the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and President Obama controversy and “too little time” (57%) discussing the controversy between Rev. John Hagee and Senator McCain.

INSIDE THE NEWSROOM

In order to understand the factors that contribute to how journalists of color evaluated the coverage of race by the mainstream media, a series of questions were asked regarding the editorial process as well as the information and research that goes into stories about race.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIVENESS to STORY SUGGESTIONS and CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Most respondents felt that management was open to story suggestions and constructive criticism. When asked about the newsroom where they worked during the 2008 presidential campaign, among those who worked in a newsroom, 78% indicated management was responsive to “story ideas on racial issues in the campaign” and 71% indicated management was responsive to “constructive criticism pertaining to coverage of racial issues in the campaign.”

PRODUCERS/EDITORS KNOWLEDGE of RACIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES

- Nearly 1 in 5 respondents (19%) believed that producers/editors were “not at all knowledgeable” about “the minority group they were covering.” In contrast, fewer respondents--only 14%--believed that producers/editors were “very knowledgeable” about “the minority group they were covering”
- Among those who believed that producers/editors were “somewhat knowledgeable” most (59%) felt the producers/editors “sought further understanding” of the issues, while a smaller but sizeable proportion (41%) believed the producers/editors “did not seek further understanding.”

USE of EXPERTS/ANALYSTS of COLOR

- Respondents were also asked questions about the media’s use of experts and analysts of color. Only 12% of respondents thought the current population of experts and analysts of color were “a good representation of the diversity in today’s multicultural society.” An overwhelming majority believed that “mainstream media should expand their pool of experts to represent the diversity of opinions in a multiracial society” (86%).

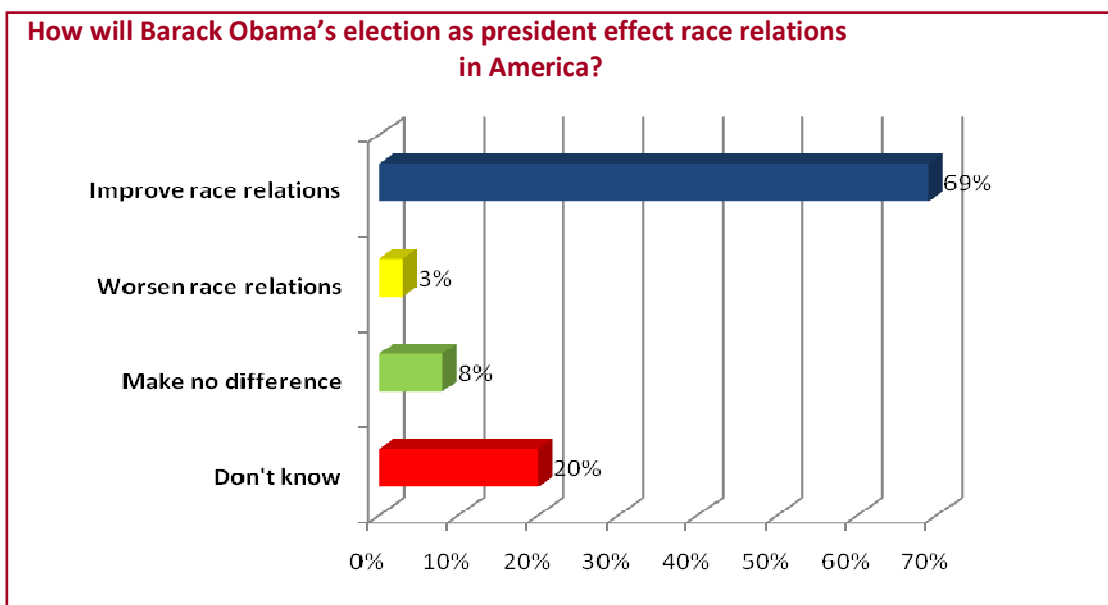
THE OBAMA EFFECT

Other polls show that the election President Barack Obama has increased expectations about future race relations in this country.² Our survey of journalists of color reveals that they are also optimistic about the effect of President’s Obama election on race relations in general, however their optimism does not extend to diversity within newsrooms. Large majorities of our respondents do not believe that that the election will increase either racial or gender diversity in senior ranks of newsroom hierarchies, even though they generally expect coverage of racial and gender issues to become more important.

The OBAMA EFFECT on RACE RELATIONS

According to the survey respondents, President Obama’s victory will improve race relations in larger society, however, they believe that his election may have limited impact on the race and gender culture in mainstream media as observed in the below data:

- Journalists of color surveyed thought that President Obama’s election will “improve race relations”



The OBAMA EFFECT: RACIAL ISSUES

81% of journalists of color surveyed indicated that they “strongly agree/somewhat agree” that President’s Obama’s election will increase the coverage of “racial and cultural issues”.

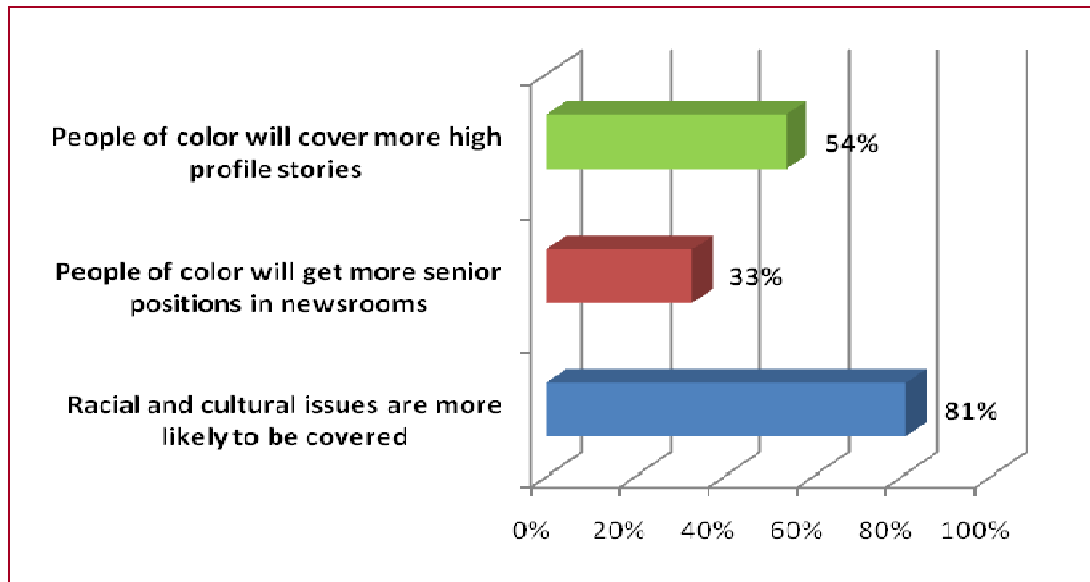
A solid majority of respondents (54%) expected that “people of color” will have an opportunity to cover “more high profile stories”.

- The data illustrates that African American (55%), Native American (55%), Latino (49%), and Asian American/Pacific Islander (46%) journalists have moderate expectations to be assigned to cover more high-profile stories post-election.

² “High Marks for the Campaign, a High Bar for Obama,” The Pew Research Center: For the People and the Press, November 13, 2008.

- Most respondents do not expect that “people of color will get more senior positions in newsrooms”—only 1 in 3 respondents (33%) expect any improvement.
 - The lack of confidence for promotions of journalists of color was equally shared among African American (71%), Native American (60%) Asian American/Pacific Islander (69%) and Latino (66%) journalists.
- Fewer than 10% of the respondents “strongly agree” that people of color will be promoted to more senior positions in newsrooms (5%) and cover more high profile stories (8%).

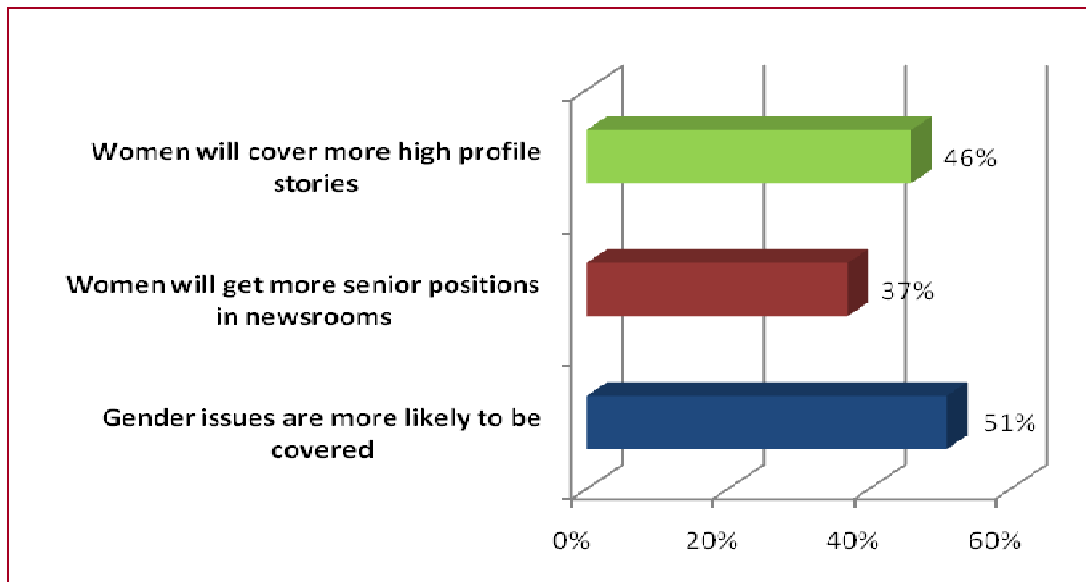
Please indicate your views about how coverage of race, as well as opportunities for journalists of color, will be affected following the 2008 election:



The OBAMA EFFECT: GENDER ISSUES

- A narrow majority of respondents (51%) expect an increase in the coverage of gender issues post-election.
- Most respondents “somewhat/strongly disagree” that women will cover more high-profile stories (54%) after the election or get more senior positions in newsrooms (63%).
- Fewer than 10% of the respondents “strongly agree” that more gender issues will be covered (6%), women will be promoted to senior positions (4%), and cover more high-profile stories (5%).

Please indicate your views about how coverage of gender, as well as opportunities for women journalists will be change following the 2008 election:



JOB SATISFACTION

Sixty-two percent (62%) of the respondents “somewhat/strongly disagree” that there are opportunities for promotion to management at their news organizations and 56% “somewhat/strongly disagree” that diversity at their current company is better than at other news organizations.” With a majority of the respondents expressing dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities (62%) and diversity in their newsrooms (56%), job dissatisfaction and frustration have the potential to become mutually reinforcing poisons in the newsroom resulting in tension, conflict, and career departures.


RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Our survey respondents had some strong opinions about how to improve upon mainstream media’s coverage of racial and diversity issues going forward.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING the COVERAGE of RACE and DIVERSITY

From the perspective of the survey respondents, the most effective strategies to transform mainstream media’s coverage of race and diversity issues will require hiring more people of color in management positions (47%) and establishing relationships with organizations in communities of color (33%).

- Native American (48%) and Asian American/Pacific Islander (44%) journalists were stronger supporters of building relationships with organizations in communities of color than African American and Latino journalists who supported hiring more people of color in management positions at 50 and 56 percent, respectively.

 Nearly 9 out of 10 journalists surveyed (89%) believe that using experts and analysts of color “improves the quality” of reporting. Eighty six percent (86%) believe that “mainstream media should expand their pool of experts of color and analysts of color to represent the diversity of opinions in a multiracial society”.

➤ The more senior journalists were the strongest advocates of a more diversified expert pool.

CONCLUSION

As this nation celebrated the historic election of President Obama, journalists of color shared mixed emotions about his election transforming the race and gender culture in mainstream media. A majority of journalists indicated that “racial and cultural issues are more likely to be covered” and that “people of color will cover more high profile stories”, however, they do not believe that the results of the 2008 election will transcend into creating opportunities for newsroom advancement for journalists of color.

The lack of confidence in the journalism industry is startling, with an overwhelming majority - 92% - of the respondents rating the mainstream media as not having done an adequate job in covering race relations. This can clearly be tied back to the disparity in the media industry, and the lack of diversity in our nation’s newsrooms. As is evidenced by the survey results, journalists of color believe that the use of experts and analysts of color contribute positively to diverse coverage and should be expanded upon “to better represent the diversity of opinions in a multiracial society”,

Although this survey answers questions regarding the views of journalists of color, more importantly it highlights opportunities for change and further study. The most telling example of the inadequacy of diversity in newsrooms is that only 14% of survey respondents felt that their producers’/editors’ were very knowledgeable of the minority group that they were covering. Certainly more diversity amongst producers and editors would increase the knowledge base around populations of color.

But most important are the implications of this survey for the role that mainstream media play in our multicultural society. The question remains: Will mainstream media advance racial, gender, and religious understanding and tolerance or will it be an impediment?

About the organizations

About The Loop 21

The Loop 21 is the premier online destination for in-depth analysis of economic and political news presented from the minority perspective. The Loop 21 not only highlights problems, but also offers insights and solutions, plus a platform where everyone is invited to join the conversation. The site is an alternative to mainstream media with a mission to lead the discussion on economic progress for people of color. For more information about The Loop 21, visit www.theloop21.com.

About UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.

UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc. is a strategic alliance advocating news coverage about people of color, and aggressively challenging its organizations at all levels to reflect the nation's diversity. UNITY, representing more than 10,000 journalists of color, is comprised of four national associations: Asian American Journalists Association, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, and the Native American Journalists Association. In addition to planning the largest regular gathering of journalists in the nation, UNITY develops programs and institutional relationships that promote its mission. For more information on UNITY, visit www.unityjournalists.org, email info@unityjournalists.org or call (703) 854-3585.

About the Eric Friedheim Library at the National Press Club

The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and has been a part of Washington life for more than 100 years. The Club's Eric Friedheim Library is a non-profit committed to helping reporters and editors adapt to technological and demographic shifts in the news business by offering a comprehensive and rigorous series of training programs. The Library is dedicated to providing timely, relevant and accurate information to journalists and media specialists. Outstanding professional and academic accomplishment is acknowledged through prestigious awards and scholarship programs. An active book and author program showcases literary achievement

About the Survey

For more details about the survey, visit www.theloop21.com where the survey responses are available.

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