

## **Reaching New Heights: The Issue of Poverty in the 2008 Campaign**

### **A study of print media**

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#### **Introduction and Summary**

This study examines U.S. print media coverage of poverty in political news from 2003 through 2008. To conduct the study, we reviewed all stories in all papers available under Lexis-Nexis that mentioned key search terms. Our data show a consistent and significant increase in coverage of poverty in political news, reaching a high point this year. Our key findings include:

- 2008 coverage of poverty as a topic in articles concerning the presidential campaigns was more than double that of 2004
- The key drivers of the coverage in 2008 include John Edwards and the economy, but these were responsible for a minority (44.8%) of articles
- Both 2007 and 2008 were record-setting years for coverage of poverty

The issue of poverty attained new heights this election cycle. While John Edwards and the economy helped drive coverage, our data indicate that they were only responsible for 44.8% of articles. This presents an opportunity for anti-poverty advocates to promote the issue.

This study includes a description of the methodology, a presentation of the findings, and some key conclusions.

#### **Methodology**

The Lexis-Nexis search engine was used to find print media articles with keywords related to poverty and politics. The research was undertaken in four parts.

In Part I, a search of all national news media was conducted. This included major national newspapers, national wires, and local newspapers. In the first search of Part I, the terms "poverty," "politics," and "candidate" were included. In the second search, the terms "poverty," "politics," "candidate," and "presidential" were included.

For Part II, only 25 of the top-ranking newspapers in the U.S. by circulation were analyzed.<sup>1</sup> The keywords searched included "poverty," "politics," "candidate," and "presidential."

In Part III, the study searched all national newspapers and newswires using the terms "poverty," "politics," "candidate," and "presidential," but used a function of Lexis-Nexis to sort the results by the category "U.S. Presidential Elections." This was designed to ensure that all of the documents included in the count were topical.

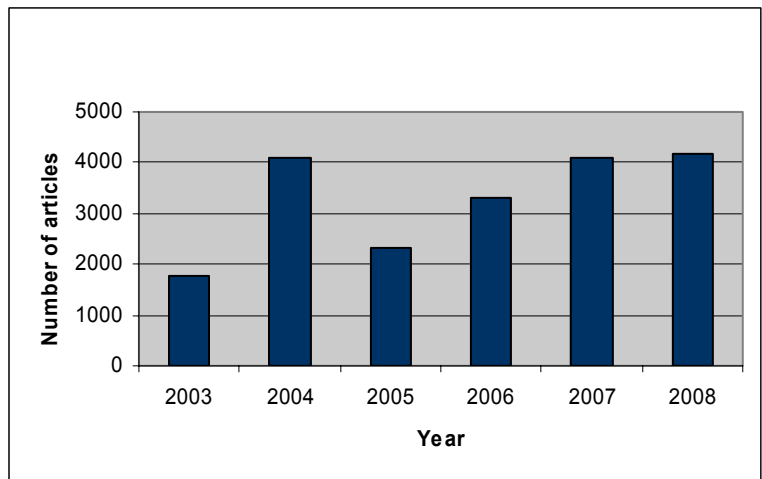
In Part IV, the study used the search criteria from Part III but narrowed the results by three separate sets of additional search terms. The first set was "John Edwards." The second was a set of terms associated with large-scale financial crisis; this added one or more of "recession," "depression," "downturn," "subprime," "financial crisis," or "economic crisis" to the Part III search criteria. The third set included the terms associated with financial crisis as well as more general terms associated with the national economy; this added one or more of "recession," "depression," "downturn," "subprime," "financial crisis," "economic crisis," "stock," "market," or "Wall Street" to the Part III search criteria.

We used data from the entirety of the years 2003-2007, from January 1<sup>st</sup> until December 31<sup>st</sup> each year. For 2008, we used data from January 1<sup>st</sup> until October 28<sup>th</sup>.

**PART I: All U.S Newspapers and Wires**

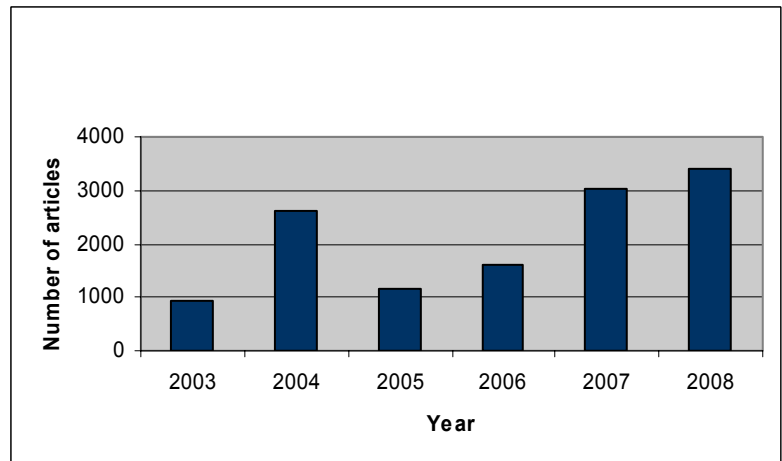
“poverty,” “politics,” “candidate”

Year	Documents returned
2003	1,778
2004	4,083
2005	2,336
2006	3,310
2007	4,100
2008	4,172



“poverty,” “politics,” “candidate,” “presidential”

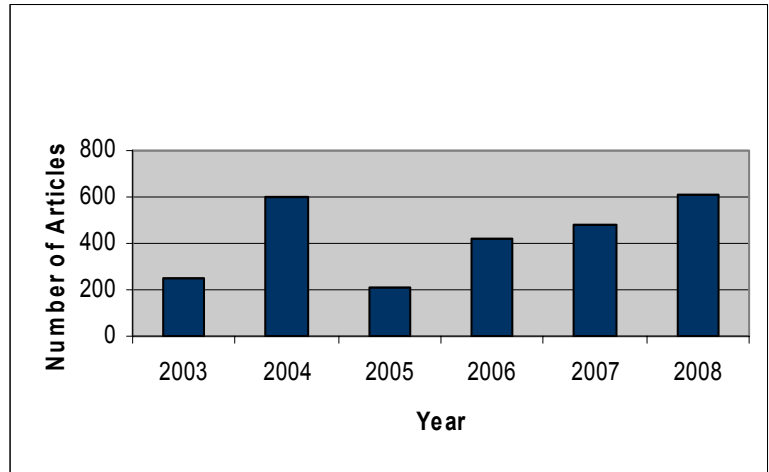
Year	Documents returned
2003	925
2004	2,608
2005	1,146
2006	1,612
2007	3,030
2008	3,412



**PART II: Top 25 U.S. Newspapers by Circulation**

“poverty,” “politics,” “candidate,” “presidential”

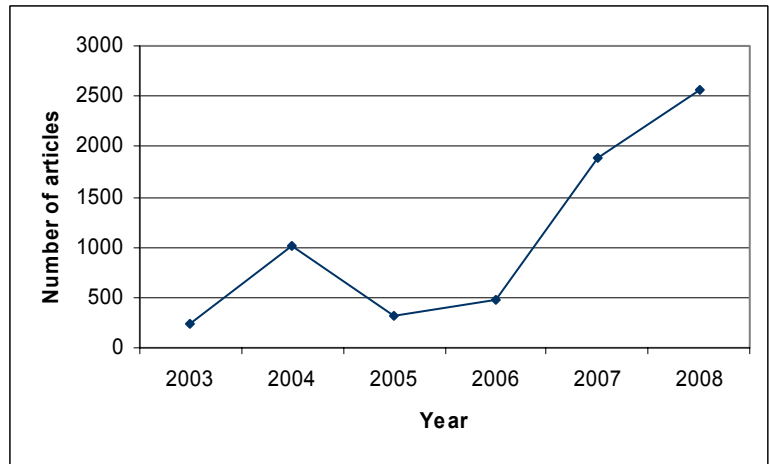
Year	Documents returned
2003	250
2004	600
2005	214
2006	420
2007	484
2008	609



**PART III: Data Controlled for Topical Articles, All U.S. Newspapers and Wires**

“poverty,” “politics,” “presidential,” “candidate”

Year	Documents returned
2003	239
2004	1,013
2005	325
2006	480
2007	1,892
2008	2,565



**PART IV: Expanded Search Criteria**

“poverty,” “politics,” “presidential,” “candidate,” “John Edwards”

Year	Documents returned	Documents mentioning “John Edwards”	Percentage of documents mentioning “John Edwards”
2003	239	80	33.5
2004	1,013	524	51.7
2005	325	145	44.6
2006	480	228	47.5
2007	1,892	1,119	59.1
2008	2,565	565	22.3

Economic crisis terms: “poverty,” “politics,” “presidential,” “candidate,” and one or more of “recession,” “depression,” “downturn,” “subprime,” “financial crisis,” or “economic crisis”

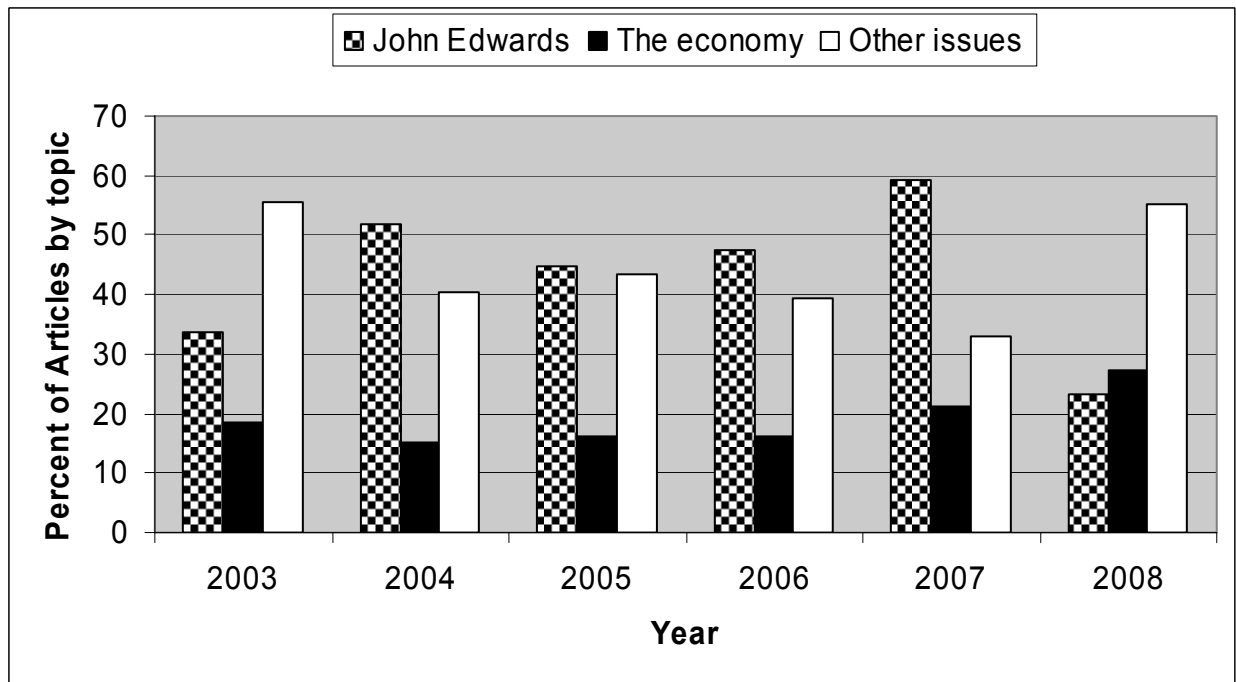
Year	Documents returned	Documents mentioning economic crisis terms	Percentage of documents mentioning economic crisis terms
2003	239	13	5.4
2004	1,013	48	4.7
2005	325	13	4.0
2006	480	11	2.3
2007	1,892	127	6.7
2008	2,565	354	13.8

General economic terms: "poverty," "politics," "presidential," "candidate," and one or more of "recession," "depression," "downturn," "subprime," "financial crisis," "economic crisis," "stock," "market," or "Wall Street"

Year	Documents returned	Documents mentioning general economic terms	Percentage of documents mentioning general economic terms
2003	239	44	18.4
2004	1,013	154	15.2
2005	325	53	16.3
2006	480	78	16.3
2007	1,892	401	21.2
2008	2,565	715	27.9

Analyzing 2008 data

Total articles on poverty	Articles containing "John Edwards"	Percentage of article containing "John Edwards"	Articles containing all economic terms	Percentage of articles containing all economic terms
2,565	565	22.3	715	27.9



### Conclusion

It seems reasonable to conclude that coverage of poverty in political news is increasing in the print media. In only the first 10 months of the year, 2008 saw more coverage of poverty than any of the past five years, including the previous Presidential election year, 2004. In addition, although the ongoing financial crisis has contributed to increased coverage of poverty, political news stories that discuss poverty independent of current economic turmoil have also been significant.

Facing the future challenges of a damaged economy will make the issue of poverty in America only more relevant, and coverage of the issue is likely to grow. But advocates and those concerned with poverty know the real test is not just whether a spotlight is shone on the issue of poverty and opportunity in America, it is whether we can summon bipartisan support to do something about building a better country, together.

<sup>1</sup>These were: *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Daily News*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Denver Post*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *New York Post*, the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Star Tribune*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Newark Star Ledger*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Seattle Times*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Detroit Free Press*, *New York Newsday*, and the *Arizona Republic*. A notable exception to the Lexis-Nexis newspaper search engine is the *Wall Street Journal*, which consistently ranks in the top twenty newspapers in the U.S. by circulation.