

# **IF IT'S SUNDAY, IT'S CONSERVATIVE**

***AN ANALYSIS OF THE SUNDAY TALK SHOW GUESTS  
ON ABC, CBS, AND NBC, 1997 – 2005***

***A REPORT BY MEDIA MATTERS FOR AMERICA***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Sunday-morning talk shows on ABC, CBS, and NBC are where the prevailing opinions are aired and tested, policymakers state their cases, and the left and right in American politics debate the pressing issues of the day on equal ground. Both sides have their say and face probing questions. Or so you would think.

In fact, as this study reveals, conservative voices significantly outnumber progressive voices on the Sunday talk shows. *Media Matters for America* conducted a content analysis of ABC's *This Week*, CBS' *Face the Nation*, and NBC's *Meet the Press*, classifying each one of the nearly 7,000 guest appearances during President Bill Clinton's second term, President George W. Bush's first term, and the year 2005 as either Democrat, Republican, conservative, progressive, or neutral. The conclusion is clear: Republicans and conservatives have been offered more opportunities to appear on the Sunday shows -- in some cases, dramatically so.

Among the study's key findings:

- The balance between Democrats/progressives and Republicans/conservatives was roughly equal during Clinton's second term, with a slight edge toward Republicans/conservatives: 52 percent of the ideologically identifiable guests were from the right, and 48 percent were from the left. But in Bush's first term, Republicans/conservatives held a dramatic advantage, outnumbering Democrats/progressives by 58 percent to 42 percent. In 2005, the figures were an identical 58 percent to 42 percent.
- Counting only elected officials and administration representatives, Democrats had a small advantage during Clinton's second term: 53 percent to 45 percent. In Bush's first term, however, the Republican advantage was 61 percent to 39 percent -- nearly three times as large.
- In both the Clinton and Bush administrations, conservative journalists were far more likely to appear on the Sunday shows than were progressive journalists. In Clinton's second term, 61 percent of the ideologically identifiable journalists were conservative; in Bush's first term, that figure rose to 69 percent.
- In 1997 and 1998, the shows conducted more solo interviews with Democrats/progressives than with Republicans/conservatives. But in every year since, there have been more solo interviews with Republicans/conservatives.
- The most frequent Sunday show guest during this nine-year period is Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who has appeared 124 times. Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE) has been the most frequent guest since 2003.
- In every year examined by the study -- 1997 - 2005 -- more panels tilted right (a greater number of Republicans/conservatives than Democrats/progressives) than tilted left. In some years, there were two, three, or even four times as many right-titled panels as left-tilted panels.
- Congressional opponents of the Iraq war were largely absent from the Sunday shows, particularly during the period just before the war began.

In short, the Sunday talk shows on ABC, CBS, and NBC are dominated by conservative voices, from newsmakers to commentators. The data from the Clinton years indicate that the disparity cannot be explained simply by the fact that Republicans currently control the government.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Principal Findings .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Journalists and Pundits .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. The Usual Suspects .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Comparing the Shows .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>7. Methodology .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>8. Appendix .....</b>	<b>22</b>

## INTRODUCTION

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The Sunday-morning talk shows on ABC, CBS, and NBC are where the prevailing opinions are aired and tested, policymakers state their cases, and the left and right in American politics debate the pressing issues of the day on equal ground. Both sides have their say and face probing questions. Or so you would think.

In fact, as this study reveals, conservative voices significantly outnumber progressive voices on the Sunday talk shows. *Media Matters for America* conducted a content analysis of ABC's *This Week*, CBS' *Face the Nation*, and NBC's *Meet the Press*. Each one of the nearly 7,000 guest appearances during President Bill Clinton's second term, President George W. Bush's first term, and the year 2005 were classified as one of the following:

- 1) Democrat;
- 2) Republican;
- 3) Progressive;
- 4) Conservative;
- 5) Neutral.

The combined audience of the Sunday shows on ABC, CBS, and NBC is approximately 10 million households -- not an insubstantial number, one might argue, but hardly *American Idol* territory. Nonetheless, the shows occupy a singular place within the media landscape. First, their audience includes virtually all of what we might call the journo-political establishment -- reporters, political professionals, interest group advocates, and so on. Second, the Sunday shows confer status on those who appear there in a way no other media presentation does. When a member of Congress or journalist is asked to appear on one of the Sunday shows, he or she has been officially designated a person of importance whose views demand consideration. Finally, the Sunday shows define the scope of official debate in Washington. The views presented on Sunday are legitimized and considered mainstream; those not presented are marginalized as outside the mainstream.

The ability of these programs to define the people and arguments that represent "reasonable" debate in the nation's capital is what gives them so much power and demonstrates the gravity of the decisions made by the producers at ABC, CBS, and NBC who book the guests every week. When one side dominates the debate -- as has the right, particularly over the last five years -- it may have serious consequences for unfolding events. As new issues arise and old issues are reexamined, the course of legislation and executive action can be determined in part by policymakers' understanding of the options before them, the shape of public opinion, which possibilities they should consider, and which they may discount. If no one in the important forums of debate discusses an issue, it falls off nearly everyone's radar screen. If everyone in those forums accepts that certain presumptions lie beyond questioning, avenues of policy can be prematurely shut off.

We would not argue that each and every episode should be precisely balanced between Republicans and Democrats or conservatives and progressives. At times, there are very good reasons to grant a solo interview to a particular newsmaker or even to host a panel discussion that includes only members of one party. However, over an extended period of time, one would expect at least a rough ideological balance in the guests given the opportunity to speak in these vital forums of opinion-making.

If this is a reasonable standard for the Sunday shows to live up to, they have failed.

Some might argue that since Republicans controlled Congress during the second Clinton term and have held both the executive and legislative branches since 2001, the results of this study are consistent with time on the Sunday shows being assigned in direct proportion to the power held by the two parties. However, that assertion presumes that the purpose of the Sunday shows is not to air a balanced debate but to serve as a mouthpiece for whichever party is in power at a particular moment. If that were to be the principle guiding the shows' booking decisions, then no Democrats should appear on the shows at all (and of course, should the Democrats take control of Congress and the White House, the same would apply to Republicans). But such a system would be consistent neither with the need in a democratic society for complete exploration of issues, nor with the networks' public interest obligations.

Furthermore, the shifting balance of power should have no effect on which journalists and pundits appear on the Sunday programs; but as our data demonstrate, conservative voices become only more dominant when George W. Bush took the White House in 2001.

We make no claims of intentional bias in the systematic over-representation of conservatives that we have documented. It is most assuredly not our assertion that the producers of the Sunday shows have set out to intentionally skew their programs in favor of right-leaning voices. Nevertheless, there are consistent patterns that suggest that certain assumptions are at work -- assumptions about who is important and how conservatives and progressives stand in relation to one another. This is particularly true in the composition of journalist panels, in which conservatives are often "balanced" by neutral reporters, with nary a progressive to be found.

The pages that follow document how Democrats and progressives have been underrepresented on *Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, and *This Week*. Our hope is that those involved in the production of these shows will utilize our data to critically examine how they construct Sunday-morning debates and to consider whether the pattern of conservative domination serves the public interest.

# PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

## The Conservative Advantage

President Bill Clinton's second term evinced the kind of balance between the left and the right that one would expect to find in one of the pillars of the establishment media. While Republicans/conservatives enjoyed a small advantage overall (52 percent to 48 percent), this disparity was hardly overwhelming or even worthy of note, much less complaint. But things changed once President George W. Bush took office.

During Bush's first term, Republicans/conservatives appeared far more often than their counterparts on the other side of the aisle, outnumbering Democrats and progressives by 58 percent to 42 percent.

Although there are small differences among the three shows (see page 14), each show follows this pattern: a roughly equal balance between the left and the right during Clinton's second term and a substantial advantage given to Republicans/conservatives during Bush's first term. The trend continued in 2005, with Republicans/conservatives comprising 58 percent of the ideologically identifiable guests.

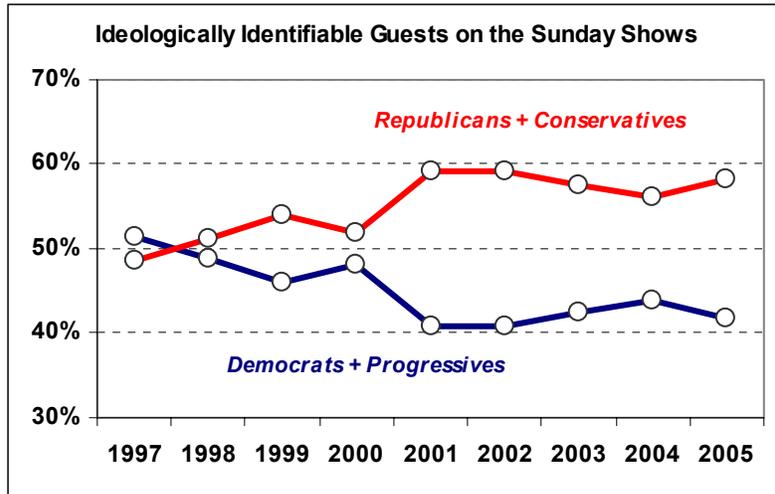


Figure 2.1

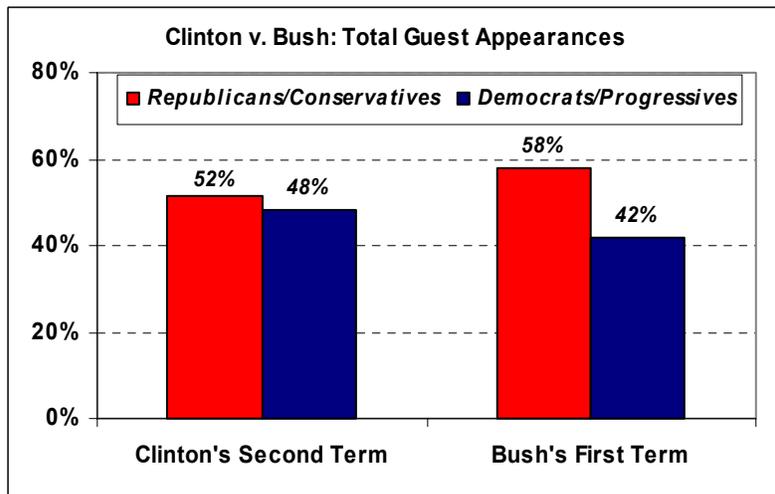


Figure 2.2

## Elected and Administration Officials

The bulk of Sunday show guests are those with direct influence over government policy, particularly members of Congress and administration officials. One would expect that the administration controlling the White House would dominate the shows, since the administration most directly drives the nation's agenda. Indeed, this is the explanation representatives of the networks gave when we asked them about the recent disparity between Republicans and Democrats (see sidebar on page 10). But that explanation does not account for the differences we see between the Clinton years and the Bush years.

The pattern we see here is the same as with guests overall: Republicans and Democrats appeared in similar numbers during Clinton's second term, but Republicans gained a substantial advantage during Bush's first term. In fact, during the Clinton term, Democrats enjoyed an eight-point advantage, outnumbering Republicans by 53 percent to 45 percent. But in Bush's first term, the Republican advantage was 22 points (61 percent to 39 percent).

It is not surprising, therefore, that administration officials appeared less frequently during the Clinton years than they have in the Bush years. The proportion of Sunday show guests coming from the administration never exceeded 10 percent during Clinton's second term. However, during the first three years

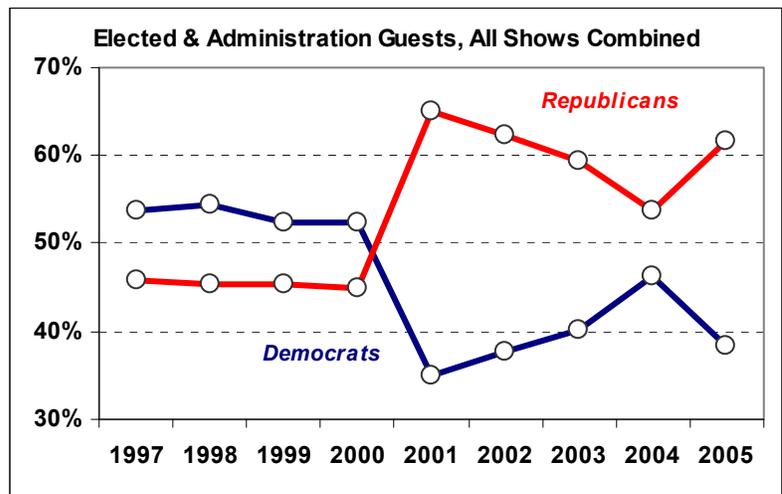


Figure 2.3

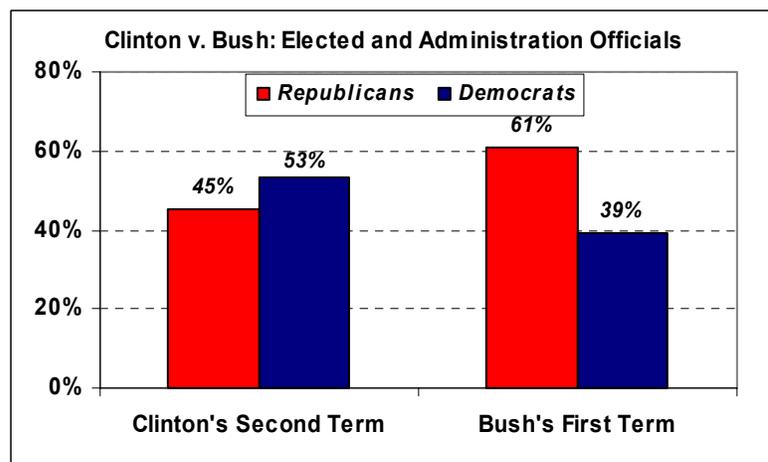


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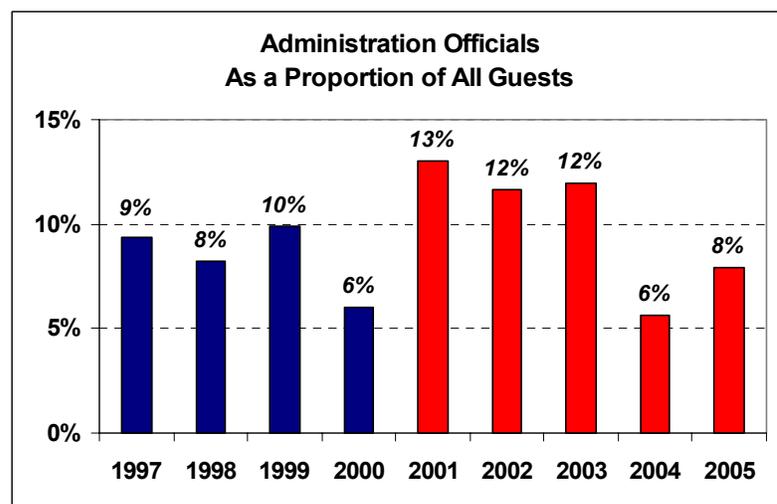


Figure 2.5

of the Bush administration, the figures were 13 percent, 12 percent, and 12 percent, respectively.

In a situation of perfect balance between the two parties, when a party assumes control of the White House, the number of elected officials from that party appearing on the Sunday shows should decrease, as they are crowded out by administration officials. Although this is what occurred during the period we examined, the effect was minimal. In fact, the number of Republican elected officials and candidates who appeared during the Clinton years was substantially higher than the number of Democratic elected officials and candidates who appeared during the Bush years.

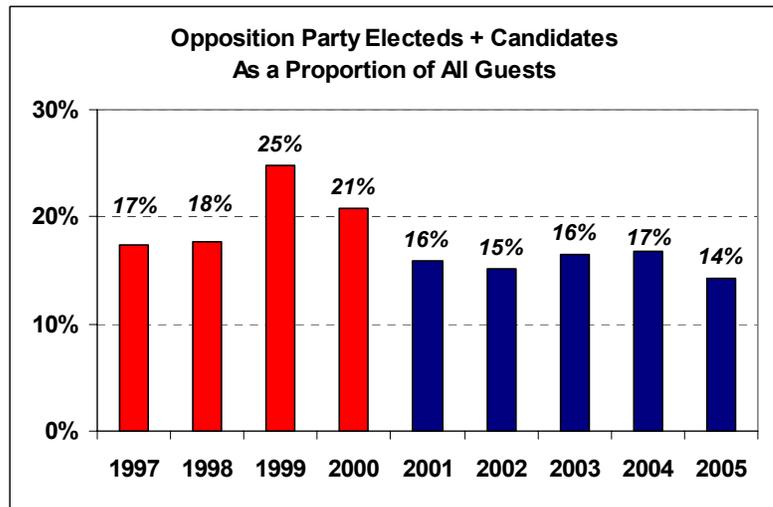


Figure 2.6

### Tilted Panels

Obviously, there are times when composing a panel of only Democrats or only Republicans is perfectly valid. But over time, one would expect that, at the very least, the number of panels tilted right would roughly equal the number of panels tilted left. But this was not what we found.

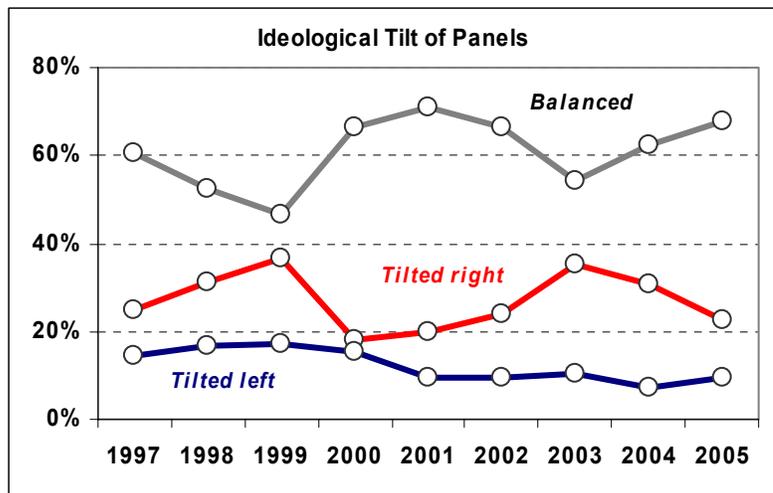


Figure 2.7

While balanced panels are the norm -- and their proportion increased in 2004 and 2005 -- in every year of the study, more panels tilted to the right (i.e., conservatives outnumbering progressives) than tilted to the left.

In some years, the difference became particularly acute. In 2003, there were more than three panels tilted right for every panel tilted left; in 2004, the year of a presidential election, there were more than four panels tilted right for every panel tilted left.

The three Sunday-morning shows were not equal on this score. *Face the Nation* came closer to parity than did the other two: During the entire period studied, 21 percent of *Face the Nation* panels tilted right, while 17 percent tilted left. In contrast, 22 percent of panels on *Meet the Press* were tilted right, compared with 13 percent tilted left. The disparity was greatest on *This Week*, where 34 percent of the panels tilted right but only 11 percent tilted left.

## The Semi-Debate Over Iraq

The war in Iraq is arguably the most important issue of our time, and one that has been hotly debated since the Bush administration first began to campaign for the war in 2002. From the beginning of that debate, the country was divided sharply. And while a majority supported the war when it began, most Americans now tell pollsters that the war was a mistake. So one would expect that those invited on the Sunday shows would represent a spectrum of beliefs on the war. But once again, one would be wrong.

We divided the debate into three periods: the prewar period (which began in September 2002); the period of "major combat operations" ending with Bush's "Mission Accomplished" aircraft carrier landing on May 1, 2003; and everything since. Examining appearances by senators (who make up the bulk of elected officials appearing on the Sunday shows), we observed that in the prewar period, only 11 percent of those who appeared on the shows voted against the congressional resolution authorizing the war.<sup>1</sup> The number since has been closer to the 23 percent of the Senate that voted against the war.

We would not argue that the Sunday shows should have a balance of guests in favor of and in opposition to the war that mirrors precisely the vote in Congress, and it is true that many from both houses who initially favored the war have since come to regret that decision. Nonetheless, one could argue that the period before the war began -- when the country was debating not how things were going but, rather, whether we should go to war in the first place -- was the time when the greatest diversity of opinion was most important to the public.

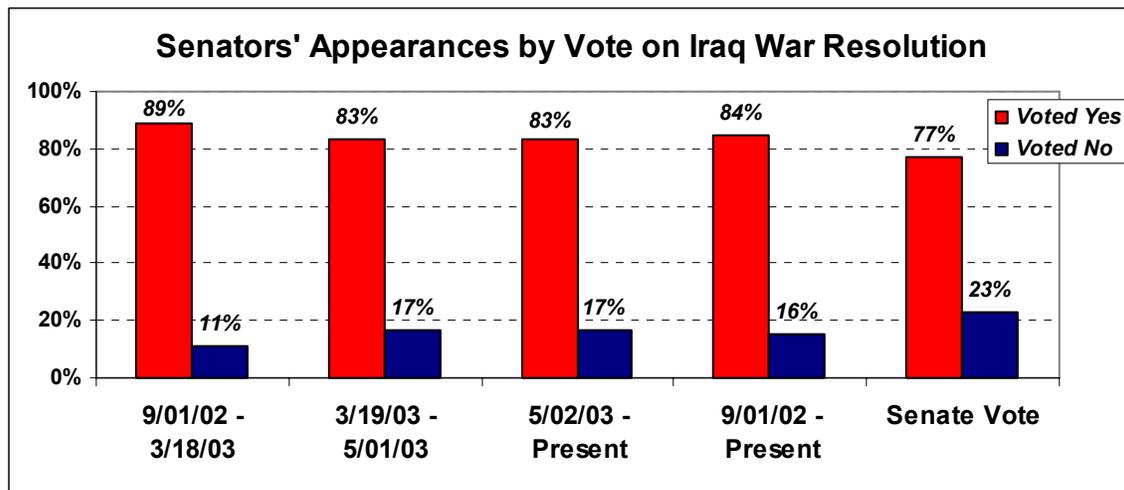


Figure 2.8

<sup>1</sup> Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) is the only member of Congress who has appeared on a Sunday show since the Iraq war began but was not in Congress at the time of the vote. Since he was on record at the time as opposing the war, we counted him as a war opponent.

## JOURNALISTS AND PUNDITS

While the numbers of both conservative and progressive journalists appearing on the shows declined overall from Clinton's second term to Bush's first term, the disparity between the two groups increased, to the point at which there were more than two conservative journalists for every one progressive journalist.

In other words, what we see here is an exaggerated version of the overall finding that the rough parity characteristic of the Clinton years evolved into conservative domination during the Bush years.

While progressives were at a significant disadvantage during the late 1990s, that disadvantage has become even more acute during the Bush years. At times, the disparity has been overwhelming. During 2003 and 2004, there were approximately four conservative journalists appearing on the Sunday shows for every one progressive journalist.

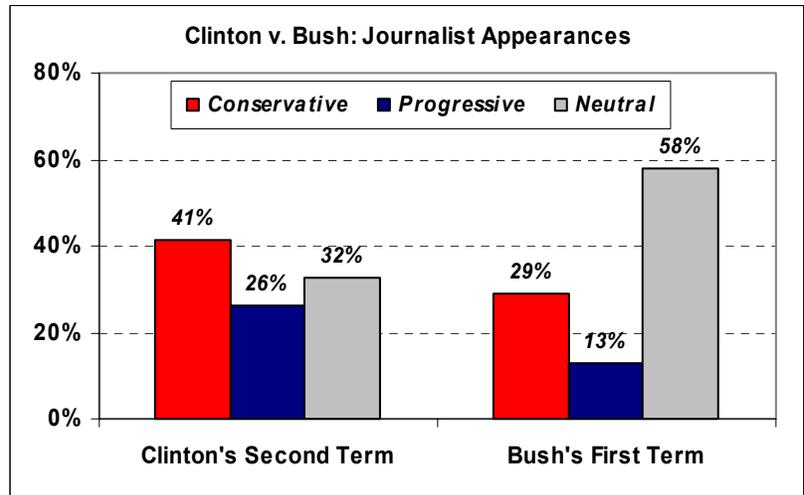


Figure 3.1

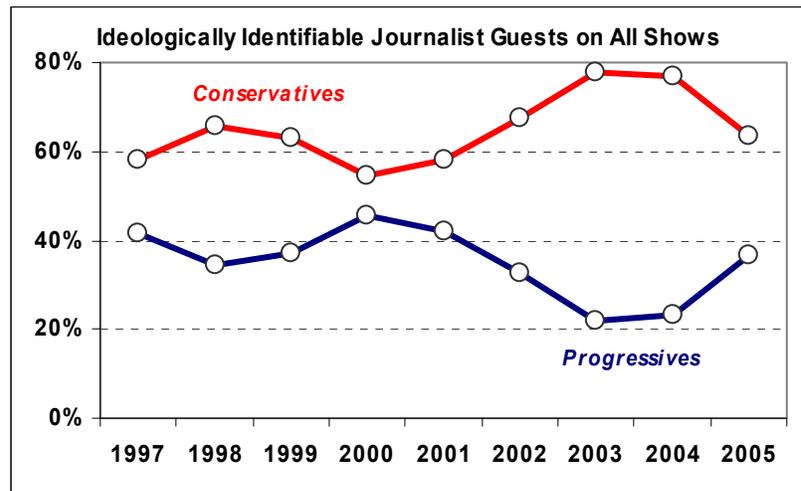


Figure 3.2

(It should be noted that most of this disparity can be accounted for by the guests on *Meet the Press* and *This Week*. While journalists regularly appear on *Face the Nation*, often to participate in interviewing a newsmaker, the vast majority of these guests are non-ideologically aligned daily newspaper reporters or centrist opinion columnists.)

And when we catalogue the journalists who are most often featured on the shows, we see a list comprised almost entirely of centrists and conservatives -- people like David S. Broder of *The Washington Post* (75 appearances) or Fareed Zakaria of *Newsweek* (72 appearances) on one hand, and Robert Novak of the *Chicago Sun-Times* (37 appearances) or William Safire of *The New York Times* (56 appearances) on the other. The progressive journalist with the most appearances is *The Washington Post's* E.J. Dionne Jr. (30 appearances).

The problem with the ideological positioning of the journalists and pundits who are brought on the shows is not only that progressives are dramatically outnumbered by their conservative counterparts, but also that all too often, conservatives -- opinion columnists or writers for conservative magazines, for example -- are paired with reporters for newspapers and television news programs. This suggests that some producers may have internalized the conservative attacks on the media as having a "liberal bias," such that the idea of someone like *National Review's* Kate O'Beirne or *The Wall Street Journal's* Paul A. Gigot being "balanced" by someone like the *Journal's* John Harwood or PBS' Gwen Ifill doesn't raise any eyebrows.

As a consequence, conservative writers and publications are granted a status not accorded to progressives. In 2005, for instance, *National Review* was represented by three appearances by Byron York, five by O'Beirne, and one by William F. Buckley Jr., while *The Weekly Standard* added two by Stephen F. Hayes. Progressive magazines, on the other hand, saw only one appearance by *The Nation's* Katrina vanden Heuvel and one by *The New Republic's* Peter Beinart (who was a supporter of the Iraq war). Writers from prominent progressive magazines such as *The American Prospect*, *The Washington Monthly*, and *Mother Jones* are almost entirely absent.<sup>2</sup>

The argument that the shows do (or should) reflect the realities of power cannot be made about journalist guests. It would not be unreasonable to expect that conservative journalists and progressive journalists would appear with equal frequency and that this balance would continue despite a change in administration. But the data show that a consistent conservative advantage grew only more pronounced during the Bush years.

**Media Matters for America asked the producers of all three shows several questions, including why it seems that, since the Bush administration began, more Republicans/conservatives have appeared on their show than have Democrats/progressives. Following are their replies:**

"Regarding your perception that Republicans have appeared more frequently during the Bush administration, one needs to consider that the party holding the presidency also has a cabinet full of major newsmaker guests that speak to U.S. policy matters -- Defense, State, Justice, Treasury, etc. The same would be true for the eight years of the Clinton administration when the cabinet was, by and large, filled with Democrats." -- **Betsy Fischer, executive producer of NBC's *Meet the Press***

"If you take everybody from the Bush administration and label them Republicans or partisans, we're a country at war, and when we can get someone from the administration [to be a guest on the show], like the secretary of state, then we get them. Republicans are in power. I bet you'd find the same thing during Clinton's administration. Except during the Clinton [Lewinsky] scandal, it was hard to get people from the [Clinton] administration to come on [to be a guest on *Face the Nation*]. When you have an administration that is not in the midst of a scandal, [*Face the Nation* will host] more people from that administration, because they're the ones running the country. If you have an issue that you need to talk to the administration on, then you have to talk to them, whether they're Democrat or Republican. But when an administration has their backs against the wall, they tend not to put [members of their administration as guests on TV talk shows]." -- **Carin Pratt, executive producer of CBS' *Face the Nation with Bob Schieffer***

"Members of the administration -- members of the president's staff and cabinet, most of whom are Republican -- are often guests on the show. Their segments more often than not are either followed by or include a guest with an opposing voice." -- **A spokesperson for ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopoulos***

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Reich, co-founder of *The American Prospect*, appeared three times in 2005, but his prominence comes far more from the fact that he is a former secretary of labor than from his association with that magazine.

## THE USUAL SUSPECTS

As any viewer of the Sunday-morning talk shows knows, a few political figures appear with remarkable frequency. Some -- like the secretary of state -- are newsmakers intimately involved with both current and future policies critical to the nation. Others seem to be invited back for no apparent reason other than that they have been on so many times before. The list of most frequent guests for recent years shows dominance by a few figures: former Secretary of State Colin Powell, Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE), and most particularly Sen. John McCain (R-AZ). McCain made 124 appearances on the Sunday shows during this period -- over 50 percent more than his next closest competitor.

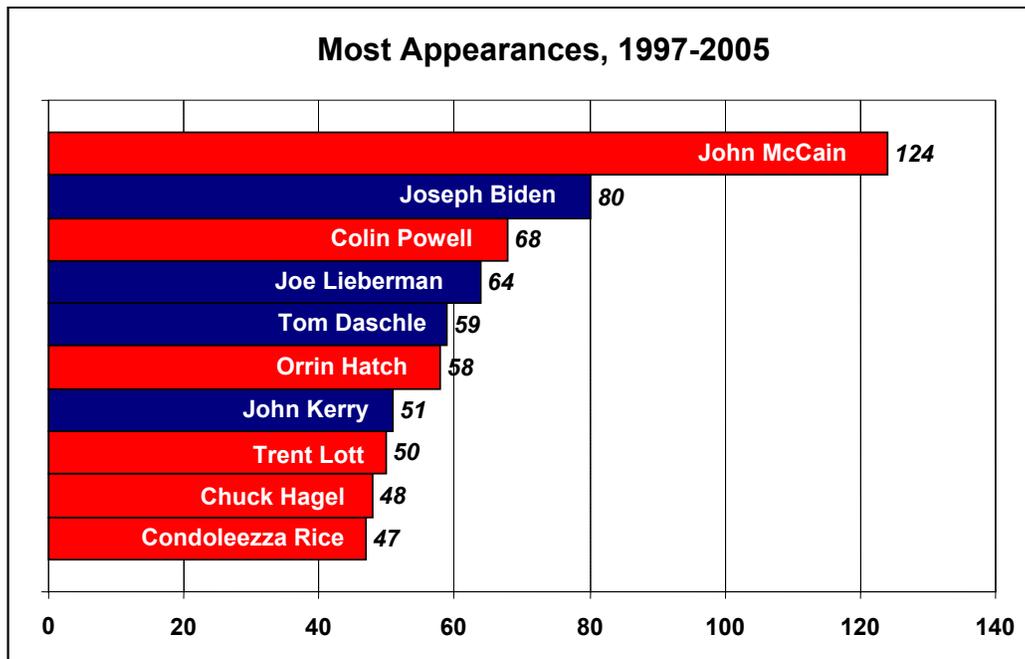


Figure 4.1

### Most Frequent Guests by Year

Year	Top Democratic Guest	Top Republican Guest
1997	Madeleine Albright (10)	Orrin Hatch (13)
1998	Jack Quinn (12)	Orrin Hatch (18)
1999	Joe Lieberman, Bob Torricelli (11)	John McCain (20)
2000	William Daley (10)	John McCain (21)
2001	Tom Daschle (17)	John McCain (18)
2002	Tom Daschle, Joe Lieberman (12)	Colin Powell (20)
2003	Joseph Biden (15)	Colin Powell (14)
2004	Joseph Biden (15)	John McCain (13)
2005	Joseph Biden (17)	John McCain (14)

As we explained in the introduction, the Sunday shows' main influence on the political world is derived from their ability to confer status on certain individuals and define the range of debate. It is not surprising that the governing administration would repeatedly send to the Sunday shows individuals from a small cadre whom they consider their most effective

spokespeople. Most members of Congress, on the other hand, would presumably be eager to appear if given the opportunity. Although this might not be true for all members at all times, there is nonetheless a wide variety of perspectives among the 535 representatives and senators on which the Sunday shows could draw. Yet a few members of the Senate seem to dominate.

## Going Solo

Though Biden has narrowly outpaced McCain over the last three years, there is one way in which the Delaware Democrat is unlikely to ever approach the Arizona Republican: Biden usually appears alongside a Republican senator. McCain, on the other hand, is more likely to be offered a privilege normally reserved for high administration officials and those who have just done something particularly newsworthy: the solo interview.

When a guest is interviewed alone by the host of a Sunday show, the networks send a message that what this person says is so important that it can't be cluttered up with someone from the other party weighing in. But in McCain's case, it's something more. McCain was given a total of 86 solo interviews (14 in 1999, 19 in 2000, 14 in 2001, 9 in 2002, 7 in 2003, 7 in 2004, and 12 in 2005). No other elected official comes close; the senator with the next-highest total of solo interviews (45) is former Sen. Tom Daschle (D-SD).

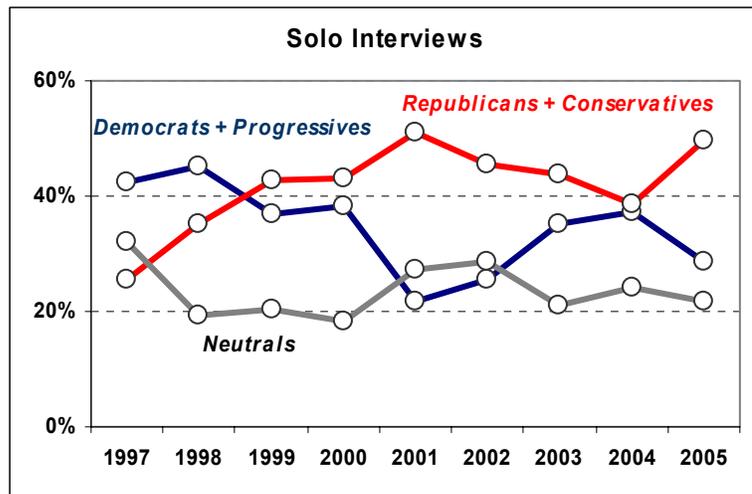


Figure 4.2

In fact, fully 69 percent (86 out of 124) of McCain's Sunday-show appearances have been solo interviews. While a few administration officials (e.g. Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice) are nearly always interviewed alone, elected officials are far more likely to be interviewed with other elected officials. The runner-up in total appearances, Biden, was interviewed by himself only 31 percent of the time (25 out of 80 appearances). The only elected official among those with a substantial number of interviews who exceeded McCain's proportion of solo interviews is Daschle, who was interviewed alone in 76 percent of his appearances (45 out of 59). Daschle, as Senate Majority Leader, was the highest-ranking elected Democrat in America at the time of many of his appearances.

It would appear that the Sunday shows perceive McCain as different from other politicians. Someone like Biden or Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) apparently needs to be balanced with someone from the other party to get an opposing view. But is McCain so far beyond the petty back-and-forth of partisan politics that he requires no balance? He is often interviewed alone even when he is not at the center of a particular news event. It appears as though the shows regard him as an entity unto himself, a "maverick" who stands above partisanship -- despite the fact that he is a Republican senator with an extremely conservative voting record, that he ran for the GOP nomination for president in 2000, and that he is considered the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination in 2008.

We should stress that there is nothing wrong with the practice of interviewing some guests alone; such interviews are often given to high administration officials. Given that, one would expect that the party holding the White House would have more solo interviews. But this was true in only two of the Clinton years -- 1997 and 1998 -- while in 1999 and 2000, more Republicans and conservatives were given solo interviews than Democrats and progressives.

It is possible that since the Republicans had a more contested primary for the 2000 presidential race, solo interviews given to those candidates would boost the Republican numbers. But the roles were reversed in 2004; even with the many interviews of Democratic presidential candidates, representatives of the right were still offered more solo interviews.

## COMPARING THE SHOWS

*Meet the Press* is the ratings leader among the three Sunday shows, with approximately four million households tuning in on a given Sunday (*Face the Nation* is seen in around three million homes and *This Week* in around 2.5 million, depending on the week). But regardless of their fortunes in the ratings competition, all demonstrate roughly the same pattern when it comes to their balance of guests: something resembling parity between the right and the left during the Clinton years but a wide advantage for Republicans and conservatives during the Bush years.

We do see, however, that *Face the Nation* comes closest to approximating the pattern that would be apparent if the shows were simply reflecting the realities of power. In 1997 and 1998, there were in fact significantly more Democrats and progressives on the CBS show, in contrast with its two rivals. (The left had more representatives on *This Week* in 1997 but only by a few percentage points.)

Furthermore, the two sides were close to equal on *Face the Nation* in 2003 and *Meet the Press* in 2004, which can be accounted for by the fact that a number of Democratic presidential candidates were interviewed. Nonetheless, even a highly contested primary with multiple candidates could not push Democrats and progressives ahead of Republicans and conservatives, unlike what happened in 1999 and 2000.

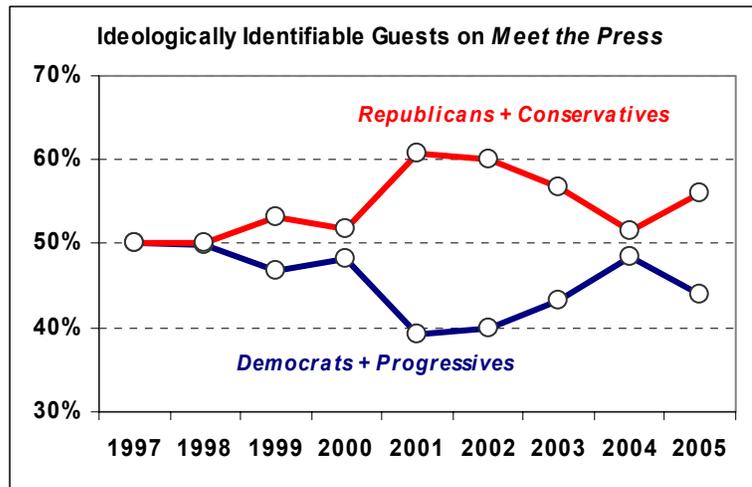


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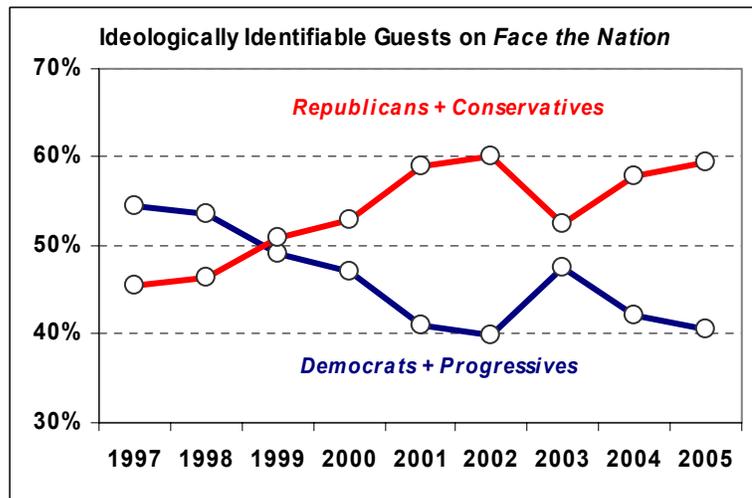


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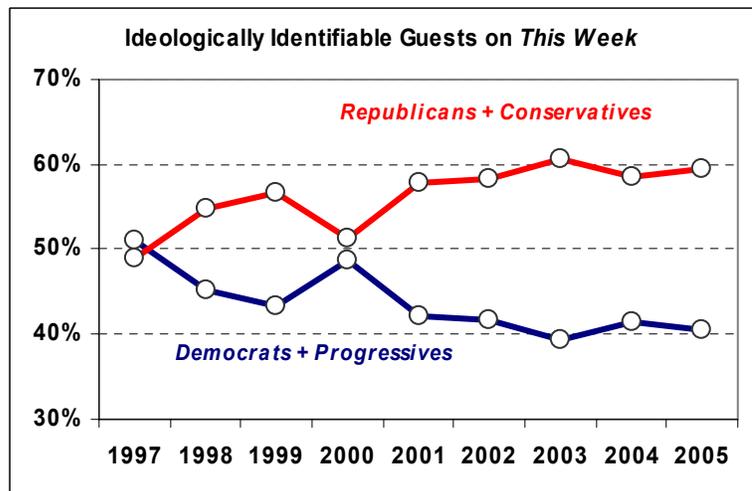


Figure 5.3

## Elected and Administration Officials

The category of elected and administration officials -- the bulk of the non-journalist guests on the Sunday shows -- is one where the differences between the three programs are minimal. As we saw earlier, what had been an eight-point advantage for Democrats during the second Clinton administration (with Democrats outnumbering Republicans 53 percent to 45 percent) became a 22-point advantage in Bush's first term

(61 percent Republicans to 39 percent Democrats).

Each of the three programs shows an almost identical pattern. *Meet the Press* went from a 53 – 46 Democratic advantage during the second Clinton term to a 62 – 38 Republican advantage in the first Bush term. *Face the Nation* went from 54 – 46 Democratic to 61 – 39 Republican. *This Week* went from 53 – 45 Democratic to 60 – 39 Republican.

## Panel Tilt

On this score, one show stood out as more balanced than the others: *Face the Nation*. While there were slightly more panels tilted right than tilted left on the CBS program, the difference was a small one, only four percentage points (compared with nine points for *Meet the Press* and 23 points for *This Week*). In 2005, this trend continued, as *Face the Nation* featured six panels tilted to the right, five tilted to the left, and 31 balanced between Democrats/progressives and Republicans/conservatives.

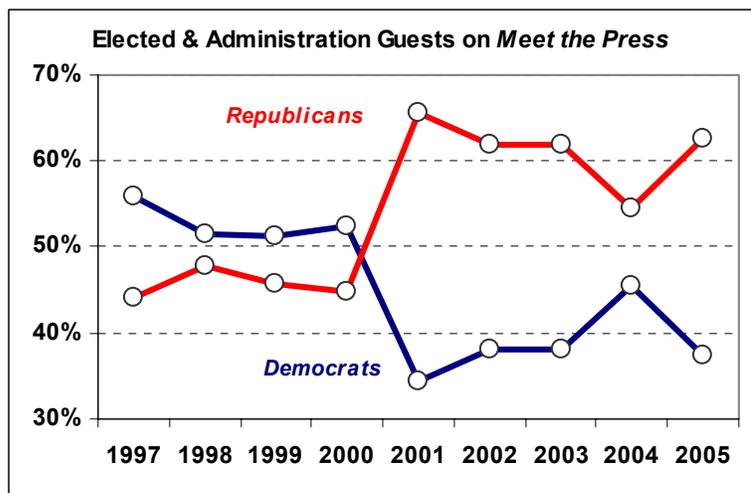


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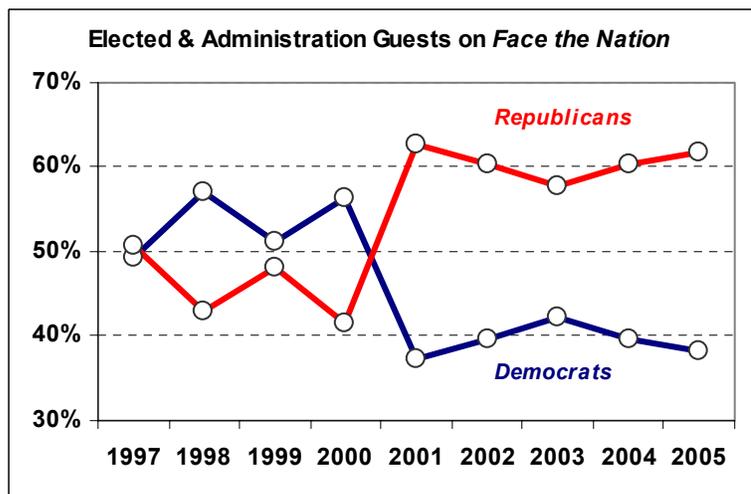


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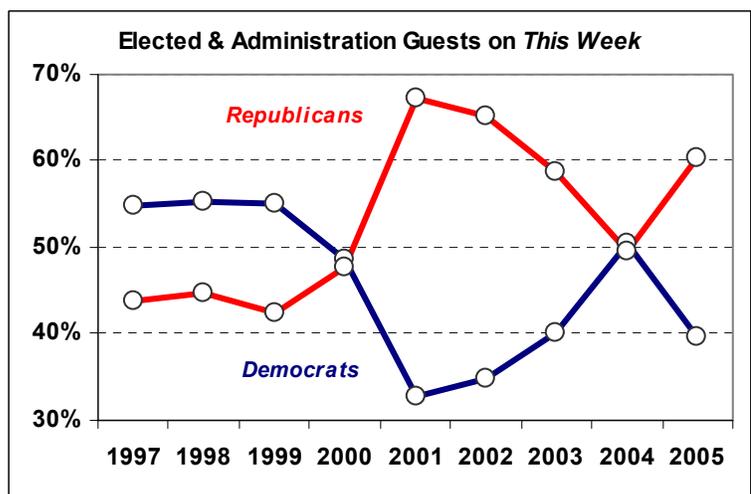


Figure 5.6

The other two programs also mirrored the patterns evident in the prior eight years. *Meet the Press* featured somewhat more right-tilted panels (17 percent to 12 percent), while *This Week* was the worst offender on this score, with 33 percent of its panels tilting right and only 6 percent tilting left. This occurs on *This Week* so often mostly because each journalist roundtable discussion features conservative George F. Will and another two or three journalists. In these discussions, there is often no progressive present; for instance, a typical roundtable may consist of Will, the centrist Fareed Zakaria, and a neutral reporter such as Linda Douglass of ABC News or Cokie Roberts of NPR.

### Journalists and Pundits

The three Sunday programs treat journalists somewhat differently. On *Face the Nation*, an individual reporter will often be brought on to participate in an interview of a newsmaker. While this will occasionally be an op-ed columnist with an identifiable ideology, in most cases the journalist guests are neutral reporters.

The same is not true, however, of *Meet the Press* and *This Week*. On the former, roundtable discussions of journalists and pundits are frequently featured, including both neutral reporters and more opinionated commentators. On the latter, every show features a roundtable discussion. In 1998 and 1999, George Stephanopoulos and *The Weekly Standard's* William Kristol appeared in most of these

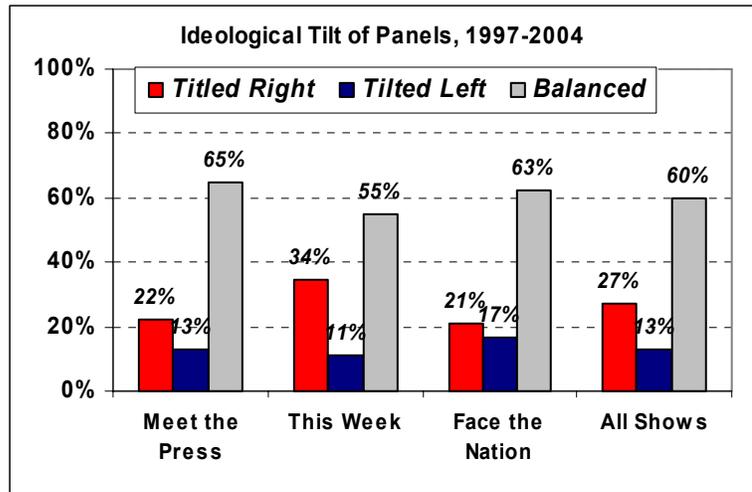


Figure 5.7

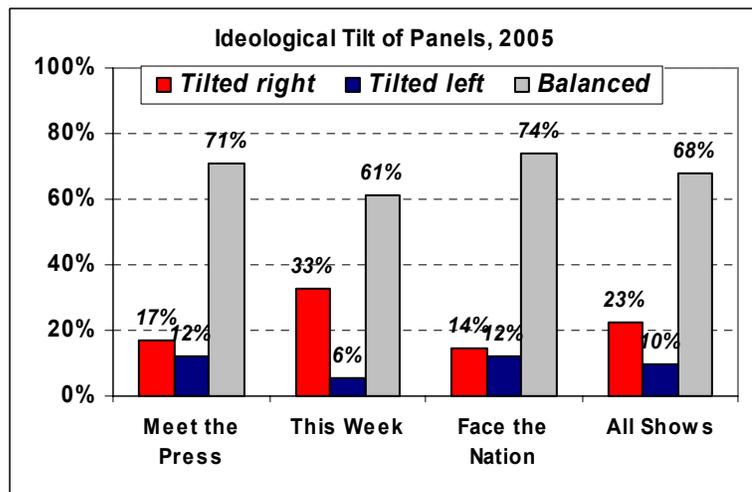


Figure 5.8

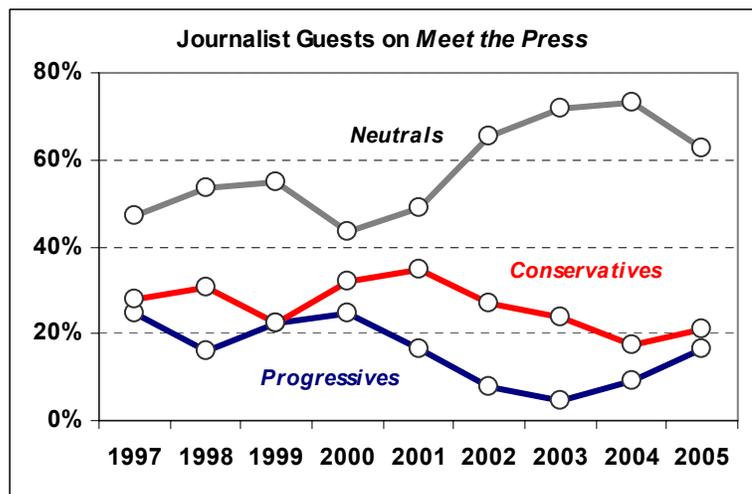


Figure 5.9

roundtables, and Will has been a fixture there since 1998 (he became a regular on *This Week* much earlier, but it was in 1998 that he began appearing nearly every week).

While *This Week* relies more heavily on ABC's own reporters to fill out the panels than *Meet the Press* does on NBC reporters, both shows draw their outside participants from a relatively small number of news organizations. With some exceptions, a journalist guest is most likely to come from what are generally considered to be "elite" publications, particularly *Time*, *Newsweek*, and a small number of newspapers. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Times* are amply represented, while other papers with circulations as high - - *USA Today* or the *New York Daily News*, for instance -- seldom see their reporters or columnists appear.

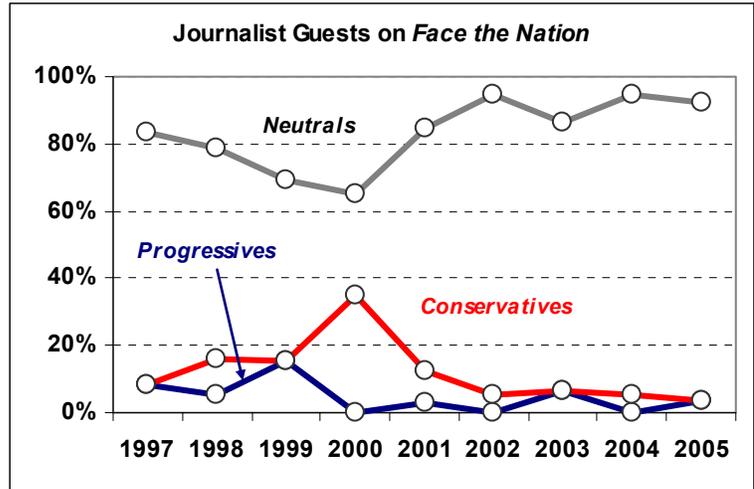


Figure 5.10

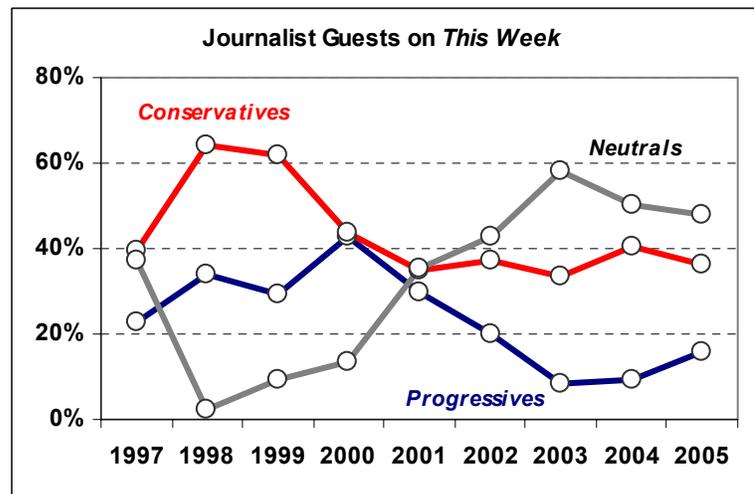


Figure 5.11

## CONCLUSION

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Since its founding less than two years ago, *Media Matters for America* has identified and documented more than 3,000 instances of conservative misinformation in the media outlets we monitor. In the course of that monitoring, we discovered that the Sunday shows often feature panels on which conservatives are pitted against neutral reporters, and on many episodes Republicans dramatically outnumber Democrats.

In order to assess whether these were isolated incidents or part of a larger pattern, we undertook a systematic analysis to determine if, in recent years, Democrats and progressives had been underrepresented on ABC's *This Week*, CBS' *Face the Nation*, and NBC's *Meet the Press*. As this report has documented, our hypothesis was proven correct.

Readers may conclude for themselves precisely what standard of balance they believe the Sunday-morning programs should adhere to. Some may take the position that every episode should be precisely balanced between the left and the right, while others may contend only that over time the shows should allow both sides to have their voices heard in roughly equal measure. There may even be some who argue that the Sunday shows should simply reflect the realities of power in Washington, and that the party in control of Capitol Hill and the White House should dominate the Sunday shows as well (although we suspect that some on the right who would make this argument would change their tune should Democrats seize control of either or both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue in upcoming elections).

Whatever position one takes, it is now clear that the Sunday shows were dramatically different during the second Clinton term than they have been since President George W. Bush took office in 2001. If one believes that this important forum of official debate should feature the most balanced and diverse combination of views possible, then the second Clinton term offered a reasonable approximation of that standard -- in some ways, if not all.

But over the last five years, Republicans and conservatives have found their voices amplified by the Sunday shows. There are more conservative individuals, more conservative opinions, and more conservative analyses. As a result of the skew of the Sunday shows, our national debate -- with all of its consequences for policy and public opinion -- has been pulled unmistakably to the right.

*Further information and data may be obtained by contacting Media Matters for America or by visiting [www.mediamatters.org](http://www.mediamatters.org).*

## METHODOLOGY

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Our goal in designing the methodology for this study was to ensure that the classifications would be as unambiguous and defensible as possible, even to those who profoundly disagree with the goals of our organization.

Readers should be clear on what we did *not* do: These classifications do not represent an analysis of what each person actually said when she/he appeared on a show on a given date. Coding each guest's comments for their ideological slant would have introduced enormous difficulties and opportunities for subjectivity. Instead, we simply classified each guest based on her/his general partisan or ideological orientation.

Of course, in a few instances, these decisions were not easy to make. While the vast majority of guests are clearly identifiable by party or ideology (or as having none), there are a few whose public stances make such classification more difficult. We therefore constructed rules that could be applied as strictly as possible. The fact that we were dealing with one four-year term under a Republican president and one under a Democratic president (plus additional analysis on 2005) meant that certain types of rules, even if imperfect, are unlikely to skew the data in any meaningful way. For instance, we decided that all administration officials would be coded as representing the party in power. One might reasonably argue that some departments of the executive branch are more "political" than others and that therefore, for instance, the secretary of state represents the administration's views in a way that the director of the National Institutes of Health does not. But making that distinction would require drawing the line somewhere between "political" and "non-political" departments, something we felt was nearly impossible to do objectively. Consequently, we decided not to draw the line at all and instead to apply the rule equally at all times.

We understand that because we are a progressive organization, some on the right will seek to undercut the credibility of our findings, perhaps charging that we have stacked the deck by classifying too many guests as conservative. Partly for that reason, when a guest's ideology or partisan affiliation was ambiguous, we erred on the side of identifying a guest to the left. Consequently, one can assume that, if anything, our figures underestimate the conservative slant to the Sunday shows.

In any large-scale content-analysis project, the strict application of coding rules will, on some rare occasions, result in a particular unit being coded in a way that some might find inaccurate. This is an inevitable hazard of content analysis, and anyone who reviews the thousands of guests included in this study might find one or two they would code differently. Nonetheless, objective coding requires the use of rules that are applied the same way by any and all coders in order to eliminate the bias a particular coder might bring.

Following are some of the principle rules coders employed in classifying guests:

- The party designations (Democrat and Republican) are reserved for current and former officeholders, candidates, campaign staff, political consultants associated with one party or the other, and administration officials. All others are labeled conservative, progressive, or neutral.

- The neutral category does not necessarily imply strict ideological neutrality but, rather, might better be understood as neutral/centrist/non-partisan -- a label too cumbersome to use.
- When guests served in both Republican and Democratic administrations in the past, they were coded as neutral barring any compelling reason to do otherwise. For example, Walter Slocum served both in the Clinton administration and as a deputy to Paul Bremer in Iraq, so he is coded as neutral.
- Some guests, however, had a clear, identifiable moment in which they became representatives of one or another ideology or partisan interest, regardless of their past associations. It was usually the case that these guests appeared on the Sunday shows only after that break, so they were coded as what they had become. For instance, Richard Clarke served in both Republican and Democratic administrations but only made appearances once he became critical of the Bush administration; therefore, he is coded as progressive. Zell Miller, though nominally a Democrat, only appeared after he became intensely critical of the Democratic Party, endorsed Bush's reelection, and spoke at the Republican National Convention; therefore, he is coded as a conservative (although he still retains his Democratic Party affiliation).
- Our "Journalist" classification applies not only to daily reporters but also to opinion columnists, magazine writers, etc.
- In numerous cases, a newsmaker's attorney made an appearance. Our judgments in these cases were made based on the client's ideology or partisanship, not that of the attorney, and whether there was a partisan element to the controversy at hand. We believe this to be the most accurate way of categorizing attorneys, since they appear only to advocate for their clients' positions on the issue being discussed. For instance, Linda Tripp's attorney was labeled as conservative, since Tripp was embroiled in the Clinton impeachment controversy. In contrast, Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh's attorney made a number of appearances, but since McVeigh could not be said to be on one side of a partisan controversy, his attorney was labeled neutral.
- In the case of foreign officials and journalists, we labeled all as neutral -- even though for some their political ideology might be easily identifiable (e.g., former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu) -- in order to avoid the need to analyze the politics of other countries.
- Members of the armed forces were classified with the administration then in power if they were in the service at that moment. However, it became apparent that, particularly during the Iraq war, retired officers would often appear to offer military analysis. Since the nature of that analysis was almost always non-partisan, all retired officers were coded as neutral absent any other affiliation.

Although we did not examine the specific comments made by guests in their appearances, there were certain instances in which it was necessary to ascertain the purpose of a guest's appearance in order to correctly classify her/him. For example, on November 14, 1999, several retired basketball players made appearances on all three shows because Bill Bradley, at the time a candidate for president, had organized a fundraiser at Madison Square Garden at which the players appeared. While in ordinary circumstances one would not classify Bob Cousy or Oscar Robertson as having a distinct political ideology, in this case they appeared on the shows for one purpose: to say nice things about Bradley, a Democrat. Therefore, we classified them as progressive for that appearance. This general rule also applies to the attorneys who appeared to represent their clients (see above).

A few individuals who are featured regularly on the shows are worthy of comment. George Will, who appears in the roundtable discussion of nearly every episode of *This Week*, is counted as a guest. Gloria Borger of CBS News and *U.S. News & World Report* and George Stephanopoulos of ABC News both began as pundit guests on their respective shows, then became co-host and host respectively. Their roles changed once they became hosts -- conducting interviews and moderating discussions but not offering the same kind of opinions on policy and politics as they had before. Therefore, we counted them as guests (Borger as neutral and Stephanopoulos as Democrat) up until the point at which they moved to hosting duties. After that point they are no longer counted in the guest database.

In one case, the reverse occurred: Sam Donaldson was a co-host of *This Week* during the earlier period of the study, but in 2005 he returned to the show on a number of occasions to participate in panel discussions. In these recent appearances, Donaldson's role has been to offer opinions on policy and politics (and he has been consistently critical of the Bush administration and the Republican Congress); for that reason, we code him as a progressive in his 2005 appearances.

### **A Statistical Note**

Some may wonder whether the differences we have observed here are "statistically significant," a term often employed but seldom explained. Statistical significance concerns whether the differences observed *in a sample* can be generalized; essentially, to say that an observed difference is statistically significant means that the researcher is reasonably sure that the difference is a true representation of reality and not an artifact of the sample. In a study like this one, however, statistical significance is not a question, because we are dealing here not with a sample but with the entire universe in question. This content analysis did not sample the guests on the Sunday shows; rather, it counted *every* guest on the Sunday shows for the period 1997 - 2005. Therefore, there is no question of statistical significance but only of *substantive* significance -- something that is not a matter of quantification but of interpretation.

### **Acknowledgments**

This *Media Matters for America* study was supervised by senior fellow Paul Waldman. This report was written by Waldman and edited by writing fellow Amanda Fazzone. Principal coding and data management was conducted by research analyst Robert M. Savillo. Other researchers who contributed include Joseph Brown of the Research Department, Adam Hundt, and Max Berger.

## APPENDIX

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The following tables correspond to figures in the main body of this report. Only those figures that do not indicate percentages are detailed here.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1: Ideologically Identifiable Guests on All Shows

Year	Republicans/Conservatives	Democrats/Progressives
1997	48.5%	51.5%
1998	51.2%	48.8%
1999	54.1%	45.9%
2000	51.8%	48.1%
2001	59.1%	40.8%
2002	59.2%	40.9%
2003	57.4%	42.7%
2004	56.2%	43.8%
2005	58.3%	41.7%

### 2.3: Elected and Administration Guests on All Shows

Year	Republicans	Democrats
1997	45.9%	53.7%
1998	45.3%	54.4%
1999	45.5%	52.3%
2000	44.9%	52.3%
2001	65.1%	34.9%
2002	62.4%	37.6%
2003	59.4%	40.2%
2004	53.8%	46.2%
2005	61.6%	38.4%

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<sup>3</sup> In some cases, rows may not add up to 100 percent if certain small groups -- for example, Reform Party candidates -- were not included in the table.

### 2.5: Ideological Tilt of Panels on All Shows

Year	Tilted Right	Tilted Left	Balanced
1997	25.0%	14.5%	60.5%
1998	31.0%	16.5%	52.5%
1999	36.5%	17.1%	46.4%
2000	18.3%	15.4%	66.3%
2001	19.8%	9.4%	70.8%
2002	24.0%	9.5%	66.5%
2003	35.1%	10.6%	54.3%
2004	30.5%	7.2%	62.3%
2005	22.6%	9.6%	67.8%

### 3.2: Ideologically Identifiable Journalist Guests on All Shows

Year	Conservatives	Progressives
1997	58.3%	41.7%
1998	65.6%	34.4%
1999	63.7%	36.3%
2000	54.4%	45.6%
2001	57.9%	42.1%
2002	66.7%	33.3%
2003	77.9%	22.1%
2004	77.6%	22.4%
2005	64.2%	35.8%

### 4.3: Solo Interviews on All Shows

Year	Republicans/Conservatives	Democrats/Progressives	Neutrals
1997	25.6%	42.5%	32.0%
1998	35.2%	45.3%	19.5%
1999	42.9%	36.8%	20.4%
2000	43.2%	38.4%	18.4%
2001	50.9%	21.8%	27.4%
2002	45.6%	25.7%	28.7%
2003	44.0%	35.1%	21.0%
2004	38.6%	37.3%	24.1%
2005	49.7%	28.6%	21.6%

**5.1: Ideologically Identifiable Guests on NBC's *Meet the Press***

Year	Republicans/Conservatives	Democrats/Progressives
1997	50.0%	50.0%
1998	50.2%	49.8%
1999	53.2%	46.8%
2000	51.7%	48.1%
2001	60.8%	38.9%
2002	60.0%	40.4%
2003	56.8%	43.6%
2004	51.4%	48.6%
2005	56.1%	43.9%

**5.2: Ideologically Identifiable Guests on CBS' *Face the Nation***

Year	Republicans/Conservatives	Democrats/Progressives
1997	45.5%	54.5%
1998	46.5%	53.5%
1999	50.9%	49.1%
2000	53.0%	47.0%
2001	59.1%	40.9%
2002	60.2%	39.8%
2003	52.4%	47.6%
2004	57.9%	42.1%
2005	59.5%	40.5%

**5.3: Ideologically Identifiable Guests on ABC's *This Week***

Year	Republicans/Conservatives	Democrats/Progressives
1997	48.9%	51.1%
1998	54.9%	45.1%
1999	56.7%	43.3%
2000	51.2%	48.8%
2001	57.7%	42.3%
2002	58.3%	41.7%
2003	60.6%	39.4%
2004	58.6%	41.4%
2005	59.6%	40.4%

**5.4: Elected and Administration Guests on NBC's *Meet the Press***

Year	Republicans	Democrats
1997	44.0%	56.0%
1998	47.7%	51.5%
1999	45.7%	51.2%
2000	44.9%	52.3%
2001	65.6%	34.4%
2002	61.8%	38.2%
2003	61.9%	38.1%
2004	54.5%	45.5%
2005	62.7%	37.3%

**5.5: Elected and Administration Guests on CBS' *Face the Nation***

Year	Republicans	Democrats
1997	49.4%	50.6%
1998	57.0%	43.0%
1999	51.2%	48.0%
2000	56.4%	41.6%
2001	37.4%	62.6%
2002	39.6%	60.4%
2003	42.3%	57.7%
2004	39.6%	60.4%
2005	38.1%	61.9%

**5.6: Elected and Administration Guests on ABC's *This Week***

Year	Republicans	Democrats
1997	43.9%	54.9%
1998	44.8%	55.2%
1999	42.5%	55.0%
2000	47.8%	48.7%
2001	67.3%	32.7%
2002	65.2%	34.8%
2003	58.7%	40.2%
2004	49.5%	50.5%
2005	60.2%	39.8%

**5.9: Journalist Guests on NBC's *Meet the Press***

Year	Conservatives	Progressives	Neutrals
1997	28.1%	24.7%	47.2%
1998	30.5%	16.2%	53.3%
1999	22.5%	22.5%	55.0%
2000	31.9%	24.6%	43.5%
2001	34.5%	16.4%	49.1%
2002	26.9%	7.7%	65.4%
2003	23.9%	4.5%	71.6%
2004	17.4%	9.3%	73.3%
2005	20.8%	16.7%	62.5%

**5.10: Journalist Guests on CBS' *Face the Nation***

Year	Conservatives	Progressives	Neutrals
1997	8.3%	8.3%	83.3%
1998	15.8%	5.3%	78.9%
1999	15.4%	15.4%	69.2%
2000	35.0%	0.0%	65.0%
2001	12.5%	3.1%	84.4%
2002	5.3%	0.0%	94.7%
2003	6.7%	6.7%	86.7%
2004	5.6%	0.0%	94.4%
2005	3.7%	3.7%	92.6%

**5.11: Journalist Guests on ABC's *This Week***

Year	Conservatives	Progressives	Neutrals
1997	39.8%	22.9%	37.3%
1998	64.0%	33.8%	2.2%
1999	61.7%	29.1%	9.2%
2000	43.6%	42.7%	13.7%
2001	34.7%	29.9%	35.4%
2002	37.2%	20.0%	42.8%
2003	33.3%	8.5%	58.2%
2004	40.5%	9.1%	50.4%
2005	36.4%	15.9%	47.7%