Stephen Cushion and Richard Thomas, **Reporting Elections: Rethinking the Logic of Campaign Coverage**, Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018, 224 pp., $22.95 (paperback).

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What logic drives election campaign reporting, and how well does this reporting serve voters? These are the central questions Stephen Cushion, a reader at Cardiff University, and Richard Thomas, a senior lecturer at Swansea University, answer in *Reporting Elections: Rethinking the Logic of Campaign Coverage*. This is the eighth title in Polity's contemporary political communication series that began with *The News and Public Opinion* (McCombs, Holbert, Kiousis, & Wanta, 2011). Analyzing television news accounts of elections in the United States and the United Kingdom, along with occasional glimpses at continental Europe, the authors develop a counterintuitive argument: that trends assumed to represent the mediatization of politics, such as increased prevalence of horse-race coverage, in fact represent the growing influence of political logic on campaign reporting. This, Cushion and Thomas contend, prevents election news from performing its chief democratic functions of educating voters and challenging public officials.
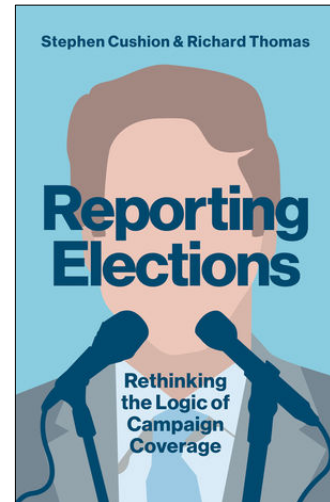
The authors make their case in a cohesive and economical narrative that provides an exhaustive summation of previous literature in addition to presenting excellent new scholarship. The book draws on results and raw data from more than 100 relevant studies, and includes more than 50 tables presenting a wealth of information. The opening chapters establish a conceptual framework grounded in agenda-setting research and centered on the relationships among television news, political campaigns, and voters. Chapters 2 and 3 are the densest, demonstrating the prevalence of horse-race coverage, and its function in political campaigns, through a barrage of statistics along with interviews that provide fascinating insights into the editorial decisions that guide campaign reporting. Using the 2015 U.K. general election as an example, the authors show that proliferation of horse-race stories—sometimes attributed to newsroom preferences for conflict—catered to political logic, helping candidates avoid disadvantageous issues and parties campaign on the likelihood of various coalition governments. These chapters also illustrate a disconnect between journalists' intent to critique campaign tactics and quantitative data showing the opposite: broadcasters "accepting rather than exposing [candidates'] events and rallies" (p. 100). The creeping dominance of political logic comes into even starker relief in the book's second half. Chapter 4 argues that broadcasters' reliance on news values benefits candidates who best appeal to those values, and chapter 5 applies that argument to the "Trumpification" of campaign coverage, in which news values "outweighed the journalistic need to balance the views of competing candidates or to counter dubious claims with facts" (p. 160). It underscores this point with Donald Trump's historic advantage in broadcast coverage and considers whether Trumpification could spread to other Western countries.

Reporting Elections makes effective use of its narrow scope and mixed-method approach to develop a fuller picture of the forces driving television news coverage and expose the minimal effects of public logic on the reporting of election campaigns. While digital expressions of public opinion such as social media posts and trends do result in news stories (Lawrence, 2015) and contribute to transfers of issue salience from public to news agendas (Groshek & Groshek, 2013), the authors' meticulous dive into television logic reveals a conspicuous gap between journalism's public service mission (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007) and the extent to which broadcast news agendas and frames promote substantive issues.

However, focusing on television—the medium Cushion and Thomas argue "informs most voters about campaigns" (p. 14)—does have its limitations. This is most conspicuous in discussions of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, in which social media "equaled or surpassed the reach of television" (Boynton & Richardson Jr., 2015, p. 1917), and some of the most-shared information sources on Twitter and Facebook were newspaper websites and digital-first publications (Faris et al., 2017). Given that, and the event-driven nature of television (Boydstun, 2013), a brief comparison to the prevalence of issue coverage on other platforms would have strengthened some of the book's contentions. The effect of Trump's personal traits on the Trumpification of news merits further discussion as well. Trump's "reality TV sensibilities" (Karpf, 2017, p. 199), from "craft[ing] a notable persona" to saying whatever it takes to grab attention (Hearn, 2016, p. 657), helped him generate $2 billion in earned media coverage before the general election campaign had even begun (Confessore & Yourish, 2016). Chapter 5, which highlights Trump's campaign tactics, would benefit from more on intrinsic qualities that worked to Trump's advantage.

Nitpicking aside, *Reporting Elections* makes important contributions to journalism studies and practice and is a helpful resource for political communication scholars. The book ends with a call for campaign coverage to "connect to voters' democratic interests without abandoning their democratic needs" (p. 173) and offers several concrete suggestions for accomplishing that, the most ambitious of which is for television news to wrest control of its topical agenda from the influence of political parties and candidates. For example, the authors submit that "*issues* could become the central logic of campaign coverage that parties *responded to* rather than defined on their terms" (p. 173). This is not a novel proposal—Benson (2018) calls for a similar approach in *Trump and the Media*—but it does spring from some of the most comprehensive research on the topic. The authors' other recommendations include more reporting on the interests of voters outside the media bubble and greater reliance on experts rather than spin doctors or professional pundits to contextualize the news. After a U.S. presidential campaign so mired in horse-race stories that it prompted the *Associated Press* to rethink its approach to covering candidate matchup polls (Easton, 2018), Cushion and Thomas provide an essential blueprint for election reporting in public interest.

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