



Tell the Truth! 2004

# Media Reality ✓ Check

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Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ☪ Wednesday, October 20, 2004

Economic Numbers in 1996 and 2004 Very Similar, But the Media Spin Depends on Who's President

## Bill Clinton Boom, George W. Bush Gloom

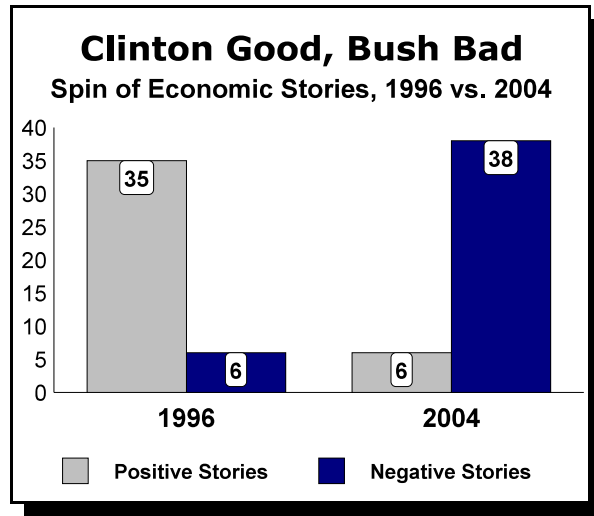
When Bill Clinton ran for re-election in 1996, the unemployment rate was 5.2 percent, inflation was three percent and economic growth was 2.2 percent. Sound good? The economy is just as good, if not better, right now: the unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, inflation is 2.7 percent, and economists' consensus forecast for economic growth this quarter is 3.7 percent.

Yet a new study by Dan Gainor, Director of the MRC's Free Market Project, found that while the national media mainly cheered the Clinton economy in 1996 (85 percent positive), reporters have mostly jeered the Bush economy in 2004 (77 percent negative). Two 2004 stories were judged as neutral.

FMP researchers analyzed TV news coverage the day of, or newspaper coverage the day after the release of unemployment and job creation reports during the summer re-election season (May to September) in 1996 and 2004. The outlets studied were ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. They found:

■ **Good Is Bad, Bad Is Good.** On June 4, 2004, the government announced the unemployment rate remained steady at 5.6 percent, with about 248,000 new jobs created. CBS reported the numbers, but then Dan Rather turned negative: "But while the jobs picture is improving nationally, there are still some problems locally, and CBS's Jim Axelrod reports, on that a Presidential election could turn." Axelrod reported from the Timken factory in Canton, Ohio, "shutting three factories and shedding 1,300 jobs," and showcased a worker predicting this could push Ohio to vote for Kerry.

By contrast, on June 8, 1996, the government stated the jobless rate was up two-tenths of a percent, to 5.6 percent. Dan Rather insisted on CBS that rate was "still low, and the numbers, pure and simple, can be misleading." Reporter Ray Brady explained: "There was a slight rise in the unemployment rate, but that's not necessarily bad news," since more people were encouraged to hunt for jobs.



■ **Bush = Hoover?** The last jobs report in October caused reporters to use bad analogies. On CBS, Dan Rather stressed: "It's the first net job loss on a President's watch since Herbert Hoover during the Great Depression of the 1930s." *The Washington Post* said the report "left Bush in the position of being the first President since Herbert Hoover not to have produced job gains during his first term in office." *The New York Times* also found: "Bush will be the first President since Herbert Hoover to face re-election with fewer

people working than when he started." Since when does 5.4 percent unemployment suggest The Great Depression?

■ **Ignoring 9/11.** No story in the FMP study quantified the job losses caused by 9/11, one million jobs lost in the 100 days after the attacks. Only six stories made any mention of terrorism or 9/11 at all. On October 8, in 11 stories on the new jobs data, only one mentioned 9/11. Just after the second debate in St. Louis that night, CNN's John King previewed the third debate: "Mr. Bush will say recession, September 11, the shortest — one of the shortest recessions in history because of his tax cuts."

— Tim Graham and Rich Noyes

Read Dan Gainor's complete analysis, "One Economy, Two Spins," at [www.freemarketproject.org](http://www.freemarketproject.org).

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Tim Scheiderer at (703) 683-5004