

Humble Pie: reporting and predicting the 2016 election

by Stu Johnson, November 22, 2016

It's been two weeks since Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election in the United States, a result that shocked many, leaving plenty of leftover "humble pie" on the table as we approach Thanksgiving. Why did the experts miss it? In my blog of September 9, I observed that there appeared to be five types of content that were being treated by all news outlets (broadcast/cable, print and internet), in a roughly descending priority of importance:

Polling – attention to poll results

Pouncing – attacks by candidates, pundits or media sources

Problems – internal troubles within a campaign or external ones related to a candidate

Process – stories related to campaign organizations, parties, or government

Policy – candidate and campaign statements on policy positions, media analysis

The morning after the November 8 election, there were profuse apologies and much head-scratching from many corners for missing the electoral college upset by Donald Trump. It seems that the misreading of the 2016 presidential election fell into several broad categories:

1. **Being dismissive of Donald Trump.** While she had her own problems, the election of Hillary Clinton was assumed by most observers to be a done deal. Of all the potential Republican opponents, the election of Donald Trump was, to them, beyond comprehension. This fundamental presumption, I believe, affected and exaggerated the other factors. The projected electoral votes consistently showed Clinton as the winner. The analysis I saw focused on the margin of victory for Clinton or the seemingly miraculous scenarios required for a Trump victory. Along with this, Trump's followers were widely cast as wacky right-wing extremists.
2. **Over-dependence on polling.** As I have pointed out in previous blogs throughout this election year, opinion polling is given far too much importance in news coverage. Unlike the far-reaching research done by Pew, Gallup and similar organizations, which takes considerable effort and time, much of the election polling was designed for quick snapshots.

While they may show an acceptable margin of error of 5-8% based on the sample size, the quality of the sample and how questions are framed can produce fuzzy and inconsistent snapshots. Therefore, it was not unusual throughout the election season to see polls vary widely and frequently in the opposite direction from one day to the next. Added to this, many news editors and writers apparently do not understand polling and seem to be looking for useful headlines from day to day.

3. **Cutting off the coattails.** Assuming the worst about Donald Trump (much of it, admittedly encouraged by the candidate) led many observers to assume that he was toxic to "down-ticket" candidates. Some of these candidates felt the same way, distancing themselves from Trump, cutting off the coattails that, it turns out, they could have used. This perspective, in turn, buoyed

expectations of trouble for the Republicans from Congress to the state and local level.

4. **Seeing blue.** The combination of polling and perceptions of Donald Trump as a candidate unworthy of serious consideration masked and contributed to another blind spot: the electoral map. Up until the election itself, the electoral map was shown as red states and blue states. In typical fashion, red (Republican) states filled large swaths of the map, while the smaller number of blue (Democrat) states pointed to the more populous and Democrat-leaning states that in recent elections could be counted on to tip the scale to win electoral college votes. Particularly because the red counties cover such a vast area, it is extremely difficult for the media to cover, leading to the flattening of perceptions into stereotypes that may well prove faulty.

The map changed on election night. As the view switched from states to counties, the country turned bright red. The only blue areas were those counties in large metropolitan areas, traditional Democratic strongholds that would be enough to capture the state’s electoral votes. For Hillary Clinton in 2016, however, the electoral college loss seems to be a combination of low voter turnout for her, stronger than projected turnout for Trump, and the presence of third-party candidates that hurt Clinton far more than Trump.

Using national polls to predict state results can be dicey; the numbers simply get too small to assure statistical reliability at the state level. Similar problems exist when using state or regional polls to make projections at the county level. In Illinois, where I live, there are 102 counties, representing an even great problem for drilling down into data from a small sample.

In addition, in the age of cell phones and social media, getting samples that accurately represent the demographics of the universe (the total number of people being represented by the poll—nation, region, or state) continues to get more difficult with every election.

Most of those red counties represent “fly-over” country that is generally dismissed by pollsters, pundits and the national press whose worlds exist in the blue—densely populated urban centers. On one extreme, some observers see people living outside the urban centers as “alt-right,” as one headline described Trump’s most ardent supporters. On the other hand, geography alone suggests that it is simply easier to cover the blue urban centers than to try to cover the vast territory of the red counties.

As election results became more clear, it was obvious that Clinton under-performed expectations, while Trump over-performed. Not only did Trump have a slightly greater portion of women, blacks and Hispanics than Romney captured in 2012, in most states his presence on the ballot did not appear to be a significant drag on down-ballot positions. While there were declines in the number of both House and Senate seats, the Republicans did retain control of both houses of Congress. The game of expectations came up short, for which Donald Trump and the GOP were the winners.

REPORTING THE ELECTION—AN OBSERVATION

Back to my focus on the “reporting priorities.” Most of my observations for that September blog were based on my own exposure to broadcast/cable news, the regional daily newspaper we subscribe to, and internet sources. When in my office, I use three monitors, which allows me to keep one monitor focused most of the time on one source. Starting with the Republican and Democratic Conventions (July 18-21 and July 25-28 respectively) and running through mid-September, I tracked the headlines on the

Comcast/Xfinity home page related to the election. Comcast—which owns NBC and its affiliated cable channels—was heavily involved in coverage of the Summer Olympics (August 5-21), producing times of literal black hole for election coverage.

The headlines were recorded several times most days as screen captures while I was working at the computer (having multiple monitors allowed me to see the Comcast home page frequently while doing other work). A listing of the 315 headlines appears at the end of this blog. While I did follow some links to see what sources Comcast was using, my primary interest was in the headlines themselves. On the links I did check, there was fair representation from Fox, CNN, and sources other than those owned by Comcast.

The power of headlines. Even when people do not follow a link, the headline has a chance of making an impression. The wording and any associated pictures are important. A turn of words can certainly have an impact, such as “Bizarre New Poll Result,” “Trump Plunges to Stunning Low,” :”DNC Chief Apologies...”

Photos can have an even greater subliminal effect—even without reading the headline, a photo of a smiling candidate against an American flag is a stark contrast to one where the candidate appears tired, distracted or scowling. In the listing of the headlines at the end of the blog, I included on many of them a description of the photo, particularly noting the background or any obvious emotion.

Interpreting emotion in a photo can be risky. In a famous experiment in the early days of film, Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein showed that context affects the perception of meaning. By cutting an image of a person with a neutral expression into different scenes, the observer could be made to see that person in a range of emotions. Eisenstein understood the power of montage as the essence of story-telling in film. So, it is with the choice of photos associated with headlines.

Unless associated with a serious problem or negative story, Clinton was often shown smiling and/or speaking against a bright background of American flags or a rally setting. It caught my attention that while Trump was shown in similar settings, there seemed to be a disproportionate number where he was shown in close-up with a black background. Even where flags or other colorful elements may be present, when a person is in a spotlight, the background can fall into darkness. By itself, that is not striking. However, in balance with the more generally colorful and cheerful photos of Hillary Clinton, it did make me wonder whether there was a subtle or even intentional bias to select photos of Trump that appeared more menacing or at least less upbeat.

Video links. When you click video links, Comcast forces you to watch a 15- to 30-second commercial before revealing the requested video. Since there is no option to skip the ad after several seconds, as some sites allow, how many people hit the back button before waiting for the commercial to finish? IF you do watch a video, at its conclusion another ad immediately begins and then cycles to the next video in the current sequence.

Some video reports were comprehensive, fair and well-presented. Others, however, were weak in content or obviously slanted in perspective, suggesting that editors were grasping for content, potentially using a story because it fit a desired narrative.

While I stand by my initial ordering of the five priorities, at least for lead stories on TV and the front pages of a newspaper, the Comcast headlines showed a different order:

Problems (103 stories)
Process (63, though some of these could have been called problems)
Pouncing (54)
Polling (38)
Policy (27 – also bottom on my original list)

In addition, 30 headlines did not fit these five, so they were assigned to a category labelled “Other.”

The following overview is purposely broad. The headlines obtained from the screen grabs was random, occurring when I was at the computer, so I will present my impression in very broad strokes.

In the descriptions that follow, reference to the candidate also includes headlines related to their party, VP candidate, or others that would be associated with their campaign.

Negatives abound. Overall, half of the headlines (159) were negative. Fully one-third (107) were negative toward Trump or the GOP while only half of that (52) were negative toward Clinton or the Democrats.

Of the 107 negative stories about Trump and the GOP, half (62) were categorized as problems, a third (37) as pouncing, leaving about one in ten (8) as polling. Of the 52 negative stories about Clinton and the Democrats, seven in ten (26) were categorized as problems, one quarter (14) as pouncing, and only one negative headline related to polling.

Positive or neutral headlines aimed at either candidate accounted for four in ten (128) of the headlines; 69 for Clinton and the Democrats, 59 for Trump and the GOP.

Of the 69 positive stories about Clinton and the Democrats, nearly half (32) were categorized as process, two in ten (15) as polling and (14) as other, and one in ten (8) as policy. Of the 59 positive stores about Trump and the Republicans, nearly half (28) were categorized as process, a quarter (16) as policy, less than two in ten (10) as other, and one in ten (5) as polling.

The “other” stories included such things as non-election activities by people associated with the campaign, and other topics that did not fit into the five main categories but could be identified with either candidate.

Polling. While the 38 headlines put polling in fourth place among the Comcast headlines, I still rate polling as a top priority for election coverage overall. The problems with polling alluded to earlier are seen in some of the headlines. For example, here are the headlines over a few days as August turned to September:

“Clinton’s Lead Over Trump Reaches Milestone” (August 27)
“New Presidential Poll is Grim News for Trump” (August 28)
“Trump Chips Away at Clinton’s Lead” (August 29)
“Clinton’s Lead Narrows in New Poll” (September 1)
“Clinton Leads Trump in National Poll” (September 2)
“New Poll Shows Clinton Crushing Trump” (September 3)
“Stunning Results in Latest Poll as Trump Surges” (September 4)

Then, the last few headlines I tracked in mid-September:

“Why Clinton Got Bigger Convention Bump” (September 16)

“Clinton Outdoing Trump in Must-Win State” (September 17)

“Clinton Pulls Ahead in Ps., Minn. Polls (September 19)

“Poll: Clinton Leads by 5 Points” (September 20)

Policy. The fewest number of headlines (27) were devoted to policy positions, 16 about Trump, 8 about Clinton, and 3 comparing the two. The topics that rated coverage focused on the economy, immigration, trade and terrorism. It was interesting to note the difference in the quality of the “fact-checking” stories. The best, in my opinion, were longer newspaper reports that made the effort to pursue matters in depth. While a few television reports took time to develop a story, others were simply giving air time to the opinion of one “expert” who may agree or disagree with the candidate.

General stories accounted for less than one in ten (30) of all headlines. They were stories that applied to both candidates, neither candidate or party, or overall analysis. 9 stories related to polling (i.e., “Who Would Win the Election Today?”), 6 as other (i.e., comparing the candidate’s luxury homes), 4 as problems, and 3 each as pouncing, process and policy.

Sometimes, it appeared that a general story could be used to get a photo favorable to one candidate on the home page. For example, “Compare Clinton and Trump’s Luxurious Homes” appeared by that or a similar title three times in the nine weeks (7/27, 7/31, and 8/16). Two of those featured a photo of Hillary, Bill and Chelsea Clinton, the third a photo of Hillary. Another story on “See Clinton and Trump’s Childhood Homes” (9/6) has a photo of a smiling Hillary Clinton with an American flag in the background. A story on “Trump’s First Home on the Market for \$1.5-million” (8/11) and “Bernie Sanders Buys Third Home” (8/16) both had photos of the candidates at rallies. The headline “Clintons Made \$10.6 Million in 2015” appeared in the news section without a photo.

WILL WE LEARN ANYTHING?

For those who fear the power of the media to shape opinion—myself included—there are some lessons from the election of 2016. The biggest may well be the sense that the proliferation of media today and the still-evolving influence of social media, have diluted the influence once available to television networks, major newspapers and news magazines. Hopefully, there will be lessons learned about the pitfall of setting expectations, particularly when shaped by ideological bias. To do this, journalists need to return to a healthy skepticism that should lead them to dig deeper.

While much has been said decrying a divided nation, we all must remember that the wisdom of the Founding Fathers was to create a system that would survive and even thrive on division rather than falling to totalitarianism. We have lost a sense of history and knowledge of basic civics to understand our role as citizens. Politics in America has always been a rough-and-tumble affair, which we must admit is deeply rooted in our culture, but it does seem we could try more often to meet in the middle rather than being driven to extremes.

THE HEADLINES

The Comcast home page is arranged with a large rotating banner toward the top of the page, then eight sections with five headlines each (Top News, Finance, and Entertainment being the most applicable here). The description for each headline includes:

- The headline and date
- Unless “TV Report” or “Photo Album” are shown, the link goes to a print story. When a quoted sub-headline is shown, that indicates the story appeared in the main rotating banner.
- The subject of a photo, if one is included (always in the main banner, only for the first of five headlines in the subject section).

Polling

- “Battleground States: Where They Stand” (7/28 – TV report “Swing State Update,” photos of Trump and Clinton)
- “Will Trump’s Numbers Dip After Hack Talk?” (7/28 – TV report)
- “After the Conventions: What the Candidates Need to Win” (7/29 – TV report “Which Key States Does Trump Need to Flip?,” photo of analyst with “Road to 270” map of states showing Clinton with 332 electoral votes and Trump with 206)
- “Who Would Win the Election Today?” (7/31 – TV report “Get an Early Look,” image of US map with states in red and blue)
- “Bizarre New Poll Result” (7/31 – TV report “Who Wins 5% of Votes?,” photo of Clinton laughing)
- “Trump Leads Clinton New National Poll” (7/31 – TV report)
- “Could 3 States Decide the Election?” (8/1 – TV report “Experts Say These Battlegrounds Are Key,” close-up photos of Clinton and Trump speaking)
- “Clinton Pulls Ahead Post-Convention” (8/1 – TV report)
- “Eric Trump’s Comments on Harassment Raise Eyebrows” (8/2 – TV report “Doubles Down on Father’s Remarks,” photo of Eric Trump)
- “Where the 2016 Presidential Race Stands Today” (8/2 – TV report, photo of Hillary at a rally with red, white and blue bunting in background)
- “Clinton’s Poll Numbers Spike as Trump Reels from Multiple Controversies” (TV report, photo of Clinton)
- “Trump Plunges to Stunning Low in New Poll” (8/6 – TV report, same photo used in headline that day about Trump losing another GOP voter)
- “Polls: Pence Growing in Popularity” (8/10 – TV report)
- “New Poll: Clinton Ahead in Swing States” (8/10 – TV report)
- “Polls: Clinton, Trump Close in Red States” (8/12 – TV report)
- “Trump ‘in Deep Trouble’ as Poll Numbers Tumble” (8/13 – TV report)
- “Poll: Trump Leads in Military Households” (8/16)
- “Clinton Maintains 9-Point Lead” (8/17 – TV report)
- “Can Trump Turn Around Polls” (8/18 – TV report)
- “Tight Polls in N.C. Senate Race” (8/18 – TV report)
- “New Polls Show a Grim Picture for Trump” (8/20 – TV report, photo of Trump in front of American flag)
- “Clinton Closes Poll Gap in Missouri” (8/24 – TV report)
- “Polls: Trump Lagging in Swing States” (8/24 – TV report)
- “Latest Poll Shows Clinton and Trump Neck-and-Neck in Nevada” (8/25 – TV report “Clinton to Speak to Crowd in Reno Today,” photos of Trump and Clinton at rallies)

- "Clinton Commands 10-Point Lead" (8/26 – TV report)
- "Clinton's Lead over Trump Reaches Milestone" (8/27 – TV report "Watch," close-up photo of Clinton at a rally, American flag in background)
- "New Presidential Poll is Grim News for Trump" (8/28 – TV report "Watch," Trump in spotlight against dark background)
- "Trump Chips Away at Clinton's Lead" (8/29 – TV report "Trump Narrows Gap in Key Voter Group," photos of Trump and Clinton speaking)
- "Clinton's Lead Narrows in New Poll" (9/1 – TV report)
- "Clinton Leads Trump in National Poll" (9/2 – TV report)
- "New Poll Shows Clinton Crushing Trump" (9/3 – TV report, photo of Trump against dark blue background)
- "Stunning Results in Latest Poll as Trump Surges" (9/4 – TV report "Watch," photo of Trump in walking away from camera with others)
- "Pollsters' Reveals Who Would Win if Election Held Today" (9/4 – TV report, photos of Clinton and Trump)
- "Why Clinton Got Bigger Convention Bump" (9/16 – TV report)
- "Clinton Outdoing Trump in Must-Win State" (9/17 – TV report)
- "Clinton Pulls Ahead in Pa., Minn. Polls (9/19 – TV report)
- "Poll: Clinton Leads by 5 Points" (9/20 – TV report)
- "Hillary Clinton Leads Donald Trump Ahead of First Debate" (9/21 – photo of Clinton with nondescript background)

Pouncing

- "Mom of Ambassador Killed in Benghazi Tell Trump to Stop" (7/24)
- "Trump's 'Art of the Deal' Ghostwriter Call Him a 'Sociopath'" (7/24 – TV report "Watch," older photo of Donald and Melania Trump in front of VH1 background)
- "First Lady Takes Aim at Trump" (7/26 – TV report "We Go High," photo of Michelle Obama)
- "Donald Trump Fires Back at DNC Speakers" (7/26 – TV report "Rips All Major Speakers Except One," photo of Trump)
- "DNC: Weaver Hits Trump on Climate Change" (7/27 – TV report)
- "Pres. Obama Takes on Trump Ahead of DNC Speech" (7/27 – TV report "Has Harsh Words for GOP Nominee," photo of President with interviewer, standing in hallway)
- "Trump Rips Clinton's Speech" (7/27 – TV report "What He Tweeted," photo of Trump with black background)
- "Kardashian Slams Her Time with Trump on 'Celebrity Apprentice'" (7/27 – TV report "My Mom Made Me Do It," photo of Kardashian speaking)
- "Kaine Mocks Trump After Getting ID Wrong" (7/28 – TV report)
- "Trump: Putin Better Leader Than Obama" (7/28 – TV report, photo of Trump with hand in "ok" gesture)
- "Trump: Dems Live in 'Fantasy World'" (7/29 – TV report "Slams Clinton Speech," photo)
- "Donald Trump: Bernie Sanders Sold His Soul to the Devil" (7/29 – TV Report "Harsh Words in First Speech After DNC," photo of Sanders at microphone)
- "Mark Cuban Endorses Hillary Clinton, Rips Donald Trump" (7/31)

- "Trump Calls Clinton 'Totally Unfit' to Be Commander-in-Chief" (7/31 – TV report, photo of trump in front of bank of American flags)
- "Trump Jokes with Mom About Kid Crying During Speech" (8/2 – TV report "'Get the Baby Out of Here'," photo of Trump pointing with American and Virginia state flags in background)
- "Former 'Apprentice' Star Has Harsh Words for Trump" (8/7 – TV report, photo of subject)
- "After Tumultuous Week, Trump Focuses on Clinton" (8/7)
- "Benghazi Parents to Sue Clinton" (8/9 – TV report)
- "Hillary Clinton Slams Donald Trump for 'Casual Inciting of Violence'" (8/10 – photo of Clinton at a rally, black background with light shining on her)
- "Trump Says Obama 'Founded ISIS' at Rally" (8/11 – TV report, photo of Trump speaking at a rally)
- "'Donald Grump' Visits 'Sesame Street'" (8/11 – TV report)
- "Trump Falsely Claims Obama, Clinton are ISIS Founders" (8/12 – text)
- "Trump 'Not That Sarcastic' About Calling Obama ISIS Founder" (8/12 – TV report, rally photo w headline that could be interpreted as not flattering)
- "Trump May Have Reached 'Point of No Return'" (8/14 – TV report, photo of Trump at a rally with American flag in background)
- "Reality Check: Is America in Rapid Decline?" (8/14)
- "There Are 4 Big Gaps Between Clinton and Trump" (8/14)
- "Trump Says He's Also 'Running Against the Crooked Media'" (8/14)
- "Trump Threatens to Pull Credentials of New York Times" (8/14)
- "Clinton: There is No New Donald Trump" (8/17 – photo of smiling Clinton walking down a hall with group)
- "Clinton Aide: Trump Pitch to Black Voters 'Out of Touch'" (8/20)
- "Trump: Shut Down Clinton Foundation" (8/22)
- "Was Hillary Clinton's Feat of Strength [Arm Wrestling with late night host] Faked? (8/24 – TV clip "Late-Night Host Speaks Out," photo from show)
- "Trump Escalates Clinton Foundation Attacks" (8/24 – TV report)
- "Bill Clinton Took \$17.6-Million From For-Profit College" (8/24)
- "Trump: Hillary Has Been Hiding" (8/25 – TV report) [Clinton was out of public view for several days, reportedly battling pneumonia]
- "Kaine Scotts at Trump's 'Bigot' Attack" (8/25)
- "Trump Doctor Wrote Health Letter in Five Minutes as Limo Waited" (8/26 – TV report, photo of doctor at desk)
- "Candidates Trade Barbs in Campaign Speeches" (8/26 – TV report; photo of both candidates, smiling)
- "Clinton Campaign Debuts Stark New Ad" (8/26 – TV report)
- "Trump Under Fire for Tweet About Wade's Caousin" (8/27)
- "Plouffe: Donald Trump is a 'Psychopath'" (8/28 – TV report)
- "Trump Could Win Big Even If He Loses Election" (8/28)
- "Are You a U.S. Voter Considering a Move to Canada?" (8/28 – TV report "Here's What You Need to Know," photo of protestor in red Viking style hat outside and unidentified building with Canadian flags that could be a consulate)

- "Dems Ask FBI to Probe Trump Campaign" (8/30)
- "Clinton Calls Out Trump in American Legion Speech" (8/31 – TV report, photo of Clinton at campaign event with enthusiastic crowd)
- "Clinton Slams Trump: Diplomacy is 'More Than a Photo Op'" (9/1 – TV report, photo of Clinton (same one used other times))
- "Mexican President to Trump: We 'Will Never Pay for a Wall'" (9/1)
- "Clinton Ad Slams Trump's Mexico Trip" (9/2 – TV report)
- "Clinton Claims Alleged Russian Hacks Meant to Bolster Trump" (9/6 – photo of Clinton speaking)
- "Clinton Suggests Terror Groups Are Rooting for Trump Presidency" (9/8 – TV report, photo of Clinton at rally, sky in background)
- "Fact Check: Is ISIS Rooting for Donald Trump?" (9/9 – TV report, photo of Hillary at a rally, but no story about her)
- "Trump Refuses to Say Obama Born in U.S.:" (9/15)
- "Where is the 6-Foot Painting of Trump?" (9/15 – TV report)
- "Clinton: Trump Should Apologize for Outrageous Lie" (9/16 – TV report, photo of Clinton waving, with several security agents and reporters around her)
- "Trump: Clinton's 2008 Campaign Started 'Birtherism'" (9/16 – TV report, photo of Trump speaking at a rally)
- "Gates: Donald Trump is 'Beyond Repair'" (9/18 – TV report)

Problems

- "Fact-Checking the RNC's First Night" (7/18 – TV report "Who Bent the Truth," photo of Trump at podium addressing convention crowd)
- "Melanie Trump Accused of Plagiarizing Michelle Obama Speech" (7/18 – TV report "Striking Similarities to Her 2008 Address," photo of Melanie Trump clapping)
- "Trump Campaign Fires Back at Speech Plagiarism Accusations" (7/19 – TV report "Campaign Manager: Media Distorting Message," same photo of Melanie Trump used with 7/18 headline)
- "Compare the Two Speeches" (7/19 – TV report "Watch," photo of Michelle Obama speaking)
- "Pro-Trump Super PACs have Dismal Fundraising Reports" (7/22 – photo of smiling Trump in front of American flags)
- "Republicans Seem to Dodge Outright Trump Endorsements" (7/22 – this headline was repeated three times in box)
- "Leaked DNC Emails Threaten Party Unity Efforts" (7/24 – TV report, photo of Clinton and Sanders in front of American flag)
- "Stunning Development Rocks Democratic National Convention" (7/24 – TV report "Watch," photo of Debbie Wasserman Schultz at press conference)
- "Sanders Calls for Debbie Wasserman Schultz to Resign" (7/24 – TV report, photo of Sanders addressing camera)
- "DNC Official Apologizes for 'Insensitive' Email After Leak" (7/24)
- "Republican Women Organize to Support Clinton" (7/24 – TV report)

- "Schultz Booed Over Email Leaks" (7/25 – TV report "Delegates Get Heated," photo of Schultz speaking)
- "DNC Chief Stepping Down in Wake of Leaked Email Scandal" (7/25)
- "DNC Issues 'Deep and Sincere' Apology to Bernie Sanders" (7/25 – TV report "Offers Statement on Leaks, 'Inexcusable Remarks'," photo of convention delegates displaying "Love trumps hate" signs unrelated to story)
- "Sander's Wife Caught on Hot Mic" (7/25 – TV report "Dropped a Big Hint," photo of Sanders and wife)
- "New DNC Chair Shuts Down Boos" (7/25 – TV report "Takes Control," photo)
- "Drama on DNC Day 1: Protests, Arrests and Resignations" (7/25 – photo of woman with "SILENCED" written on tape over mouth)
- "Why Experts Are Sure Russia Hacked DNC" (7/25)
- "Russia Offers 'Four-Letter' Response to DNC Hack Claim" (7/26)
- "See Lavrov's Surprisingly Feisty Response to Hacking Question" (7/26 – TV report)
- "Trump: I Have 0 Investments in Russia" (7/27 – TV report)
- "Biden Downplays DNC Discord" (7/27 – TV report "That's Normal, Man," photo of Biden)
- "Lifelong GOPer Switches to Clinton" (7/28 – TV report "Reagan Staffer Speaks," photo)
- "Donald Trump Draws Back on Russian Hack Invitation" (7/28 – photo to Trump speaking with black background)
- "Russian Intelligence Hacked DNC: US" (7/28)
- "Melanie Deletes Her Website" (7/29 – TV report "Find Out Why," photo)
- "GOP Staff Switches to Clinton" (7/29 – TV report "Harsh Words for Trump," photo)
- "Appeals Court Shoots Down N.C. Voting Law" (7/29)
- "Could Donald Trump Be Denied National Security Briefings?" (7/29 – TV report, photo of Trump at a rally)
- "Slain Soldier's Dad: GOP Must Take 'Moral Stand' on Trump" (7/30 – photo of Khan and wife at convention podium)
- "Was Hillary Clinton's Email Hacked?" (7/30 – TV report – one time without photo, another time with photo of Clinton in dark glasses looking at phone)
- "Trump Questions Army Father's DNC Speech, Wife's Silence" (7/30)
- "Dad of Muslim Soldier Killed in Iraq Responds to Trump" (7/31)
- "Trump Feuds with Soldier's Parents" (7/31 – TV report "Turning Point in Race?," photo of Trump)
- "Trump of Defense over Reputed Russian Ties" (7/31 – TV report)
- "Pence: 'Obama Was Born in Hawaii'" (7/31)
- "Trump Doesn't Back Down from Feud with Slain Soldier's Parents" (8/1 – TV report "McCain Denounces Trump's Comments on Khans," photo of Trump with pursed lips, possibly listening to a question at a press conference)
- "Clinton Interview Raises Questions" (8/1 – TV report "FBI Answer Slammed," photo of Clinton)
- "North Dakota Voter ID Laws Struck Down" (8/2)
- "Mexican Sec. Behind Trump Visit Resigns" (7/31)
- "DNC Shakes up Leadership in Wake of Email Hack" (8/2 – TV report, photo of Clinton seated, chin on hands, with look that could be interpreted as exasperation)

- "Trump Campaign Manager: Reports of 'Intervention,' Turmoil Not True" (8/3 – TV report "Reports Say Trump's Kids, Friends Plan Intervention," photo of Trump speaking, with black background)
- "Pence Endorses Paul Ryan" (8/3 – TV report "Twist in Controversy," photo of Pence)
- "Republican CEO Endorses Clinton" (8/3 – TV report)
- "Could Trump Drop Out of the Race?" (8/4 – TV report "Inside the GOP's Options to Replace Him," unflattering close-up photo of Trump against black background)
- "Trump Loses Another GOP Voter" (8/6 – TV report, close-up photo of Trump at microphone with black background)
- "As Trump Sinks, Here's 5 Things We Learned Last Week" (8/7 – photo of Trump at a rally, shading eyes from light to look out into crowd)
- "List of Republicans Dropping Trump Grows" (8/7 – TV report, similar photo as previous story but different angle)
- "Can McCain Survive Trump's White House Bid" (8/7)
- "Trump's Actions Affecting Senate Races?" (8/4 – TV report)
- "Two Benghazi Parents Sue Clinton" (8/8)
- "50 GOP Leaders Warn That Trump Would Be 'Most Reckless' President" (8/10 – TV report, close-up photo of Trump speaking against black background)
- "Documents Allege Christie Lied in 2013" (8/10)
- "Report: RNC Tells Trump to Turn It Around" (8/11 – TV report)
- "Trump's 'Straight Talk' Wasn't So Helpful This Week" (8/13 – photo of Trump at rally)
- "Clinton Could Have an October Surprise" (8/13 – TV report, photo of Clinton at a rally)
- "Trump Poll-Watching Plan Stirs Voter Intimidation Fears" (8/15 – same photo of Trump used in Aug 10 story on GOP leaders)
- "Senor: Trump Campaign Is Collapsing" (8/14 – TV report, same photo of Trump as used in story headlined "Trump May Have Reached 'Point of No Return'")
- "FBI to Send Congress Clinton Interview Notes" (8/16)
- "Giuliani [an early Trump supporter] Makes Major 9/11 Flub" (8/15 – TV report)
- "Texas to Appeal Voter ID Law" (8/18 – TV report)
- "Exposed! Naked Trump Statues Pop Up Across U.S." (8/19 – TV report, photo of two men taking selfies by one of the statues)
- "Donald Trump Admits Regret for Causing 'Personal Pain'" (8/19)
- "Clinton Responds to 'Deranged Conspiracy Theories'" (8/19)
- "What to Make of Trump's Wild Week" (8/19)
- "Judge: Clinton Must Answer Questions" (8/19)
- "Clinton Email Hack Linked to DNC Hack?" (8/19 – TV report, photo of Clinton looking at phone while representing US at a meeting)
- "Clinton: Powell Suggested Private Server" (8/19 - TV report)
- "Trump, Clinton Would Both Bring Ethics Baggage" (8/20 – photos of Clinton, Trump)
- "Another Republican Breaks Ranks to Endorse Clinton" (8/20 – TV report, photo of Clinton)
- "Trump Under Fire for Comments About African-Americans" (8/21 – photo of Trump shaking hands at a rally)

- "Trump Sparks Outrage with Stark Plea" (8/21 – TV report, photo of Trump at a rally with American flag in background)
- "Former President Carter Makes Waves with Clinton Comment" (8/23 – TV report "Surprise Remark One Month After Endorsing Her," photo of Carter at microphone)
- "Bernie Sanders' New Group Hits Major Trouble with Mass Resignations" (8/23 – photo of Sanders)
- "Trump Doctor Touts Bogus Credential" (8/23 – TV report)
- "Why Focus on Hillary's Health?" (8/23 – TV report)
- "Hillary Clinton Responds to Rumors About Her Health" (8/23 – TV report "What Did She Say," photo of Clinton from late night show, not looking her best)
- "Trump's About-Face Spells Trouble for Right-Wing Author Coulter" (8/25 – TV report "Ruins Book Launch with One 'Unforgivable Move'," photo of Coulter)
- "Clinton Facing an 'October Surprise'" (8/28 – TV report "Watch," photo of Clinton with others, perhaps addressing a reporter or someone in crowd)
- "Ugly Confrontation Outside Trump Tower" (8/28 – TV report "Watch," photo supposedly of black protestor confronting a white Trump supporter)
- "Trump's Political Plea Tweet Creates a Firestorm" (8/28 – TV report, photo of Trump clapping in front of American flag)
- "Trump Meets with Mexican President: Dispute Emerges Over Wall" (8/31)
- "Child Services Investigating Anthony Weiner over Sexting Scandal" (9/1 – TV report, photo of Weiner) [This report would be followed shortly by the FBI reopening the Clinton email investigation]
- "Clinton Foundation Used Tax Money" (9/1 – TV report)
- "Latino Trump Supporter Warns of 'Taco Trucks on Every Corner'" (9/1)
- "FBI Releases Clinton Interview Notes" (9/2 – TV report "What Are the Key Takeaways," photo of Clinton at rally)
- "FBI Issues Spy Warning to Both Campaigns" (9/2 – TV report)
- "Another Top Republican Backs Clinton" (9/3 – TV report "Watch," photo of Clinton)
- "Russia Suspected of U.S. Presidential Election Scheme" (9/6 – TV report, photo of Trump supporters)
- "Trump Dismisses Ties to Fla. AG" (9/6)
- "Can Homeland Security Protect the Election from Hacking?" (9/6 – TV report, photo of room with workers at computers)
- "Libertarian Candidate's 'Oops' Moment" (9/8)
- "Former Clinton Aide Bryan Pagliano Skips Email Hearing" (9/13 – TV report, photo of empty place in hearing room at Pagliano's name plate)
- "Protesters Assaulted at Trump Rally" (9/13 – TV report)
- "Trump Won't Talk Lab Results on 'Dr. Oz'" (9/14 – TV report)
- "Hacker Releases Further DNC Documents" (9/14)
- "Trump Jr. Clarifies 'Gas Chambers' Remark" (9/15)
- "Doctor Thinks Hillary Clinton is Being Poisoned" (9/15 – TV report, photo of Clinton on right with large black background on left)

- "Democrats Fear Bill Clinton is Losing His Touch: Report" (9/16 – TV report, photo of Bill Clinton speaking w American flag in background)
- "Kasich: Slim Chance I'll Vote for Trump" (9/16 – TV report)
- "Lawyers: [Trump supporter] Christie Knew of Lane Closures" (9/19 – TV report)
- "'Bridgate' Scandal Heads to Court" (9/19)
- "Aides Blame Christie for 'Bridgate'" (9/20 – TV report)

Process

- "Giuliani Goes All Out in Fiery Speech" (7/18 – TV report "Watch," photo of Giuliani speaking)
- "RNC Day 2" What to Expect" (7/19 – TV report "Who's Speaking," photo of convention platform)
- "Clinton's VP Pick Could Come Today" (7/22 – TV report "2 Main Contenders," photo of Clinton)
- "Sanders Wanted Clinton to Pick Warren as VP" (7/24)
- "Democratic National Convention Begins: What to Watch For" (7/25 – TV Report "What Does Clinton Need to Accomplish?," photo of sign outside arena)
- "Clinton, Kaine Give First Joint Interview" (7/25 – TV report "Watch '60 Minutes'," photo of Kaine and Clinton)
- "It's Clinton's Week but Here's Why Obama is Key" (7/25)
- "Sanders Laments Loss, Gets Behind Clinton on Raucous Day One" (7/26 – TV report "I Am Proud to Stand with Her Tonight," photo of Sanders at podium waving to crowd)
- "Silverman Ad Lib Changes DNC's Tone" (7/26 – TV report "You're Being Ridiculous," photo of Silverman)
- "Could [Bill] Clinton's Speech Change the Election?" (7/26 – TV report "Watch," photo of Bill Clinton applauding)
- "DNC Day 2: What to Watch For" (7/26 – TV report "Watch," photo of convention floor)
- "Top Sanders Aide Joins Clinton Campaign" (7/26)
- "History Made: Clinton Officially Wins the Democratic Nomination" (7/27 – TV report "See the Big Moment," photo of Hillary signs on convention floor)
- "Larry Sanders Casts Vote for Brother" (7/27 – TV report "Emotional Moment," photo of Larry Sanders on convention floor)
- "DNC: Bernie Sanders Makes Bold Move to Nominate Clinton" (7/27 – TV report, photo of Sanders on convention floor with microphone in hand)
- "DNC Day 2's Focus: Unity?" (7/27 – TV report "What to Expect Tonight," photo of convention floor)
- "Sanders Pushes Back at 'Bernie or Bust' Movement" (7/27 – photo of Sanders at podium)
- "Mother of Orlando Shooting Victim Moves the DNC" (7/27 – TV report "Christine Leinonen: 'Love Trumps Hate'," photo of Leinonen speaking with two men on either side comforting her)
- "Sanders: Movement Will Go On" (7/27 – TV report "Bernie's Wife Speaks," photo of Sanders' wife speaking)
- "Kaine Officially Wins VP Nom" (7/27 – TV report "See the Big Moment." Image of Kaine and Clinton with large Kaine name on banner in background)
- "DNC: Daughter of Sandy Hook Victim Honors Mother" (7/27 – TV report, photo of speaker at podium)

- “Trump: I Want a Female President, Too” (7/27)
- “Transgender Woman Makes History on the DNC Stage” (7/28 – TV report “Sarah McBride Pays Emotional Tribute,” photo of McBride at podium)
- “Hillary Clinton Delivers Historic Speech at DNC” (7/29 – TV Report “Clinton: America at a Moment of Reckoning,” photo from convention)
- “See Clinton’s Full DNC Address” (7/29 – Video “Watch,” photo of Clinton giving speech)
- “Koch Donor Retreat Convenes Under Trump’s Shadow” (7/30)
- “Sanders to Return to Senate—But Not as a Democrat” (7/31 – TV report, photo of stern-looking Sanders at podium)
- “Trump Declines to Endorse Speaker Ryan” (8/2 – TV report)
- “Security Rushes to Protect Clinton” (8/4 – TV report “Protesters Derail Rally,” photo of Clinton apparently reacting to activity)
- “Trump Endorses Paul Ryan, John McCain” (8/6)
- “Trump Campaign Says it Barred Ryan Challenger from Rally” (8/7)
- “Trump: I Will Demand Fair Moderators in Debates” (8/10 – TV report, photo of Trump making point at a rally)
- “Trump Wants New Debate Terms” (8/10 – TV report, photo of Trump clapping at a rally)
- “Clinton and Kaine Release Tax Returns” (8/12 – video, upbeat photo of Clinton and Kaine with spouses at a rally photo)
- “In His Words: 19 Thoughts From Donald Trump” (8/14 – photo of Trump at a rally)
- “He’s With Her: Biden Makes Campaign Trail Debut” (8/15 – TV report, photo of Biden and Clinton together at rally)
- “Trump’s Staff May Write His Tweets” (8/15)
- “Trump to Receive Intelligence Brief” (8/17)
- “Christie Joins Trump for FBI Briefing” (8/17 – TV report)
- “What the New Trump Campaign Shake-Up Means” (8/17 – wide shot of Trump at podium with flags in dark background)
- “Some Good News for Endangered Republican Senators” (8/18 – photo of Trump at a rally, black background)
- “Clinton to Meet with Top Law Enforcement” (8/18 – TV report)
- “Trump Hits Campaign Trail with New Team” (8.18 – TV Report)
- “Trump Campaign Chair Paul Manafort Resigns” (8/19 – TV Report, photo of Manafort apparently answering reporting questions at a Trump rally)
- “Trump to African-America Voters: What Do You Have to Lose?” (8/20)
- “Palin Sounds Off on Trump’s Switch-Up” (8/25 – TV report)
- “Trump to Hold Talks with Hispanic Leaders” (8/26 – TV report)
- “Study Finds No Evidence of Voter Fraud” (8/26)
- “Trump’s Visit with Mexican President: What to Expect” (8/31 – TV report “Watch,” close-up photo of Trump speaking, black background)
- “Trump: We Didn’t Discuss Who Will Pay for the Wall” (8/31 – TV report “Details Meeting with Mexican President,” photo of Trump speaking with marble wall background)
- “Trump’s Hispanic Adviser Resigns” (9/1 – TV report)
- “Presidential Debate Moderators Revealed” (9/2 – TV report)

- "Biden Invokes Son's Death in Intense Exchange with Heckler" (9/4 – TV report "Watch," photo of Biden at rally with American flag in background)
- "Ready, Set, Go: Sprint to Election Day Starts Now" (9/5 – close-up photos of Clinton and Trump)
- "Impromptu Clinton News Conference" (9/6 – TV report)
- "Architect of Trump's Mexico Visit Resigns" (9/8 – TV report)
- "Pence Releases 10 Years of Tax Returns" (9/9)
- "Clinton Back on the Trail, Heads to North Carolina" (9/15 – TV report, photo of Clinton giving "thumbs up")
- "Hillary Clinton Calls Time Off Campaign Trail 'a Gift'" (9/15 – TV report, photo of Clinton smiling with American flags in background)
- "Trump Says He's 'Afraid' Election is 'About to be Rigged'" (9/16 – close-up of Trump at rally with black background)
- "How Would a President Trump Manage His Business Empire?" (9/18)
- "Clinton: Election 'Downright Depressing'" (9/19 – TV report)
- "Trump Makes Pitch to Black Voters" (9/21 – TV report)

Policy

- "Fact-Checking Donald Trump's Acceptance Speech" (7/22 – TV report "How Do His Claims Hold Up?," photo of Trump at convention giving thumbs-up)
- "Fact Check: Hillary Clinton's DNC Acceptance Speech" (7/29 – TV report "Do the Claims in Her Speech Hold Up?," photo from TV coverage of speech)
- "6 Ways Candidates Clash on Your Finances" (8/1 – TV report "Take a Look at Their Positions," photo of Trump and Pence, though it is interesting to note that of the five people in the background at a rally, three are women, two men, and the woman most visible in the center is African American).
- "Fact-Checking Donald Trump's Economic Speech in Detroit" (8/8 – TV report, photo of Trump giving speech)
- "Trump Promises Details in Sweeping Tax Plan" (8/9)
- "Trump's Tax Loopholes Would Help the Rich?" (8/10)
- "Clinton to Unveil Economic Plan" (8/11 – TV report)
- "Clinton: I Will Stop Any Trade Deal That Hurts U.S. Workers" (8/11 – TV report, photo of Clinton giving address)
- "Fact-Checking Hillary Clinton's Economic Speech in Michigan" (8/11 – TV report, photo of Hillary smiling, supposedly at the Michigan event)
- "Trump 'Fine' with Sending American Citizens to Gitmo" (8/12)
- "Fact checking Clinton's Economic Speech" (8/12)
- "Clinton vs. Trump on Immigration" (8/16 – TV report)
- "Trump Vows a Return to 'Law and Order'" (8/17)
- "Clinton, Trump Agree to Forum on Veterans, National Security" (8/19)
- "How Clinton and Trump Would Each Affect the National Debt" (8/19 – generic photo of people in a meeting with national debt superimposed)

- "Court Reduces Early Voting in Ohio" (8/23)
- "Donald Trump Openly Weighs a Massive Immigration Reversal" (8/24 – photo of Trump close-up focused on hand, shot used with other stories)
- "Trump Recommits to Mass Deportation in Fiery Speech" (8/31 – photo of Trump gesturing in front of American flag)
- "Trump Sticks to Hard Line on Immigration in Arizona Speech" (8/31)
- "Trump on Day 1: We Will Start Building Impenetrable Wall" (8/31)
- "Fact Check: Donald Trump 's Fiery Immigration Speech" (9/1 – TV report "AP Looks at His Plan," photo of Trump w black background)
- "Trump Feuds with Mexican President" (9/2 – TV report "Sparring over the Wall," photo of Trump at a rally) - in another version of this story, the headline was "Donald Trump in Twitter Feud with Mexican President"
- "Trump Said 'Take the Oil.' Can He?" (9/8 – TV report)
- "Trump to Release Child Care Tax Proposal" (9/13 – TV report, photo of Trump giving thumbs-up at event with flags in background)
- "Trump Proposes \$4.4 Trillion Tax Cut" (9/15 – TV report)
- "Are You More Like Hillary or Donald on Policy?" (9/18 – link "Take the Quiz Now and Find Out," photos of Clinton and Trump speaking, both very intense)
- "Fact Check: Trump's Terror Speech" (9/19)

Other

- "Obama's Half-Brother Voting for Trump" (7/24 – TV report "Watch," photo of half-brother) [This was left as "other" because it could have been taken as a joke by many instead of a problem for Clinton (or Trump, for that matter)]
- "Compare Clinton and Trump's Luxurious Homes" (7/27 – TV report "See 4 Houses of the Candidates," photo of Hillary, Bill and Chelsea Clinton at DNC Convention)
- "Why Vladimir Putin Hates Hillary Clinton" (7/27 – photo of Putin whispering into Clinton's ear)
- "Kaine Spoofs His 'Boring' Image" (7/27 – photo of Kaine on "Meet the Press")
- "Chelsea Weighs in on Donald & Ivanka Trump" (7/28 – TV report "What She'd Consider Doing with Ivanka," photo of Chelsea Clinton)
- "Chelsea Clinton Steps into Spotlight" (7/29, TV Report "Loving Picture of Hillary," photo from convention)
- "Vice President Joe Biden Set to Make His Acting Debut" (7/30 – TV report "All About the Upcoming TV Role," photo from show promoting the story)
- "Check Out Clinton and Trump's Elegant Homes" (7/31 – TV report "Compare 4 Houses of the Candidates," photo of Clintons)
- "What Would First Husband Do?" (7/31 – TV report "New Potential Role," photo of Bill Clinton)
- "Biden Marries White House Staffers" (8/2 – TV report "Unites 'Two Great Guys'," photo of Biden with two men in marriage ceremony)
- "Clint Eastwood Rips PC Culture" (8/4 – TV report "Sparks Controversy," photo of Eastwood speaking)

- "Clinton, Florida Gov. Urge Congress to Pass Zika Bill" (8/10 – TV report, photo of somber-looking Clinton in front of pregnancy-related posters)
- "Trump's First Home on the Market for \$1.5-Million" (8/11 – Photo album "Peek Inside His Boyhood House," photo of Trump speaking at a rally)
- "RNC Head: Don't Believe the Hype" (8/12 – TV report)
- Send "Clintons Made \$10.6 Million in 2015" (8/12)
- "What Are the Trump and Clinton Kids Worth?" (8/13 – TV report "Find Out Now," stock photo of Trump with daughter)
- "Bernie Sanders Buys Third Home" (8/16 – TV report "What's the Price Tag?," photo of Sanders smiling)
- "Compare Clinton and Trump Homes" (8/16 – TV report "See 4 of Their Homes," photo of Clinton)
- "Pence in La. to Tour Flood Damage" (8/19 – TV report)
- "12 Tips to Learn from Hillary's Tax Return" (8/23 – TV report "Cover All Bases," photo of Clinton)
- "Trump Hikes Rent on Own Office?" (8/23 – TV report)
- "Five Things to Know About the Alt-Right" (8/24)
- "Barbra Steisand Sings a Duet with 'Donald Trump'" (8/26 – highlight from Saturday Night Live skit)
- "Clinton's State Dept Schedule Revealed" (8/29)
- "See Clinton and Trump's Childhood Homes" (9/6 – Photo album "Compare Homes," photo of Clinton smiling with American flag in background)
- "Clinton to Meet with Security Experts" (9/9 – TV report)
- "Donald Trump Lets Jimmy Fallon Mess Up His Hair" (9/16 – TV report "You Have to See What it Looks Like Afterward," photo from late-night show)
- "Fallon Blasted for Trump Interview" (9/18 – TV report, photo of Fallon messing up Trump's hair)
- "Johnson, Stein Fail to Make First Debate" (9/16 – TV report)