

SHOULD 'FAKE NEWS' BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY?

THE IMPACT OF THE DAILY SHOW WITH JON STEWART

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the impact of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart on the regular viewers of the show. By using discourse and statistical analysis on six different events on the show, I try to determine whether The Daily Show improves the ranking of the politicians making guest appearances, and whether it significantly shapes the opinions on social issues among its audience. Findings show that due to the ceiling effect and highly opinionated viewers, the show has no significant impact on social issues, but it does help the improvement of the ranking of the politicians. With this, I conclude that the show is a narrow targeted program aimed at liberal, young, urban and opinionated social elite more than it is an influential shaper of the public opinion.

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INTRODUCTION

By taking a look at media or press history, we can agree on many functions that the media has in society, and even more roles it played in history. It is a well-discussed issue that the news media have an inherited habit of stating opinions while reporting the news, and they find it extremely difficult to get out of this frame. At some point in time, drawing a clear line of distinction between reporting and opinion has been considered to be a factor of objectivity and has been most highly valued. This was known as the greatest years of American journalism when public figures like Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite were the most trusted men in America according to some surveys, and ‘The Pentagon Papers’ and ‘Watergate’ represented the ultimate victory of free press over the government. James W. Carey argues that “objectivity was a defensive measure, an attempt to secure, by quasi-scientific means, a method of recording the world independent of the political and social forces that were shaping it. In this rendition, a democratic press was the representative of the people, of people no longer represented by political parties and the state itself”¹ This era only speaks of the value of the development of this media role into one of the most significant roles the news media has ever played in history – the criticism of authority.

When discussing the rival narratives of liberal press history, James Curran points to the ‘Whig’ versions of liberal press history. According to him, the emerging press in the 19th and the 20th century brought the function of challenge to the social authorities in a society.

¹ James W. Carey, *American Journalism On, Before, and After September 11*; P-79 in *Journalism after September 11* / edited by Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, London : Routledge, 2002

“The ‘Whig’ version argues that an increasingly independent press subjected authority to critical scrutiny, and represented the views of the public to parliament and government. It became the ‘fourth estate’, the voice of the people in the corridors of power. This transformation is said to have occurred in the early to mid-nineteenth century, although another view [...] holds that it really took place a century later after an unfortunate interlude when the press was little more than an extension of the party system.”²

A second interpretation that Curran lays down says that the power structure in 19th century Britain was gradually modified partly due to “the judicious maturing of the democratic system by relying on the concerns of pressure groups to government and enabling society to commune freely with itself.”³

This particular media function has been overwhelmingly dominant in today’s broadcast media. With the appearance of the 24 hour news networks, nobody could have expected more news happening, but rather more news reporting, which was their primary role. And even so, the coverage of all the daily domestic and world events could not possibly take 24 hours, and that is the reason why these networks relied on host and pundit commentary to help the news time consumption. The repetition of reports and opinions also plays a large role in this whole system as it helps the construction of beliefs and positions among the audience. In the same time, this news punditry and the increasing presence of interpretation of the news made it difficult to provide fair and balanced coverage. A short analysis of this trend leads to answers in history of the media and their political economy.

² Curran, James, *Media and power*, London: Routledge, 2002. P. 6

³ *Ibid.* P. 6

Jeffrey P. Jones in his article 'Beyond Genre: Cable's Impact on the Talk Show', points to similar changes in content in the entertainment media as in the news media and discusses them drawing parallels in their political economy. According to him, a big role is played by effect of cheaper and easier-to-produce content on the programming. Moreover, this is why TV production switched from scripted (TV movies, TV novellas, sit-coms...) to live content that allowed certain amount of improvisation, less scripted discussions, and celebrity glitz substituting the amusement of the happenings in the scripted content, Getting back to news programming, this very same political economy reasoning can be applied. 24-hour news networks decided to spend more time on talking hosts, stakeholders and pundits instead of real reports, research, investigative journalism and etc. The best example of how close these two sides (reports and opinions) can go is the FOX news network. Their most well known shows (such as the O'Reilly Factor with conservative show host Bill O'Reilly) incorporate news reporting and commentary in the same time without making a clear division demanded by objectivity principles (having in mind their motto 'Fair & Balanced', objectivity is probably what they should be aiming for).

On the opposite side (entertainment media), the same kind of trend took place in about the same time with the new shows appearing on the new cable channels. "Their significance is not that they have been replicated across the television landscape, but that in the process, each has also blurred and transformed their preexisting generic boundaries."⁴ Jones lists 'Politically Incorrect' with Bill Maher and 'The Daily Show' with Jon Stewart to be the first shows to start this trend. These shows could not fit in the previous taxonomy of

⁴ Jeffrey P. James, Beyond Genre: Cable's Impact on the Talk Show; in Thinking outside the box : a contemporary television genre reader; edited by Gary R. Edgerton and Brian G. Rose. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, c2005; P. 157

Erler and Timberg⁵ of *entertainment talk* (shows like ‘The Tonight Show’ and ‘The Jerry Springer Show’), *news talk* (like ‘Meet the Press’ and ‘Washington Week in Review’) and *socially situated talk* (like Judge Judy and Survivor).⁶ According to Jones, these shows managed to “mix and blend the traditionally distinct talk show assemblage of celebrity talk, on the one hand, and serious-minded political talk by experts, on the other. In the process, they challenged the status (if not the validity) of programs in both existing categories”.⁷

Seems like the political economy of the media approach can offer quite a few questions about the appearance of such shows. The story of the creation of the Comedy Central cable channel answers many of the questions faced. Jones describes the birth of the channel and the turns it made to reach the cult status some of its shows have today. It was formed as a merge between the Time Warner’s Comedy Channel and the HA! TV Comedy Network of the Viacom Corporation (which will eventually turn to be its single owner together with the MTV, VH1...).

“[Comedy Central] immediately began to search for a formula that would make the network more than simply a location for stand-up comedy routines and sitcom reruns. The network, therefore, needed programming that was distinctive and original, something that would define the channel in viewers’ eyes. Original programming, such as sitcoms or dramedies, can be expensive to produce, while talk programming is famously not. The

⁵ Robert J Erler and Bernard M. Timberg, “A taxonomy of Television Talk,” in Bernard M. Timberg, *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 195 – 203. As cited in Jeffrey P. James, *Beyond Genre: Cable’s Impact on the Talk Show*; in *Thinking outside the box : a contemporary television genre reader*; edited by Gary R. Edgerton and Brian G. Rose. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, c2005; P. 157

⁶ See: Jeffrey P. James, *Beyond Genre: Cable’s Impact on the Talk Show*; in *Thinking outside the box : a contemporary television genre reader*; edited by Gary R. Edgerton and Brian G. Rose. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, c2005; P. 157

⁷ *Ibid.* P.157

network, then, began a “quest to be more topical,” as network executives put it, by mining news and other political events for their comic potential through various talking head or running commentary gags.”⁸

But these shows (Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart), even with sharing the same comic premise (the comic potential of politics), took very different formats and went their separate ways. The Bill Maher shows⁹ were aired weekly, lasted longer (60 minutes), incorporated stand-up and narration, but were mostly a celebrity and pundit entertainment talk on political topics. On the other hand, The Daily Show with Jon Stewart was aired 4 times a week, dealt with daily political events and news and included significantly less time of celebrity/pundit entertainment talk. This is the reason why these shows were put in different baskets and considered to have different impact on audiences.

The format of The Daily Show was adopted from previous TV shows (such as Saturday Night Live’s ‘Weekend Update’ and Monty Python’s ‘Flying Circus’) that included sketches using TV News and news reports as basis for their sketches. As these shows were rarely dealing with current and specific cases and events, they were called fake news. The actors would report on invented comic events clearly referring to similar events from the political reality, or mock the news conventions adopted by the journalists and news outlets.

⁸ Jeffrey P. James, *Beyond Genre: Cable’s Impact on the Talk Show*; in *Thinking outside the box : a contemporary television genre reader*; edited by Gary R. Edgerton and Brian G. Rose. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, c2005; P. 159

⁹ Bill Maher hosted the ‘Politically Incorrect’ on Comedy Central until 1997 when he transferred to ABC, and after 2001, when he left ABC due to censorship disagreements, he hosted the ‘Real Time with Bill Maher’ on HBO



A snapshot from the Daily Show website showing that it considers itself to belong to the 'fake news' genre, while many consider it to be much more than just comedy

The new genre appeared and developed by the Daily Show was quite similar to the fake news sketches, although it provided news coverage and investigations on a daily basis with a lot bigger portion of real and current affairs included. Employing the whole comedy potential of current politics, the show sits on the very edge between news reporting and entertainment, a shady area that would perfectly, even literally, fit into Delli Carpini's and Williams' 'Infotainment'.¹⁰

Fiction was not impossible to be included, but in such cases strong suggestions of real political happenings would occur making the report a piece of political satire. With time, these shows started to attract bigger and bigger audience by taking large chunks of the audiences of both late night comedy shows and news networks. Their viewership has recently reached to a point where nearly 50% of the Americans aged below 30 take their political news information from late night comedy shows.¹¹ Moreover, the show already has a spin-off show aired right after, hosted by one of the former cast members Stephen Colbert. The

¹⁰ For more on this, see: Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Bruce A. Williams. 2001. "Let Us Infotain You: Politics in the New Media Environment." in Bennett, W. Lance and Robert and M. Entman (eds.) *Mediated politics: communication in the future of democracy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 160-181

¹¹ Mindich, D. (2005). Tuned out: Why Americans under 40 don't follow the news. New York: Oxford UP, p. 57. As cited in: Some Good News about the News: 5 Reasons Why 'Fake' News is Better than Fox 'News'. By Brian L. Ott / Colorado State University • June 24, 2005. See: <http://flowtv.org/?p=484>

Colbert Report, although adopting a similar format, does not have the same value to the public discourse as The Daily Show.

Regardless of its popularity, The Daily Show managed to gain respect both from its viewers and political actors with a lot of prominent politicians, public figures and analysts accepting invitations to discuss serious issues on a comedy show (among which are most of the democratic and some republican presidential candidates in 2004 and 2008 elections, former State Secretaries Colin Powell and Madeline Albright, former Vice-President Al Gore and many more). Senator John Edwards, the runner-up in the 2004 Democratic elections for presidential nominee, announced his candidacy on his guest appearance on the Daily Show on September 13, 2003. In the 20 minutes of airtime each of these four weekdays, the show starts with one or a few topics that it considers being worthy of their coverage. Instead of using the opinion of pundits, experts and gray hairs, the Daily Show goes with a mockery rolls of ‘senior correspondents’ taken from their cast members who offer comic opinions on the chosen issues either by being present in the studio, or be connected via satellite when reporting from remote places in the world. These correspondents are acting characters of journalists who are opinionated and are in a quest for answers that support their side of the coin. Often, they are aggressive towards some of the stakeholders (the liberals), and understanding and suggestive towards the other side (conservative).

Furthermore, perhaps the most powerful tool in the arguments in the narratives of the show host is the usage of a huge video and audio archive that they use to show contradicting statements or acts of public figures. This makes a better critique stand point than any opinion of a ‘political insider’. Finally the show ends with a brief guest interview with guests coming in for a particular reason (campaign promotion, book or video promotion etc.). The choice of

guests is radically different from the ones being hosted on the regular late night shows. Their message, book or video has to be political in most of the cases, which is not the situation with the talk shows that usually avoid this kind of encounters. The recurrent jokes of the show are usually sorted in two 'segments' with catchy names or slogans mocking the segments of the real news networks like 'America Under Threat' or 'War on Terror' that have a clear one-sided message. In these segments, the authors of the show are filing the contradicting statements, the inconsistencies or the bluffs of the public figures and with that constantly reminding the viewers of the changes of the political positions of the parties, groups and individuals.

Geoffrey Bahm describes this as 'Discursive Integration' in his article "The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism".¹² He puts the segments of the show into three groups that serve the discursive integration: The opening monologue is *interrogating power* (1), the *critiquing of the news* is the news review segment of the show (2), and the guest interviews are a promotion of *dialogue and democracy* (3). Each of these segments has a unique combination of entertainment and serious point making which leads, according to Bahm, to a new form of Political Journalism.

The biggest critique of the show has come from the conservative news camp claiming that the show has standpoints that are rather liberal and close to the democratic party and leftist politics. And although it openly does not stand in favor of any leftist policy, most of the jokes are targeting the inconsistencies and irrationalities of the conservative and rightist positions on religion, family values, gay issues, narcotics use, military affairs etc. This might be the case because the show came of age and increased its popularity under a rather

¹² The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism/ by Geoffrey Baym. Political Communication, 22: 259 – 276, Taylor & Francis Inc. 2005

conservative federal government (although it was created in 1997 when Clinton was in office), or it might be interpreted as yet another problem that can be explained by an analysis of the political economy of the media.

Robert W. McChesney addresses this trend in a single chapter in his book 'The Problem of the Media'. He writes that the conservative critique on the 'liberal media' lies on four arguments: 1.) Journalists have more say in media behavior than editors and owners; 2.) Journalists are liberals; 3.) Journalists abuse their position to promote liberal policies and 4.) Objective journalists would see the world as conservatives do.¹³ He does agree that this case makes some sense as it is true that American journalists do hold liberal views¹⁴, but still that is nothing compared to the influence editors and owners have on political orientation of the media. Moreover, the real reason why journalists are liberal, according to McChesney, is their social status (their wages, social class distribution, income group, urban living). Having in mind that the Daily Show is produced in New York City and all of the writing team lives there, this explanation is rather acceptable. Thus, The Daily Show has many times been accused for being a follower of the liberal agenda of the media. The 'liberal media' is a phrase that has been perpetuated in the US public discourse recently by conservative politicians and media. When Bill O'Reilly hosted Jon Stewart on the O'Reilly factor, he suggested the same reason why presidential candidate John Kerry did not answer to his invitation, but showed up on the Daily Show even though the viewers are 'stoned slackers' and, according to their research, 85% intoxicated while watching the show.¹⁵

¹³ The problem of the media: U.S. communication politics in the twenty-first century by Robert W. McChesney; New York : Monthly Review Press, c2004

¹⁴ For more on this, please see the F.A.I.R. research on "Examining the "Liberal Media" Claim" on: <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2447>

¹⁵ See Jon Stewart on the O'Reilly Factor on 17 September 2004. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5pK7sK0i4A>

But a 2004 Election Study conducted by The Annenberg School of Communication shows a very opposite image of the audience of the show. Most of the viewers are well educated, urban and white. They share the liberal views on individual liberties with the show, as well as the views supporting the leftist social policies.¹⁶ Moreover, the most amazing (but on a second thought very expected finding having in mind the demographics of its audience) finding of the survey is that the viewers of the Daily Show are better informed on issues discussed in the 2004 Presidential Campaign than the viewers of the other media outlets (both news networks and entertainment shows).

Moreover, it is an unchallenged notion that the best target group for comedy projects is youth. The fact that most comedy shows are oriented towards young audiences proves this notion. Considering the impact of the cable TV invasion of the American homes, one cannot argue that it was leading to increased revenue of the TV networks from subscriptions, and decreased dependence on advertising. Moreover, the cable TV boom, regardless of the fact of a bigger production of entertainment programming, led to a bigger plurality of news editorials and a meal for every kind of political taste, and the developments with the digital TV has indeed increased the liberty of choosing your own information sources. This leads to a necessary analysis of the target audiences of this particular TV project and its target audience (young, urban, liberal), a trend widely known as segmentation of the audiences.

It is a widely known argument in media theory that the conflicting revenues from sales and advertising determine the future orientation of a media outlet. In that way, media

¹⁶ 2004 National Election Study of the Annenberg School of Communications from the University of Pennsylvania. Available at: http://web.archive.org/web/20050308165738/http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/naes/2004_03_late-night-knowledge-2_9-21_pr.pdf

tend to orient towards the groups that can buy the products that they are advertising, rather than simply looking for a wider audience.¹⁷ Michael Schudson in his article 'Four Approaches to the Sociology of News' argues that "advertisers find value in papers that attract a small, concentrated elite audience; the expense of reaching an 'upscale' audience is lower if a large share of this audience can be addressed through a single publication without having to pay the expense of reaching thousands of extraneous readers".¹⁸ In other words, there is no point in advertising the new BMW limousine in the mass oriented and freely distributed Metro newspaper. However, this concept only portrays the products and readers as single-dimensional sets of income individuals. Their products are either targeted to the rich elites, or to the poor masses. Improving and expanding this concept would mean that you advertise the appropriate product to the appropriate audience (like advertising a bit more expensive hybrid car to a well educated, environmentally aware and urban viewers of a particular show).

Is it possible that the news discussion format offered by The Daily Show is more informative and offers more in-depth analysis of a particular issue? Or is it because the show entertains an audience with demographics that are more likely to be better informed (better educated, higher income, younger, urban)? The direction of this relationship is difficult or perhaps impossible to determine. I will try to answer a part of this question by trying to determine whether the show is only entertaining a specific social elite, or helping the opinion making among the audience.

¹⁷ See the Advertising filter in: Herman, Edward S. and Chomsky, Noam. 1994 [1988]. A Propaganda Model. In *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*

¹⁸ Michael Schudson, *Four Approaches to the Sociology of News in Mass media and society*; edited by James Curran and Michael Gurevitch; London : Hodder Arnold ; New York : Distributed in the U.S.A by Oxford University Press, 2005

Outlining the Research

In order to answer this question, I will set a hypothesis stating: The guest appearances on The Daily Show will increase the popularity of its guests among the viewers of the show. Moreover, the side-taking fake reports will increase the support of the side taken in them among the viewers of the show.

In order to answer on these hypotheses, I will take a look at the guest appearances of General Wesley Clark, Senator John Kerry and former Mayor of New York City Rudi Giuliani.¹⁹ By taking a sample of The Daily Show viewers before the guest appearance took place, and another sample of viewers after the show, I will look at the average rating and see if it has changed. The period before will consider the answers of the interviewees 14 days before the event, and the period after will cover the 14 days after the event took place. My hypothesis will expect that this average will be changed and increased. By that, my null hypothesis will be that this average on candidate's or issue rating will not increase. Furthermore, I plan to use the same method of before and after sample in analyzing the impact of the show on viewers' opinions on particular issues. The selected issues are decisive and dividing in American politics and are considered to be among the most favorite issues covered on the show. The Daily Show clearly takes a side on gay rights, gun control, and media coverage on the current events, and I plan to see whether this side taking has an effect on viewers' opinions. According to this, I will expect the opinions of the viewers to change in favor of the side taken by the reporter of the show.

¹⁹ These three politicians are chosen because their approval rating is included among the questions in the survey, AND they have made their guest appearance while the survey was taking place.

These samples will be taken from a massive, year-long National Election survey conducted by the Annenberg School of Communication from the University of Pennsylvania in the period before the 2004 Presidential Elections. The survey gathered the opinions of less than 100.000 Americans on domestic and international politics with more than several hundred people interviewed daily from different states and social background. The samples will be taken two weeks before and after a guest appearance or a fake report took place on the show and they will be compared.

The statistical methodology employed in the research will be consisted with the most appropriate technique of measuring differences between two independent samples. The T-Tests can measure the difference between rather small samples by taking in consideration the size of the samples, their mean difference and the standard deviation. Finally, they offer confidence intervals that simplify the interpretation of the tests and measure their scientific validity. As in other scientific works, I will use the 95% confidence as support for my arguments. At some places I will discuss the 90% confidence combined with other theoretical proves to lay out the possibility that the change has occurred due to the guest appearance or the fake report on The Daily Show. Finally, I will employ some cross tabulations in order to compare the viewers of The Daily Show with the rest of the public on policy issues. This is relevant for the Ceiling Effect argument I will claim at the end of the analysis.

The research will be divided into three chapters. Firstly, I will discuss the independent t-test results between the two samples of viewers of the show on their opinion of the three guests on the show (Clark, Kerry, Giuliani). Secondly, I will do the same with the three issues mentioned previously (gay rights, gun control and media attention). And finally, in the third chapter I will discuss the overall comparison between the viewers of the show and the

rest of the American public. I will conclude by interpreting the results of my statistical and discourse analysis and show how they answer my hypothesis

THE IMPACT OF THE GUEST APPEARANCES

The Interview with Rudolph Giuliani

Former mayor of New York City Rudolph Giuliani appeared as a guest on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart on March 3, 2004 and like all the more important guests received seven and a half minutes of talk with Jon Stewart. Over the whole interview, Stewart never confronted him in a real sense and had a rather friendly appearance. They essentially covered three topics: supporting Bush on the upcoming elections, gay marriage and stock market crime. On each of the three topics, Giuliani gave answers that would not get him in the conflict with the host or the studio audience. Additionally, he called both presidential candidates to be good people who love America and have different ways in solving the current problems, he gave a few personal stories on how he talked about personal health issues with Kerry (“a fine descent man”), had business lessons from Cheney and how it is like to be a trial lawyer.²⁰ Apart from this, Stewart in several occasions expressed his affection to Giuliani calling him a “friend”, “sweetheart” and “you’re lovely”.²¹

According to the conversation summarized above, it is obvious that Giuliani came on the show avoiding conflict positions or topics. He tried to balance between the presidential

²⁰ Rudolph Giuliani thinks John Kerry and George W. Bush are honest, decent men who have different philosophies. See the interview on the website of the Daily Show at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=108854&title=rudolph-giuliani-pt.-1>

²¹ Rudolph Giuliani talks about gay marriage and white-collar scandals. (Part 2). See the interview on the website of the Daily Show at: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=108996&title=rudolph-giuliani-pt.-2>

candidates stating they are both good and tried to put a different frame on the gay marriage issue (stating that what matters is the laws and procedures and mayors should respect that). By that, one would expect the rating of the Stewart audience for Giuliani to increase after the show.

Table 1: Stewart Viewers Ratings on Rudi Giuliani 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

	Mean	N	T	Significance (2-tailed)
Period Before	6.06	36	-0.992	0.326
Period After	6.79	14		

Chart 1: Stewart Viewers Ratings on Giuliani 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

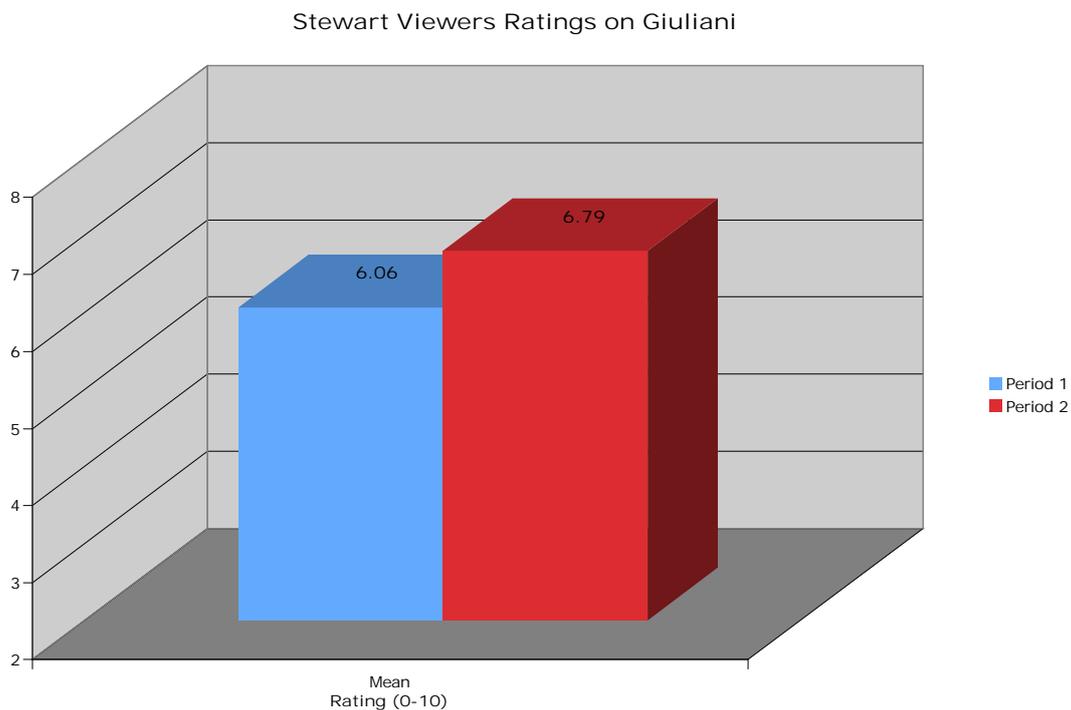
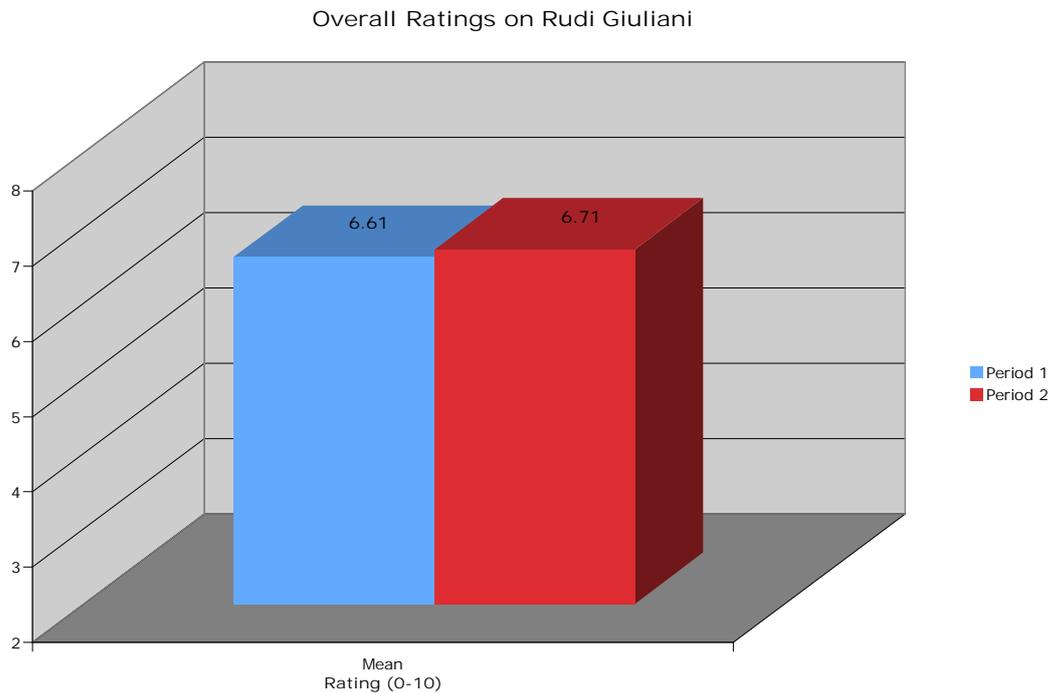


Table 2: Overall Ratings on Rudi Giuliani 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

	Mean	N
Period Before	6.61	985
Period After	6.71	483

Chart 2: Overall Viewers Ratings on Giuliani 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance



When comparing tables 1 and 2 (or charts 1 and 2) few things are obvious on the first glance: Giuliani is a lot more popular among the rest of the population than he is among the viewers of The Daily Show in the period before his guest appearance when the first sample was taken. This rating is on a scale from 1 to 10 where the average Stewart viewer rates Giuliani 6.09 and the average of the rest of the population in that period is 6.61. However, a notable change occurs in the Giuliani rating after the show among the Stewart viewers raising his rating up to 6.79, whereas the rating he has among the rest of the population raises for only 0.1.

Unfortunately, the second sample of The Daily Show viewers is extremely small $N=14$ which reduces the possibility to reach a sufficient confidence level. That said, it can not be said with any statistically acceptable certainty that the event caused the change in Giuliani's rating among the viewers of the show because $t=-0.992$.

This change, even though it does not have any statistical significance (only 0.326) points to some additional indicators to draw conclusions. If we consider table and chart 2, which on an entirely different and significantly bigger sample show little growth on Giuliani's rating we can conclude that in these 30 days, nothing significantly changed the people's opinion about this person. On the other hand, the viewers of The Daily Show had an opportunity to see Rudolph Giuliani being interviewed on their favorite show, asked easy questions, not getting involved in arguments and sharing common grounds with their favorite TV host. This group of people significantly raised their general opinion on Giuliani but due to the sample size this change is statistically unprovable. The positive direction of the obvious change *visa vi* my assumption leads to a conclusion that the difference between the two groups of viewers of The Daily Show appeared as a result of the appearance of Rudi Giuliani as a guest on the show, and this would be statistically provable if the samples were bigger.

In addition to these findings, Rudi Giuliani has never had his name mentioned on the show in this four week period before and after the interview, part of his appearance. The show follows the most frequent news in the country like the trial of Martha Stewart, the new Mel Gibson's movie 'The Passion of Christ', the democratic race and the gay marriage constitution amendment that will be discussed further down in this work. He was not running for office at this time and was not involved in any debates. This means that Giuliani did not make any appearances or statements that will influence a change in his rating among Americans, part from the appearance on The Daily Show that, as we have seen, made a change on his rating among the viewers of the show.

The Interview with General Wesley Clark

General Wesley Clark appeared on The Daily Show on December 11, 2003 while he was running for the Democratic nomination for Presidency. That was the first reason for his appearance, with the second being a promotion of his book “Winning Modern Wars”.²² He got 10 minutes from the show and almost all of the time was spent talking about his campaign. On the beginning, Stewart started reviewing his resume ironically wondering why he has only 4 out 12 stars (although that is the maximum that anyone in the military has today) calling it “wildly impressive”. They talked about why he decided to enter politics after 38 years spent in the military which gave Clark the opportunity to present himself as a person who would rather chose to serve his country than to earn big money and like somebody who has actually ‘worn a flight suit’ clearly attacking President Bush as a draft dodger.

In the second part of the interview Stewart gave a challenge to Clark on his competency joking that he solved the Kosovo problem with air bombings and asking if he can solve the education system in the same way. Clark gave two very personal and touching stories of environment protection and veteran policies and asked young people to join his campaign by naming his website for three times in the last ten seconds on the interview, to which Stewart ironically stated: ‘Wow, you are hip!’²³

²² Jon Stewart interviews General Wesley Clark about his run for the presidency and his new book "Winning Modern Wars." See the interview (Part 1) on The Daily Show website: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=112826&title=general-wesley-clark-pt.-1>

²³ General Wesley Clark talks about his run for the presidency and his new book "Winning Modern Wars." See the interview (Part 2) on The Daily Show website: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=112942&title=general-wesley-clark-pt.-2>

Overall, the whole interview did not offer any content to Clark’s program, and only covered his personality. He was not challenged nor confronted by Stewart on anything substantial except his incompetence of working a job he has not worked before, although he was impressed by his previous achievements. Clark on the other hand came to promote himself to a younger audience openly asking for their engagement and abandoning apathy. I would expect that his rating would increase after the guest appearance among the viewers of The Daily Show, although the conversation was not as impressive and sincere as in the case with Giuliani.

Table 3: Stewart Viewers Ratings on Wesley Clark 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

	Mean	N	T	Significance (2-tailed)
Period Before	5.48	60	-1.776	0.078
Period After	6.18	66		

Chart 3: Stewart Viewers Ratings on Wesley Clark 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

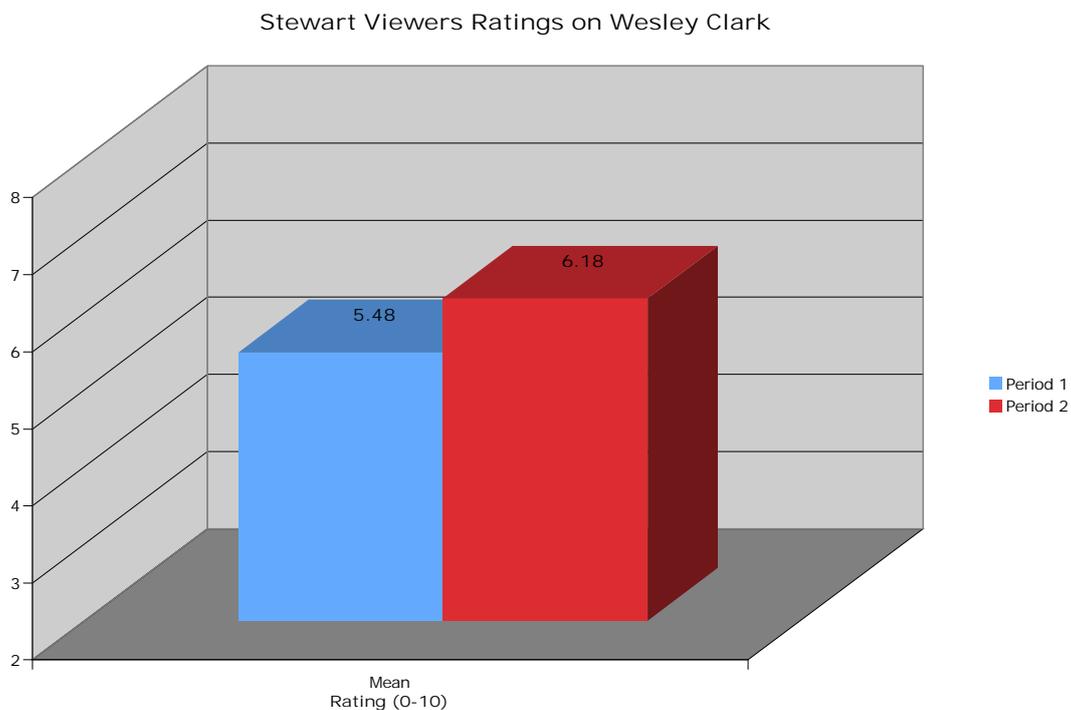
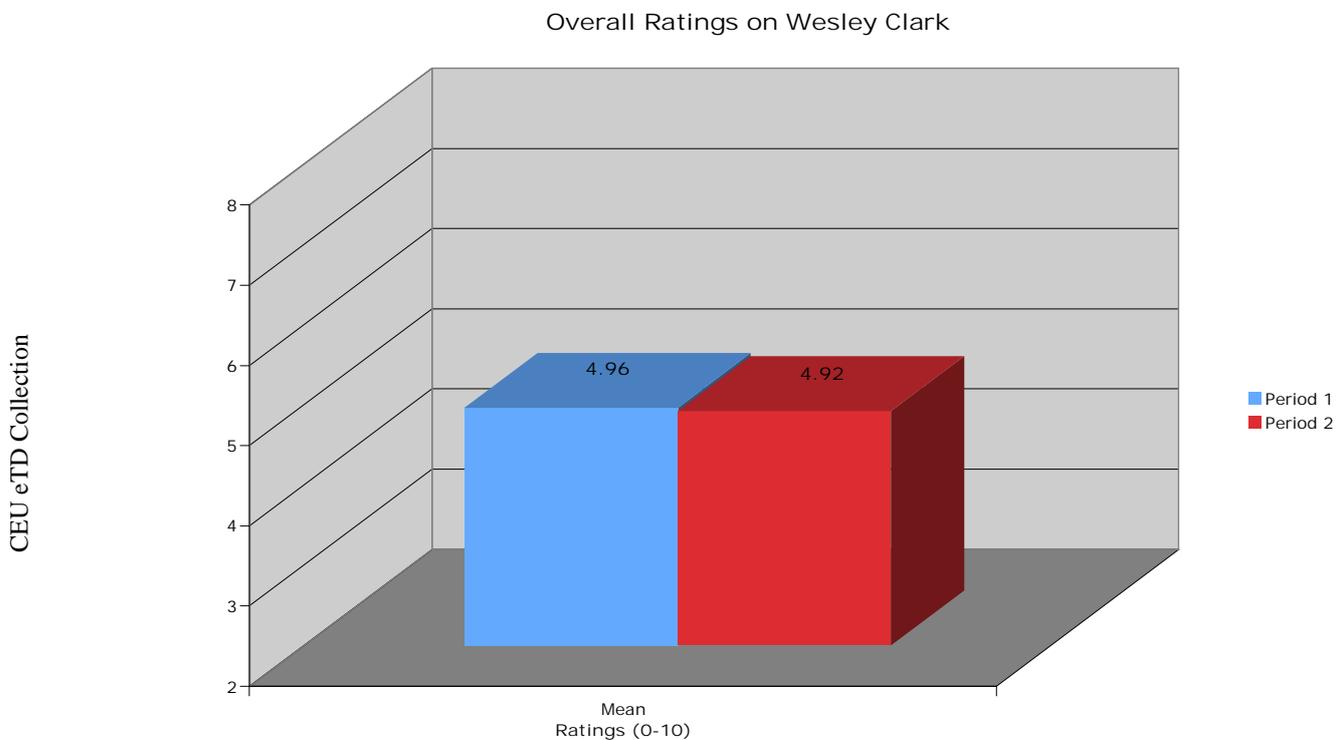


Table 4: Overall Ratings on Wesley Clark 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

	Mean	N
Period Before	4.96	1824
Period After	4.92	1633

When comparing tables 3 and 4 (or charts 3 and 4) the first thing that can be noticed is that there are two different trends with the rating average going in the opposite directions. Firstly, the mean among the viewers of The Daily Show increases for 0.7, which is more than in the previous case, and secondly, the mean among the rest of the population is declining for insignificant 0.04. Naturally, the two samples in the first table are significantly smaller than the two samples in the second one. The confidence level which is $t=1.776$ lets us say with 90% confidence that the change in viewers ranking of Clark happened because of his guest appearance on the show.

Chart 4: Overall Ratings on Wesley Clark 14 Days before and After the Guest Appearance



On the other hand we have Clark's rating declining for seemingly insignificant 0.04 among the rest of the population. However, due to the size of the two samples we can assume that this change is real and is not due to chance. Moreover, unlike in the previous case with Giuliani, Clark has a higher initial ranking among The Daily Show Viewers (5.48) than the rest of the population (4.96). This means that The Daily Show viewers had a more positive opinion about this person than the rest and bigger changes should not be expected. And after surveying the second sample in both cases, we see a closing gap in the first (Giuliani) and an opening one (Clark) after being interviewed by Jon Stewart. Furthermore, Giuliani's ranking is rising between both groups whereas in Clark's case there are opposite trends, which leads to an easier conclusion about the impact of the guest appearance.

It should be noted here, however, if there were any other Clark appearances or issues that have taken place in this four week interval. According to The Daily Show archive, if any such events or appearances took place, they were not worthy of their coverage. Instead, the show is concentrating on Democratic front runners Howard Dean, John Kerry and Dick Gephardt ahead of the Iowa caucus taking place more than one month after the interview with Clark. In fact, outsiders like Al Sharpton and Dennis Kucinic get more coverage in this interval by The Daily Show than General Clark which makes me conclude that the interviewees outside the control group did not have a significant factor that would influence their opinion on him

The Interview with Senator John Kerry

The interview with John Kerry took place on August 24, 2004 just two and a half months before the presidential elections. This was one of the longest interviews lasting for 11

and half minutes in which Stewart and Kerry covered more topics than usual, but never confronted on any of them. Moreover, Stewart was openly supportive to the Senator and often helping him out with the answers to his own questions. This interview was criticized by the two hosts of the CNN's Crossfire when they had Jon Stewart on their show, arguing that he was "sniffing Kerry's throne" with questions like: "How are you holding up?" "Is it hard not to take [the attacks] personally?" "Have you ever flip-flopped?"²⁴

The interview questions started with the topic of media treatment Kerry was getting on the campaign and Stewart was ironically asking questions that the Bush campaign was launching against him: "Are you the most liberal Senator, more liberal than Karl Marx?" "I've been watching the cable news shows and apparently you were never in Vietnam?" Then Stewart let Kerry to show his standpoints on the Iraq war, the social issues (economy, healthcare, taxes), the energy policy etc. And Stewart never challenged any of these points made by Senator Kerry nor asked a difficult question. The only joke that can be considered to be an attack on his top social position was: "Is it true that every time I put Ketchup on my pizza, your wife gets a nickel?"²⁵

Overall, the interview was full of laughs and jokes. Stewart and Kerry had a relaxed conversation and laughed at each other's jokes with the audience joining in all of the time. With this said, I would expect that the viewers of the show to increase their ranking of the Senator after they have seen the show.

²⁴ Jon Stewart appears on Crossfire. October 14, 2004. See the full interview on YouTube: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=aFQFB5YpDZE>

²⁵ Under Bush, America lost jobs and healthcare, and has gone backwards on the environment, but can John Kerry prove he was in Cambodia on Christmas Eve?? See the full interview with Senator John Kerry on the Daily Show website: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=108481&title=john-kerry-part-1>

Table 5: Stewart Viewers Ratings on John Kerry 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

	Mean	N	T	Significance (2-tailed)
Period Before	6.83	184	1.094	0.293
Period After	6.52	197		

Table 6: Overall Ratings on John Kerry 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

	Mean	N
Period Before	5.17	4173
Period After	5.07	3986

Chart 5: Stewart Viewers Ratings on John Kerry 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance

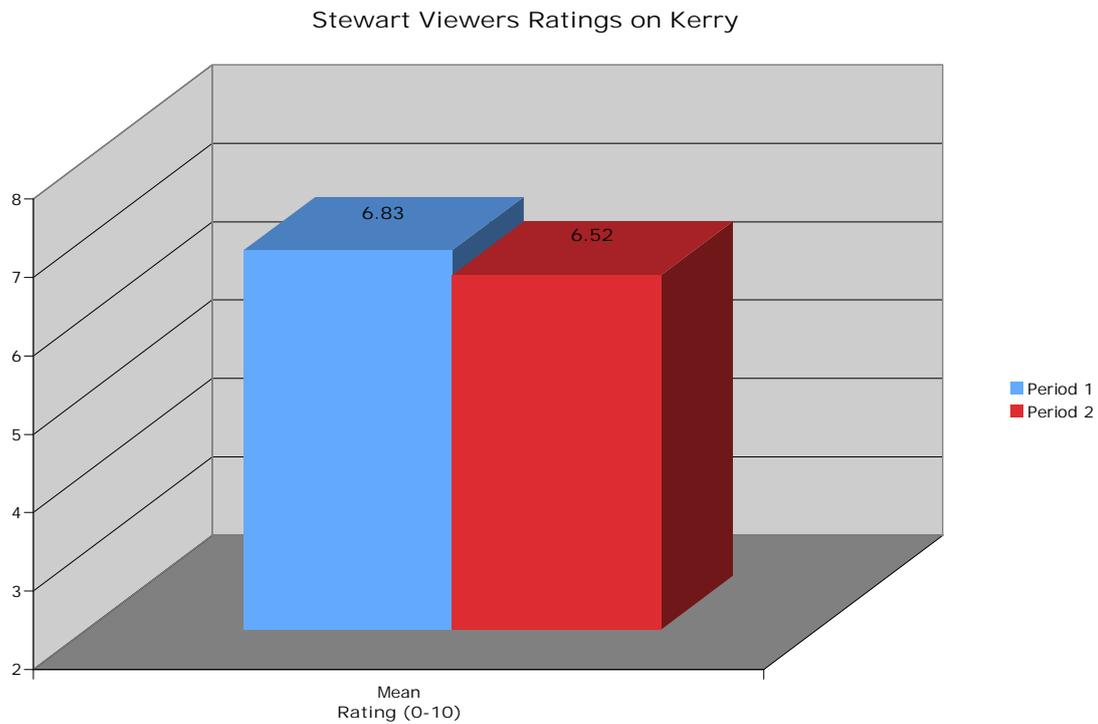
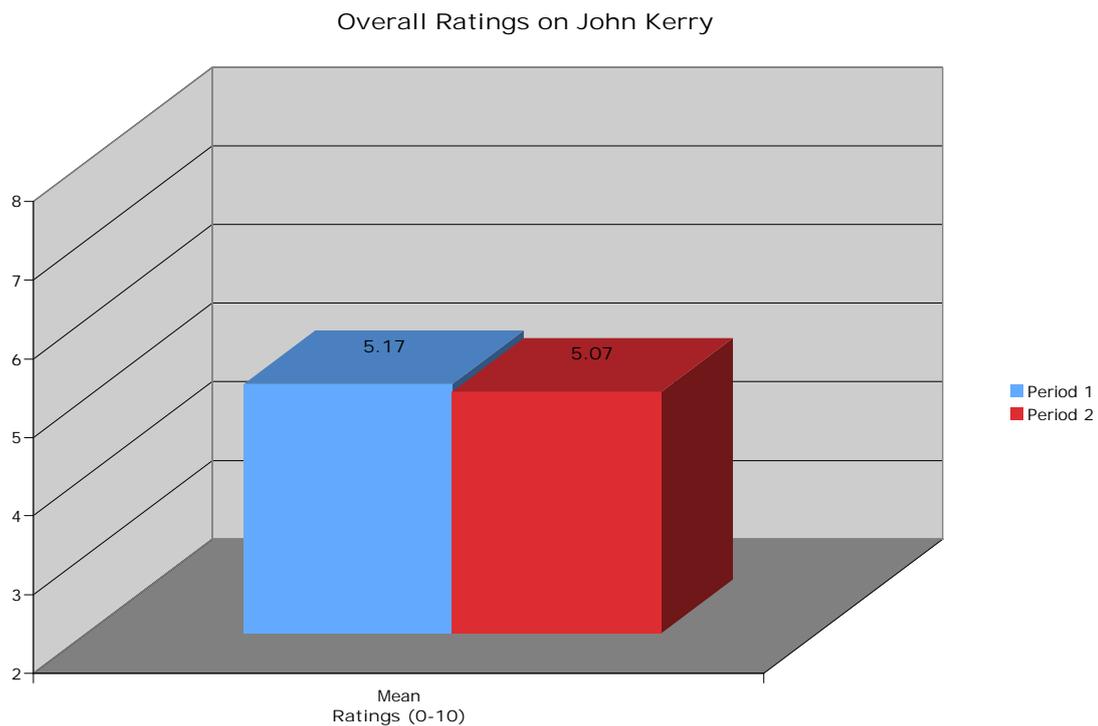


Chart 6: Overall Ratings on John Kerry 14 Days Before and After the Guest Appearance



From what we can see above, it is obvious that the ranking of John Kerry has dropped for almost 0.3 among the viewers of The Daily show after the guest appearance. Moreover, these are the biggest before and after samples compared to the cases analyzed before and we can be fairly sure about this drop. Unlike the cases with Clark and Giuliani, this time the rating of John Kerry does not move in the opposite direction nor it is rising together with the overall one. Senator's rating drops for 0.3 among the viewers of the show, and for 0.1 for the non-viewers.

Having in mind that this is a period of heavy campaigning, presidential debates and etc. one can assume that there were other factors that influenced this drop. On the other hand, unlike in the previous cases, here we can see a huge gap between the overall public opinion about Kerry and the opinion of the viewers of The Daily Show. Kerry's average ranking among the viewers of the show is 1.66 higher than the average of the rest of the population

(with the Giuliani rankings gap being 0.45 and Clark's 0.48 in the 14 days before the guest appearance).

By looking at the episodes of the show in the previous and following two weeks, John Kerry's name has been often mentioned as a part of the 'Indecision 2004' coverage of the presidential campaign. Two topics have been covered, both part of the campaign discourse of the two camps on the elections. Firstly, the show in single occasion covers the attacks of the Bush campaign on the statement Kerry made on the need to be more 'sensitive' on the war on terror, and ironically, only to be followed by a similar statement by Bush. Secondly, the show offers more coverage of TV ads undermining Kerry's honours and achievements in the Vietnam war, where Jon Stewart links these ads with the Bush camp. This all can be considered as a part of a regular presidential campaign, and in some way one would expect it to have an effect on people's opinion on Kerry.

THE IMPACT OF THE 'FAKE' REPORTS

The Report on Gun Control

On May 12, 2004 The Daily Show aired a story covering an initiative in the Arizona Senate to change the gun control policy and allow carrying guns into establishments that serve alcohol.²⁶ The Daily Show cast member Ed Helms does a fake report and goes to Arizona to talk to the stakeholders and regular people about this bill. The character he plays is opinionated even when he starts the report. He introduces the state legislator Randy Graf who proposed this bill while a patriotic ooh-dixie-land kind of music goes in the background clearly favorizing his position before even the other is presented. Helms reports that for 'some insane reason' Arizona has banned guns in bars. At this point the sarcasm is too obvious not to see that he is mocking State Senator Graf. The conversation with Senator Graf continues:

Helms: Is there anything more terrifying than a room full of people without guns?

Graf: I guess even more terrifying would be a room full of people not allowed to have guns.

Helms: (making a scared look on his face) I just got chills.

Helms continues with the story showing the other side of the problem stating that "even the common sense ideas have their opponents" and introducing representative John

²⁶ A Round of Shots: Is there anything more terrifying than a room full of people without guns? See the full report on the website of The Daily Show: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=111825&title=a-round-of-shots>

Loredo who compares the problem to drinking and driving. To this, Helms offers an explanation saying “drinking and driving is illegal because cars can crash and kill people. And Gun... is hardly a car!” The report continues with Helms offering some background information on former serving marine John Loredo and golf professional Randy Graf suggesting that Graf knows better what guns do. Then, he asks bar owners what their opinion is about this bill, and they oppose it, to which he answers with idiotic hypothetical questions like what would they do if a bear walked into the bar and they were unarmed? Or making claims that alcohol causes conflicts, but guns solve them. Finally he makes an experiment showing him more aggressive after drinking half a bottle of liquor, but extremely affectionate after drinking the whole bottle concluding that he wished he brought his gun with him.

Obviously Helms is against this bill and he creates a character that needs to be ridiculed, and this character is supporting the bill. The irony and parody are very clear and an appropriate joke is present in every other sentence. Therefore, I would expect the ratings of the gun control issue to be increasing among the viewers of the show after this report compared to 14 days before it was aired.²⁷

Table 7: Stewart Viewers on Gun Control 14 Days Before and After the Fake Report on Gun Control

	Mean	N	T	Significance (2-tailed)
Period Before	1.43	70	-0.664	0.508
Period After	1.53	72		

²⁷ The question in the survey asks if they support more or less gun control on a scale from 1 to 4 with 1 maximum control, and 4 being minimum.

Chart 7: Stewart Viewers on Gun Control 14 Days Before and After the Fake Report on Gun Control

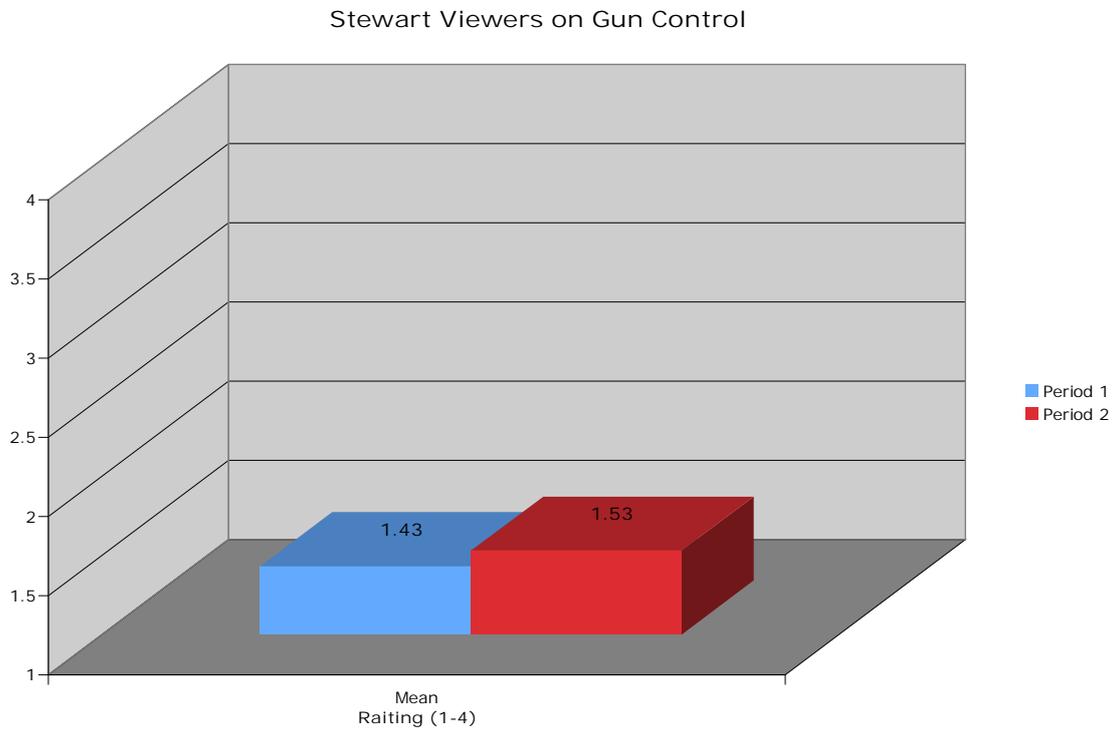
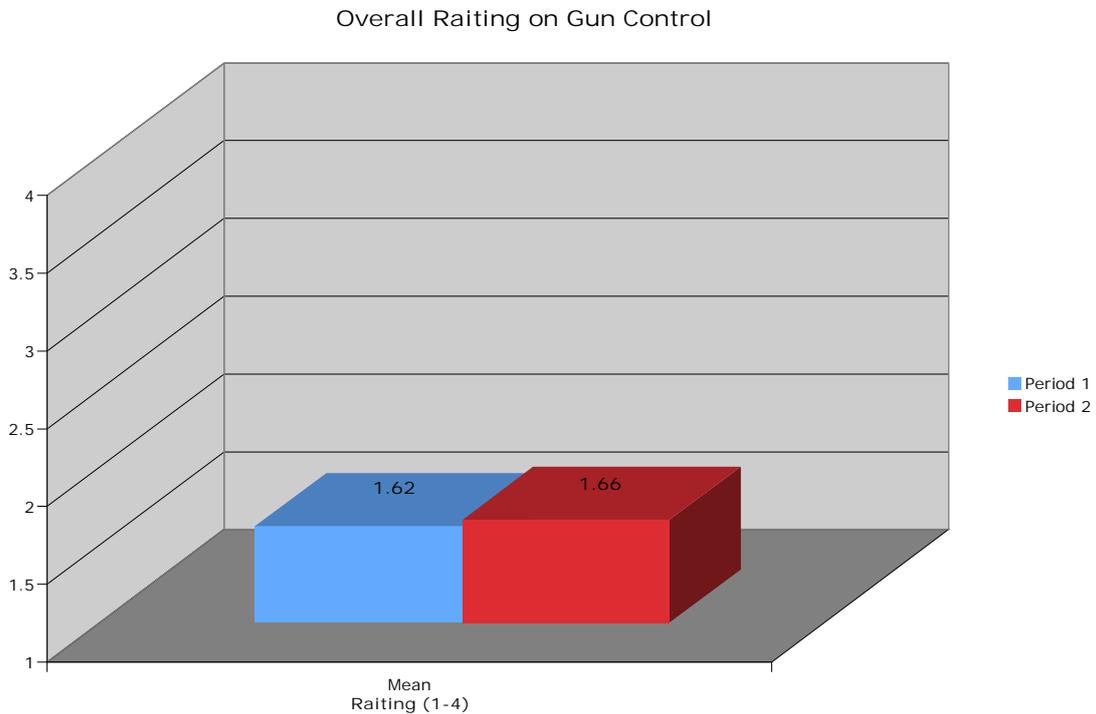


Table 8: Viewers of Other Late Night Comedy Shows on Gun Control 14 Days Before and After the Fake Report on Gun Control

	Mean	N
Period Before	1.62	415
Period After	1.66	475

From the tables and charts above we can observe a trend in the same direction with both viewers of the Daily Show and viewers of the other comedy late-night shows declining their support for stricter gun control. The samples of the viewers of The Daily Show are big enough to accept the change as valid. Their ranking has increased for 0.1, and the ranking of the other shows' viewers has declined for 0.04. This is a trend that goes in the opposite direction of my expectations and refutes my hypothesis on this issue.

Chart 8: Viewers of Other Late Night Comedy Shows on Gun Control 14 Days Before and After the Fake Report on Gun Control



However, it remains obvious that the viewers of The Daily Show favor more gun control than the viewers of the other shows. Moreover, it is noticeable that they favor very strict gun control averaging 1.42 on a scale from 1 to 4.

The Studio Punditry on Gay Marriage

On February 23, 2004 almost the whole show was covering the developments of the Gay Marriage issue in America with Jon Stewart discussing the ‘braveness’ of the mayor of San Francisco who decided to register gay couples, and the California Governor Schwarzenegger deciding to call for the help of the Attorney General. Next to him in the studio is the person who had over 300 relationships by the age of 21, the ‘senior moral authority’ Stephen Colbert. They discuss the proposed federal marriage amendment, and

Colbert is playing a character that is in favor of the amendment stating his own reasons.²⁸ He argues that marriage is an often violated, easily broken and eminently disposable contract between a man and a woman.

Colbert: The minute we let gays and female gays...

Stewart: That's uhm... that's lesbians

Colbert: Them! The minute we let them get married we're breaking the last societal barrier between their world and our world.

Stewart: But, I think that's the point. The point is that when you break down those barriers that's a metaphor for something positive...

Colbert: Look Jon, the only reason my wife and I got married in the first place was because it was something gays couldn't do. [...] But now, the vows that I made to my wife seem as shallow and empty as the vows I made to my previous wives.

Stewart: Well, I guess if you feel so strongly you would support the constitutional amendment banning same sex unions...

Colbert: Absolutely Jon, I know a constitutional amendment is a drastic step, but there is a societal trend there I disagree with, so what other choice is there? We have to defend the institution of marriage.

Stewart: Well to defend the institution of marriage, would you also support a constitutional amendment against adultery, because that's...

Colbert: WOW, wow!! Listen comrade, get your jack booted thugs out of my bedroom [...]

²⁸ Stephen Colbert argues if we let gays and female gays get married, we break down the last societal barrier between our world and their world. See the whole talk on the website of The Daily Show: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=112394&title=gay-marriage>

In one of the following shows Stewart lists the senators who have been divorced several times and still support the constitutional amendment openly asking for the morality in the ‘protection of the sanctity of marriage’ argument. This argument has been one of the most common ones in the gay marriage debate and Colbert and Stewart in this pundit talk are making a point that a person who had 300 relationships by his 21st birthday and a few previous marriages does not value the sanctity of marriage. This point has been clearly made in this conversation several times, and the conservative argument has been attacked on several points.

Therefore, I will take a look at the opinion on the constitutional marriage amendment that the viewers of this show have two weeks before and after this episode of the show.²⁹ My expectation is that the opposition to the constitutional amendment will rise in the second period.

Table 9: Stewart Viewers on Gay Rights (Marriage Amendment) 14 Days Before and After the Conversation on Gay Marriage

	Mean	N	T	Significance (2-tailed)
Period Before	3.16	93	0.524	0.601
Period After	3.07	103		

Table 10: Other Late Night Comedy Viewers on Gay Rights (Marriage Amendment) 14 Days Before and After the Conversation on Gay Marriage

	Mean	N
Period Before	2.6	739
Period After	2.64	805

²⁹ In the questionnaire, the scale is set from 1 to 4 with 1 being strongly in support of the amendment, and 4 being strongly against it.

Chart 9: Stewart Viewers on Gay Rights (Marriage Amendment) 14 Days Before and After the Conversation on Gay Marriage

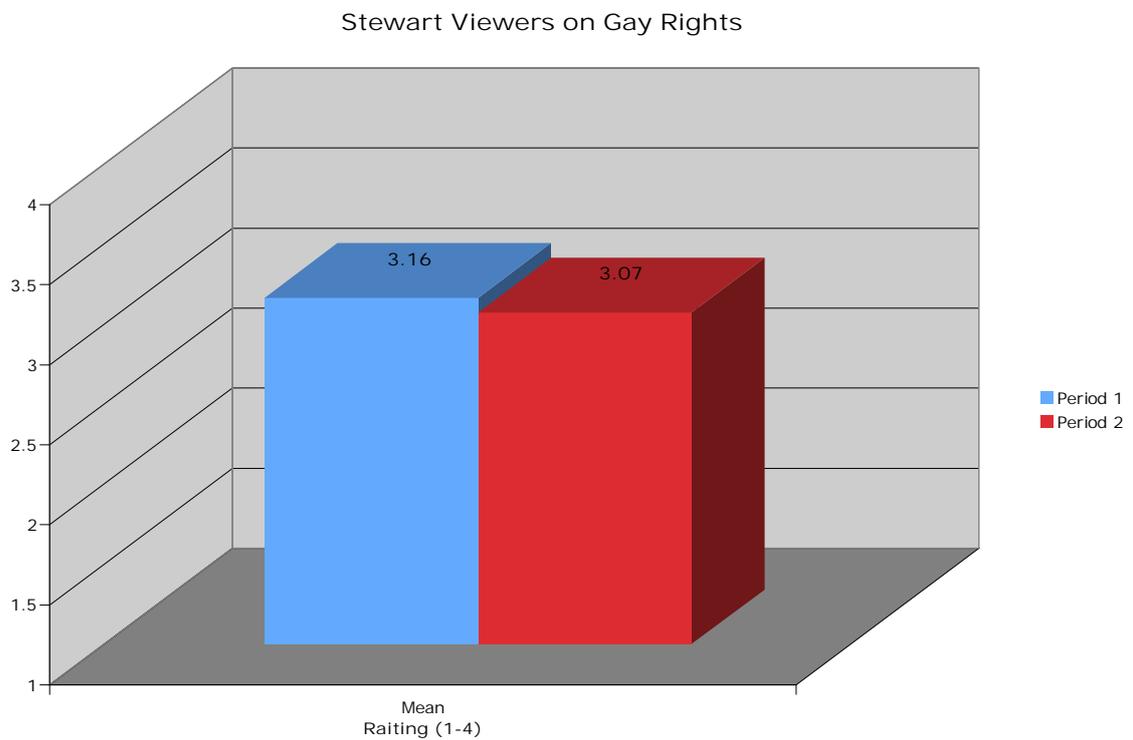
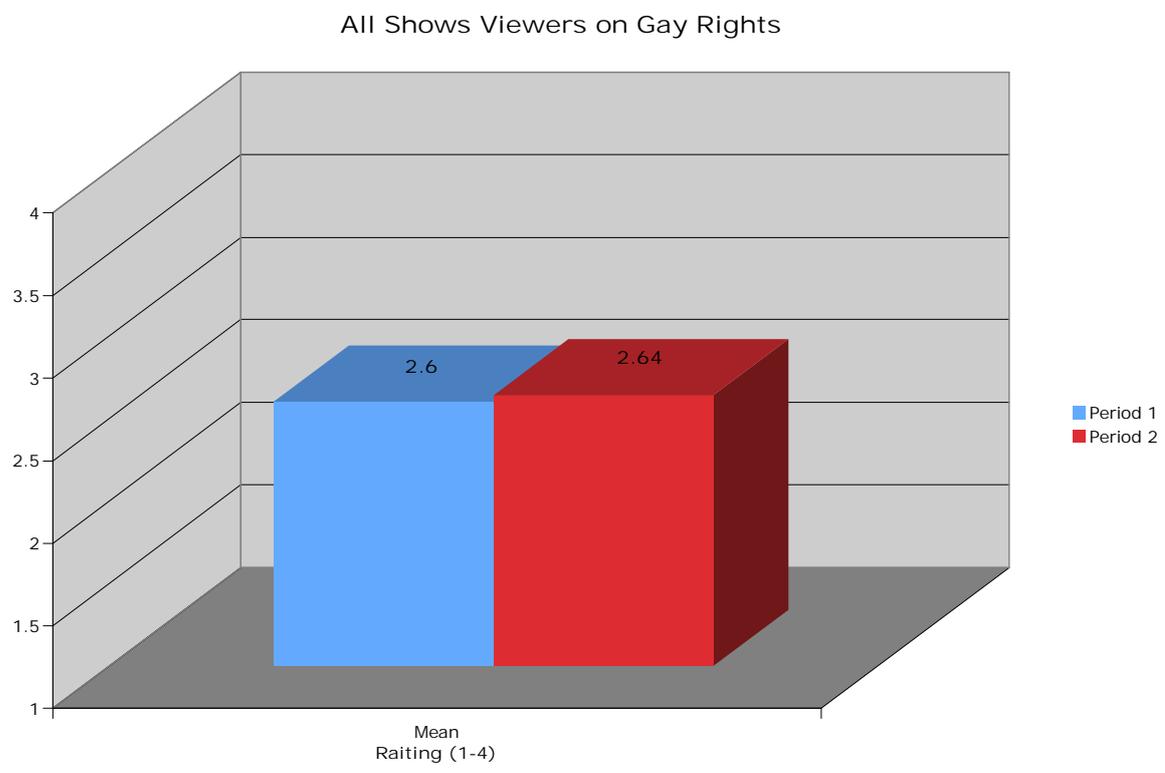


Chart 10: Other Late Night Comedy Shows Viewers on Gay Rights (Marriage Amendment) 14 Days Before and After the Conversation on Gay Marriage

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From what we see above, we can say that the expected growth in the opposition to the Marriage Amendment is missing. Instead, there is a decline among the viewers of The Daily Show of perhaps insignificant 0.09. The sample sizes are sufficient to say that this would be a real trend, if going in the right direction, even though it seems insignificant. On the other side, there is a small rise of 0.04 with much bigger samples. Again, there is a notable difference among the viewers of The Daily Show and the rest in the average support of the issue with the Stewart viewers ranking against the amendment with 0.56 higher than the viewers of the other late-night comedy programs. Moreover, they score extremely high with 3.16 on a scale of 1 to 4.

The Wolf Blitzer Interview

Geoffrey Bahm argues that one of the most important and unique features of The Daily Show is the News Critique it contributes to the public discourse. “The Daily Show also interrogates the content of the news media, the ‘real’ news that arguably is failing its democratic function”.³⁰ The show actively contributes to the media literacy of its viewers and consistently points out to the trivial coverages rather than on the important issues. Moreover, it often discusses the side taking and manipulation of the audiences, with Fox News Network being the show’s favorite muse of inspiration. I will try to quantify the impact it has on media literacy by measuring the attention to ‘real’ political news the viewers of the show pay before and after a following episode of the show.

³⁰ The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism/ by Geoffrey Baym. Political Communication, 22: 259 – 276, Taylor & Francis Inc. 2005. Page: 268

On July 12, 2004 Stewart hosted the CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer and discussed the role of the media in Politics.³¹ In the seven-minute interview, most of the time was spent discussing the media actions in the Iraq war and Blitzer received very harsh criticism from Stewart on the role his TV network played during the reasoning for the war. Here are some excerpts from the conversation:

Stewart: The senate Intelligence Committee came up with this story... Oh, the Iraq war, its kind of a funny story... it was a mistake! We were wrong about all that... Taking the country into a war based on a wrong information told to you by a guy called 'curveball'... shouldn't that be, I mean just out of curiosity, the biggest scandal we've ever had in the country?

Blitzer: What, you've never made a mistake in your life? CIA is not perfect, sometimes they get it wrong...

Stewart: That's a good point. But in that situation, shouldn't somebody be fired??

Blitzer: Well George Tenet did leave this weekend...

Stewart: After he was told he was doing a superb job!!

(The conversation continues with discussion how we cannot appreciate what we do not know, namely the successes of the intelligence.)

Stewart: so the CIA is back in their offices, having their meetings... No WMDs... Is the media doing anything? Like at CNN, do you have meetings saying: "yeah, we should've asked that!"

Blitzer: I think that we have meetings.

Stewart: So what is the media doing differently?

³¹ Jon Stewart asks Wolf Blitzer the hard questions on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction. See the whole interview on the website of The Daily Show:
<http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=130492&title=wolf-blitzer>

Blitzer: I think we learned from our mistakes and try to do it better the next time.

Stewart: Specifically.

Blitzer: Specifically, we learned from our mistakes and try to do it better the next time. (Stuart bursts into laughter) We look back and we say “we should’ve been more skeptical”.

Stewart: Oh, common...

Blitzer: We were trained to be skeptical by our own nature.

Stewart: why weren’t you?

Blitzer: I think we could’ve been more skeptical...

Stewart: Are you afraid of the Bush administration because the Bush administration was so ham handed [...] are they so forceful that they intimidated the press core into not asking those questions?

Blitzer: No. The answer is no.

Stewart: So, is the press suffering from ... and I’m going to say this word... groupthink, or.... To use another word... retardation!?

Blitzer: No, it’s groupthink.

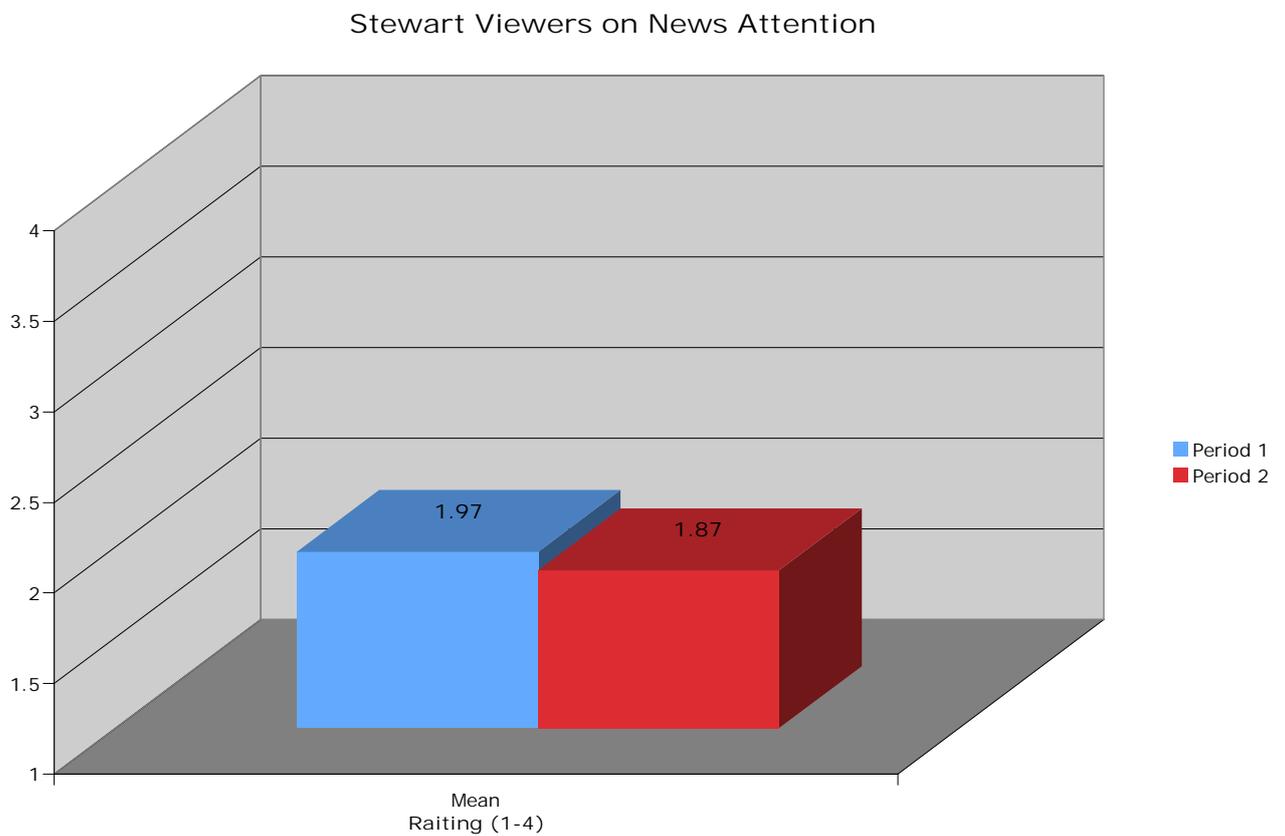
So in these seven minutes Stewart managed to call the CNN coverage of the Iraq war a ‘groupthink’ and ‘retarded’ and made the top anchor of CNN to chose the lesser of the two evils and admit they were driven by groupthink. He also made him admit that the media were not doing what they were trained to do, and that “they should’ve been more skeptical”. Having such an important media figure to admit the mistakes of the press core witnessing such a big scandal (absence of weapons of mass destruction) would make me expect that the viewers of the show will change their opinion on how much they trust the media.

Consequently, I would expect them to pay more attention to political news in order not to be misinformed.³²

Table 11: Stewart Viewers' Attention to Political News 14 Days Before and After the Conversation with Wolf Blitzer

	Mean	N	T	Significance (2-tailed)
Period Before	1.97	110	0.953	0.341
Period After	1.87	135		

Chart 11: Stewart Viewers on Attention to Political News 14 Days Before and After the Conversation with Wolf Blitzer

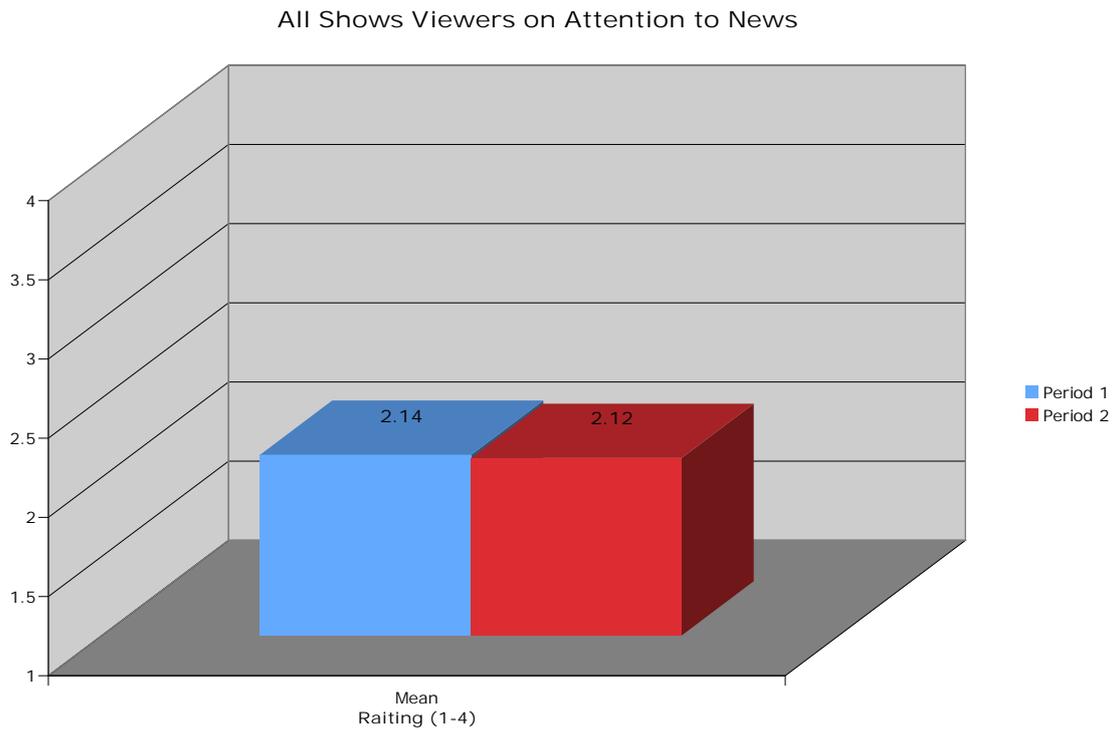


³² As there is no question in the Annenberg survey asking how much the interviewee trusts the media, I will take the question on news attention to be complementary and thus appropriate. The news attention is measured on a scale from 1 to 4 with 1 being the maximum attention and 4 being minimum.

Table 12: Other Late Night Comedy Viewers on Attention to Political News 14 Days Before and After the Conversation with Wolf Blitzer

	Mean	N
Period Before	2.6	739
Period After	2.64	805

Chart 12: Other Late Night Comedy Viewers on Attention to Political News 14 Days Before and After the Conversation with Wolf Blitzer



From the charts and tables above we can see that there is a positive trend among the both groups with both paying more attention to political news after the breakpoint. The change among the Stewart viewers is somewhat more significant (0.1), whereas the change among the others is 0.02. The sample size of the Stewart viewers group offers us better conclusion making and the t-test shows that the $t=0.953$. This value of t, however, does not prove any scientific confidence that the change between the first and the second period occurred due to the interview.

The average answers are again interesting. According to the tables, The Daily Show viewers pay more attention to political news than the viewers of the other Late-Night comedy programs. This gap is widening from 0.19 to 0.25 after the second period. But even considered the whole scale, a score of 1.87 out of a scale from 1 to 4 shows that the viewers of The Daily Show pay a lot of attention to political news on network and cable television.

REACHING FOR THE CEILING

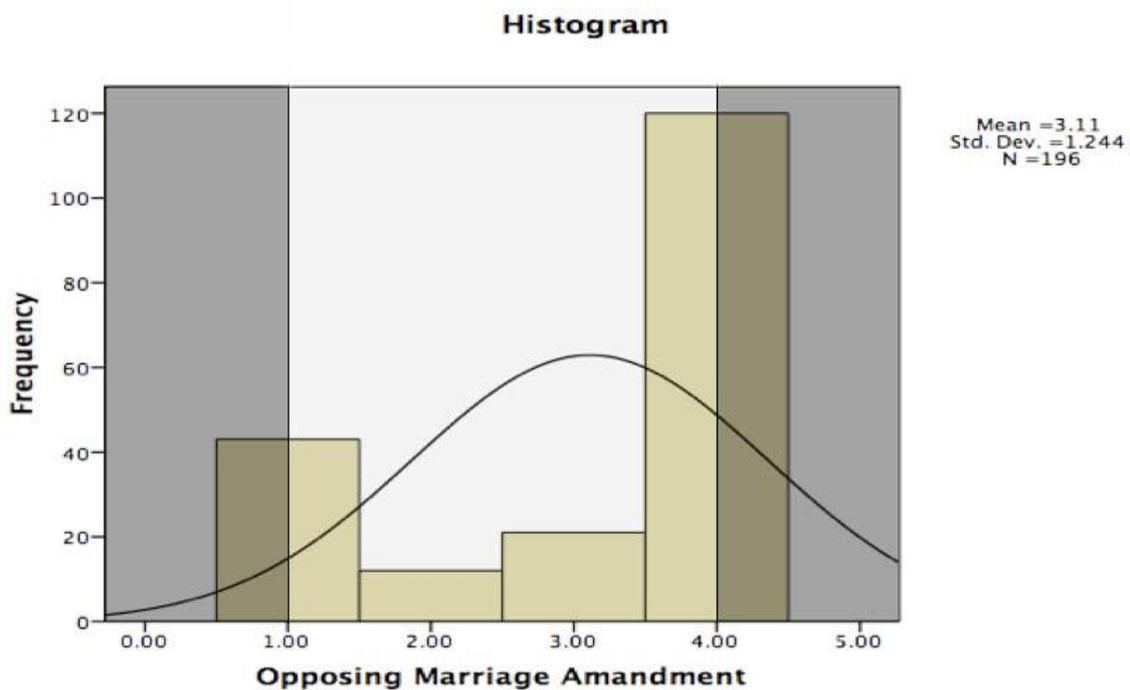
From the previous analysis we saw that the means on any variable tested on the viewers of the Daily Show is quite different from the mean of the whole population or the viewers of the other late-night comedy shows. The means of the viewers of the show are approaching the extremes of the variable scales, more precisely, the extreme that shows the liberal values on a particular issue and more favorability for liberal politicians than the rest of the public. Thus, in the tested period their rankings of General Clark were higher for 0.52 than the rest of the public (5.48 to 4.96), the rankings on Giuliani were lower than the average of the rest of the public, but leveled after his liberal standpoints on the guest appearance on the Daily Show. The rankings of Senator Kerry, even though that they declined in the second period, were higher for amazing 1.66 compared to the rest of the public (6.83 to 5.17). Furthermore, the viewers of The Daily Show are more liberal on gay rights, favor stricter gun control, and pay more attention to political news than the rest of the viewers of the late-night comedy shows. These rankings are closely approaching the extremes with 1.43, 3.16 and 1.97 respectively.

According to the theory of the Ceiling Effect, the proximity of the mean of the measured variable does not leave much space for interpretation in the possible changes, or simply explained as 'lack of variability'. Because there is no normal distribution, the ceiling effect distorts the curve and leaves very little room for variability and interpretation of possible effects that would be visible if the distribution was normal.³³ Obviously, the means on the previously discussed issues among the Stewart viewers are not simple peaks on a normally distributed, bell-shaped curve, but rather peaks on a weird shaped, unevenly

³³ For more on Ceiling and Floor Effects see: Ceiling and Floor Effects, available at: <http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~howe/EMAI/ch3/node7.html>

distributed curve. On this curve, the equal distance from the mean of one of the more extreme cases will not have the same effect on the mean as the effect the case on the opposite side of the mean will have.

Chart 13: The Uneven Distribution of the Viewers of The Daily Show on Marriage Amendment³⁴



It should be noted that the question on the survey questionnaire states: How much do you favor the federal marriage amendment? With 1 being strongly in favor, and 4 being strongly against, it is obvious from the chart above that the viewers of The Daily Show are in average around the 3 position, and predominantly in the 3 and 4 area.

³⁴ Please note that the range is not as wide as it shows on the histograms. The range is from 1 to 4 which makes the curve even more odd-shaped.

Chart 14: The Uneven Distribution of the Viewers of The Daily Show on Gun Control

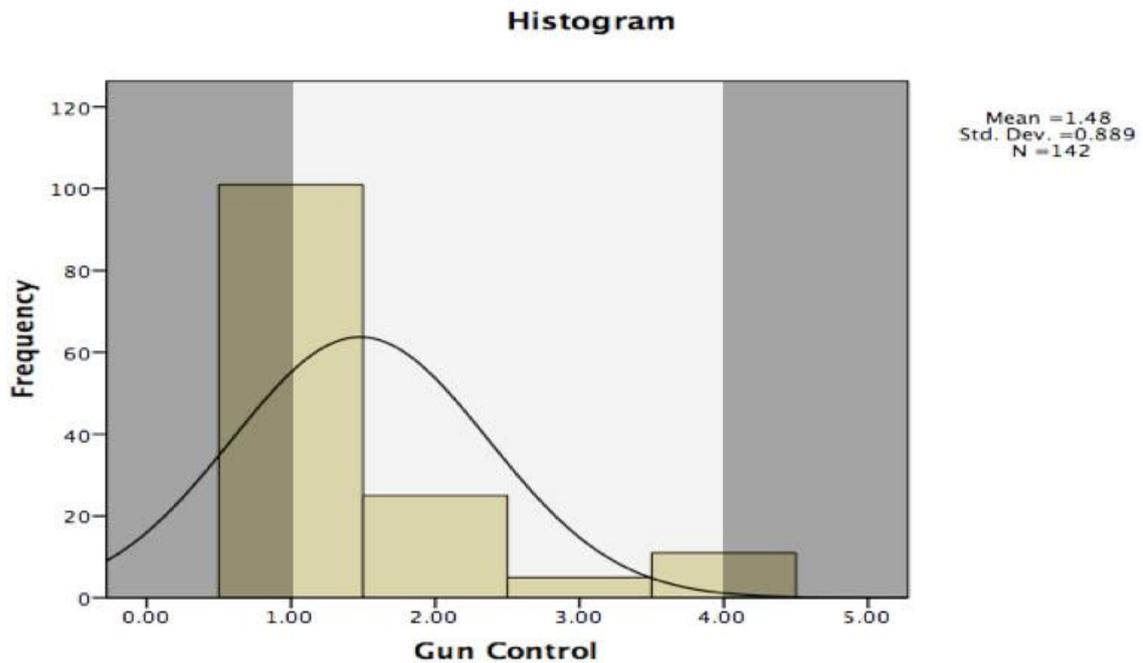
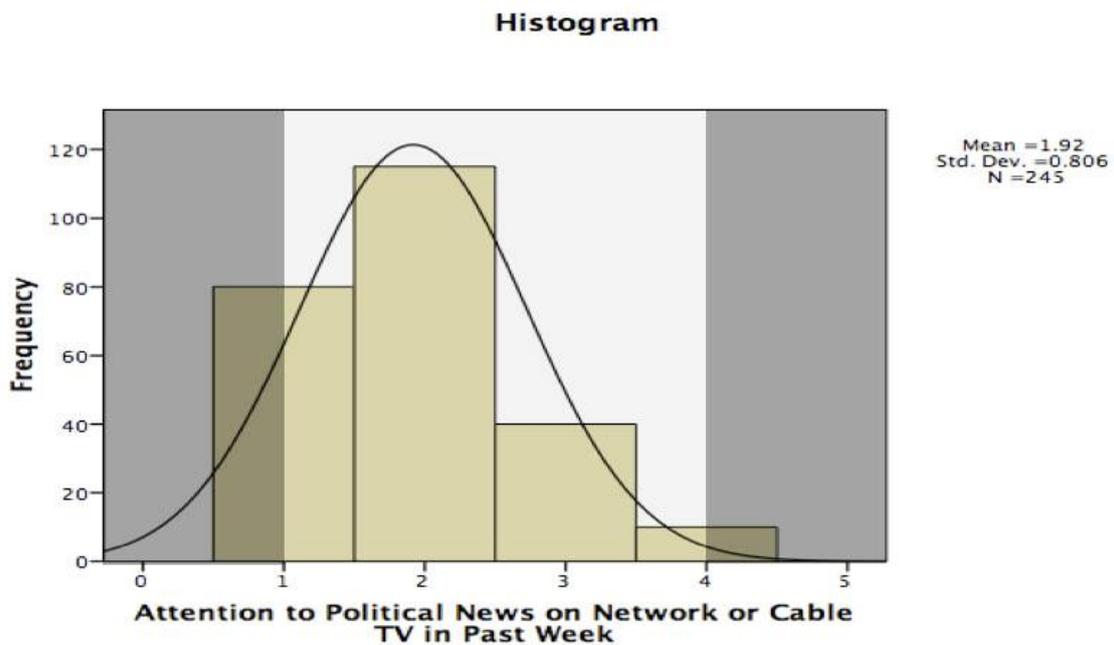


Chart 15: The Uneven Distribution of the Viewers of The Daily Show on Attention to Political News³⁵

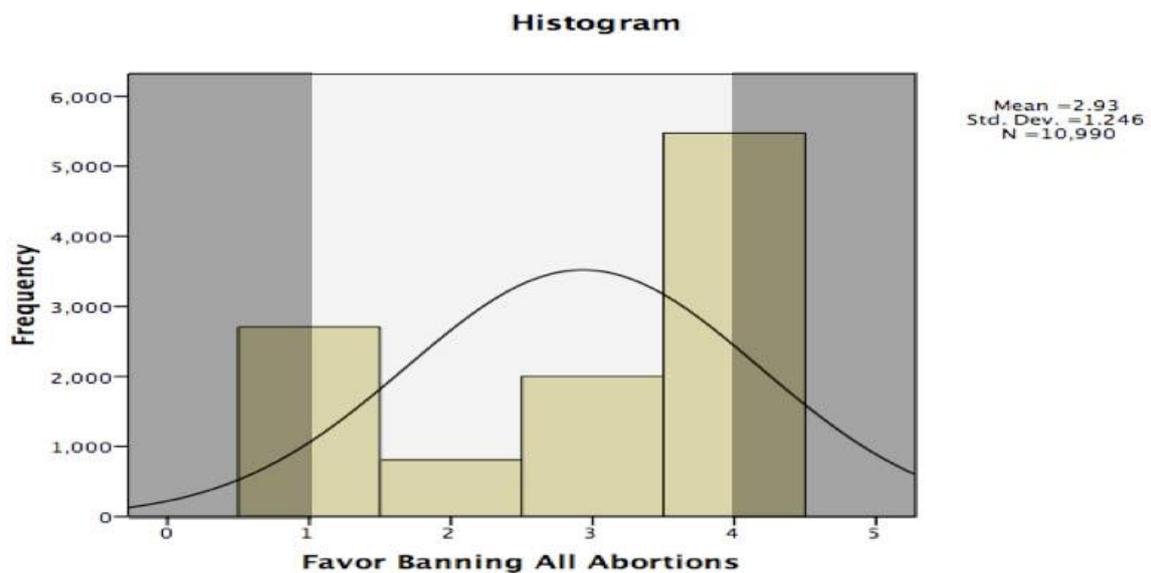


³⁵ Please note that the range is not as wide as it shows on the histograms. The range is from 1 to 4 which makes the curve even more odd-shaped.

Regarding the charts above (respectively), the questions in the questionnaire state: Do you favor more gun control, and how much attention did you pay on political news about the campaign during the last week? In the first question, the 1 is coded for more gun control, 3 for less, and 4 for state should do nothing. In the second, the 1 is coded for great deal, and 4 for no attention to political news.

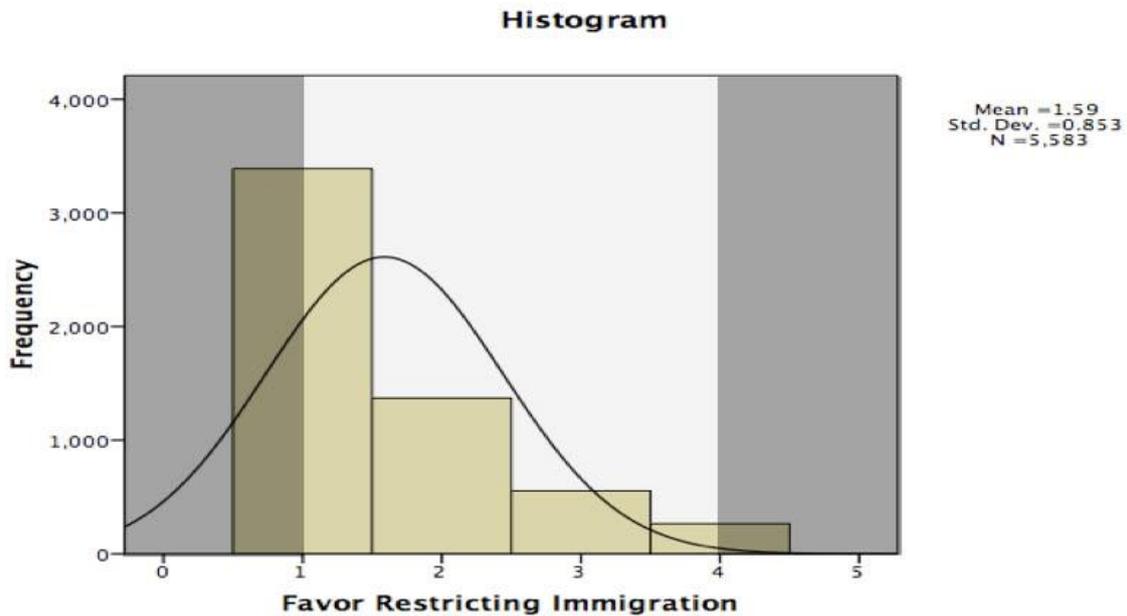
A couple of more examples on issues that have not been included in the research prove the same point on the uneven distribution of the opinions of the viewers of The Daily Show.

Chart 16: The Uneven Distribution of the Viewers of The Daily Show on Banning All Abortions



In the above chart, according to the questionnaire, 1 is coded for strongly in favor, and 4 for strongly against. In the chart below, 1 stands for strongly against restricting all immigration, and 4 stands for strongly in favor.

Chart 16: The Uneven Distribution of the Viewers of The Daily Show on Restricting All Immigration



All the issues presented on the charts and on the tables above are essentially ideological and have been a traditional debate topic in the American public discourse between conservatives and liberals. As expected before, the viewers of The Daily Show appear to be more liberal than the rest of the population. However, their proximity to one of the extremes in each of these issues makes it difficult to draw conclusions on possible changes and the confidence of their causality. Moreover, the viewers of this show tend to be very opinionated in average, at least more than the viewers of the other late-night comedy shows. Their means are so remote from the ideal bell-curve peak, that the absence of changes might well be described as a result of the Ceiling Factor. Because they are so opinionated on gay rights issues, gun control, immigration etc. the possible changes in the average attitudes cannot be noticed.

But, this problem does not appear in the first part of the research. The three politicians that have been taken into the analysis have been within the ranking interval of 5 to 7 (out of 10). The distribution curve is more normal here, and the independent sample t-tests can actually show better results.

CONCLUSION

From the statistical analysis conducted before, no simple argument can be made about each of the compared pairs of samples. In the interviews part, there is room for some statistical conclusions to be made, but in the issues analysis, such thing was missing. However, an overall, simple, easy, initial conclusion can be made about the audience of the show. The viewers of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart are very liberal on social issues, but that could have been easily guessed by the content of the show or the previous demographic analysis of the audience done by the Annenberg School of Communication. The direction in that relationship (content influencing the audience or vice versa) still seems difficult to be determined.

Starting with the first hypothesis, we saw that the guest appearance of two of the politicians (Clark and Giuliani) improved their ranking among the viewers of the show. Having in mind that these were casual, friendly and no-conflict interviews, where the host did not challenge previous work and policy solutions, it was expected that the ranking of these two politicians would rise. Moreover, the trend of keeping the same ratings or their decline among the non-viewers of the show serves this argument even more. The interview with Kerry shows a trend in the opposite direction of the one expected. But, having in mind that the interview took place in the time of active campaigning, it is reasonable to expect that other factors might also have played a role in the unexpected change.

The second part of the research offers more interesting and more difficult to interpret findings. As it is obvious from the transcribed fake reports/interview the writers of the show take clear positions on the issues covered. Often, like it is in the gun control and gay rights

examples, the show creates a character played by one of its cast members and uses it as a regular opponent of their political world. These characters are usually conservative, conformist, refusing to challenge authorities and conventions, rely their philosophies on slogans rather than on critical thinking. And with the omnipresent media criticism in the show, these characters usually play one of the figures commonly featured on news media (a reporter, pundit or a politician). With this, they let him lead the conversation and let him make a fool out of himself and have the expense of everyone else's laughter.

The first two examples in the second part of the research are clear examples of this principle. The first of them being a clear mockery of news reporting, and the second one being a mockery of news punditry. The reporter, who covers the guns in Arizona bars news, starts his report by stating his side. He puts more favorable background music when he interviews the conservative politician and uses negative words to describe the cases and arguments of the liberal one. He tries his best to convince the future victim of the bill (a bar owner from Arizona) that it is in everyone's interest for drunken people to be allowed to carry guns. He goes as far as mixing guns and alcohol to conclude that a sufficient amount of alcohol will eventually make people friendly and peaceful. The reporter Ed Helms states the most well-known NRA arguments in the most inappropriate contexts to show how ridiculous they are (trying to make sense of the NRA slogan 'guns don't kill people, people kill people' when the analogy of drunk driving and drunk gun caring is made; and saying that he needs the gun for protection in case a bear walks in to a bar). The laugh track going in the background rings like an alarm every time a conservative argument has been refuted with another joke. And yet, even though a stronger position and better developed argument has been made than in a regular guest appearance, the results in the change of opinion are missing.

The ‘senior moral authority’ Stephen Colbert discussing the marriage amendment is a sketch built around the same principle: constructing a ridiculous character who will represent the opposing side of the story, be terrible in it, give the worst arguments in the worst context and still pretend like he believes in what he is saying. This time, the only argument of the opposing camp that is being refuted is the ‘sanctity of marriage’ argument. The whole conversation is dedicated to show the banality of this statement in times when people have relationships before they get married, and often get divorced after that. But behind all this argumentation lies Stewart’s hatred against gay people and his refusal to let them have equal rights and opportunities like the rest of the people claiming that the marriage amendment is the last barrier to keep the two worlds separated.

In these two examples, The Daily Show only employs comedy into a refuting of well-known conservative arguments. Having in mind that the viewers of the show are very opinionated on these issues (gun control favorability of 1.43, and marriage amendment opposition 3.16 on scales from 1 to 4), one would reasonably conclude that there is no room for changing their opinion with comedy, moreover, pushing it further to the extreme. This audience was aware of these arguments before the shows were aired, had taken the same side as the show as well, so there was no reason why some of them would change or intensify their opinion towards the issues.

Finally, the last example under analysis (the interview with Wolf Blitzer) is interesting in many aspects. Firstly, because is one of the best examples of the unique media critique and literacy contribution the show makes in the public discourse. Secondly, because this is the only interview analyzed in this work that included a decent challenge on the guest,

and finally because the duel was clearly won by the host. By laying out a solid argumentation of media inefficiency and failure to complete its democratic function by challenging authorities in the particular case (the Iraq War), Stewart takes the liberty to say that the media are led by groupthink or retardation, to which Blitzer agrees only about the groupthink.

Unlike the previous two examples under analysis, this one actually has a statistical change in the second sample pushing it further to the extreme (from 1.97 to 1.87). This change, however, does not fit any scientifically accepted confidence interval. Moreover, the overall viewer attention to news is also improved which makes it even more difficult to draw conclusions on the impact of the interview on the show's viewers.

So, it is obvious that the show might answer the hypothesis only when there is a room for change. When the viewers are heavily opinionated on an issue, that is in accordance to the positions The Daily Show promotes, their opinion intensification is rather impossible due to the ceiling effect. On the other hand, when the viewers have divided opinion on an issue, or a public figure, certain changes in their rankings as a result of the show's coverage can be statistically proven. It is essential here to make a clear distinction between the nature of support a candidate and an issue can get from an audience. The issues appear to be single-dimensional variables and people can have strong opinions with them when they are familiar. We see that the viewers of The Daily Show are very much like that, but not when it comes to supporting candidates. This is due to the multi-dimensionality of the way people rank politicians. Every politician represents a whole set of values, opinions, policy proposals etc. The issue of the politician's personality is also very relevant when a politician is being rated. With this in mind, one would wrongly expect that politicians would have majority of the people agreeing them on every issue and like their personality in the same time. That is the

reason why we have more normal distribution on the candidates' charts, and that is the reason why there the impact of the show is obvious.

But putting the statistical analysis aside, the show's contribution to the public discourse and the American democracy in general is what makes it even more important. On the first sight, the show is only a new and improved format exploiting the comedy potential of current political affairs. But looked underneath the surface, The Daily Show is a rather serious, consistent and constant observer of the American society that employs jokes to build and refute arguments. The fact that both candidates in the American presidential race 2008 appeared on the show for a few times, that almost all other runners in the party races did so too, and that some of them even announced their start on the show tells that they have seen its importance. Moreover, numerous other public figures have also stopped by knowing that they will not always be asked easy and personal questions like on the other entertainment shows, but rather difficult challenges on their work and choices they have made.

And that is not even the most amusing part about the concept of the show. Unlike the other political shows, The Daily Show recognizes that politics does not happen only in state capitals and Washington D.C., the offices of the elected officials and party committees. Moreover, it treats groups and movements, persons and companies, and most importantly the media, as important stakeholders in every political process and issue. The media critique and media literacy it promotes is probably the most unique aspect the show has and that is what makes it so valuable to American democracy today. So, it not only seats on the very interception between entertainment and politics being the most apparent example of 'infotainment', but it also bridges the gap between the 'Whig' role of 19th century media and the contemporary media developments. Its role of challenging social authorities, conventions

and practices through humor in a cable news targeted audience environment is what makes it the ‘water cooler place’ of the American public discourse.

To conclude, The Daily Show is target oriented entertainment program that can have a changing impact on its viewers only on issues they are not heavily opinionated on. When Jon Stewart was attacked for asking easy questions to John Kerry on Crossfire, he argued that he was impressed that they “took their clues on integrity from a comedy show” reminding the hosts that the show that goes before his on Comedy Central is “puppets making prank phone calls”. This is not the only time Jon Stewart insisted that he is a host of a comedy show, and called his genre ‘fake news’, taking the burden away from his back. But the statistical analysis used in this work shows that his audience is highly opinionated and shares his views on social issues, which makes him an entertainer, and to some degree, opinionator of his demographics. An entertainer of better-off, well-educated, young and urban social elite that he can slightly change their opinions on politicians or reinforce their previously held beliefs on social issues. But regardless of the fact that the show does not significantly shape the opinions of its audience, the reinforcement of their opinions can also be considered as more than just an entertaining role. Moreover, the overall impact on the American society can be better assessed with the unique approach The Daily Show has on politics and that cannot be ignored.

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