Sitting with Oprah, Dancing with Ellen: Presidents, Daytime Television, and Soft News

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On July 29, 2010, President Barack Obama took to the air on The View to talk politics, policy, and family. Pundits billed the visit as the first time a sitting U.S. president appeared on a daytime television program, calling it a crowning moment for The View. The telecast drew about 6.7 million viewers, the highest rating ever for the show. The episode also garnered "the largest number of women viewers in 17 months with 516,000 in the 18–34 age group and 1.3 million females tuning in aged 18–49." At a time when the president was gearing up for the midterm elections while still trying to recover some of the spark and popularity he had heralded to clinch his 2008 election victory, Obama’s interview with the famous hostesses placed the commander in chief under a new spotlight in previously uncharted territory.

As Obama took to the air, much speculation swirled over the appearance—whether it was appropriate, what the topics of conversation would be, and how it might affect the president’s standing, particularly among women. Critics varied widely in their views. Governor Ed Rendell (D-PA) publicly warned Obama that appearing on The View would be beneath the dignity of the office of the presidency and comparable to appearing on The Jerry Springer Show. Rosie O’Donnell and Sarah Palin made similar complaints from the far left and right, respectively. At the same time, other news sources and prominent bloggers touted the president’s renewed efforts to reach women viewers and try new venues with headlines such as “I Am Glad We Have a Media Accessible President” and “Obama Goes to Where the Women Are.”
During the interview itself, Obama split his time between serious political conversation and answering more personal questions related to family and American pop culture. On the one hand, the president energetically addressed and answered questions about how his administration had been dealing with unemployment, the overall state of the economy, and the war in Afghanistan since his taking office. Otherwise, Obama let the panelists quiz him about his daughters, the songs on his iPod, and his Blackberry phone, as well as some more gossip-oriented pop culture questions, including whether Obama was aware of actress Lindsay Lohan’s legal problems and how familiar he was with the reality television star known as Snooki. As the episode unfolded, viewers were thus simultaneously exposed to strong doses of policy substance as well as casual entertainment fluff for the curiously minded.

In the aftermath of the episode, critics reengaged in debate over whether the president’s visit was appropriate and how, if at all, it may have changed people’s perceptions about the president. Did Obama win over some of the soccer moms so critical for the midterm elections and his own political future? Did he strike the right balance in connecting on a personal level with the American public while taking on serious issues? Otherwise, did his appearance on a daytime show somehow damage the prestige of the presidency?

Certainly, Obama’s daytime show appearance received a great deal of attention, with untold numbers of Internet downloads to accompany the historic television ratings. Looking at the polling outcomes around his visit, Obama’s job approval rating appeared to increase only between one to two percentage points the week after the event, a far cry from what pundits would consider a significant bounce in popularity, particularly considering the numerous other factors known to influence such numbers. However, whether and to what extent Obama succeeded in getting his message out and endearing himself to female voters remains an open question that merits further scholarly inquiry. To address these considerations, I begin by putting Obama’s visit to The View in historical context with respect to previous presidential candidate appearances on daytime and other types of talk shows (e.g., prime-time and late-night programming). I then delve into the research that examines people’s potential for integrating political knowledge as well as more recent work on whether presidential appearances on soft news programming may influence voter knowledge and political behavior. With particular reference to daytime television, I further consider whether and to what extent presidents may employ such venues for effectively reaching out to the female demographic and, more broadly, affecting the public discourse.
A Look Back: Political Candidates Taking to the Airwaves

Presidential candidates and presidents themselves have increasingly turned to various outlets of nighttime entertainment, “soft” news, and, more recently, daytime television as a platform for their political messages. Such shows are touted for their potential to reach broader audiences and are said to help “humanize” political figures that otherwise appear separated from everyday life. To illustrate, I briefly touch on a few noteworthy examples across the decades, putting in context the growing tendency by presidential candidates and commanders in chief to take to the airwaves, often with a little sense of humor and a lot at stake.

On September 16, 1968, presidential candidate Richard Nixon appeared very briefly on NBC’s *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In*, uttering Judy Carne’s famous line “Sock it to me!”12 The appearance was made possible in part through Nixon’s friendship with one of the show’s writers, Paul Keyes, who coached the candidate through six takes and captured what was arguably Nixon’s most humanizing moment during the 1968 presidential campaign. Ahead of the appearance, however, some of Nixon’s advisors expressed serious concerns about how the American public would react to such a comedic exploit. In the end it was decided that, rather than relay the famous words with an exclamation, Nixon would instead deliver the line as an incredulous question—“Sock it to me?”—and thereby avoid getting doused by any liquid or dropped through a trap door as was typical for most guests. The appearance made headlines and was generally well received, seeming to strike a balance between comedy and appropriateness. It was a rare show of media savvy by a man who would develop great disdain for the industry.

Years later, in 1984, Jesse Jackson was much more daring when he hosted a full episode of *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) while also running as a Democratic presidential candidate.13 During the episode, Jackson did a number of impressions, including one of then vice president George H. W. Bush. He also openly criticized NBC for not having enough minority workers on staff. Not long after the show’s airing, NBC reported it had received “about 300 calls—three times the normal number of phone calls—many complaining that the show was in bad taste and not funny.”14 Despite the criticism, the national exposure significantly raised Jackson’s visibility, aiding his battle for attention against Democratic front-runners Gary Hart and Walter Mondale. Garnering such attention was essential to Jackson’s campaign efforts, particularly because he was as seen as more of a beltway outsider and was at that point only the second African American (following Shirley Chisholm) to take on a nationwide campaign for
president. Though some pundits had written him off early as a fringe candidate, Jackson surprised many when he went on to finish third in the primary battle. His impressive finish also helped set the foundation for a very competitive 1988 Democratic primary bid against Michael Dukakis.

Perhaps most memorably, Bill Clinton famously appeared on The Arsenio Hall Show in June 1992 to play “Heartbreak Hotel” on the saxophone before going on to win the 1992 presidential election. Clinton’s display of musical talent and charismatic character came at a very opportune time; he had just captured the Democratic nomination but was trailing in the polls behind President George H. W. Bush and Ross Perot in the general election campaign. Clinton’s key advisers—including Paul Begala, James Carville, and Dee Dee Myers—all insisted on the appearance, debating instead over what outfit would suit the candidate best. After a short huddle, it was decided that Clinton would wear Begala’s sunglasses and a jazzy tie, creating a more “hip” image of Clinton that would stick in the minds of voters. Pundits later claimed that the performance helped set the momentum for Clinton’s famous June 1992 rebound in the polls that turned his campaign around and galvanized his reputation as the election’s “Comeback Kid.”

Since such earlier appearances, presidential candidate visits to entertainment talk shows have been on the rise. Particularly since the 1990s and into the new century, appearances on prime-time and late-night television have become common, with many presidential candidates and some sitting presidents seeking out not only nighttime entertainment shows but also soft news venues that allow for both humanizing comedy and political campaign messages to transpire. Long-serving senator John McCain, for instance, has appeared on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart more than a dozen times and was the first sitting U.S. senator to host SNL in 2002. Moving beyond prime-time and late-night shows, political figures and their advisors also began to expand and exploit the potential for positive exposure and visibility afforded by daytime talk shows, which have also evolved to include more air time for political discussion and debate.

From Prime Time to Daytime

Although daytime television has not always been a force of politics and campaigns, it has long delivered “some of the most progressive television in the nation.” Compared to their nighttime counterparts, daytime shows of all stripes were ahead of their time in beginning to employ female central characters and address issues central to women and other minorities. Early on, soap operas
like *All My Children* and talk shows such as *Donahue* took on issues like sexism, machismo, and abortion; addressed the need for greater female equality and assertiveness; and provided a springboard for pushing the acceptance of diversity in sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity into the mainstream.19

Between the 1970s to the 1990s, public affairs slowly began to take hold in daytime television. Thereafter, from the mid-1990s onward, Oprah Winfrey received praise from many critics for abandoning a “tabloid television” platform in order to transition herself—and her audience—into a more sophisticated arena filled with progressive conversations about public affairs, as well as a hefty Rolodex of guests concerned with the betterment of society and healthy living.20 Political candidates responded (and contributed) to the trend by increasingly seeking daytime television spots to take advantage of the new opportunities for political discourse.

By the time the 2000 election kicked off, all the major presidential candidates—Al Gore, George W. Bush, and Ralph Nader—wasted no time in paying numerous visits to various daytime television shows. Among their numerous visits, Bush and Gore both sought out a slot with the star of daytime television, Oprah Winfrey, while Nader taped an episode with Queen Latifah that focused on getting out the youth vote.21 All three appearances received positive reviews and garnered notable television ratings. By then, appearances by presidential candidates on daytime television had become a mainstream practice.

**DAYTIME HOSTS: HUGE RATINGS AND BIGGER MEGAPHONES**

To many observers, it is not surprising to see the increased efforts by presidential figures to make soft news appearances, particularly since they often garner larger audiences than do more traditional venues.22 What should not be overlooked, however, is the extent to which daytime talk show hosts have actively and increasingly sought out presidential candidates as well, particularly given the tendency of such guests to be ratings winners. As Jennifer Parker puts it, “Booking an interview with a leading presidential candidate can be as much of a score as booking a Hollywood star—and the presidential candidates are more than happy to oblige.”23

Beyond the incentive for ratings, bringing presidential candidates onto their shows also gives daytime talk show hosts an opportunity to take part in and shape public debates themselves. To date, Oprah Winfrey is arguably the standard-bearer when it comes to daytime television hosts taking on and engaging in public discourse over policy and politics.24 As Rebecca Traister puts it, “For decades daytime has been the home of culture-changing Oprah Winfrey,
who made blackness, and black womanhood, not only visible in the lily-white mainstream media—not only acceptable, not only likable—but also deeply and powerfully relatable. Were it not for Oprah Winfrey, we might not have Barack Obama as our Democratic candidate for president, both because of her early endorsement of his candidacy and also because of her presence and power in American culture.25

Indeed, pundits and scholars have pointed to the major role that Oprah Winfrey played in determining the outcome in the lengthy Democratic primary battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.26 By most accounts, Winfrey’s endorsement of Obama appeared to improve the candidate’s credibility among key voting blocs at the height of his primary election battle against then senator Clinton. Observers found interesting the implicit choice Winfrey made between her gender and her race and how it affected the choices made by her viewers, particularly African American female viewers split between choosing either the first female or first African American male to lead the Democratic ticket.27 Winfrey also took some ratings hits from viewers who disagreed with her choice, as well as some hard questions about her loyalty to the women’s movement.28 Thereafter, Winfrey became a bit more careful and cautious in her approach to politics, often passing on the opportunity for major political interviews and focusing instead on addressing topics related to societal needs. Most recently, Winfrey started the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), along with a new show entitled *Oprah’s Lifeclass*, which she uses as a platform for addressing a range of personal challenges facing many Americans.29

Oprah Winfrey has also inspired other female hosts to take on the major political candidates and issues of the day. For instance, despite being relatively new to the scene, Ellen DeGeneres has already had numerous political guests, including Barack Obama (who famously danced with her), Hillary Clinton, and John McCain. Aside from DeGeneres, many cite the star-studded panel from *The View* not only for their ability to interview the big names, but also for holding daily substantive debates over politics. Though the show has always had a “newsy bent” inscribed by founder Barbara Walters, the show’s platform has more recently taken a stronger turn toward politics. In particular, many cite Rosie O’Donnell’s short tenure on the show as a major catalyst. Early on, O’Donnell held her own with the rest of the panelists, creating a forum of intense debates that immersed millions of daytime viewers in the guts of political intrigue and controversy.20 Later on, O’Donnell was ousted for being too controversial and replaced by the less divisive but equally political Whoopi Goldberg. Since then, Goldberg has helped move the show to relatively more
civil though equally political territory, effectively rounding out the panel of hostesses that also includes Sherri Shepherd, Joy Behar, and the unabashedly conservative Elisabeth Hasselbeck.

**DAYTIME TELEVISION AS A VENUE FOR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

As more political candidates continue to stream into daytime television, elections are becoming increasingly relevant for traditionally feminine and often marginalized audiences. The trend is occurring at a time when women in politics are breaking new ground and redefining expectations about female leadership. In just the last couple of years, Hillary Clinton came within a hair of nabbing the Democratic primary race in 2008 (and likely the White House) before taking over Condoleezza Rice’s post of secretary of state, while Sarah Palin was barnstorming the country as the right wing’s fundraiser in chief and star maker for unknown up and coming Tea Party candidates. During her tenure as Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi adapted “gritty maneuvering” to her catlike Democratic legislators to oppose all of George W. Bush’s major initiatives and, more recently, to rally behind and vote for Barack Obama’s biggest first-term gambles, including the economic stimulus package and health care reform.31 Across from the capitol building, Elena Kagan recently joined Sonia Sotomayor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the Supreme Court, leaving an unprecedented number of women in charge of interpreting the law of the land. For a country that took nineteen amendments to its Constitution before finally allowing women to vote in 1920, things seem to have come a long way. Nevertheless, women’s voices on television have only recently begun to emerge amid the long-male-dominated anchor and pundit positions on news shows, while descriptive representation continues to fall short for women across all branches of government.

In looking for ways to expand the voice and representation of women in politics, daytime television is increasingly becoming a venue with the potential to encourage greater political participation and issue activism among women, as well as greater government responsiveness to female constituents. Hilary Estey McLoughlin, president of Telepictures Productions, which syndicates both The Ellen DeGeneres Show and The Tyra Banks Show, is an expert on the influence that daytime television can have on politics.32 In the midst of the 2008 primaries, McLoughlin commented on the potential that daytime talk has for candidates mindful of female voters: “Ellen has a very influential audience of soccer moms that the candidates know are important to reach. . . . Tyra’s show [has] a younger audience, which is also key to the election.”33

During Obama’s visit to The View in July 2010, the president pointed out
the potential that talk show hosts have in influencing public debate. He did so in answering one of Joy Behar's questions about why the president had not done more to address the partisan attacks levied against him. "That's your job," the president quipped.34 Though the president was half jesting in his response, it stands to reason that the forum afforded to women like Joy Behar and Oprah Winfrey provides a powerful platform for women's empowerment, with both the increasing number of female hosts and the broader audience of women they speak on behalf of.35 Indeed, Behar and others have tremendous creative control over the content of their programs, which they can take full advantage of by increasingly addressing women's issues, relating their importance to the viewing audience, encouraging greater discourse and political participation to benefit the women's movement, and seeking out female (as well as male) guests that are most likely to engage effectively in such conversation and debate.

WHAT PRESIDENTIAL FIGURES (AND WOMEN) STAND TO GAIN

As noted previously, during the 2004 reelection campaign against John Kerry, then sitting president George W. Bush and first lady Laura Bush made an appearance on Dr. Phil.36 Unlike Obama's visit to The View six years later, then president Bush chose not to talk about any serious political issues, focusing instead on topics such as "spanking, teenaged drinking, and what kind of men the Bushes hope their daughters choose as husbands."37 Asked about his image, Bush billed himself as a man who "loves life... can relate to people from all walks of life... loves to read history... loves to laugh a lot." About a week later, Bush's rival, John Kerry, and his wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, made their own appearance on Dr. Phil and took on similar topics, including some difficult personal experiences such as Teresa's miscarriages and the adjustments John Kerry's daughters had to make when he divorced his first wife, Julia Thorne.38 Both appearances were considered humanizing for the candidates and having the potential to influence viewer perceptions of the candidates and their families, though the effect on voter choices and the election was apparently minimal. Much like the polling numbers seen after Obama's recent visit to The View, no significant movement in the polls was cited for Bush or Kerry in 2004 (both candidates hovered around the 49 percent mark in polls taken immediately before and after each appearance).39 This raises the question, Do daytime television appearances really make a difference and, if so, how?

THE DOWNSIDE: LIMITATIONS OF SOFT NEWS

Some critics have been overtly skeptical that any good can come from "soft" news programming and political appearances on entertainment shows. David
Horowitz, founder of the former Center for the Study of Popular Culture, once lamented, “We’re in the midst of a global war with Islamic fanatics. How is telling jokes with Jay Leno going to help that?”  

In other words, in a highly complicated world, how can soft news and daytime television possibly provide the tools necessary to help citizens become more knowledgeable, active, and reasoned voters?

For decades, scholars have widely considered a theoretical puzzle, known as the democratic dilemma, which warns that a democracy may not function properly if its voters are unable to make reasoned choices.  

Reasoned decision making requires that people have at least a minimal awareness of the consequences of their actions. However, the majority of the electorate’s knowledge of political information remains very low, calling the viability of effective self-governance into question.  

At first glance, one would expect that soft news and the “fluff” of daytime television would fall far short of providing the kind of useful information one would need to be politically knowledgeable or motivated enough to act on such knowledge through voting or other forms of political participation.

Philip Converse’s classic work pioneered what scholars refer to as the fundamental paradigm of minimalism: the view that mass publics display “minimal levels of political attention and information; minimal mastery of abstract political concepts; minimal stability of political preferences; and minimal levels of attitude constraint.”  

However, this perspective began to change during the mid- to late 1970s as scholars questioned, on theoretical and methodological grounds, whether such a negative evaluation of the capacities of the mass electorate was indeed accurate.  

The section that follows reviews some major alternative approaches to the assessment of voter capabilities, namely, studies on heuristics, core values and beliefs, and online information processing. I then relate such findings to more recent studies that deal directly with the potential influence that soft news and daytime television may have in shaping and moving public opinion and voting behavior.

**THE UPSIDE: ONLINE PROCESSING, VISIBILITY, AND THE RATIONAL VOTER**

V. O. Key asserts that “voters are not fools,” since they behave rationally and responsibly given the clarity of alternatives presented to them and the character of the information they have available.  

In this line of thought, the average citizen’s responsibilities are portrayed as limited, as is the expected payoff for one’s vigilance. Thus, though citizens may be capable of sophisticated political thought and action, it is not rational for them to expend the personal resources
necessary to do this. Rather, citizens engage in what Samuel Popkin calls "low-information rationality," which individuals achieve by taking cues from trusted political elites about which policies they should prefer and by harnessing a variety of heuristic strategies to deduce their political preferences. In this way, individuals are able to avoid the need to infer preferences from factual bits of knowledge stored in long-term memory.

Henry Brady and Paul Sniderman argue that citizens can draw an impressively accurate map of politics (of who wants what politically, of who takes the same side as whom, and of who lines up on the opposing sides of key issues) by relying on their political affect. Political affect denotes the "likability heuristic" that is rooted in people's likes and dislikes of politically strategic groups. Party identification and retrospective evaluations of the economy have also been interpreted as efficient "information shortcuts" for "cognitive miser." It is worth noting as well that aside from members of the public engaging in low information rationality, political actors such as legislators engage in similar behavior, particularly when it comes to decisions about legislation.

In more recent studies, scholars point to the online process model (i.e., the "impression-driven" model of candidate evaluation), which suggests that many people process information using a running tally at the time they are exposed to it, update their opinion accordingly, and then quickly forget the information itself, while retaining an updated affective summary judgment. Scholars of online process models thus argue that, rather than measuring a voter's actual level of political knowledge, those who use memory-based methods may in fact be testing voter recall ability. This is because people may express informed preferences even though they may be unable to recall the factual information used to shape those preferences.

All things considered, the summary tally allows voters to construct opinions in a reasoned manner. The specific information used to create such a tally is irrelevant because it is not necessary to recall it correctly in order to make proper judgments. Thus real-time impression processes are what influence voter choice. This is why individuals know how much they like or dislike a candidate or an issue but are (1) unable to recount exactly why and (2) may instead provide stereotypes or other rationalizations that vary from the original information they utilized for evaluation. Daytime television provides a good venue for this thought process, as hosts often touch on a variety of topics—serious and substantive as well as personal and character based—that viewers may find appealing and informative enough to shape lasting views about certain issues and political figures.
THIS JUST IN: RECENT FINDINGS ON THE "OPRAH EFFECT"

Despite some of the limitations mentioned above, scholars have begun to take notice of what has been termed the "Oprah Effect," referring to the manner in which appearances on soft news and talk shows can sometimes influence undecided voters and those less likely to have a direct interest in political information.\textsuperscript{59} Looking at soft news coverage of foreign policy, Baum argues that such media platforms help attract and influence viewers who are typically less interested in politics and more independent.\textsuperscript{54} Others, such as Markus Prior, have countered that the soft news audience is much smaller than those interested in hard news and that a preference for soft news decreases the likelihood of gains in political knowledge or participation.\textsuperscript{55} However, audiences for soft news and daytime television have grown exponentially, and video clips from the telecasts often reach millions of additional viewers through the Internet. As pollster John Zogby has put it, "The clips of the politicians get played over and over again on cable television and on YouTube, making these shows more important to candidates."\textsuperscript{56}

Conversely, Matthew Baum posits that by adopting recent findings from cognitive and social psychology studies (as noted in the foregoing sections), scholars can better understand the merits of soft news media, particularly in the manner that otherwise inattentive viewers can, at the very least, potentially increase their political knowledge and, under certain conditions, even engage in learning that influences political behavior, if only in the short term.\textsuperscript{57} Baum argues that chat shows provide candidates "their best chance at reaching people they could actually persuade, while doing it in a relatively friendly context."\textsuperscript{58} Indeed, having a friendly context is particularly useful because it allows candidates to put forth their message without the kind of probing more often seen in investigative journalism and among the White House press corps. Thus candidates and presidents can use such venues to more easily set the terms of a debate and have greater control over the way their message is framed.\textsuperscript{59}

More recently, Baum and Angela Jamison have drawn on the "Oprah Effect" to argue that news quality depends not so much on the extent of substance in content as on how well it enables individuals to choose candidates based on their personal preferences.\textsuperscript{60} For the large portion of the electorate that tends to be less attentive, scholars find that soft news programs such as The Daily Show and The Colbert Report may actually trump traditional hard news venues in helping viewers determine preferences.\textsuperscript{61} As for daytime television, the "Oprah Effect" began with the megastar's shift away from tabloid coverage and onto more serious, substantive conversation and debate. Consequently, it should not
be so surprising that President Obama chose to visit to *The View*, nor that he also addressed substantive policy matters in addition to the entertaining fodder that transpired between the hosts and their guest. The implication of these changing trends in daytime television is that such programming has much potential for cultivating greater political knowledge among the masses, engaging viewers who are otherwise inactive politically, and perhaps even mobilizing key demographics under the right context and conditions.

Although some may continue to debate the appropriateness of Obama’s historic visit to *The View*, the findings from recent studies imply that the president had some foresight in perceiving the potential benefits of appearing on a show more likely to engage women and other key voting blocs than the more traditional hard news outlets. If presidential figures (and other politicians) increasingly seek out the public in such venues and continue to draw large audiences, it stands to reason that daytime television hosts will double their efforts to make such appearances count, both in motivating viewers to take interest in national debates and in amplifying their own megaphones in trying to influence the debate themselves. For female hosts such as the gang of five that headline *The View*, as well as their female viewers, daytime television holds much promise for providing a new venue for political discourse.

Notes

it may be more appropriate to cite Obama as the first U.S. president to appear on daytime TV outside of a presidential election cycle.


13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16. Clinton also garnered positive attention by appearing on Don Imus's radio show, Imus in the Morning, just before his appearance on The Arsenio Hall Show. In addition to hitting the radio waves, Clinton's campaign worked out a deal with ABC's Nightline, which taped and later broadcasted the Imus radio appearance to add visual imagery of the candidate as relaxed and down-to-earth (see Saal, “Clinton's Presidential Campaign”).
19. Ibid.
23. Parker, “Talk Shows Pursue.”
27. Ibid.
33. Parker, “Talk Shows Pursue.”
34. Dowlin, “I Am Glad.”
35. Though the focus here is on women’s empowerment on daytime television, the same may certainly be said with respect to other prime-time and late-night shows, with anchors such as Rachel Maddow leading the way in lending a voice not just to like-minded viewers but often to females (as well as LGBT and other minority voters) on the key political issues of the day.
36. Toward the end of his term, President George W. Bush also made a brief but notable appearance on NBC’s prime-time show Deal or No Deal in April 2008 to commend show contestant Captain Joseph Kobes, a U.S. war veteran who had served in Iraq, stating: “I’m thrilled to be on Deal or No Deal with you tonight.... Come to think of it, I’m thrilled to be anywhere with high ratings these days” (see Haydon, “The List”). As a lame duck president suffering in the polls, Bush nevertheless made the appearance to try to at least remind some of his viewers of the down-to-earth persona he had first displayed as Texas governor and then during the height of his popularity as president.
37. Skinner, “Bushes Do Dr. Phil.”
38. Skinner, “John and Teresa Do Dr. Phil.”
40. Parker, “Talk Shows Pursue.”


46. Delli Carpini and Keeter, What Americans Know, 45.


51. Memory-based models suggest that people draw on information in their minds that is readily available to them, which helps them to form their political attitudes and opinions. There are three memory-based schools of thought—the sociological model (Columbia school), the social-psychological model (Michigan school), and the rational-choice model (Rochester school)—that explain how voting behavior works (see Milton Lodge, Patrick Stroh, and John Wahlke, “Black-Box Models of Evaluation,” Political Behavior 12, no. 1 (1990): 11; Milton Lodge, Kathleen McGraw, and Patrick Stroh, “An Impression-Driven Model of Candidate Evaluation,” American Political Science Review 83, no. 2 (1989): 399–419; Milton Lodge, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Shawn Brau, “The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and the Dynamics of Candidate Evaluation,” American Political Science Review 89, no. 2 (1995): 309–26.

52. Milton Lodge and Charles Taber, “Three Steps toward a Theory of Moti-

53. Baum and Jamison, “Oprah Effect.”


56. Parker, “Talk Shows Pursue.”


58. Parker, “Talk Shows Pursue.”

59. Nevertheless, such an advantage could quickly dissipate if talk show hosts become more aggressive. Already, observers have noted an increase in the amount of probing that takes place on daytime interviews. One prominent example is the manner in which Elisabeth Hasselbeck challenged President Barack Obama on The View when the president addressed the issue of unemployment and his administration’s efforts to save jobs (see Danny Shea, “Elisabeth Hasselbeck: Obama ‘Crafty’ on The View but ‘Wonderful Citizen,’” Huffington Post, July 30, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/30/elisabeth-hasselbeck-obam_n_664883.html). Another example may be the way Ellen DeGeneres “subjected [John] McCain to one of his most uncomfortable interviews, using her upcoming nuptials as a platform on which to grill the candidate about the issue of gay marriage” (Traister, “How the Election”).

