

Coverage and Change

Trace how media attention may shape public opinion.

12.C.4.E "Analyze media to determine the cause-and-effect relationship(s) between media coverage and public opinion trends."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each change in media coverage, circle each poll result, and number the non-media events that could also affect opinion. Use your marks to judge whether the passage shows a possible cause, a proven cause, or both.

Lakeview Housing Debate

- ① In a media-literacy simulation, residents of Lakeview consider a proposal to replace a downtown parking lot with apartments. In March, the local newspaper ran two brief articles focused on zoning rules, while local television gave the proposal little attention. A city survey of 600 residents found that 48 percent supported the plan, 30 percent opposed it, and 22 percent were unsure. During the next six weeks, a television station aired four reports featuring tenants who struggled to find housing. Its website posted short video clips, and those clips were widely shared on neighborhood social-media pages. The reports mentioned the parking issue only briefly.
- ② An April survey using the same question and a similar sample found 61 percent support, 24 percent opposition, and 15 percent unsure. The increase followed housing-centered coverage, so timing supports a possible connection. Repeated tenant interviews may have made the housing shortage more vivid and may have directed viewers toward supportive comments and stories. However, timing alone does not prove that coverage caused the shift. Between surveys, the city also released a report estimating that the project could add 180 homes, and a well-attended public hearing allowed residents to question planners. Either event could have influenced opinions.
- ③ After the hearing, the station aired a segment about traffic congestion, including interviews with drivers worried about the loss of parking. Social-media posts about traffic then increased. In a May poll, support slipped to 55 percent, opposition rose to 33 percent, and uncertainty fell to 12 percent. The pattern is consistent with the possibility that traffic-focused coverage strengthened concerns among some residents. Yet the poll cannot show which individuals watched the segment or changed their minds because of it. An analyst would compare viewing data, post content, and responses from people who did and did not see the reports before claiming a direct causal effect.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did public opinion change from the March survey to the April survey, and what shift in coverage came before that change?

2 Explain one way the housing-centered reports could have contributed to increased support for the apartment plan.

3 Identify two events besides media coverage that could have influenced opinions between the March and April surveys.

4 What cautious cause-and-effect claim can an analyst make about the May poll, and what claim cannot be made from the poll alone?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose a current or recent public issue you have observed. Write exactly four sentences: describe media coverage, give evidence of an opinion trend, explain one possible media effect using cautious language, and name one other factor or piece of evidence needed before claiming direct causation.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each change in media coverage, circle each poll result, and number the non-media events that could also affect opinion. Use your marks to judge whether the passage shows a possible cause, a proven cause, or both. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did public opinion change from the March survey to the April survey, and what shift in coverage came before that change?	Support rose from 48 percent to 61 percent, opposition fell from 30 percent to 24 percent, and uncertainty fell from 22 percent to 15 percent. Before this change, television aired repeated housing-centered reports featuring tenants and shared video clips online.
2	Explain one way the housing-centered reports could have contributed to increased support for the apartment plan.	The tenant interviews may have made the housing shortage more vivid and focused viewers on supportive comments and stories, which could have increased support.
3	Identify two events besides media coverage that could have influenced opinions between the March and April surveys.	The city released a report estimating that the project could add 180 homes, and residents attended a public hearing where they could question planners.
4	What cautious cause-and-effect claim can an analyst make about the May poll, and what claim cannot be made from the poll alone?	An analyst can say that traffic-focused coverage may have strengthened concerns because opposition rose after that coverage. The analyst cannot say the coverage directly caused people to change their minds because the poll does not show who watched it or why opinions changed.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

During a week of local news reports and student-made videos about late buses, coverage emphasized students missing class. A student council poll showed that support for adding buses rose from 44 percent before the coverage to 62 percent afterward. The coverage may have increased support by making missed instructional time more visible. However, a new route map released that week could also have changed opinions, so I would compare responses from students who did and did not see the reports.

Accept responses that accurately connect a coverage trend with an opinion trend while using qualified causal language. Strong responses also identify confounding events, missing exposure data, or another reason that timing alone cannot prove causation.