






Politics and the Media

1. The role of the media in a democracy
2. The candidate and television
3. Talk radio
4. The question of media bias
5. Political news and campaigns on the web

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Media Defined

- Media*: (plural) medium of communication, any method used by people to communicate.
- Mass media*: channels through which people can communicate to mass audiences.
- Print media*: newspapers, magazines, books
- Electronic media*: radio, television, Internet

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1. The Role of the Media in a Democracy

- Media are a dominant presence because they provide entertainment
- Play a vital role in our political lives
- Positive media exposure and news coverage are essential to winning votes
- Free press is considered a vital tool of the democratic process

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The Role of the Media in a Democracy (cont)

- The power of the media is enormous and how the media use their power has become an issue with many Americans
- What the media say and do has an impact on what Americans think about politics
- The media also reflect what Americans think about politics


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The Role of the Media in a Democracy (cont)

- Agenda-setting function of the media
 - A criticism against the media is that they play too large a role in determining the issues, events, and personalities that are in the public eye
 - The media decide the relative importance of issues by
 - Publicizing some issues and ignoring others
 - Giving some stories high priority and others low priority


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The Role of the Media in a Democracy (cont)

- The media set the political agenda- the issues that politicians will address
 - Shape public opinion by determining what news will be reported and how it is edited
 - Natural disasters/suffering in one part of the world or the US might be reported differently than what occurs in another part


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The Role of the Media in a Democracy (cont)

- Television has the greatest impact
- Almost every home in the US has TV
 - Plus TV is in airports, shopping malls, restaurants, medical offices, and portable devices
 - TV can be downloaded to digital devices and watched at one's convenience
 - TV is the primary news source for about 60 percent of Americans

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Media Usage

Media Usage by Consumers, 1998-2008

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Multichannel TV	800	750	700	650	600	550
Cable TV	200	250	300	350	400	450
Computers	100	150	200	250	300	350
Blogs	10	25	50	75	100	125

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The Role of the Media in a Democracy (cont)

- Print media will treat an issue in detail
- TV is generally too brief and superficial
 - News is reported quickly-a few minutes or a sound bite of a few seconds
 - Captures a thought or a perspective and has an immediate impact on the viewer
 - Uses visual elements that have exaggerated importance (ex. homeless, politician in an awkward moment)

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The Role of the Media in a Democracy (cont)

- TV offers “selection bias”-viewers don’t know what portions of a video have been left out
- TV is “big business”- stations compete for viewers by airing programs that try to both inform and entertain at the same time

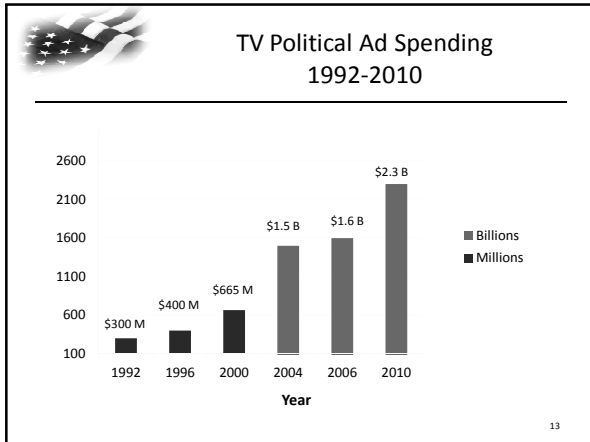
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2. The Candidate and Television

- Today political advertising consumes at least half of the total budget for a major political campaign
- First political TV advertising was during the 1952 presidential election
 - At that time there were only 15 million TV sets
 - Today there are over 100 million in America
 - 1st decade ads were positive
 - Now negative ads are a part of political advertising

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The Candidate and Television (cont)

- Attack ads (advertising that attacks the character of the opposing candidate) dates to 1800
 - The *Federalist Gazette of the US* described Thomas Jefferson as having a “weakness of nerves, want of fortitude, and total imbecility of character.”
- 2006-90% of the political advertising was negative in the final weeks of the election

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The Candidate and Television (cont)

- Issue ads (ads that focus on flaws in the opponents’ positions on issues)
- Candidates undermine their opponents’ credibility by pointing to discrepancies between what the opponent says in speeches and their political records
- Issue ads are also used by interest groups to promote a candidate or party

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The Candidate and Television (conti)

- Extreme ads can create sympathy for the candidate being attacked rather than support for the attacker especially if the attacks are not credible
- Negative ads garner more attention than positive ads
- Some believe that negative ads are likely to focus on substantive political issues instead of personal characteristics

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The Candidate and Television (continued)

- Televised debates
 - 1960 -1st televised debate between John Kennedy (D) and Richard Nixon (R)
 - 1992-only debate that included a 3rd party candidate, GHW Bush (R), Bill Clinton (D), Ross Perot (Reform)
 - Debates have been conducted by the Commission on Presidential Debates since 1987
 - 1st debates were under the League of Women Voters

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The Candidate and Television (cont)

- Debates provide an opportunity for voters to find out how candidates differ on issues
- Gives voters an opportunity to assess personalities
- The impact of the debates on voters is “debatable”
- Since 2000 there have been for each election
 - 3 presidential debates
 - 1 vice-presidential debate

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The Candidate and Television (cont)

- News coverage
 - News coverage is free in contrast to expensive political ads
 - Managed news coverage-planned campaign events that get TV news coverage (Ex. large campaign rallies, interviews)
 - Events are planned to accommodate the press including providing space on campaign planes and buses
 - Campaigns *spin* the story hoping reporters will portray their candidate favorably

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3. Talk Radio

- 1988- 200 talk-show radio stations
- Today- there are more than 1200
- 1 in six Americans listens to talk radio regularly
- The power of talk radio was realized in the 1930s when President Franklin Roosevelt started delivering "fireside chats" on radio.

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Talk Radio (cont)

- Talk-show hosts do not attempt to hide their political or religious bias
 - Often they exaggerate for effect
- Talk-radio is an equalizer because it is relatively inexpensive to start a rival talk show

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4. The Question of Media Bias

- For our political system to work citizens must be well informed
 - They can be well informed only if the news media are fair and balanced
- Today few Americans believe that the news media are unbiased in their reporting
- 2009 Gallup poll:
 - 25% had “a great deal” of confidence in newspapers
 - 22% had “a great deal” of confidence in TV news

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The Question of Media Bias(cont)

- The majority think the media reflect a liberal bias
 - 44 % said news media is too liberal
 - 19 % said news media is too conservative
 - 33 % said news media is about right

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The Question of Media Bias (cont)

- 1980s study:
 - Found that media producers, editors, and reporters showed a notable liberal bias in their news coverage
- 1992 Roper poll
 - Bill Clinton beat GHW Bush by 82% among journalists compared to 5% in the general population

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The Question of Media Bias (cont)

- Some media scholars suggest that even if reporters hold liberal views, these views are not reflected in their reporting
- They point out that reporters are only the starting point for news stories
- Some believe that media bias plays a significant role in shaping presidential campaigns and elections but argue it is not a partisan bias

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The Question of Media Bias (cont)

- They say it is a bias against losers
- A candidate that falls behind in the race is labeled a "loser"
 - That is the image that the voters perceive
- The media use the winner-loser paradigm throughout the campaign, even in the debates

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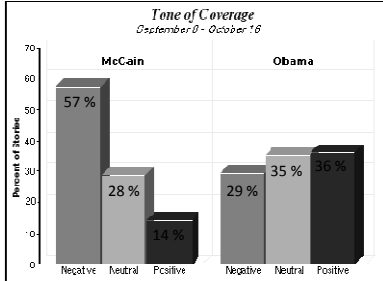
The Question of Media Bias (cont)

- "Selection bias"
 - News directors select programming they believe will attract the largest audiences and garner the highest advertising revenues
 - A Pew study showed that about 66 % of reporters agreed that increased pressure is seriously hurting the quality of news coverage
 - About 1/3 have felt pressure from either advertisers or corporate owners concerning what to write or broadcast

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The Question of Media Bias (cont)



Pew Research Center
 Study included:
 • 2,412 stories
 • From 48 news outlets
 • During the period from Sep 8-Oct 16 2008

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5. Political News and Campaigns on the Web

- About 2/3 of Internet users now consider the Internet to be an important source of news
- Almost every major news organization currently delivers news via the web

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Political News and Campaigns on the Web (cont)

- A major change in the news culture is the "blog"
 - Number of blogs has been doubling every six months since 2003
 - Blogs are offered by
 - Independent journalists
 - Scholars
 - Political activists
 - Citizenry at large

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Political News and Campaigns on the Web (cont)

- The increase in news blogs and do-it-yourself journalism on the Web poses a threat to mainstream news sources
- Beware of blogs...
 - Some blogs are written by bloggers who are hired by companies to rave about their product or by a political candidate to support their positions

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Political News and Campaigns on the Web (cont)

- Internet is an inexpensive way to contact, recruit, mobilize supporters, disseminate information on their positions, and raise campaign funds
- 2004 election- 43% of those who went online for elections news said the information affected their voting decisions

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