

Chapter Twelve

The Media

Chapter Objectives

- Describe the evolution of journalism in United States political history and indicate the differences between the party press and the mass media of today.
- Demonstrate how the characteristics of the electronic media have affected the actions of public officials and candidates for national office.

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- **TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.** Describe the impact of the pattern of ownership and control of the media on the dissemination of news. Show how wire services and TV networks have affected national news coverage. Discuss the impact of the “national press.”
- Discuss the issue of “media bias” and how this bias might manifest itself. Assess the impact of such bias, if it exists, on the electorate.
- Assess the impact of the media on politics and indicate why it is so difficult to find evidence that can be used to make a meaningful and accurate assessment. Explain why the executive branch probably benefits at the expense of Congress.

The Media

- Media: newspapers, television, radio, World Wide Web
- Most people's knowledge of politics comes from the media
- Laws and understandings in the U.S. give the media substantial freedom
- There is a long tradition of private media ownership in U.S.

THEME A: THE HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE NEWS MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES

The Media in History

- Changes in society and technology made possible self-supporting, mass readership **QuickTime** and a **Tiff (Uncompressed) decompressor** are needed to see this picture.
- The middle class favored new, progressive periodicals
- Radio arrives in 1920s, television in the late 1940s

The Media in History

- Shorter sound bites on the nightly news make it more difficult for candidates and officeholders to convey their message
- Politicians now have more sources—cable, early-morning news, news magazine shows
- 40% of American households access the Internet

Table 12.1: Decline in Viewership of the Television Networks

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"Big Three" Networks: Average Shares of Prime-Time Viewing Audience

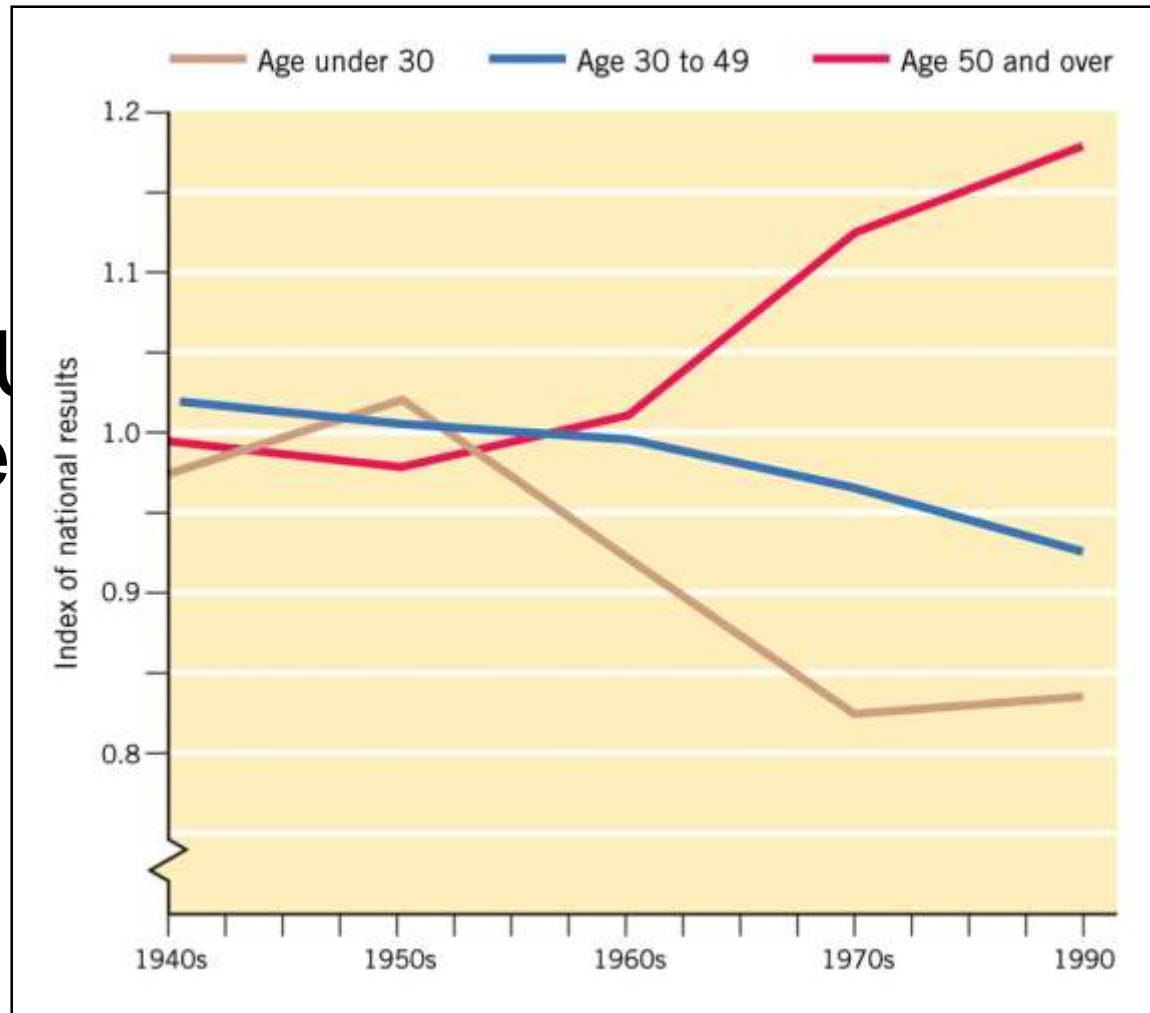
Year	Share
1961	94%
1971	91
1981	83
1991	41
1997	33
2002	29

Source: Updated from *The Public Perspective* (September/October 1992): 6, reporting data provided by Nielsen Media Research and NBC. Used by permission of *The Public Perspective*, a publication of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut; Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau analysis of Nielsen data, April 25, 2002–May 21, 2002.

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Figure 12.1: Young People Have Become Less Interested in Political News



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Los Angeles Times, Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press (June 28, 1990).

Newspapers

- Number of daily newspapers has declined significantly
- Number of cities with multiple papers has declined
- Subscription rates have fallen as most people get their news from television

Role of the National Press

- Gatekeeper: influences what subjects become national political issues and for QuickTime and a TIFF (long compressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture
- Scorekeeper: tracks political reputations and candidacies
- Watchdog: investigates personalities and exposes scandals

Rules Governing the Media

- After publication, newspapers may be sued for libel, obscenity, and incitement to illegal act
- ~~The Supreme Court allows the government to compel reporters to divulge information in court if it bears on a crime~~
- Radio and television are licensed and regulated by the FCC

The Media and Campaigns

- Equal access for all candidates
- Rates no longer are the cheapest
- QuickTime™ and TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
- Now stations and networks can sponsor debates limited to major candidates

Theme A Discussion Questions

- In the United States, the party press has a negative connotation because it imputes bias to a newspaper. Yet many major newspapers in Western Europe are subsidized by political parties and retain a reputation of quality. Consider some of the benefits of a party press. (Does the desire of newspapers in the United States to be “objective” prevent hard questions from being asked? Is political debate in the United States less informed for this reason?)
- Does a popular press pander to the lowest common denominator of interest and taste?
- Explain how the localism and decentralized qualities of the United States news media contribute to the promotion of democracy.

THEME B: MEDIA SELECTION AND BIAS IN THE NEWS

Media Bias

- Members of the national media are generally more liberal than the average citizen.
- Conservative media outlets have become more visible in recent years.
- Talk radio is predominantly conservative.
- Journalistic philosophy is that the news should be neutral and objective.

Table 12.2: Journalist Quick Opinion Versus Public Opinion

Table 12.2 Journalist Opinion Versus Public Opinion

	Journalists	The Public
Self-described ideology:		
Liberal	55%	23%
Conservative	17	29
Favor government regulation of business	49	22
U.S. should withdraw investments from South Africa	62	31
Allow women to have abortions	82	49
Allow prayer in public schools	25	74
Favor "affirmative action"	81	56
Favor death penalty for murder	47	75
Want stricter controls on handguns	78	50
Increase defense budget	15	38
Favor hiring homosexuals	89	55

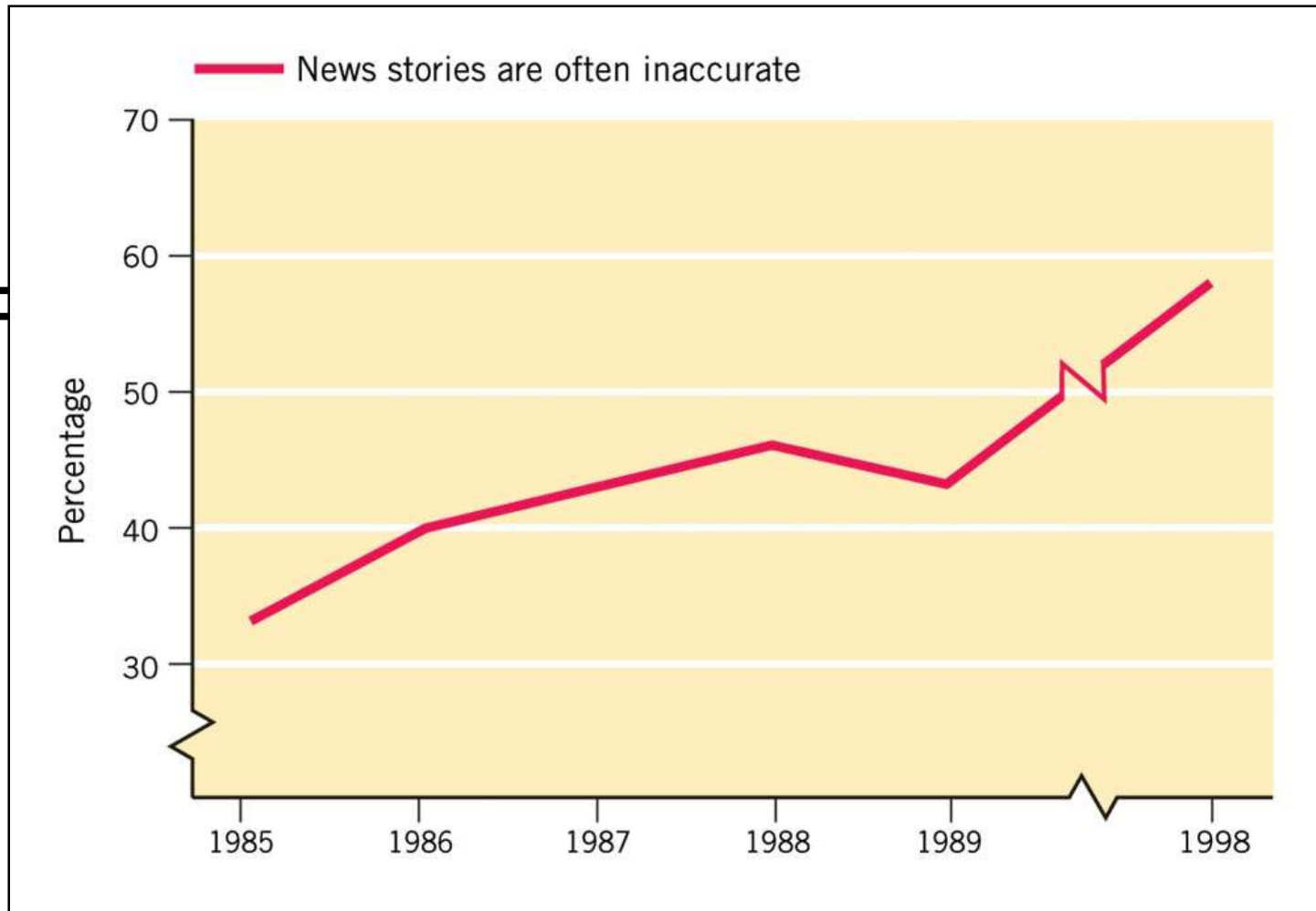
Sources: *Los Angeles Times* poll of about 3,000 citizens and 2,700 journalists nationwide, as reported in William Schneider and I. A. Lewis, "Views on the News," *Public Opinion* (August/September 1985): 7. Reprinted with permission of American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

Influence on the Public

- **Selective attention:** people remember or believe only what they want to
- **TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressors** are needed to see this picture
- **QuickTime™ and a** News (paper) that endorsed incumbents gave them more positive coverage, and voters had more positive feelings about them
- Press coverage affects policy issues that people think are important

Figure 12.2: Public Perception of Accuracy in the Media

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Pew Research Center, "The People and the Press" (February 1999), 13.

Coverage of Government

- The president receives the most coverage
- Gavel-to-gavel coverage and House proceedings processed by COMPASS are needed to see this picture
- Senatorial use of televised committee hearings has turned the Senate into a presidential candidate incubator

The Adversarial Press

- Adversarial press since Vietnam, Watergate, Iran contra™ and a QuickTime™ and a
- TFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
Cynicism created era of attack journalism
are needed to see this picture
- Adversarial media has made negative campaign advertising more socially acceptable

Sensationalism

- Intense competition among many media outlets means that each has a small share of the audience
- Sensationalism draws an audience and is cheaper than investigative reporting
- Reporters may not be checking sources carefully because there is such competition for stories

Theme B Discussion Questions

- If most reporters hold liberal views, why hasn't the American public become more liberal over the years? Could reporters alter public opinion if they tried?
- What are some recent examples of the media's role as watchdog? Is the watchdog function ever exercised in a biased way? How?
- Studies show that the issues the public considers important are substantially the same issues featured by the media. Does this prove that the media set the agenda? What other interpretation of this piece of information is possible?
- On what sorts of issues would we expect the media to have the most impact—whether in setting the agenda, shaping attitudes, or determining how politics is conducted? Would we expect the media to have greater influence on:
 - Domestic issues or foreign-policy issues?
 - Issues where the parties have traditional positions, or issues that cut across party lines?
 - New issues or old issues?
 - National issues or local issues?
 - Socially divisive issues, where deeply committed segments of the population are lined up against each other, or majoritarian issues (such as corruption or the economy), where almost all Americans share similar notions of what is right but are not sure which policy or candidate can achieve it?
 - Young people or old people?

People much exposed to the media or people little exposed to the media?

THEME C: GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA

Government Constraints on the Media

- Reporters must strike a balance between expressing critical views and maintaining **QuickTime** and a **TFP (uncompressed) decompressor** are needed to see this picture
- Governmental tools to fight back: numerous press officers, press releases, leaks, bypass the national press in favor of local media, presidential rewards and punishments

Theme C Discussion Questions

- The media have much freedom in the selection and publication of material in the United States. In 1979, for example, the *Progressive* magazine announced its intention to publish the blueprint to a hydrogen bomb in its next issue. Should the government have intervened to prevent publication? What standards should be used in determining when information can be kept from publication? It should be noted that the blueprint was eventually published. Should a government agency like the FCC be established to regulate the press?
QuickTime™ and a TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
- Freedom of press has greater First Amendment protection than freedom of broadcasting. To illustrate, cigarette advertisements are forbidden on radio and television but not in newspapers and magazines. Are the two forms of media so different to justify this disparity in treatment? How so? Doesn't the decentralization of the broadcast media make enforcement more difficult?

