

Edwards, Wattenberg, and Lineberry
Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy
Fourteenth Edition

Chapter 7

The Mass Media and the Political Agenda

Introduction

■ Mass Media:

- Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet and other means of popular communication

■ High-Tech Politics:

- A politics in which the behavior of citizens and policymakers and the political agenda itself are increasingly shaped by technology

The Mass Media Today

■ Effective communication through media is key to political success.

- Media Events: events purposely staged for the media that nonetheless look spontaneous.
 - Media events can be staged by almost anybody.
- Image making and news management is important, especially for presidents.

The Development of Media Politics

■ Introduction

- The news media wasn't always so important.
- Press Conferences: meetings of public officials with reporters.
 - Franklin Roosevelt held over 1,000
- Investigative Journalism: the use of in-depth reporting to unearth scandals, scams & schemes putting reporters & politicians opposite each other.
- Coverage of presidential candidates has become less favorable.

The Development of Media Politics

■ The Print Media

- Newspapers and magazines
- “Yellow journalism”: a sensational style of reporting characterized newspapers at the turn of the century.
- Pecking order among newspapers
 - *New York Times* has largest impact
- Newspaper and newsweekly circulation has declined.

The Development of Media Politics

■ The Broadcast Media

- Television and radio
- Brought government and politics into peoples' homes.
 - Vietnam War
- Politicians' appearances and mannerisms more important.
 - Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate

The Development of Media Politics

■ Government Regulation of the Broadcast Media

- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates the use of airwaves in three ways:
 - Prevent near monopoly control of market
 - Reviews performance of stations
 - Issues fair treatment rules for politicians

The Development of Media Politics

■ From Broadcasting to Narrowcasting: The Rise of Cable News Channels

- Narrowcasting: media programming on cable TV or Internet that is focused on one topic and aimed at a particular audience, e.g., C-SPAN
- Potential of cable to report on news as it happens and offer myriad choices
- Yet resources are limited and stories are not substantive

The Development of Media Politics

■ The Impact of the Internet

- Potential to inform Americans about politics
- Internet is purposive—people choose what to learn about
- Since Americans are generally disinterested in politics, they will not necessarily use the Internet for political information.
- Blogs provide additional information about news stories.

The Development of Media Politics

■ Private Control of the Media

- Only a small number of TV stations are publicly owned in America.
- Independent in what they can report, media are totally dependent on advertising revenues.
- Chains: massive media conglomerates that account for over four-fifths of the nation's daily newspaper circulation
 - Also control broadcast media

Reporting the News

■ Finding the News

- Beats: specific locations from which news frequently emanates, such as Congress or the White House
- Trial Balloons: an intentional news leak for the purpose of assessing the political reaction
- Reporters and their sources depend on each other—one for stories, the other to get them out.

Reporting the News

TABLE 7.1

The Top 25 Lycos Searches for the Week Before the 2008 Presidential Election

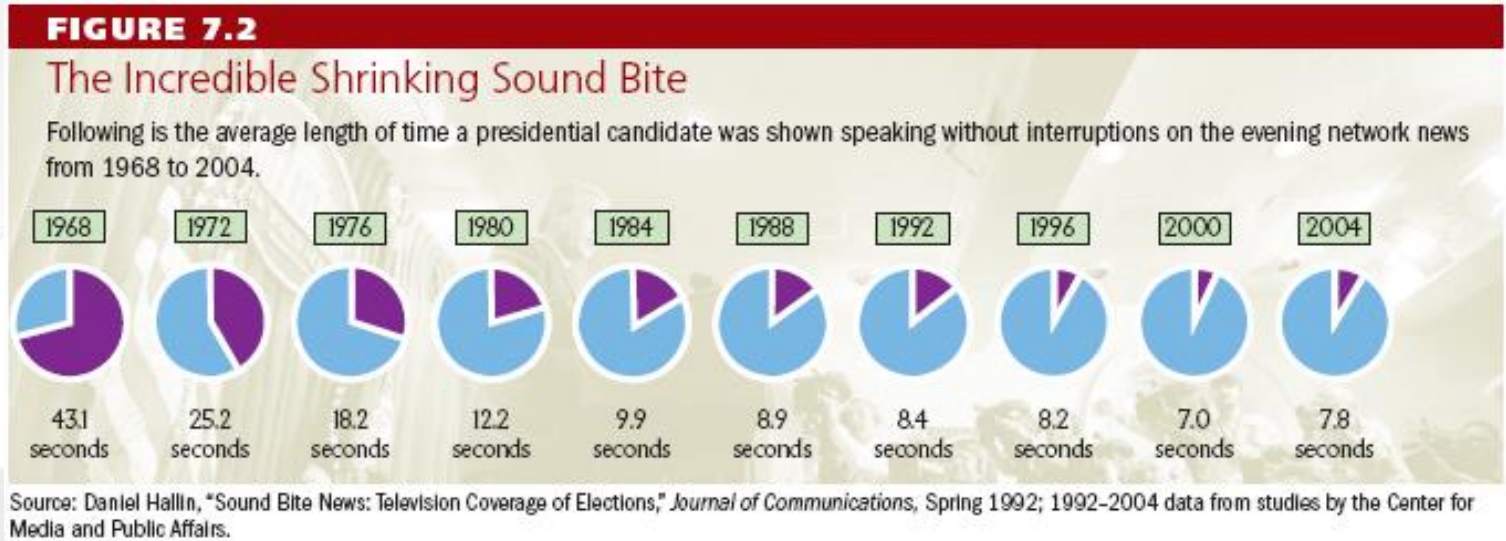
RANK	SEARCH TERM	RANK	SEARCH TERM
1.	Clay Aiken	14.	Naruto
2.	Paris Hilton	15.	WWE
3.	YOUTUBE	16.	Kanye West
4.	Travis Barker	17.	Lance Armstrong
5.	Pamela Anderson	18.	Biggest Loser
6.	Kim Kardashian	19.	Bristol Palin
7.	Facebook	20.	Lehman Brothers Bankruptcy
8.	DJ AM	21.	RUNESCAPE
9.	Britney Spears	22.	Kendra Wilkinson
10.	Dragonball	23.	Carmen Electra
11.	Lindsay Lohan	24.	Jennifer Hudson
12.	Sarah Palin	25.	Eva Mendes
13.	Megan Fox		

Source: <http://50.lycos.com/>.

Reporting the News

■ Presenting the News

- *Superficial* describes most news coverage today.
- Sound Bites: short video clips of approximately 10 seconds



- Major TV networks devote less time to covering political candidates

Reporting the News

■ Bias in the News

- Many people believe the news is biased in favor of one point of view.
- Generally is *not* very biased toward a particular ideology
- News reporting is biased towards what will draw the largest audience—good pictures and negative reporting

Reporting the News

TABLE 7.2

Stories Citizens Have Tuned In and Tuned Out

The explosion of the space shuttle <i>Challenger</i> in 1986	80%
Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon	74%
Impacts of hurricanes Katrina and Rita	73%
Los Angeles riots	70%
Rescue of baby Jessica McClure from a well	69%
School shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado	68%
Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990	66%
Start of hostilities against Iraq in 2003	57%
Supreme Court decision on flag burning	51%
Opening of the Berlin Wall	50%
Arrest of O. J. Simpson	48%
Nuclear accident at Chernobyl	46%
Capture of Saddam Hussein	44%
Controversy over whether Elián González should have to return to Cuba	39%
2000 presidential election outcome	38%
Impeachment trial of President Clinton in the Senate	31%
Confirmation of John Roberts as Chief Justice	28%
Prescription drug benefit added to the Medicare program	25%
2004 Republican National Convention	22%
Release of President Bush's education plan in 2002	21%
Congressional debate about NAFTA	21%
Jack Abramoff's admission that he bribed members of Congress	18%
Ethnic violence in the Darfur region of Sudan	16%
Passage of the Communications Deregulation Bill	12%
Violent protests in Tibet against the Chinese government in 2008	12%
2003 Supreme Court decision upholding campaign finance reform	8%

Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

The News and Public Opinion

- **Television news can affect what people think is important.**
 - Agenda-setting effect
- **The media influence the criteria by which the public evaluates political leaders.**
- **Some stories or events can be made more important, others less important, depending on their coverage.**

The Media's Agenda-Setting Function

■ Policy Agenda

- The issues that attract the serious attention of public officials and other people actively involved in politics at the time

■ Policy Entrepreneurs

- People who invest their political “capital” in an issue to get it placed high on governmental agenda
- Use media to raise awareness of issue

Understanding the Mass Media

■ The Media and the Scope of Government

- Media as watchdog restricts politicians
- New proposals are met with skepticism which restricts scope of government, what it can do
- If media identifies a problem, it forces government to address it, which expands the scope of government

Understanding the Mass Media

■ Individualism and the Media

- Candidates run on their own by appealing to people on television
- Easier to focus on one person like the president, than groups, e.g., Congress or the courts

■ Democracy and the Media

- “Information is the fuel of democracy.”
- But news provides more entertainment than information; it is superficial.
- News is a business, giving people what they want.

Summary

- **Media shape public opinion on political issues and influence policy agenda.**
- **Broadcast media have replaced print media over time.**
- **Narrowcasting and the Internet are further shifting media.**
- **Seeking profits, media are biased in favor of stories with high drama.**