



The Media and U.S. Politics

The Media and US Politics



- The Influence of the Media on Politics
- The Changing Role of the U.S. News Media
- The Media and Public Opinion
- The Media and Elections
- The Media and Governance

The Influence of the Media on Politics

- The media, in particular the print media, have been called the “fourth estate” and the “fourth branch of government.”
- By definition, and to make money, the mass media disseminate messages to a large and often heterogeneous audience.
- The Internet has become a more important source of news in the United States, taking its place alongside print, radio, and television.

The Influence of the Media on Politics

- The Pervasiveness of Television
- The Persistence of Radio



The Influence of the Media on Politics

- The Declining Importance of Newspapers and Newsmagazines
- The Growing Popularity of the Internet



The Changing Role of the U.S. News Media

- A Political Tool
 - Constitution ratified – newspapers were a single sheet
 - Hamilton & Jefferson recognized need to keep voters informed
 - Partisan newspapers - John Fenno (Federalist) & Philip Freneau (Republican)
- Financial Independence – “Penny Press”

The Changing Role of the U.S. News Media

- “Objective Journalism”
 - Reaction to exaggeration and sensationalism (“yellow journalism”)
 - Professional associations and codes of ethics
- The Impact of Broadcasting
 - Radio & television nationalized & personalized news
 - FDR and the “Fireside Chats”

The Changing Role of the U.S. News Media

- Investigatory Journalism
 - Watergate, Jack Anderson and *Washington Post* reporters
- Media Consolidation
- Regulation of the Media

The Media and Public Opinion

- When dramatic events such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 occur, we realize television's power to bring world events into our lives.
- The pervasiveness of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television confers enormous influence.
- For a long time, analysts argued that political leaders wielded more influence in U.S. politics than did the media.

The Media and Public Opinion

The media can also exert significant influence on public opinion.

- Agenda Setting
 - Presidential leadership: President Bush in NYC, Sept. 2001 *“I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.”*
- Issue Framing – media “spin”

The Media and Public Opinion

Are the Media Biased?

- We tend to blame the media for being either too conservative or too liberal.
- Most U.S. news media are committed to being unbiased.
- One bias that does not have a partisan or ideological slant is the bias toward sensationalism.

The Media and Public Opinion

Factors That Limit Media Influence

- Political Socialization
 - Values & attitudes shaped by family & media
 - Party identification
 - Face-to-face contacts (*peer pressure*)
- Selective Exposure
 - Screening out messages
 - Selective perception

The Media and Public Opinion

Factors That Limit Media Influence (cont.)

- Needs
 - Seeking information or entertainment
 - Dominance on broadcast media & newspapers reduced with advent of cable TV & Internet
- Audience Fragmentation

TABLE

10-1 Partisanship and Ideology of Journalists, Policy Makers, and the Public

	Journalists	Policy Makers	Public
Party Identification			
Democrat	27%	43%	34%
Republican	4	24	28
Independent	55	26	21
Other	5	5	12
Do Not Know/Refused	9	2	4
Self-Described Ideology			
Liberal	25%	25%	21%
Moderate	59	52	37
Conservative	6	18	35
Do Not Know/Refused	11	5	7

■ *Why do you think journalists identify as Independent in a far greater percentage than policy makers or the public?*

SOURCE: The Kaiser Foundation, *The Role of Polls in Policy Making*, Combined Topline Results, June 2001, p. 27, www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=13842.

Party self-identification for regular viewers of:

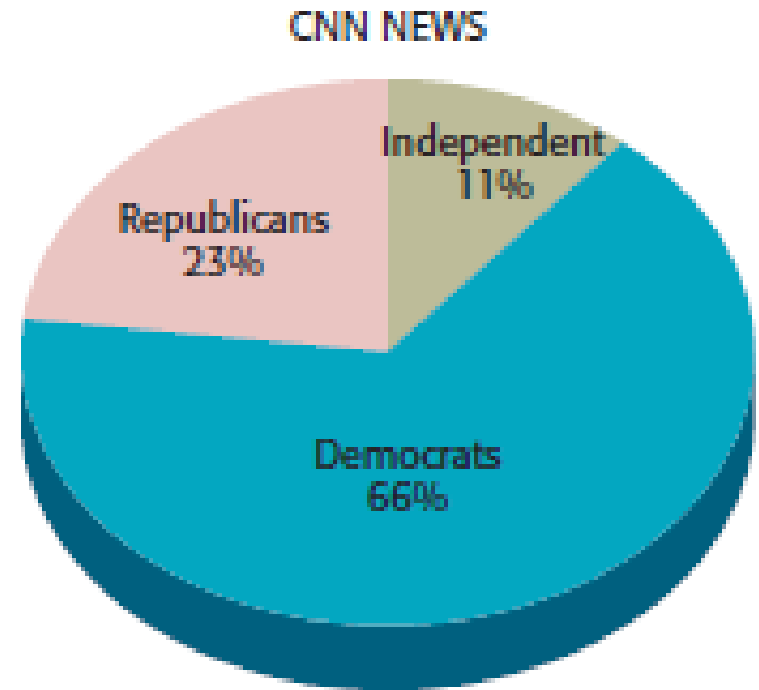
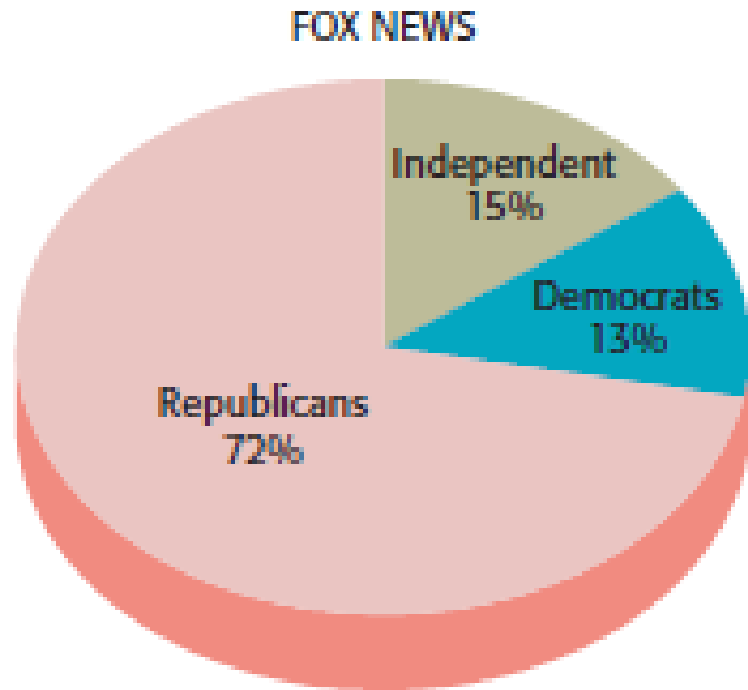


FIGURE 10-1 Partisanship and Preferred News Source.

■ *What do these figures imply about the practice of selective exposure?*

SOURCE: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "July 2009 Political-Media Survey" dataset, people-press.org/data/archive.

The Media and Elections

The Media and Elections

- Choice of Candidates
- Campaign Events
 - Staging press conferences, interviews, “photo ops”
 - Coverage of conventions has declined on network TV since 1952, while cable still carries extensive coverage

The Media and Elections

The Media and Elections (cont.)

- Technology
- Image Making and Media Consultants



The Media and Elections

Impact on Voter Choice

- Personality over Substance
- The Horse Race
- Negative Advertising



The Media and Elections

Impact on Voter Choice (cont.)

- Information About Issues
- Making a Decision
- Election Night Reporting

TABLE

10-2 Presidential Press Conferences: Joint* and Solo Sessions, 1913-2010

President	Total	Solo	Joint	Joint as Percentage of Total	Months in Office
Wilson	159	159	0	0	96
Harding		No Transcripts Available			29
Coolidge	521	521	0	0	67
Hoover	268	267	1	0.4	48
Roosevelt	1020	984	33	3.2	145.5
Truman	324	311	13	4.0	94.5
Eisenhower	193	192	1	0.5	96
Kennedy	65	65	0	0	34
Johnson	135	118	16	11.9	62
Nixon	39	39	0	0	66
Ford	40	39	1	2.5	30
Carter	59	59	0	0	48
Reagan	46	46	0	0	96
G. H. W. Bush	143	84	59	41.3	48
Clinton	193	62	131	67.9	96
G. W. Bush	208	50	158	76	96
Obama [†]	39	17	22	56	21

* In a joint press conference, the president answers questions along with someone else, most often a foreign leader. In a solo session, only the president answers questions. There are three missing transcripts for Roosevelt and one for Johnson, which makes it impossible to determine whether those sessions were solo or joint ones.

[†] Obama through November 2010.

■ *How does President Obama's use of press conferences compare to his recent predecessors?*

SOURCE: Adapted from Martha Joynt Kumar, "Presidential Press Conferences: The Importance and Evolution of an Enduring Forum," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, No. 1 (March 2005); and Kumar 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010.

The Media and Governance

- When policies are being formulated and implemented, decision makers are at their most impressionable.
- Some critics contend that the media's pressuring policy makers to provide immediate answers forces them to make hasty decisions.

The Media and Governance

Political Institutions and the News Media

- Presidents have become the stars of the media.
- Members of Congress have long sought to cultivate positive relationships with news reporters in their states and districts.
- The federal judiciary is the branch least dependent on the press.