Chapter 10

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 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

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

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

Party self-identification for regular viewers of:

**FOX NEWS**
- Republicans: 72%
- Democrats: 13%
- Independent: 15%

**CNN NEWS**
- Republicans: 23%
- Democrats: 66%
- Independent: 11%

**FIGURE 10–1 Partisanship and Preferred News Source.**

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

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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Solo</th>
<th>Joint</th>
<th>Joint as Percentage of Total</th>
<th>Months in Office</th>
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<td>Wilson</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harding</td>
<td></td>
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<td>29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hoover</td>
<td>268</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
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<td>984</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>145.5</td>
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<td>Truman</td>
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<td>311</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>96</td>
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<td>84</td>
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<td>Obama†</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>21</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* 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?

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.