

# THE MEDIA AND U.S. POLITICS

## I. INTRO

- a. In 2008, Obama understood the impact of the Internet and used it to his advantage
  - i. Mostly concentrated on younger people
  - ii. Young use facebook and myspace, which was used extensively by Obama in the 2008 election
  - iii. Music video on Obama titled “Yes We Can!”

## II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA ON POLITICS

### a. INTRO

- i. Print media – the “fourth estate” or 4<sup>th</sup> branch of government
- ii. MASS MEDIA- all forms of information flow, reach almost everyone in U.S.
- iii. NEWS MEDIA – tells people what’s going on in the world
  1. Entertainment and news have become blurred; 60 Minutes and Dateline
- iv. Mass media disseminates messages on a large scale to a heterogeneous crowd
- v. Internet has become a more important source of news in the U.S.

### b. THE PERVASIVENESS OF TELEVISION

- i. TV has changed U.S. politics more than any other invention
- ii. Emotional impact not done in print media
- iii. Most people watch some type of TV news each day
- iv. Growth of around the clock cable news is one of the most recent developments
  1. Used to be only ABC, CBS, NBC; now CNN, FOX, MSNBC

- 2. Cable, Internet, Google bring instantaneous information 24/7
  - v. One of the big changes in last ½ century is dependence on TV advertising for candidates and parties; sound bites and slogans
  - vi. Much less focus on politics in local news; less than a minute per broadcast
  - vii. In large urban markets, newspapers do a much better job of covering Congressional candidates than TV
  - viii. In most contested referendums, advertising is the most important source of information for the voters
- c. THE PERSISTENCE OF RADIO
  - i. Radio continues to reach more households than TV
  - ii. Essential while driving
  - iii. More targeted than TV; can reach a distinct audience; NPR, talk radio
- d. THE DECLINING IMPORTANCE OF NEWSPAPERS
  - i. Declining, especially among younger people
  - ii. Now have national newspapers such as WSJ and USA Today
  - iii. Internet has hurt due to alternative; generating advertising revenue
- e. THE GROWING POPULARITY OF THE INTERNET
  - i. 12BB publicly accessible documents; 153MM unique domain names
  - ii. 37% Internet is primary source for news
  - iii. Younger people use it in place of library for schoolwork
  - iv. Politicians use it effectively for fundraising efforts. Changed the way campaigns are financed

- v. Provides inexpensive way to communicate with organization

### III. THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE U.S. NEWS MEDIA

#### a. INTRO

- i. Average American adult spends 67 minutes per day consuming news
- ii. Media bashing has become a national pastime

#### b. A POLITICAL TOOL

- i. From the framers, the Bill of Rights protected freedom of the press in 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment; watchdog of politics
- ii. From Hamilton and Jefferson, newspapers created partisan viewpoints to be read and understood

#### c. FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

- i. In Jacksonian era, with greater suffrage, the news went from the elite to the masses and increased literacy significantly
- ii. Created the ability to charge for newspapers; “penny press”; less political and more human interest stories to be bought

#### d. OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM

- i. By early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sentiment is press should be independent of political parties; expressed by NY Times
- ii. Reaction to “YELLOW JOURNALISM”- sensationalism and exaggeration of news
- iii. Journalists viewed their work as a profession; code of ethics

#### e. THE IMPACT OF BROADCASTING

- i. Radio and TV personalized the news; follow it as it happens
- ii. 1933, FDR used radio effectively; fireside chats
- iii. TV increased the dramatics of politics

- iv. Cable news created 24/7 information and news; CSPAN

f. INVESTIGATORY JOURNALISM

- i. Do more than just report the news, investigate it which has significant political consequences; 60 Minutes;
- ii. Watergate was most significant; revealed secrets of Nixon administration through the media of TV, radio and newspaper; Deep Throat

g. MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

- i. Consolidation has created media giants that are multinational; Murdoch with FOX
- ii. Multi-news agencies that own newspapers, TV stations, radio stations
- iii. FCC is supporting the consolidation of media outlets; concern about limited access to information- one newspaper per city

h. REGULATION OF THE MEDIA

- i. FCC regulates media through licensing and fines

IV. MEDIATED POLITICS

a. INTRO

- i. 9/11 shows the power of TV into our lives
- ii. Media in general determines what we see, read, hear and reach many people quickly
- iii. Political parties and interest groups are not as important today because media shapes people's perceptions of parties and candidates
- iv. News media has taken the role of speaking for the people; makes news not reports it

b. THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

- i. TV's ability to present images and communicate events has greatly influenced public opinion
  - 1. News coverage of the Vietnam War
  - 2. Watergate

- ii. For a long period of time, analysts believed that the political figure had more influence on media than media had influence on political figure; today media is more aggressive in news gathering
- c. FACTORS THAT LIMIT MEDIA INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION
  - i. POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION – our attitudes, beliefs and values can be stronger than the media message; we tend to watch and read what we believe in; CNN v FOX; NY Times v WSJ
  - ii. SELECTIVITY –
    - 1. SELECTIVE EXPOSURE- filtering out what we don't believe in; creating a bias
    - 2. SELECTIVE PERCEPTION – perceiving what we want out of political messages; Clinton's Lewinsky affair
  - iii. NEEDS – people read and watch news media for different reasons; entertainment (sex scandals) vs. affect on lives (economic issues)
  - iv. AUDIENCE FRAGMENTATION – growth of cable and internet allow users to tailor the media to their specific preferences; CNN vs. FOX vs. CSPAN vs MSNBC vs Comedy Channel
- d. ARE THE MEDIA BIASED?
  - i. People blame media for being too conservative or liberal
  - ii. Most U.S. news media are committed to being unbiased
    - 1. Insulate advertising from news and content
    - 2. Internal checks and balances between advertising and content
  - iii. Some commentators complain that reporters have become too friendly with who they cover
  - iv. Review table 10-1 on pg. 289

- v. Journalists are more liberal than the population as a whole
- vi. One bias that is not partisan is the bias towards sensationalism
- e. PUBLIC OPINION – 2 important influences media exert
  - i. AGENDA SETTING – by calling public attention to certain issues, media influences what will be debated; not absolute power
    - 1. Reagan used the media to set the national agenda; “the great communicator”
    - 2. Most effective when it appears to be natural or unscripted
  - ii. ISSUE FRAMING
    - 1. Media “spin”
    - 2. In referendum campaigns, the side that defines the battle the best, wins

## V. THE MEDIA AND ELECTIONS

### a. INTRO

- i. Coverage of campaigns greatest in presidential elections; least in state and local
- ii. Smaller the election, the more sway of opinion by news coverage; less news coverage
- iii. Diversification of news media, especially in larger campaigns, lessens the ability to influence the outcome of elections

### b. CHOICE OF CANDIDATES

- i. Extensive use of TV enforces looking and sounding good, as well as increasing the political consulting industry
- ii. Highlights mistakes and gaffes by candidates and office holders; good TV
- iii. Candidates can overcome gaffes by utilizing TV advertising; Obama in PA

- iv. TV can influence who has a chance to win; creative ads by lesser known candidates can get media attention
- c. CAMPAIGN EVENTS
  - i. “photo ops”; reinforce visual message and public image
  - ii. National conventions are very strong events that capture national attention
    - 1. Cable channels now cover to a much greater extent than traditional TV
- d. TECHNOLOGY
  - i. Satellites allow candidates to broadcast nationally from home town or wherever they are
  - ii. Target specific groups via cable TV or Internet
  - iii. Internet and email used for more passive voters
    - 1. Citizens can interact with each other via blogs, utube, facebook
- e. IMAGE MAKING AND MEDIA CONSULTANTS
  - i. TV and the Internet media have given rise to MEDIA CONSULTANTS- campaign professionals who can provide candidates with positive media perception on media relations, advertising strategies, and opinion polling
    - 1. “power ties”; blue shirts
    - 2. Taken over the role of party politicians
    - 3. Coach candidates on how to act and behave on TV
    - 4. Utilize FOCUS GROUPS - small sample of people with in depth interviews
    - 5. Some criticize media consultants are the new political elite
- f. THE MEDIA AND VOTER CHOICE
  - i. PERSONALITY OVER SUBSTANCE
    - 1. Critics believe more importance on looks and personality than substantive issues

2. Strong public appetite for candidates' strengths and weaknesses
3. Much depends on the sophistication of voters; well-informed are less swayed
- ii. THE HORSE RACE
  1. More commentary on where candidate is in polls versus issues
  2. Propensity to discuss the "game" rather than issues
- iii. NEGATIVE ADVERTISING
  1. Voters say they dislike attack ads, but they actually do work and inform the voting public
  2. Can create some VOTER SUPPRESSION – not turning out to vote
- iv. INFORMATION ABOUT ISSUES
  1. In recent elections have experimented with issues-centered focus called CIVIC JOURNALISM
- v. MAKING A DECISION
  1. More influence in primary versus general election because there is less information on primaries
- vi. ELECTION NIGHT REPORTING
  1. Controversy as to whether election night reporting influences the western states; don't show up to vote if know they are losing
    - a. Project winner when they are wrong
    - b. Effectiveness of exit polling

## VI. THE MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE

### a. INTRO

- i. Lack of press attention to the way policies are implemented explains why we know little of day to day governance



- ii. Media more concerned with large events and sensationalism
- b. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE MEDIA
  - i. Presidents are the stars of the media
    - 1. “Bully pulpit”
    - 2. Manipulate news coverage to his advantage
    - 3. Most media coverage is favorable to neutral
  - ii. Members of Congress try to cultivate relationships with media
  - iii. Due to large size of Congress, less media influence
    - 1. More likely to get negative coverage
    - 2. Only given media coverage for sensationalist situations
  - iv. Federal judiciary is the least dependent on the press
    - 1. Doesn’t rely on public opinion due to lack of term limits
    - 2. Manipulation of press more subtle
  - v. News media most influential at local level
    - 1. Fewer news sources
  - vi. Not all believe power is harmful
    - 1. Watchdog ability