

## Chapter 12

# The Media

## REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

### CHAPTER FOCUS

In this chapter you examine the historical evolution and current status of relations between the government and the news media—how the media affect government and politics and how government seeks to affect the media.

After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. Describe the evolution of journalism in American political history, and describe the differences between the party press and the mass media of today.
2. Demonstrate how the characteristics of the electronic media have affected the actions of public officials and candidates for national office.
3. Describe the effect of the pattern of ownership and control of the media on the dissemination of news, and show how wire services and television networks have affected national news coverage. Discuss the influence of the national press.
4. Describe the rules that govern the media, and contrast the regulation of electronic and print media. Describe the effect of libel laws on freedom of the press and of government rules on broadcasters.
5. Assess the effect of the media on politics, and discuss why it is 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.
6. Describe the adversarial press and how reporters use their sources. Describe how an administration can develop tactics to use against the adversarial press.

### STUDY OUTLINE

#### I. Introduction

##### A. New media v. the old media

1. New media: television and the Internet
2. Old media: newspapers and magazines
3. New media getting stronger
  - a) 60 Minutes story on Bush and the National Guard
  - b) Bloggers rebuttal
  - c) Young people and the Internet

##### B. Media and public officials

1. Love-hate relationship
  - a) The media advance careers and causes
  - b) But the media also criticize, expose and destroy

2. Relationship shaped by laws and understandings that accord tremendous degree of freedom for the media

a) Cross national study of freedom of press

(1) Comparisons with Great Britain

(a) Libel law in Great Britain

(b) Official Secrets Act (Great Britain)

(c) Freedom of Information Act (United States)

(d) Government regulation of press in other nations (Austria, France, Italy)

b) The media landscape in the United States

(1) Long tradition of private ownership

(2) No licensing for newspapers

(3) Licenses and F.C.C. regulation for radio and television

(4) Potential limits to freedom

(a) The need for profit

(b) Media bias

## II. Journalism in American political history

### A. The party press

1. Parties created and subsidized various newspapers

2. Circulation was small, newspapers expensive, advertisers few

3. Newspapers circulated among political and commercial elites

### B. The popular press

1. Changes in society and technology made the press self-supporting and able to reach mass readership

a) High-speed press

b) Telegraph

c) Associated Press, 1848; objective reporting

d) Urbanization allowed large numbers to support paper

e) Government Printing Office; end of subsidies in 1860

2. Influence of publishers, editors created partisan bias

a) "Yellow journalism" to attract readers

b) Hearst foments war against Spain

3. Emergence of a common national culture

### C. Magazines of opinion

1. Middle class favors new, progressive periodicals

a) *Nation*, *Atlantic*, *Harper's* in 1850s and 1860s on behalf of certain issues

b) *McClure's*, *Scribner's*, *Cosmopolitan* later on

2. Individual writers gain national followings through investigative reporting

3. Number of competing newspapers declines, as does sensationalism

4. Today the number of national magazines focusing on politics accounts for a small and declining fraction of magazines

### D. Electronic journalism

1. Radio arrives in the 1920s, television in the 1940s

2. Politicians could address voters directly but people could easily ignore them

3. But fewer politicians could be covered.

a) President routinely covered

b) Others must use bold tactics

4. Recent rise in the talk show as a political forum has increased politicians' access to electronic media

a) Big Three networks have made it harder for candidates by shortening sound bites

- b) But politicians have more sources: cable, early morning news, news magazine shows
    - c) These new sources feature lengthy interviews
  - 5. No research on consequences of two changes:
    - a) Recent access of politicians to electronic media
    - b) “Narrowcasting,” which targets segmented audiences
  - 6. Politicians continue to seek visuals even after they are elected
- E. The Internet
  - 1. Ultimate free market in political news
  - 2. Increasingly important role in politics
    - a) Fund raising efforts
    - b) Blogs, discussion and criticism
    - c) Candidate web sites
  - 3. Voters and political activists can now communicate with each other
- III. The structure of the media
  - A. Degree of competition
    - 1. Newspapers
      - a) Number of daily newspapers has declined significantly
      - b) Number of cities with multiple papers has declined
        - (1) 60 percent of cities had competing newspapers in 1900
        - (2) Only 4 percent in 1972
        - (3) Joint Operating Agreements allow same company to own the major papers of different cities
      - c) Newspaper circulation has fallen in recent years
      - d) Most people now get most of their news from television
      - e) Age and newspaper readership
        - (1) Made little difference in the 1940s and 1950s
        - (2) Radical change by the 1970s
    - 2. Radio and television
      - a) Intensely competitive, becoming more so
      - b) Composed mostly of locally owned and managed enterprises, unlike Europe
      - c) Orientation to local market
      - d) Limitations by FCC; widespread ownership created
  - B. The national media
    - 1. Existence somewhat offsets local orientation
    - 2. Consists of
      - a) Wire services
      - b) National magazines
      - c) Television networks—some with news around the clock
      - d) Newspapers with national standing and readership because
        - (1) They sell many copies
        - (2) They are closely followed by political elites
        - (3) Radio and television often consult such papers in their own reporting
        - (4) They provided background, investigative, or interpretive stories about issues and politics
    - 3. Roles played
      - a) Gatekeeper: what is news, for how long
        - (1) Auto safety
        - (2) Water pollution
        - (3) Prescription drugs
        - (4) Crime rates

- b) Scorekeeper: who is winning or losing
  - (1) Attention to Iowa, New Hampshire
  - (2) Free publicity for winners and momentum for subsequent primaries
- c) Watchdog: investigate personalities and expose scandals
  - (1) Hart's relationship with Donna Rice in 1987
  - (2) Watergate (Woodward and Bernstein)

#### IV. Rules governing the media

##### A. Newspapers versus electronic media

- 1. Newspapers almost entirely free from government regulation; prosecutions only after the fact and limited: libel, obscenity, incitement
- 2. Radio and television licensed, regulated

##### B. Confidentiality of sources

- 1. Reporters want right to keep sources confidential
- 2. Most states and federal government disagree
- 3. Supreme Court allows government to compel reporters to divulge information in court if it bears on a crime
- 4. Myron Farber jailed for contempt
- 5. Police search of newspaper office upheld

##### C. Regulating broadcasting

- 1. FCC licensing
  - a) Seven years for radio
  - b) Five years for television
  - c) Stations must serve "community needs"
  - d) Public service, other aspects can be regulated
- 2. Recent movement to deregulate
  - a) License renewal by postcard
  - b) No hearing unless opposed
  - c) Relaxation of rule enforcement
- 3. Radio broadcasting deregulated the most
  - a) Telecommunications Act of 1996 permits one company to own as many as eight stations in large markets (five in smaller ones)
  - b) Results:
    - (1) Few large companies now own most of the big-market radio stations
    - (2) Greater variety of opinion and shows on radio
- 4. Deregulation and the content of broadcasting
  - a) Fairness Doctrine (eventually abandoned)
  - b) Equal Time Rule

##### D. Campaigning

- 1. Equal time rule applies
  - a) Equal access for all candidates
  - b) Rates no higher than least expensive commercial rate
  - c) Debates formerly had to include all candidates
    - (1) Reagan-Carter debate sponsored by LWV as a "news event"
    - (2) Now stations and networks can sponsor
- 2. Efficiency in reaching voters
  - a) Works well when market and boundaries of state or district overlap
  - b) More Senate than House candidates buy TV time

#### V. Are the national media biased?

##### A. What are the views of members of the national media?

- 1. More self-described liberals than in the general public
- 2. Higher voting for Democratic candidates than in the general public

3. More secular
4. Some evidence that levels of liberalism are increasing
5. Public perception of a liberal bias
6. Existence of conservative media outlets—talk radio
  - a) Rapid growth
  - b) Explanations for conservative dominance
    - (1) High ratings
    - (2) More self-described conservatives than liberals in this country
    - (3) Conservatives do not feel other media outlets reflect their views
    - (4) Liberal audience is divided into racial and ethnic groups which are loyal to media outlets which are more narrow in their orientation

B. Do the beliefs of the national media affect how they report the news?

1. American ideal of neutrality and objectivity
2. Opportunity for bias varies with the type of story reported
  - a) Routine stories
  - b) Feature stories
  - c) Inside stories
3. Trends in American history
  - a) Early newspapers emphasized opinion
  - b) With technological change (telephone, telegraph, AP) came emphasis on routine stories
  - c) With radio, television and round the clock news came an emphasis on feature and insider stories
4. Research on media beliefs and reporting
  - a) *Times* and *Post* stories covering 12 years
    - (1) Conservatives much more likely to be identified as such
    - (2) Ideological labeling might influence readers
  - b) Study of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine
    - (1) Focus on stories concerning nuclear power
    - (2) Scientists and engineers in the field were avoided
    - (3) Magazines were opponents of nuclear power
  - c) Coverage of economic news by top ten newspapers
    - (1) Varied depending on whether a Democrat or Republican was in office of the presidency
    - (2) Headlines were more positive with Democratic presidents
  - d) Assessment of the *Times* by its public editor

C. Does what the media write or say influence how their readers and viewers think?

1. Selective attention complicates our understanding
2. Study of 60 Senate contests over five year period
  - a) Newspapers that endorsed incumbents gave them more positive coverage
  - b) Voters were more positive about endorsed incumbents
3. Study of the impact of FOX news aired at different times in different cities
4. CN and NC studies showing influence of media on public beliefs about issues
  - a) Influence may be mitigated by personal experience—unemployment, crime, gasoline prices, etc.
  - b) Where there is lack of personal knowledge, influence may be greater—American foreign policy, the environment, etc.
5. Best evidence of media impact: name recognition and popularity and support
  - a) Estes Kefauver
  - b) Importance of a media presence
  - c) Impact on television commentary on presidential popularity

## VI. Government and the news

### A. Prominence of the president

1. Theodore Roosevelt: systematic cultivation of the press
2. Franklin Roosevelt: press secretary a major instrument for cultivating press
3. Press secretary today: large staff, many functions
4. White House press corps is the focus of press secretary
5. Unparalleled personalization of government

### B. Coverage of Congress

1. Never equal to that of president; members resentful
2. House quite restrictive
  - a) No cameras on the floor until 1978
  - b) Sometimes refused to permit coverage of committees
  - c) Gavel-to-gavel coverage of proceedings since 1979
3. Senate more open
  - a) Hearings since Kefauver; TV coverage of sessions in 1986
  - b) Incubator for presidential contenders through committee hearings

### C. Why do we have so many news leaks?

1. *Constitution*: separation of powers
  - a) Power is shared, decentralized
  - b) Branches of government compete
  - c) Not illegal to print most secrets
2. Adversarial nature of the press since Vietnam War, Watergate
  - a) Press and politicians distrust each other
  - b) Media are eager to embarrass officials
3. Cynicism created era of attack journalism
  - a) Many people do not like this kind of news
  - b) People believe media slant coverage
  - c) Public support for idea of licensing journalists or fines to discourage biased reporting
4. Public confidence in big business down and now media are big business
5. Drive for market share forces media to use theme of corruption
6. Increased use of negative advertising

### D. Sensationalism in the media

1. Prior to 1980, sexual escapades of political figures not reported
2. Since 1980, sex and politics extensively covered
3. Reasons for change
  - a) Sensationalism gets attention in a market of intense competition
  - b) Sensational stories are often cheaper than expert analysis and/or investigation of stories about policy or substantive issues
  - c) Journalists have become distrusting adversaries of government
  - d) Journalists are much more likely to rely on unnamed sources today and, as a result, are more easily manipulated
4. Impact of 9/11
  - a) Public interest in national news
  - b) Greater confidence and trust in news organizations, for about a year

### E. Government constraints on journalists

1. Reporters must strike a balance between
  - a) Expression of views
  - b) Retaining sources
2. Abundance of congressional staffers makes it easier

- 3. Governmental tools to fight back
  - a) Numerous press officers and press releases (canned news)
  - b) Controlling form of communication
    - (1) On the record
    - (2) Off the record
    - (3) On background
    - (4) On deep background
  - c) Skipping over national media and going local