

# The Mass Media and the Political Agenda

## Chapter 7

# 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

- Media Events:
  - Events purposely staged for the media that nonetheless look spontaneous. Media events can be staged by almost anybody.
- Other items to consider:
  - 60% presidential campaign spending is TV ads
  - Image making / news management is important, especially for presidents

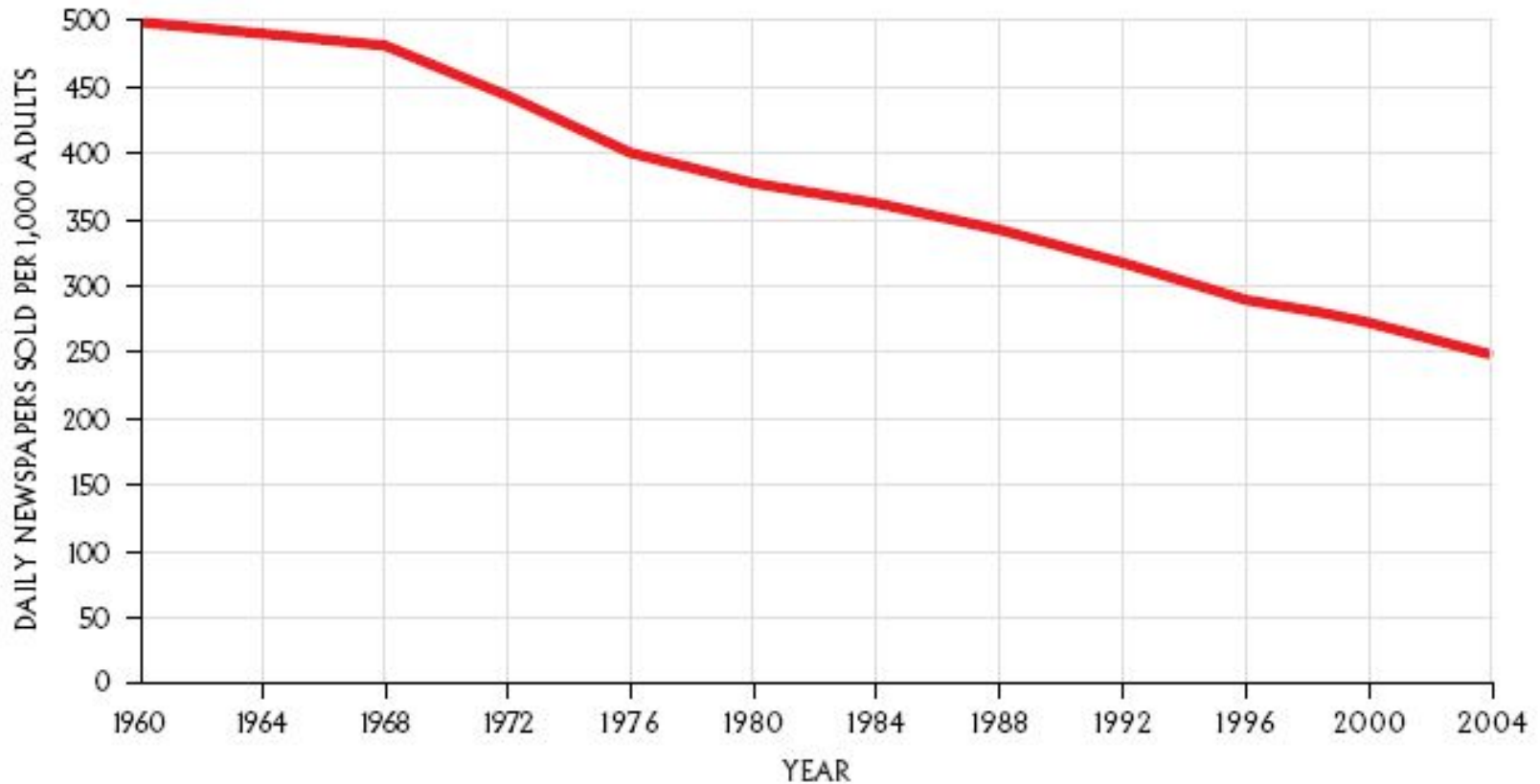
# The Development of Media Politics

- Introduction
  - The news media wasn't always so important.
  - Press Conferences: meetings of public officials with reporters - Roosevelt used many of these.
  - Investigative Journalism: the use of in-depth reporting to unearth scandals, scams & schemes putting reporters & politicians opposite each other.

# The Development of Media Politics

- The Print Media
  - Newspapers and magazines
  - “Yellow journalism” characterized newspapers at the turn of the century.
  - Among the press there is a pecking order.
  - Newspaper circulation has been declining.
  - Magazines are also struggling.

# The Development of Media Politics



Source: *Editor and Publisher*; U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 7.1

# The Development of Media Politics

- The Broadcast Media
  - Television and radio
  - Brought government and politics into people's homes.
  - Made the politicians more aware of their appearance and mannerisms.
  - Television is the principal source of news for most Americans, and most believable.

# The Development of Media Politics

- Government Regulation of the Broadcast Media
  - The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates the use of airwaves.
- Narrowcasting: Cable TV and the Internet
  - Media programming on cable TV or the Internet that is focused on one topic and aimed at a particular audience



# The Development of Media Politics

- Private Control of the Media
  - Only a small number of TV stations are publicly owned in America.
  - The media are totally dependent on advertising revenues.
  - Chains consist of massive media conglomerates that control almost three-quarters of the nation's daily newspaper circulation as well as 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 Embedded Reporting of the Iraq War: Opposing Opinions**

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About two weeks after the start of hostilities against Iraq the *Los Angeles Times* poll asked a representative sample of the U.S. population a carefully balanced question about the embedded reporting of the war. The question was:

*Reporters have been assigned to U.S. military units in the region of Iraq and given unprecedented access to military action and personnel. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view: (1) "Greater media coverage of the military action and U.S. personnel in Iraq is good for the country because it gives the American people an uncensored view of events as they unfold" or (2) "Greater media coverage of the military action and U.S. personnel in Iraq is bad for the country because it provides too much information about military actions as they unfold?"*

The results are presented here for the sample as a whole, as well as by gender.

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	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Embedded reporting good for the country	55%	58%	52%
Embedded reporting bad for the country	37%	34%	41%
Don't know	8%	8%	7%

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Source: *Los Angeles Times* national poll conducted April 2–3, 2003.

# Reporting the News

- Presenting the News
  - *Superficial* describes most news coverage today
  - Sound Bites: Short video clips of approximately 15 seconds.

# Reporting the News

- Bias in the News
  - Many people believe the news favors one point of view over another.
  - Generally are *not* very biased along liberal / conservative lines.
  - Generally are biased towards what will draw the largest audience.

# The News and Public Opinion

- Television news can affect what people think is important.
- The media influence the criteria by which the public evaluates political leaders.
- Some policies can be made more important, others will be 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.
  - All depend on good images and good will.

# Understanding the Mass Media

- The Media and the Scope of Government
  - The media as watchdog restricts politicians.
  - New proposals are met with skepticism - so that restricts what the government can do.
  - But, if the media identify a problem, they ask what the government is going to do to fix it.



# Understanding the Mass Media

- Individualism and the Media
  - Candidates can now run on their own.
  - Easier to focus on one person like the President, than Congress or the courts.
- Democracy and the Media
  - “Information is the fuel of democracy.”
  - But, is the news more entertainment than information? Is this what the people want?