

# The Media



# Development of the Mass Media

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- Mass media
  - Means of communication that are technologically capable of reaching most people and economically affordable to most
  - Have existed for less than two centuries
  - Political power related to control of information

# Newspapers and Magazines

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- Early newspapers weeklies
- As party politics developed, so did the parties' relationships with newspapers.
  - Most were one-sided
  - Printed the party line
- Technological improvements made it easier to publish newspapers.
  - Penny press
  - Sensationalism—sells papers.
  - Still partisan

# Newspapers and Magazines

- After the Civil War, the independent press began to develop.
- Publishers began to see that they need not alienate potential readers with highly partisan offerings.
- Party machines no longer required services of partisan newspapers.
- Newspapers became big business.
  - Chains emerged thanks to Hearst and Scripps.
  - No longer voice of one editor heard.
  - More professional.
  - Influence of the Progressive Muckrakers
  - Magazines emerged that focused on the new, educated middle class.



# Newspapers and Magazines

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- Today, newspapers and magazines are an important part of mass media.
  - Over 10,000 newspapers and 12,000 periodicals are currently published.
  - *NYT* and *LAT* have circulations of more than 1 million a day.
  - *WSJ* reaches over 2 million.
- Most important development: decline in diversity
  - Mergers
  - Media conglomerates
  - Are mass media losing their value as they need to generate corporate profit?

# Radio

- 1930s: Print monopoly of mass communication began to erode.
  - First radio stations appeared in the 1920s.
  - Radio news agencies emerged in 1930s.
- Used as a political tool
  - President Coolidge used radio to communicate with voters.
  - Roosevelt used radio to calm the nation with his “fireside chats.”
- Radio spread quickly. Today there are close to 16,000 radio stations that reach nearly 85 percent of the population.
  - similar problems: lack of diversity due to radio chains
- Talk radio format most important political development



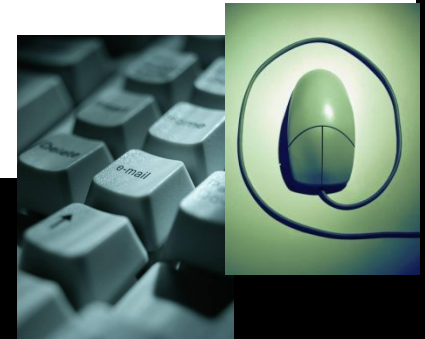
# Television



- To most, mass media means TV.
  - More than 1500 television stations are in the U.S.
  - 99 percent of all households have at least one TV set. The average is four.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> station went on air in 1939.
  - By 1960, 90 percent of households had TVs.
  - Three large networks dominated the industry.
  - After cable deregulation, households with cable went from 20% in 1970 to 67% in 2000.
  - Networks lost audience share. May have responded with less news (to cut costs).
  - Still the largest single source of information available to the public.

# New Media

- New media
  - Cable and satellite TV, fax, e-mail, and the Internet – the media that have grown out of the technological advances of the past few decades
  - Internet may not really be mass media yet.
    - Only about half the American population has access to the Internet.
    - But, its political importance is growing.
  - New media may alter the nature of political appeals from general to more tailored.





# Government Regulation of the Electronic Media

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- Federal Radio Commission (1927)
  - necessary to allocate a limited public resource: bandwidth
- Federal Communications Commission (1934)
  - When television emerged, it fell under the FCC's regulation responsibilities.
- They issued licenses to operate and specified the conditions of operation.

# Government Regulation of the Electronic Media

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- Equal-time rule
  - Promulgated by the FCC, it required any station selling time to a candidate to sell time to other candidates at comparable rates.
- From 1949 to 1987 FCC also enforced a fairness doctrine
  - required stations to devote a reasonable amount of time to matters of public importance and to air contrasting viewpoints on those matters
  - eventually required stations to give public figures who were criticized during program an opportunity to reply
- 1990s saw much deregulation
  - abolished local phone monopolies, deregulated cable rates

# What Information Sources Do Americans Rely On?

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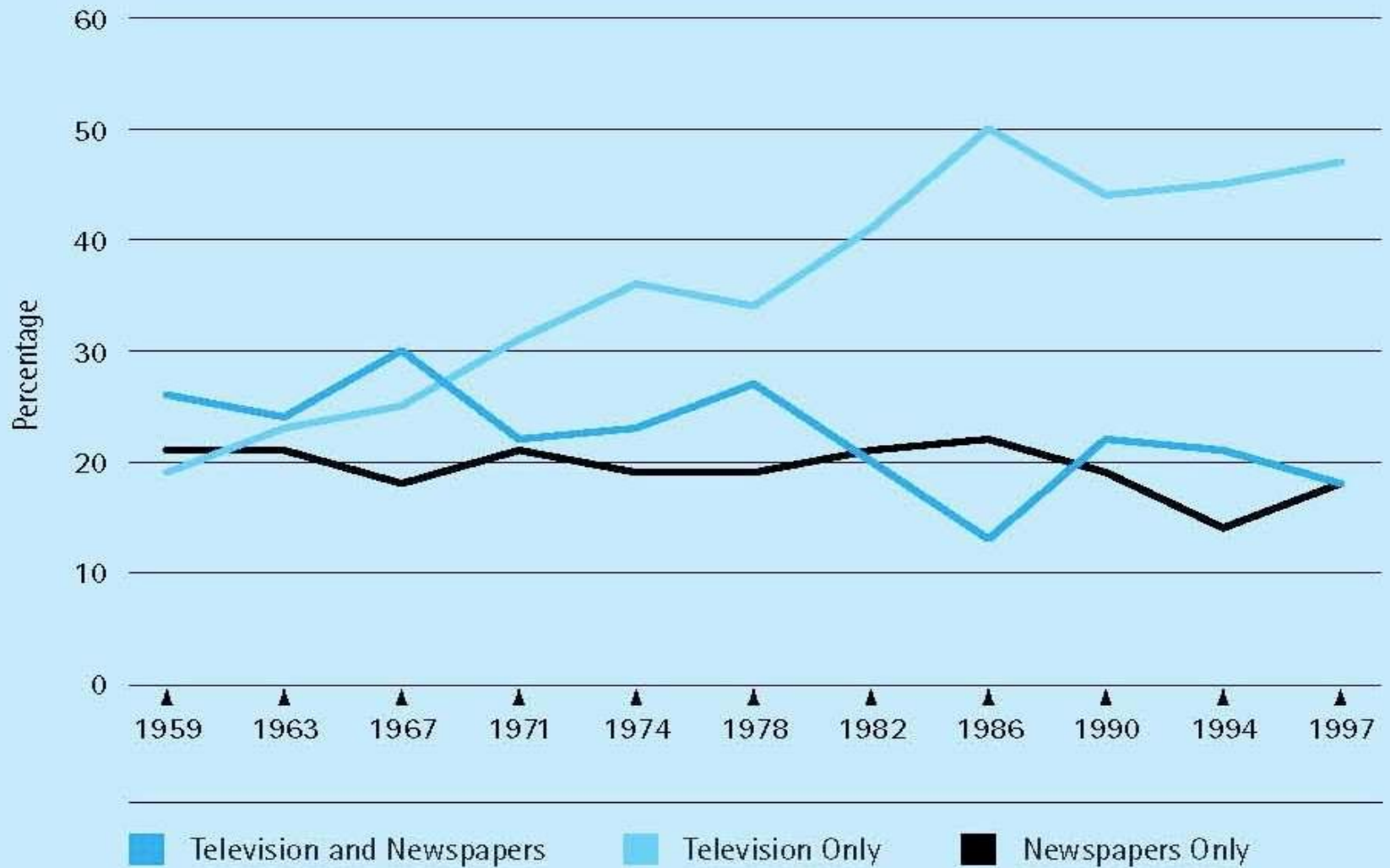
- TV is the public main source of information beginning in the 1960s.
- Newspapers have slightly more influence over politics than society.
  - More influence in local elections than TV
  - And less but substantial influence on state elections
  - Well-educated and older people are likely to rely on newspapers.

TABLE 9.1  
CITIZEN USAGE OF THE NEWS MEDIA, 1998

Percent of all Americans who regularly . . .	
Read daily newspaper	68
Watch local evening news	64
Listen to radio news	52
Watch network news	38
Watch news magazines (such as <i>60 Minutes</i> )	37
Watch morning network news	23
Watch CNN	23
Go online to read news	20
Read news magazines (such as <i>Newsweek</i> )	15
Listen to NPR	15
Watch TV tabloids	14
Listen to talk radio	13
Watch CNBC	12
Watch MSNBC	8
Listen to Rush Limbaugh	5
Watch PBS <i>NewsHour</i> with Jim Lehrer	4
Watch C-SPAN	4

SOURCE: Adapted from Pippa Norris, *A Virtuous Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 268.

How often do you get your news from each of the following sources: every day, several times a week, occasionally, or never? (Plot points depict respondents who answered every day.)



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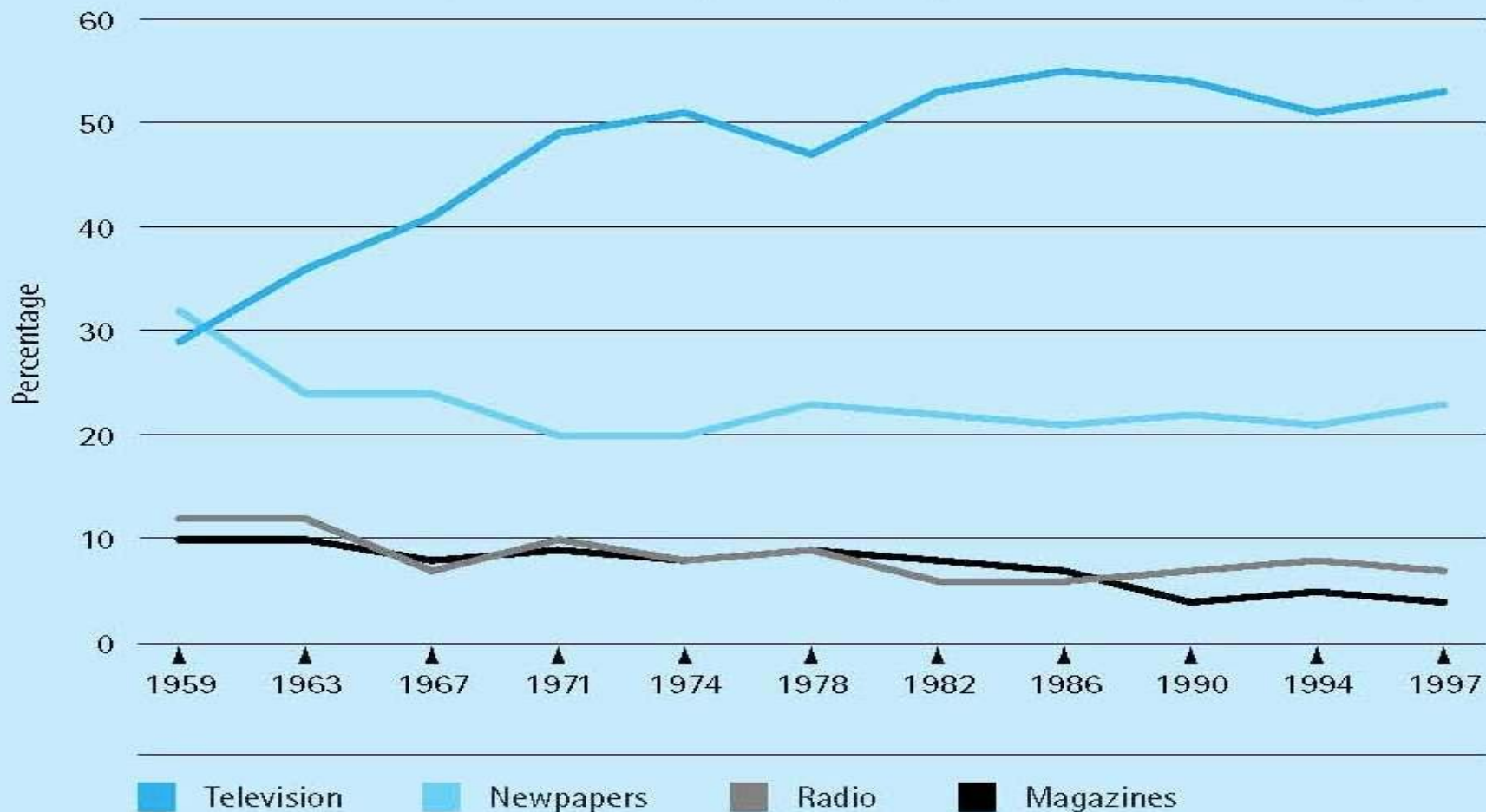


FIGURE 9.1

### TV Is the Primary Source of News for Contemporary Americans

A majority of Americans watch TV news, and almost a majority rely exclusively on the television to learn about national politics.

SOURCE: Data are taken from the Roper Organization, *America's Watching: Public Attitudes Toward Television* (1997).

# Media Effects?

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- Selective perception
  - tendency to discount information that is inconsistent with one's prior predisposition in favor of information consistent with what one already believes
- General notion is that the mass media can have an impact on public opinion but it is subtler in nature than mass persuasion.

# Agenda Setting

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- Agenda setting
  - Occurs when the media affect the issues and problems people think about, even if the media do not determine what positions people adopt
- CNN effect
  - Purported ability of TV to raise a distant foreign affairs situation to national prominence by broadcasting vivid pictures



# Priming and Framing

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- Priming
  - Occurs when the media affect the standards people use to evaluate political figures or the severity of a problem
- Framing
  - Occurs when the media induce people to think about an issue from one standpoint rather than from another



# Socialization

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- The media may play a role in socializing individuals.
- Ex: sex and violence on television
- Not clear how this influences American politics
  - could account for the widespread concern over crime
- Concerns over portraying of government and minorities (particularly African Americans)
  - X-Files/24 examples. Leadership corrupt. Good guys always rogue agents.
  - Stereotyping minorities on TV

# How Strong Are Media Effects?

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- Effects, like agenda setting, framing and priming, depend on both the characteristics of the audience and the nature of the information.
- People who are uninterested in and uninformed about politics are most susceptible to agenda setting.
- Partisans are inclined to think in terms of issues at the core of their party's concerns.

# Media Biases

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- Modern journalists present themselves as objective.
- Supposed to report events and conflicts accurately so that voters can make informed judgments.
- Yet many observers believe that the media do skew the news.
  - Most common charge is political bias.

# Ideological Bias

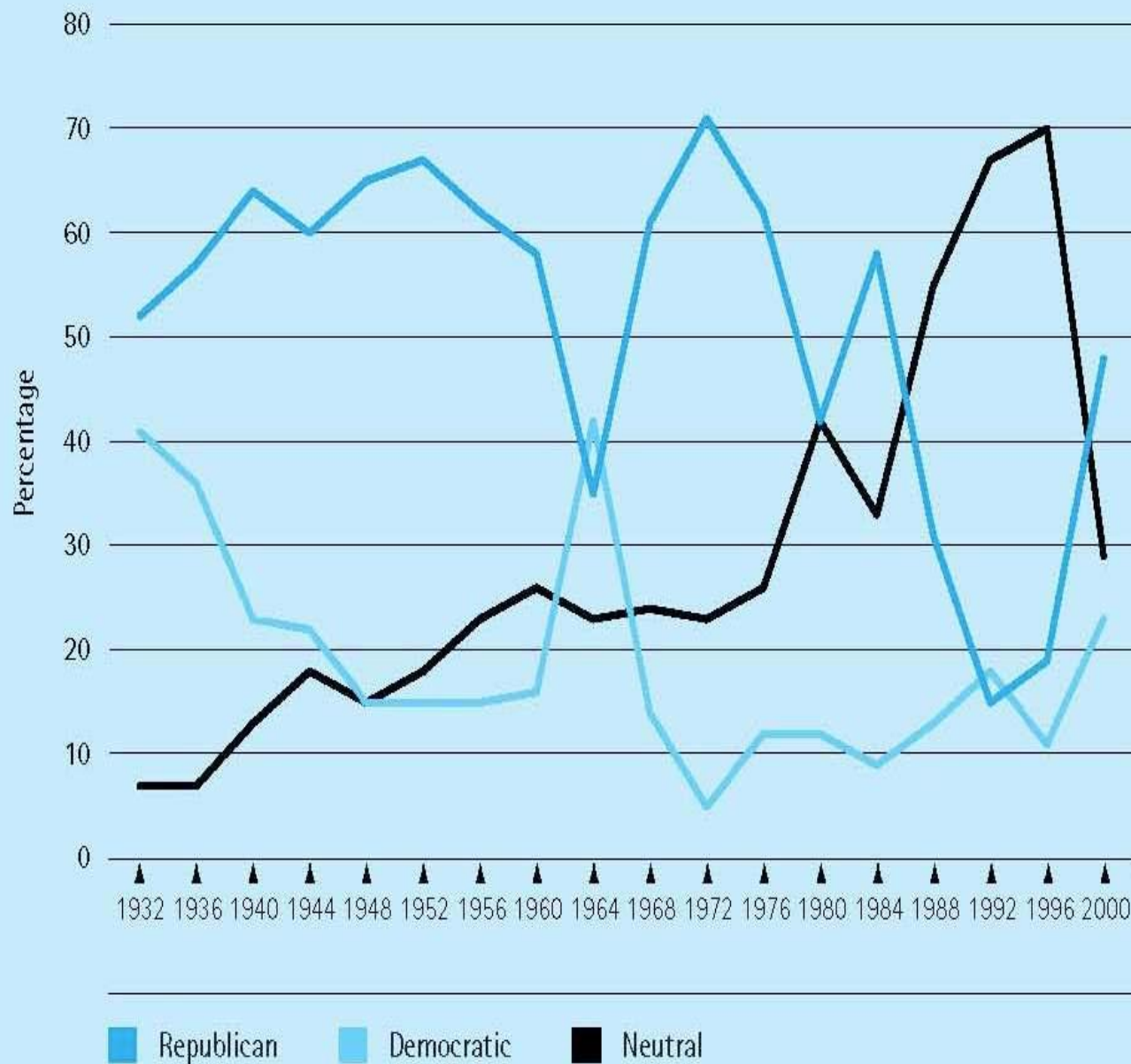
- Journalists more Democratic than population at large
  - Survey of Washington bureau chiefs and congressional correspondents reported that in 1992, 89 percent voted for Clinton (compared to 43 percent of the electorate).
- Journalists also hold views that are more liberal than those of other college-educated professionals.
- But does this affect the news?
- When you evaluate the spin (positive or negative slant that reporters or anchors put on their reports) you find the lapses are not as common as critics imply.
- Most coverage of politics is relatively spin-free.
- Media tend to be hard on incumbents, losers, and those involved in scandals regardless of party.
- Changes in media system have worked to reduce tendency toward liberal bias.



FIGURE 9.2

Newspapers Endorse Republican Presidential Candidates More Often than Democratic Candidates

SOURCE: Harold Stanley and Richard Niemi, *Vital Statistics of American Politics, 2001–2002* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), pp. 194–195.



# Selection Bias

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- Selection principle
  - Rule of thumb according to which stories with certain characteristics are chosen over stories without those characteristics
  - Choice of stories based on
    - Negativity (failure, loss, etc.) when government or officials do something wrong. Scandal and problems.
    - Look for heroes and villains. Sensational stories not abstract social developments.

# Professional Bias

- Third kind of media bias arises from the demands of the journalism profession today.
- Some journalists are specialists – have a beat.
- But most are generalists who lack specific substantive expertise.
- They become dependent on outside experts to help them with their stories.
  - Quality of information may suffer.
- Greater focus on entertainment
- All lead to “pack journalism” – herd mentality





# Prospects for Change

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- News media are private, profit-making enterprises.
- Respond to public demands
- Like to change only if public demands such change

# The Media and Electoral Politics

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- Transmit information about problems and issues
- This information helps voters make their choices.
- But does media bias cause media coverage to fall short of the ideal?

# Campaign Coverage

- This is an area where the media are criticized heavily.
  - Charge: The media provide little coverage of policy issues.
  - Charge: The media concentrate on issues such as character at the expense of genuine policy and expertise issues.
  - Evidence: The trend in horse-race coverage is increasing.
  - Even candidates are critical of the nature of coverage.



**TABLE 9.2**  
**EVALUATIONS OF THE MEDIA HAVE WORSENERD**

News Organizations General . . .	1985	1999	2002
	%	%	%
Are moral	54	40	39
Are immoral	13	38	36
Care about people they report on	35	21	30
Don't care	48	67	55
Are highly professional	72	52	49
Are not professional	11	32	31
Protect democracy*	54	45	60
Hurt democracy*	23	38	19
Care about how good a job they do*	79	69	78
Don't care*	11	22	14

\*Data are derived from 2001 survey data.

SOURCE: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

# The Conventions

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- Process for nominating presidential candidates stabilized in 1972 and took the surprise out of the process
- Since then conventions are not as important.
- Media coverage has dropped.
  - The more the party managers tried to package their message to please television, the less the major networks were interested.
  - Now the convention coverage venue is cable and the Internet.

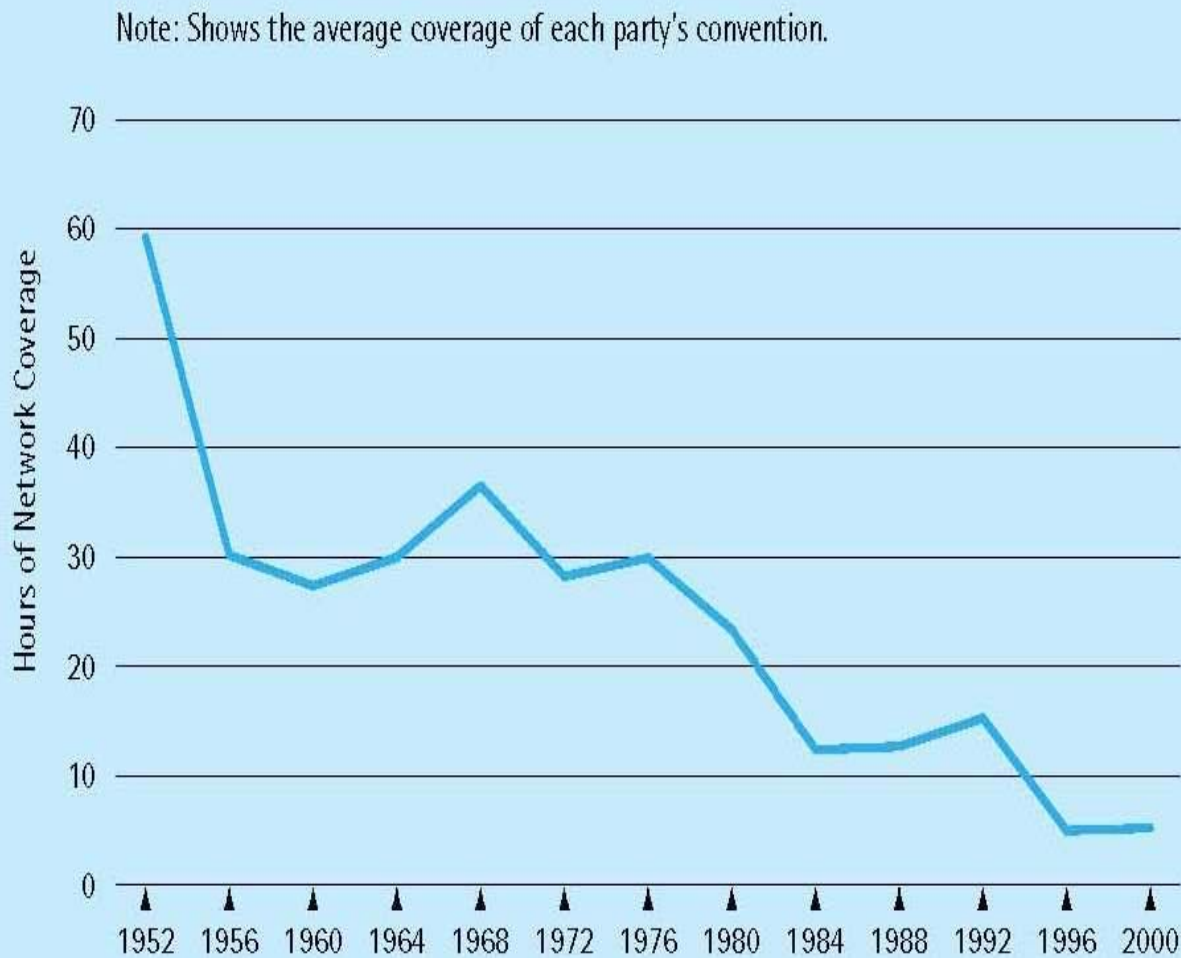


FIGURE 9.3

The Networks Increasingly Ignore the National Political Conventions

SOURCE: Adapted by Sam Abrams from Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics of American Politics 2001–2002*, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), p. 191.

# The Presidential Debates

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- No other campaign events earn the ratings that the presidential debates earn.
- First televised debates were in 1960.
  - Nixon and Kennedy
  - Radio listeners thought Nixon won; TV viewers thought Kennedy won
- Studies show that performance in the debates can sway the undecided voter.



# Media Coverage of Government

- Media coverage of government is similar to that of campaigns.
- From the news media perspective, government and the work it does is pretty dull.
- For that reason, there is relatively little news coverage of it.
- When they do cover government...
  - Emphasis is on president
  - Emphasis is on conflict
  - Emphasis is on the negative
- Officials have exaggerated concern with the press.

