CHAPTER 7 {PRIVATE}

THE MASS MEDIA AND THE POLITICAL AGENDA

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Politics in Action: How Television has brought a Sense of Immediacy to Governing (pp. 217–218)
   A. **High-tech politics** is a politics in which technology increasingly shapes the behavior of citizens and policymakers, as well as the political agenda itself.
   
   B. The **mass media** consist of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and other means of popular communication that reach, and profoundly influence, not only the elites but also the masses.

II. The Mass Media Today (pp. 218–219)
   A. A **media event** is staged primarily for the purpose of being covered.
   B. Image making is critical to campaigning and day-to-day governing.

III. The Development of Media Politics (pp. 220–230)
   A. Introduction
      1. Franklin D. Roosevelt practically invented media politics, holding two **press conferences** (presidential meetings with reporters) a week.
      2. The Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal soured the press on government.
      3. **Investigative journalism** is the use of detective-like reporting methods to unearth scandals.
   
   B. The **Print Media**
      1. "Yellow journalism" characterized the early history of newspapers in the United States.
      2. The press has a pecking order.
      3. The political content of leading magazines is slim.
   
   C. The **Broadcast Media**
      1. During World War II, radio went into the news business in earnest.
      2. Since the 1960s, television has had a profound impact on politics.
   D. Government Regulation of the Broadcast Media
      1. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates communications via radio, television, telephone, cable, and satellite.
      2. The FCC regulates airwaves to prevent near-monopolies, license stations, and ensure fair treatment.
   E. From Broadcasting to **Narrowcasting**: The Rise of Cable News Channels
      1. Rather than appealing to a general audience, cable news channels focus on a narrow particular interest.
      2. Many scholars feel that cable news has reduced the overall quality of
political journalism.

F. The Impact of the Internet
1. The Internet provides vast amounts of information at one’s fingertips.
2. The impact of the Internet on politics has been more subtle than revolutionary.

G. Private Control of the Media
1. Unlike many other countries, virtually all American media outlets are in private hands, allowing freedom in journalistic content.
2. Major metropolitan newspapers are mostly owned by **chains**.

IV. Reporting the News (pp. 230–236)
A. News is what is timely and different.
B. Finding News
1. Most news organizations assign reporters to **beats**, specific locations where news frequently happens.
2. **Trial balloons** consist of information leaked to discover the political reaction.

C. Presenting the News
1. News coverage has become less complete as technology has enabled the media to pass along information with greater speed.
2. **Sound bites** are more common.

D. Bias in the News
1. News reporting is not systematically biased toward a particular ideology or party.
2. Television is biased toward stories that generate good pictures. The **talking head** is considered boring.

V. The News and Public Opinion (pp. 236–238)
A. Although studies show that the media do not affect how people vote, they do affect what they think about and the priorities they attach to problems.
B. People's opinions shift with the tone of news coverage.

VI. The Media’s Agenda-Setting Function (pp. 238–239)
A. The **policy agenda** is the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time.
B. **Policy entrepreneurs** are people who invest their political "capital" in an issue.
C. The media can be used by the poor and downtrodden as well as the elite.

VII. Understanding the Mass Media (pp. 239–241)
A. The Media and the Scope of Government
B. Individualism and the Media
C. Democracy and the Media

VIII. Summary (p. 241)
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying Chapter 7, you should be able to:

1. Describe the characteristics of the mass media today.

2. Explain the development of the print and broadcast media from a historical perspective.

3. Understand how news is found and reported by the media.

4. Describe how the news media affect public opinion.

5. Discuss the concepts of policy agenda and policy entrepreneur and the media's importance to each.

6. Understand how the media affect the scope of government and the democratic process.

The following exercises will help you meet these objectives:

Objective 1: Describe the characteristics of the mass media today.

1. Explain the purpose of a media event.

2. List the seven principles of news management as practiced in the Reagan White House.

   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 
   5. 
   6. 
   7.
Objective 2: Explain the development of the print media and the broadcast media from a historical perspective.

1. Explain two media techniques used most effectively by President Franklin Roosevelt.
   1. 
   2. 

2. What is meant by the term "investigative journalism"?

3. Explain the significance of the "yellow journalism" era to the print media.

4. Explain how television affected the political career of Richard Nixon.

5. What effect did television have on the war in Vietnam?

6. Explain the three ways in which the Federal Communications Commission has regulated the airwaves.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 

7. What impact has cable TV had on news reporting?
8. List four findings of the Columbia University’s Project for Excellence in Journalism on cable news programming.

1.

2.

3.

4.

9. What makes news reporting on the Internet particularly different from news reporting on television?

10. Explain two consequences of private control of the media in the United States.

1.

2.

Objective 3: Understand how news is found and reported by the media.

1. Where does most news come from?

2. What is meant by a "sound bite" and what does it tell us about news coverage?

3. Explain how the news media tend to be biased.

Objective 4: Describe how the news media affect public opinion.

1. In experiments by Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, what effect did manipulating TV stories have on viewers?
2. Give examples of how the media have had an effect on the public's evaluation of specific events.

Objective 5: Discuss the concepts of policy agenda and policy entrepreneur and the media's importance to each.

1. Define the term "policy agenda."

2. List five items in the policy entrepreneur's "arsenal of weapons."
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.

Objective 6: Understand how the media affect the scope of government and the democratic process.

1. How do the media act as a "watchdog"?

2. What is the difference between the "information society" and the "informed society"?
KEY TERMS

Identify and describe:

high-tech politics

mass media

media event

press conferences

investigative journalism

print media

broadcast media

narrowcasting

chains

beats

trial balloons
sound bites

talking head

policy agenda

policy entrepreneurs

**Compare and contrast:**

- high-tech politics and mass media
- media event and press conference
- print media and broadcast media
- sound bite and talking head
- policy agenda and policy entrepreneur
Name that term:

1. It reaches the elite as well as the masses._________________________

2. These are staged primarily for the purpose of being covered._________________________

3. This tends to pit reporters against political leaders._________________________

4. These control newspapers with most of the nation's circulation._________________________

5. The primary mission of cable and Internet news._________________________

6. Specific locations from which news frequently emanates._________________________

7. Information leaked to see what the political reaction would be._________________________

USING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Choose one of the three major networks, CBS, NBC, or ABC, and watch the evening news every day for a week. While watching, write down the topic of each news story, the amount of time spent on the story, and an assessment of the story's content and the issues it raises. Read a daily newspaper (preferably the New York Times or another major paper) for the same days. Compare the television and newspaper coverage of the same news stories. Analyze the differences between these media in terms of how the stories were presented, depth of coverage, and issue orientation. Evaluate how the print media and the broadcast media might differ in their influence on public opinion.

2. Based on your understanding of the role of the media in the agenda-building process, critique a news item or article that concerns a policy issue. Your critique should begin by asking how well the item identified the policy issue, the policy entrepreneurs, and people in government concerned about the issue. Assess the news item as both a source of information and a source of influence on your
perceptions of politics, government, and policy. Consider how policymakers might use the news item as well. Put yourself in the position of the reporter and consider how the story might have been improved. In light of your critique, discuss your impressions of the media as unofficial but important sources of influence on public opinion and the policy agenda.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Circle the correct answer:

1. Which of the following statements is FALSE?
   a. There was virtually no daily press when the Constitution was written.
   b. The daily newspaper is largely a product of the mid-nineteenth century.
   c. Television has been around since the first half of the twentieth century.
   d. Reporters submitted questions in writing to presidents as late as Herbert Hoover’s presidency, 1929-1933.
   e. None of the above

2. Prior to the 1930s,
   a. press conferences were held twice a week.
   b. the president was rarely directly questioned by the media.
   c. the media was dominated by a few influential newspapers.
   d. image building was essentially built around radio broadcasting.
   e. the president catered to the local, rather than the national, press.

3. Investigative journalism
   a. uses in-depth reporting to unearth scandal among political leaders.
   b. frequently pits reporters against political leaders.
   c. may contribute to greater public cynicism and negativity about politics, according to some analysts.
   d. All of the above
   e. None of the above

4. The two primary kinds of media that scholars distinguish between are
   a. online media and hard media.
   b. new media and old media.
   c. print media and broadcast media.
   d. biased media and objective media.
   e. news media and entertainment media.

5. At the turn of the century, newspaper magnates Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst ushered in the era of
   a. yellow journalism.
   b. nickel tabloids.
   c. newspaper chains.
   d. penny press.
   e. political advertising.
6. Which of these is not an example of broadcast media?
   a. Magazines
   b. The Internet
   c. Television
   d. Radio
   e. None of the above; all are examples of broadcast media.

7. The Associated Press is an example of a
   a. high-technology medium.
   b. newspaper chain.
   c. massive media conglomerate.
   d. wire service.
   e. trade association acting as an interest group for newspapers.

8. A major metropolitan newspaper averages roughly 100,000 words per day; a typical broadcast of the nightly news on TV amounts to about ____ words.
   a. 3,600
   b. 150,000
   c. 200,000
   d. 250,000
   e. 300,000

9. Television coverage of the war in Vietnam had the effect of
   a. generating popular support for the president and the war.
   b. hiding the true horrors of the war and the number of casualties from the American people.
   c. exposing governmental naiveté and lies about the progress of the war.
   d. duping the public into believing the war would soon end.
   e. simultaneously undermining support for the war in North Vietnam while boosting public morale in South Vietnam.

10. The FCC regulates communications via
    a. radio.
    b. television.
    c. telephone.
    d. cable.
    e. All of the above

11. Since 1996, no single owner can own more than ____ percent of the broadcast market.
    a. five
    b. ten
    c. twenty
    d. thirty-five
    e. fifty
12. Which of the following is an example of a narrowcasting outlet?
   a. MTV
   b. ESPN
   c. ABC
   d. All of the above
   e. Both a and b

13. To a large extent, television networks define news as what is ________ to viewers.
   a. informative
   b. vital information
   c. entertaining
   d. thought-provoking
   e. yet unknown

14. The bottom line that shapes how journalists define the news, where they get the news, and how they present it is
   a. their personal ideology.
   b. the First Amendment right to freedom of the press.
   c. government regulations.
   d. profits.
   e. their professional values.

15. A trial balloon is a
   a. method used by the media to force a politician or public official to admit to lying to a reporter.
   b. piece of information leaked to politicians from a reporter in order to confirm another source.
   c. sensational criminal trial that attracts inflated media coverage.
   d. directive by judges to deny access to reporters in certain sensitive cases.
   e. method used by public figures of leaking certain stories to reporters to see what the political reaction will be.

16. A news beat is a(n)
   a. location from which news frequently emanates, such as Congress or the White House.
   b. successful angle for covering a story.
   c. approach to investigative journalism.
   d. story that has passed its time and is no longer interesting.
   e. description of the pace and rhythm of journalism.
17. In 2004, the average sound bite of a presidential candidate shown talking on the nightly news averaged
   a. less than ten seconds.
   b. about thirty seconds.
   c. about two minutes.
   d. about ninety seconds.
   e. about a minute.

18. Which of the following statements is TRUE?
   a. The vast majority of studies have found that reporting in the news media is systematically liberally biased.
   b. The vast majority of studies have found that reporting in the news media is systematically conservatively biased.
   c. The vast majority of students have found that reporting in the news media is not systematically biased toward one ideology or party.
   d. Most stories in the news media present only one point of view, thus painting an unbalanced view for readers and/or viewers.
   e. Few reporters actually believe in journalistic expectations about objectivity.

19. Comprehensive surveys of American journalists between 1971 and 2002 have found that reporters are
   a. more likely to classify themselves as liberal than as conservative.
   b. more like to classify themselves as conservative than as liberal.
   c. more like to classify themselves as independent, or having no ideological preference.
   d. evenly split between conservatives and liberals.
   e. Both c and d

20. Which of the following is FALSE?
   a. The media’s watchdog function helps keep politicians in check.
   b. Americans consistently rate the media’s watchdog role in positive terms.
   c. A majority of Americans believe that press criticism of political leaders does more harm than good.
   d. Journalists frequently hold disparaging views of public officials.
   e. Journalists rate the watchdog as an important role for the media.
TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS

Circle the correct answer:

1. A media event is staged primarily for the purpose of being covered by reporters, cameras, etc. T / F

2. Ronald Reagan was the first president to hold frequent press conferences and give fireside chats to reassure the public. T / F

3. Prior to the 1960s, the relationship between politicians and the press was one of skepticism and distrust. T / F

4. Investigative journalism has contributed to greater public cynicism and negativism about politics. T / F

5. Gradually, the broadcast media has replaced the print media as our principal source of news and information. T / F

6. Using the broadcast media, Lyndon Johnson was successful in persuading the public that America was winning the war in Vietnam. T / F

7. In Canada and most of Europe, the major networks are government owned. T / F

8. To a large extent, television networks define news as what is entertaining to the average viewer. T / F

9. An intentional news leak for the purpose of assessing the political reaction to that news leak is called a trial balloon. T / F

10. The majority of studies have shown that the media, especially newspapers, tend to have a liberal bias. T / F

SHORT ANSWER/SHORT ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Explain the importance of the 1960 presidential debate.

2. Explain the historical development of the print and broadcast media in the U.S. Use examples to illustrate your answer.

3. What is the difference between broadcasting and narrowcasting?

4. How do reporters and journalists “find” the news?

5. How does television define what is newsworthy? Explain where television finds its news stories and how they are presented to the American public.
ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Describe the relationship between the mass media and the president, and how it has changed over the last several decades. Include examples of how various presidents such as George Bush, Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, and Franklin Roosevelt have interacted with the media, i.e., how much and under what circumstances.

2. Has the increase in information technologies in society created a more informed citizenry? Why or why not? What claims do the commercial media make regarding why citizens are or are not informed?

3. What role do the media play in defining the policy agenda? How can the media be used by policy entrepreneurs to achieve their objectives? Is such use a problem or a virtue in America's democratic system? Explain.

4. Evaluate the role of the FCC? Does the FCC exert too much influence over the media? Not enough?

5. Is the news media biased?