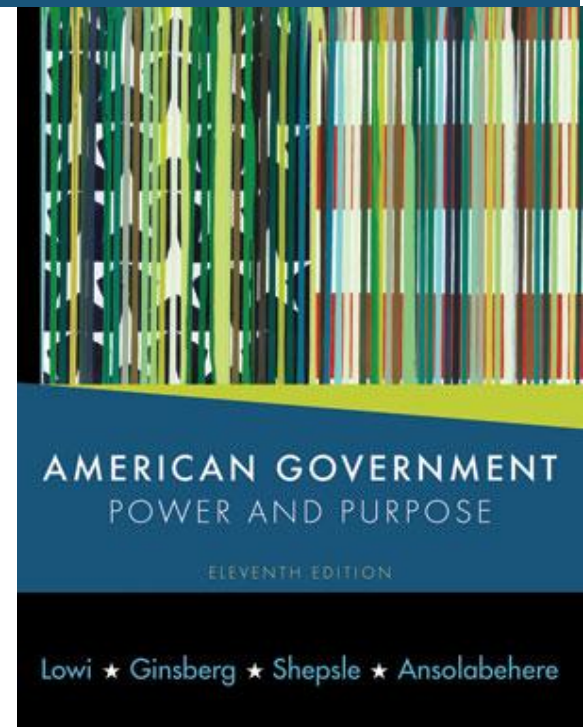


13

The Media

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT POWER AND PURPOSE

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Scholarly Views of Media Effects

Scholars are divided on the question of media influence in politics.

- ▶ Some adhere to the **hypodermic model**, believing that all contemporary politics is influenced in key ways by mass media.
- ▶ Others believe that media merely reflect society but do not shape it; they claim that media have **minimal effects** on politics.



The Hypodermic Model

From 1900 to the late 1930s, scholars described media influence as direct, immediate, and effective (e.g., propaganda).

This model argued that media messages are “injected” into the public and have their intended effects.

Minimal Effects

From the 1940s to the 1960s, scholars described media effects as minimal, nonexistent, and/or relatively unimportant compared to other factors.





The minimal effects view was based on:

- The pluralist idea that many voices and messages as well as media competition cancel out the potential effects of any one view;
- The idea that audiences are not passive but instead bring their own perspectives and interpretations to media messages.

Media Actors as Political Actors

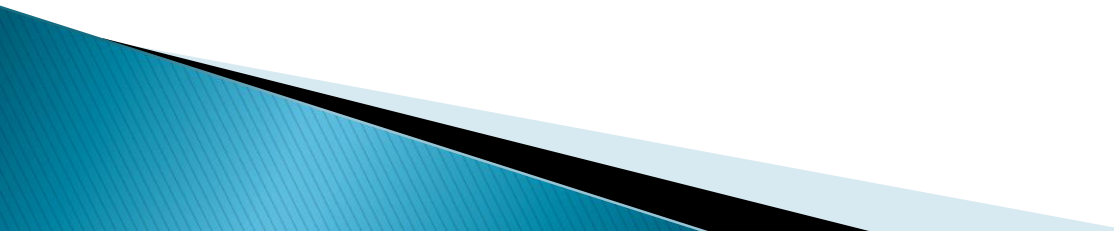
*The Rationality Principle:
All political behavior is
goal-oriented and
purposive.*

People tend to find
that media actors are
biased against their
own perspectives.

- Conservatives focus on the “liberal” views of reporters to argue a liberal bias;
- Liberals believe that corporate control of mass media and the role of editors and advertisers give media a conservative bias.

Still, pluralists (and minimal effects scholars) would emphasize how these various tendencies themselves might cancel out.

Moreover, considering *The Policy Principle*, *political outcomes are the products of individual preferences and institutional procedures*, imagine how the liberal views of reporters might be mediated by more conservative editors, advertisers, and corporate owners.



Considering the multiple goals of all of the political actors in the political communications system, the minimal effects theory makes intuitive sense.

Politicians, the press, and media audiences all have their own political goals.

- ▶ Politicians and reporters “negotiate” their relationships in order to reconcile their competing goals;
- ▶ Readers, listeners, and viewers interpret and shape the media messages that come to them.

Politicians' Goals in Media Politics



Politicians' goals in media politics generally focus on getting more and favorable coverage and greater publicity for their actions.

Media help them:

- Posture for constituents;
- Influence other political actors;
- Shape public debate on policy.

Politicians can court the press by meeting reporters' practical and substantive needs. They can increase their chances of getting covered by:

- ▶ Giving reporters access, pictures, and timely information;
- ▶ Giving reporters conflict and exciting stories.



Media and Reporter Goals



Different media organizations and outlets have varying goals and different impacts on American politics.

Regional and local news and television organizations are the main source of *diversity* of voice and perspectives in the American media, as they emphasize the local stories most relevant to their audiences.

The Trend in Regular News Consumption, 1993–2008

| | 1993 (%) | 1996 (%) | 2000 (%) | 2002 (%) | 2004 (%) | 2006 (%) | 2008 (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Local TV news | 77 | 65 | 56 | 57 | 59 | 54 | 52 |
| Cable TV news | — | — | — | 33 | 38 | 34 | 34 |
| Nightly network news | 60 | 42 | 30 | 32 | 34 | 28 | 29 |
| Radio* | 47† | 44 | 43 | 41 | 40 | 36 | 35 |
| Newspaper* | 58† | 50 | 47 | 41 | 42 | 40 | 34 |
| Online news‡ | — | 2§ | 23 | 25 | 29 | 31 | 37 |

*Based on use the previous day.

†Data from 1994.

‡Viewed at least three days per week.

§Data from 1995.

SOURCE: Pew Research Center for People and the Press, "Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources," August 17, 2008, <http://people-press.org/report/444/news-media> (accessed 4/9/09).

There is far less variation in the reporting of national news and events.



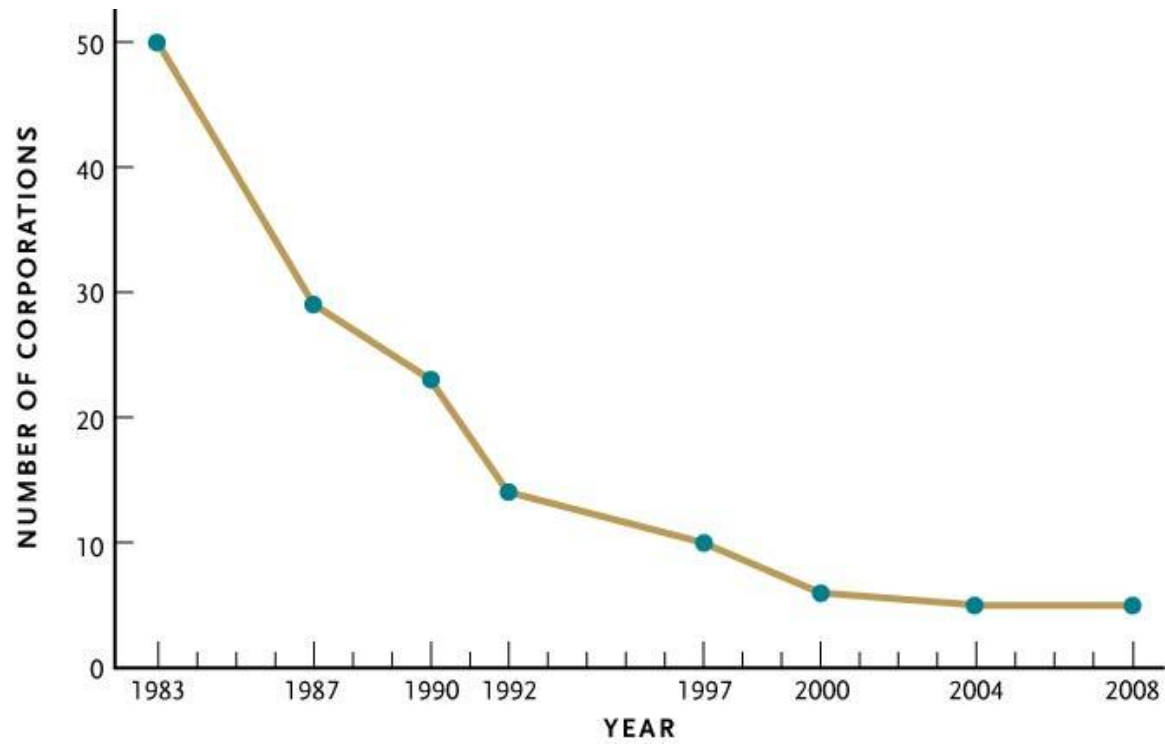
- Most local newspapers are owned by large media organizations;
- Most local television stations are affiliated with the major networks;
- A great deal of news is influenced by wire services and major publications like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*,
- The Cable News Network (CNN) has considerable influence on cable television news.



The nationalization of the news in the twentieth century has contributed significantly to the nationalization of American politics.

Moreover, the consolidation of ownership of media outlets in recent years has challenged the pluralistic nature of America's mass media.

Number of Corporations that Control the Majority of U.S. Media





Media Goals and Media Imperatives

Reporters and news organizations have their own goals, professional norms, and procedures that affect news content.

- Reporters have deadlines to meet and “newsholes” to fill;
- Reporters follow “newsbeats,” or places they regularly go to collect news information.

Media Power

Sources of Media Power

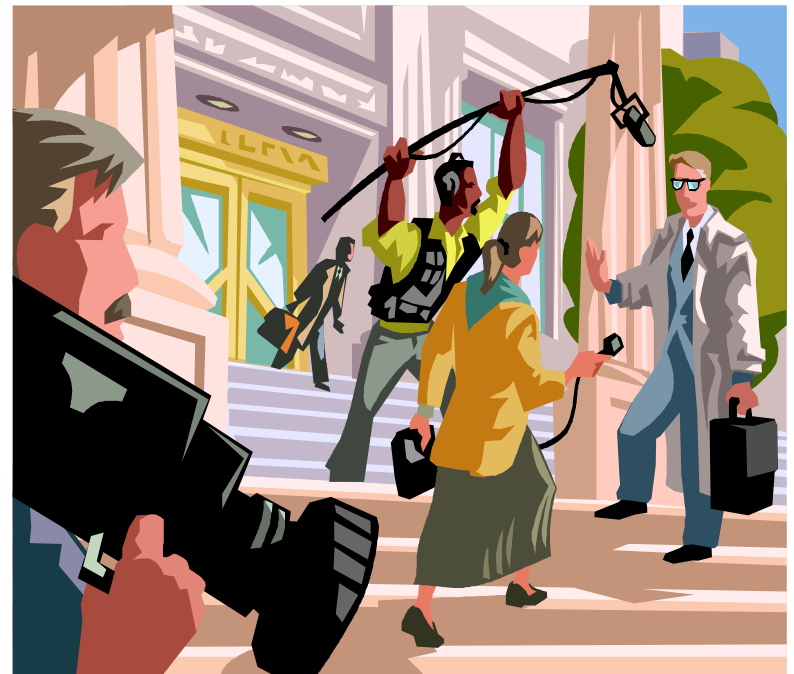
- ▶ **Agenda setting** → the power of the media to bring public attention to particular issues and problems;
- ▶ **Priming** → a process of preparing the public to take a particular view of an event or a political actor;
- ▶ **Framing** → the power of the media to influence how events and issues are interpreted.



Media Power in Elections

Media influence in elections is of particular importance in a democracy.

How the media set the campaign agenda, frame particular issues, and prime our evaluations of individual candidates can have tremendous effects on electoral outcomes.

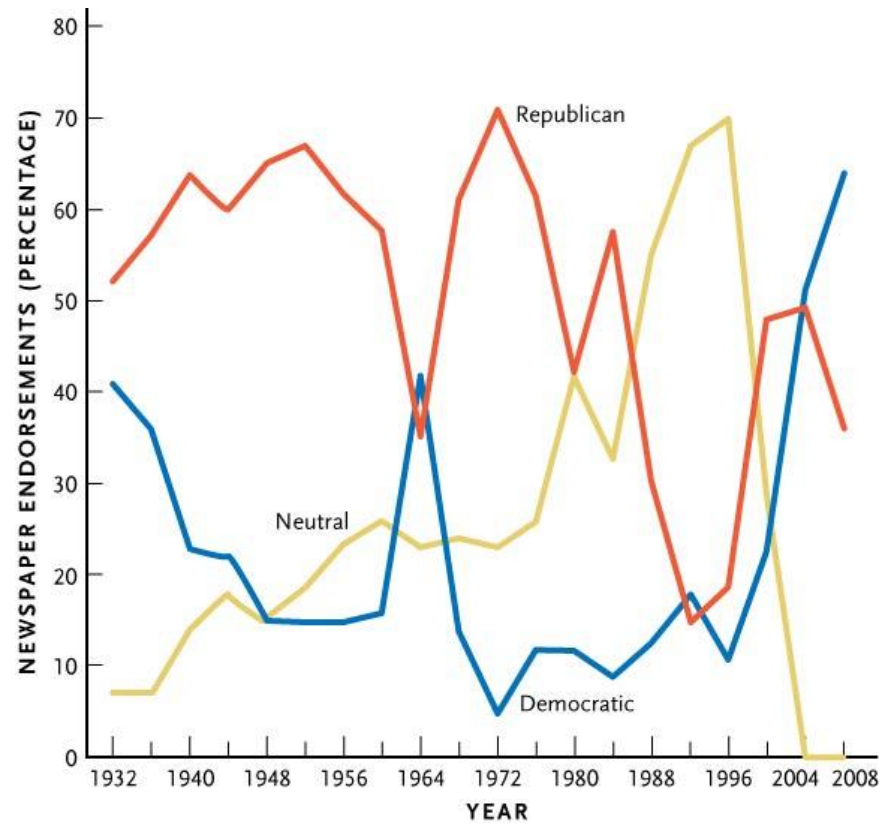


Media Bias in Elections?

Although many people claim that there is a liberal media bias likely to benefit Democrats in elections, Republican presidential candidates actually have been more likely to win newspaper endorsements over time.



Newspaper Endorsements



Two journalistic
“norms”—
adversarialism and
objectivity—also
work to mitigate
individual reporter
biases and likely
affect news content.

Adversarialism, whereby the
press considers itself a
watchdog over the
government, tends to focus
reporters on negative
aspects of the political
process.

An **adversarial press** is less
prone to passively accept
the “talking points” and
media messages of any
particular campaign.

By the same token, an **objectivity** norm in the press makes reporters reluctant to take a position on an issue and leads reporters to seek out “both sides” of an issue.

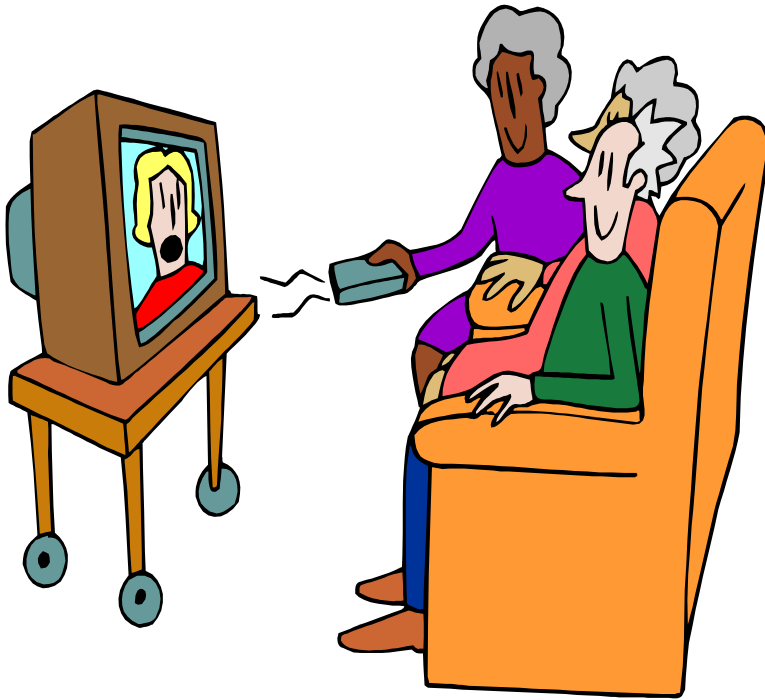
Thus, any particular candidate or campaign’s attempt to set an agenda or frame an issue is likely to be met and countered by the competing claims of their opponents.



Audiences as Political Actors

Audiences—readers, listeners, viewers, surfers and bloggers—actively interpret the media messages that come to them.





The audiences for any particular news source themselves vary by demographics.

For example, educated Americans are more attentive to “hard news” programming than are citizens with lower levels of education.

Education and Attention to The News

| Level of Education | Level of Attention to Hard News* | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|---------|
| | High (%) | Medium (%) | Low (%) |
| College graduate | 36 | 59 | 6 |
| Some college | 30 | 59 | 11 |
| High school graduate | 23 | 59 | 18 |
| Not a high school graduate | 12 | 60 | 28 |

*People with high levels of attention to hard news follow international, national, local, and business news closely; those with low levels do not follow the news.

SOURCE: Compiled by authors from Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment," Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey, August 17, 2008, <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/444.pdf> (accessed 5/8/09).

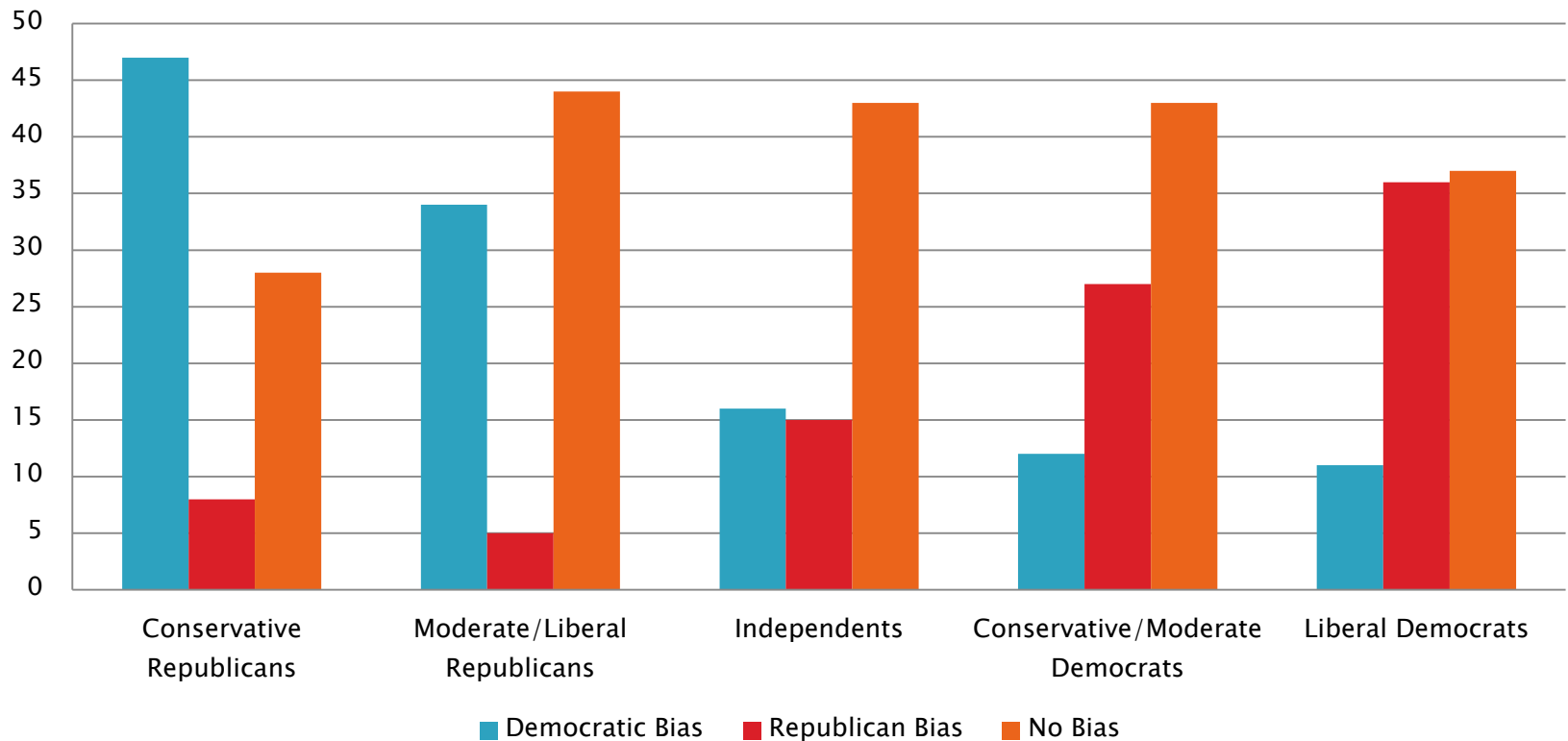


Individual readers and viewers actively seek out and interpret political and media messages as well, selectively exposing themselves to and interpreting media messages.

Selective perception
refers to the tendency of
audiences to perceive
media messages in ways
that reinforce their
previously held political
beliefs.

Selective exposure
refers to the tendency
of audiences to seek
out information
sources that are most
likely to confirm their
previously held
ideological beliefs.

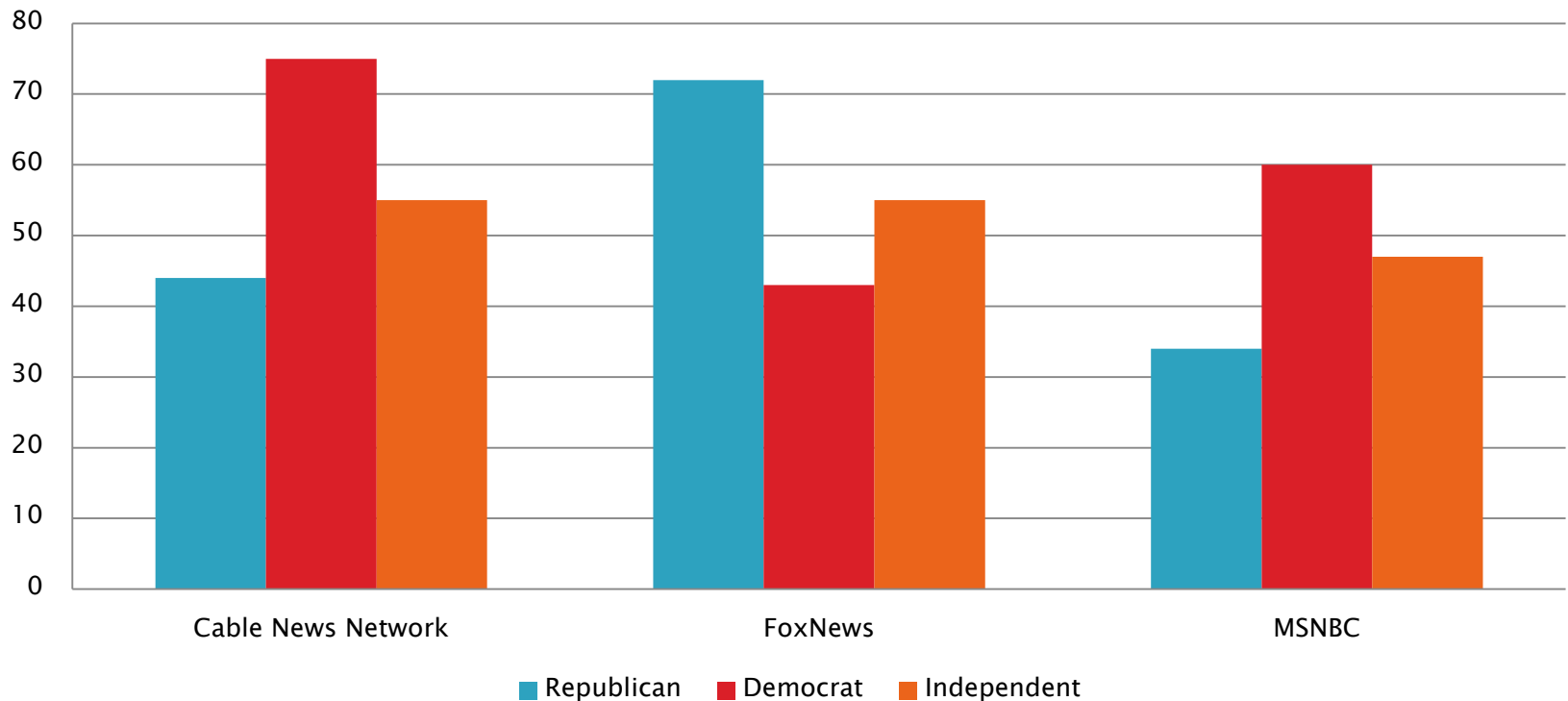
Ideological and Partisan Perceptions of Media Bias



Source: Pew Research Center. "Cable and Internet Loom Large in Fragmented Political News Universe," 1/11/2004, <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php.3?ReportID=200>, accessed 5/27/2006.

Increasingly, partisans and ideological voters pick their favorites among media sources, **selectively exposing** themselves to limited sources of political news and viewpoints.

Favorability of Cable News Outlets by Party Identification

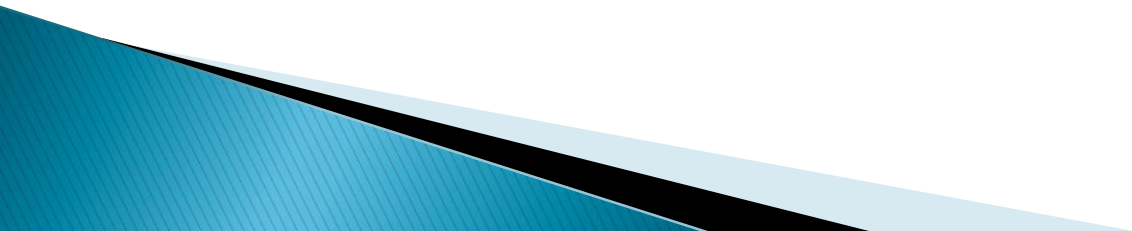


Figures represent the percentage in each partisan category who have a favorable opinion of the news outlet.
Source: Pew Research Center, "Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two Decade Low Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985–2009," September 13, 2009, <http://people-press.org/report/543/>, accessed 9/25/2009.

Media Critics

Although partisan critics of contemporary media politics point to the unfair treatment their side gets from the media, in fact the politics of media bias is incredibly complex, as politicians, reporters, and the mass public engage one another in a system that is politically charged from top to bottom.

Additional Art for Chapter 13

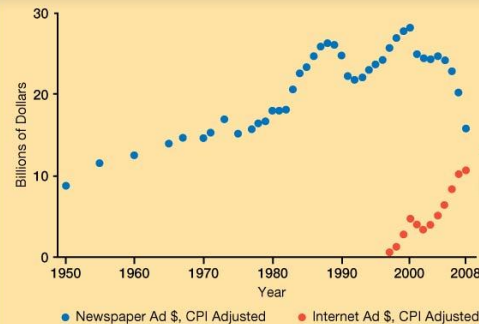


ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

The End of Newspapers?

Newspapers and the press enjoy a special place in American democracy. In the landmark case *New York Times v. Sullivan* (1963), Justice William Brennan defended the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of the press as essential to an informed public, healthy deliberation, and democratic elections. A precipitous decline in newspaper readership in 2008, then, came as a shock to many observers. According to *Editor & Publisher*, a leading journal that tracks the industry, daily newspaper circulations fell by 7 percent in 2008 alone, with most of the major cities' newspapers showing decreases in readership of 10 to 20 percent and many papers threatening to close. Some observers went so far as to call for a public takeover of the newspapers in order to maintain this important source of information. Did this decline portend the end of newspapers in the United States? What was causing the decline? And what might it mean for our democracy?

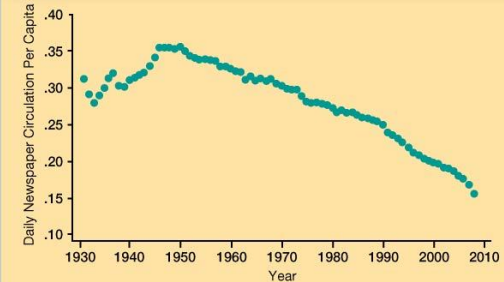
ECONOMIC CRISIS FOR NEWSPAPERS



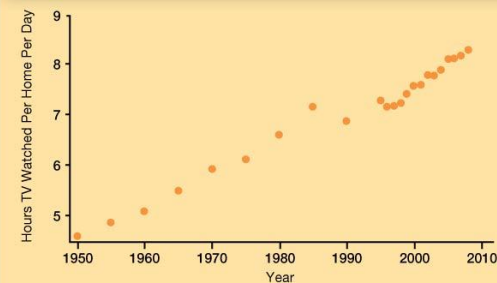
The economic difficulties of newspapers are best reflected in their balance sheets. There are approximately 1,400 daily newspapers in the United States, a figure that has been roughly the same since 1970. Their main source of revenue is advertising, which accounts for about 90 percent of the revenue generated by a print newspaper. From 2000 to 2008, real revenues of newspapers decreased by over \$14 billion, a 50 percent decline, and their losses appear to be accelerating. Over the same period, Internet advertising revenue increased by \$7 billion. These trends lead many observers to expect Internet advertising to overtake newspapers before 2015. Advertisers, of course, are seeking the audience. The decline in revenues is widely seen as an indicator of eroding newspaper readership, and the pattern since 2000 suggests that the Internet is largely to blame.

A longer-term perspective shows that the decline in newspaper reading started long before the late 1990s, when the Internet emerged. At their peak in the 1950s, approximately 35 newspapers were sold for every 100 people in the United States. Today that figure is roughly 15 newspapers for every 100 persons, and falling.

DECLINE OF NEWSPAPER READERSHIP



RISE OF TELEVISION VIEWING



The Internet, however, does reflect a more general account of the problems facing newspapers—competition. Internet advertisers and Web sites have competed with newspapers for revenues and audience in recent years. Since the 1950s, television has competed with newspapers for the leisure time and attention of the American public. Television, and over the past few years the Internet, have gradually won over the newspaper audience.

Sources: Newspaper circulation and revenue: *Editor & Publisher, Editor & Publisher Yearbook*, various years. Internet Revenue: Internet Advertising Bureau, Internet Advertising Report, 2008 Full-Year Results, March 2009, www.iab.net/media/file/IAB_PwC_2008_full_year.pdf (accessed 7/16/09). Television Audience: Nielsen Media Research, NTA Annual Averages, reported by Television Bureau of Advertising, *Trends in Television*, various years. Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse M. Shapiro, "Competition and Truth in the Market for News," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 22, no. 2 (2008): 133–54.

This concludes the presentation slides for Chapter 13: The Media

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