

OVERVIEW

- Media Outlets
- Media Bias
- The Presentation of Political News
- The Two-Step Flow of Political Information
- Media Effects on Popular Opinion

SOURCES OF MEDIA

- Newspapers
 - Dominant form until 20th century.
 - Circulation in decline since World War II.
- Radio
- Television
 - Dominant source today, but share in decline.
- The Internet

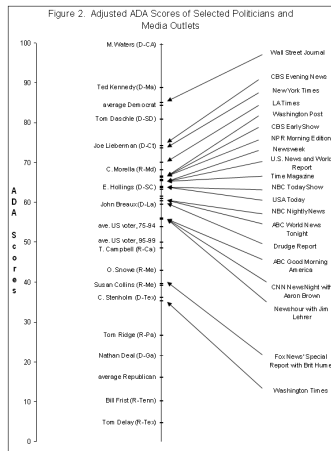
FORMS OF BIAS IN THE MEDIA

- Ideological Bias
 - “Liberal” and “conservative” media outlets.
 - Reporters are overwhelmingly liberal.
- Corporate/Pro-Capitalist Bias.
 - The mass media is a business.
 - Media ownership tends to be conservative
- Negativity Bias
 - “If it bleeds, it leads.”

FORMS OF BIAS IN THE MEDIA

- Simplicity Bias
 - Media prefers “personality” stories and simple narratives instead of complex issues.
- Professional Bias
 - Journalists rely on other journalists for expertise and information.

IDEOLOGICAL BIAS IN THE MEDIA?



Source: Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo. 2005. "A Measure of Media Bias." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110(4): 1191-1237

COVERAGE OF POLITICAL NEWS

- Personality-driven
 - Emphasis on the president and governors, less emphasis on legislators and courts.
- Accentuates negative news.
- Emphasis on "horse-race" coverage and "character" instead of issues.
- Breaking news emphasized over long-term stories.
- Manipulated by political "spin" by campaigns.

CAN MEDIA COVERAGE BE FIXED?

- Media coverage is based on commercial pressures:
 - Ratings and circulation drive coverage.
 - Mass public is not interested in most issues.
- Continuous news cycle driven by news networks (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC) and the Internet.
 - Positive: more in-depth news coverage available to those who seek it out.
 - Negative: only those who seek it out benefit.

THE TWO-STEP FLOW

- Political information moves from political elites to the mass public in two stages:
 - *Opinion leaders* (political activists, major media organizations) decide on a *narrative*.
 - The mass public responds to the narrative(s) given by opinion leaders.
- Politicians occasionally try to talk directly to the mass public (when they perceive opinion leaders to be hostile), but this is usually ineffective.

MEDIA INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION

- Agenda setting
 - What the media covers—or *doesn't* cover—influences what people think is important.
- Priming
 - Voters think about issues and candidates based on the *context* they are discussed in.
- Framing
 - *How arguments are made* influences how people think about issues and candidates.

HOW DRAMATIC ARE MEDIA EFFECTS?

- Political science research says:
 - Highly knowledgeable voters *filter out* information they disagree with, or can make arguments against it.
 - Least knowledgeable voters do not pay attention to the media in the first place.
 - Mid-range voters are the most influenced.
- The *less* people care about an issue, the *more* the media will influence their attitudes.