

APGoPo Unit 4

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

Any study of linkage institutions would be incomplete without a consideration of the role that mass media plays in the American political system. Political parties and interest groups serve as important links between citizens and government, but an increasingly important component is mass media that provides information, and also shapes, fosters, or censors it. Mass media has become such an integral part of the political system that it is sometimes called "**the fourth branch**" of government, and it both reflects and influences public opinion. The media link public opinion and the government, and the influence of the mass media on politics is enormous.

MASS MEDIA AS LINKAGE INSTITUTION

- The mass media are means of communication, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the internet, that can reach large, widely dispersed audiences
- The mass media connect people to their government officials by interviewing citizens, presenting poll results, and covering protests
- Media called "fourth estate" or "fourth branch"
 - Mass media vs. news media (part of mass media that stresses news)
 - Mass media - messages often simplified, stereotyped, predictable
 - Characteristics:
 - More interactive
 - More emphasis on entertainment – "infotainment"
 - Personalized
 - Emotional
 - Informal

TELEVISION

- The 1960 presidential debate between Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon marked a watershed event when television replaced newspapers and radio as America's principal source of political news.
- Most people now get their news from television
 - Focus is more on image and appearance
 - Communication is through "sound bites" (something quick and easy to remember); No in-depth analysis
 - 30-second commercials influence elections; 10 seconds for "sound bites"
- Use of television as electronic throne of President
 - President can now bypass journalists' annoying questions and go right to the people with a speech
 - Decline of press conferences
 - White House manipulation of television with photo opportunities and sound bites.

RADIO

- FDR was the first president to take advantage of radio – fireside chats
- Talk radio has been a major growth medium in the last decade (Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck) – talk show hosts have begun to play a prominent and controversial role in discussing political issues

NEWSPAPERS

- Newspaper circulation rates continue to decline because of television and the internet
- Concern about "revolving door" in journalism: former govt. leaders who become journalists → reporting is tainted

THE INTERNET

- Becoming a key source of information for the American public
- Especially popular with people under 30