The Media as a Political Institution

- Although not a formal branch of the U.S. government, the media play a critical institutional role in the political system.
- It is impossible to maintain a democratic political system over time without a properly functioning media.
The Media as a Political Institution: Diversity

- A diversity of sources, firms, and technologies makes up the media.
  - 1,400 daily newspapers
  - 1,500 television stations
  - Hundreds of weekly magazines
  - Countless websites

- Available in most every language
Clicker Question

From which type of media outlet do you receive the majority of your news?

A. newspapers/print media
B. television/radio
C. Internet
D. none
Types of Media: Print

- Newspapers and magazines are the oldest forms of printed political communication.
- Print journalism allows for greater context, depth, and analysis than other formats.
- Competition from other news formats—especially the Internet—threatens the viability of print media.
Broadcast Media

• Television
  – Networks: CBS, NBC, ABC (1950s)
  – Cable news: CNN (1980s), Fox News (1990s), and MSNBC (2000s)
  – Broadcast media engage in very little actual reporting.

• Radio
  – Talk radio is a powerful medium for mobilizing American conservatives.
  – Left-wing radio has been less successful.
The Internet

• The Internet has emerged as a powerful new technology for the dissemination of news and information, with a wide variety of political perspectives.
• Many Internet news sites aggregate news collected by other media.
• Politicians increasingly communicate with voters through social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter.
# The Trends in Regular News Consumption, 1991–2010

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<td>Got news online</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
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Regulation of the Electronic and Broadcast News Media

• In the United States, the government neither owns nor controls broadcast networks.
• The government does regulate content and ownership of broadcast media, but print media are free from government interference.
• This tendency can be traced to First Amendment protections for the press.
Regulation of News Media

• Broadcast media face greater scrutiny from federal regulators than do other media.
• Content and ownership are key issues.
• Media regulation
  – Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
  – Licenses broadcasters and regulates profanity, obscenity, and indecency
Regulation of Broadcast Media: FCC Regulations

• Equal Time Rule: Broadcasters must provide candidates for the same office an equal opportunity to communicate their messages.

• Right of Rebuttal: Individuals have the right to respond to personal attacks.

• Fairness Doctrine: The FCC requires broadcasters to provide time for opposing views on issues.
The Internet and Government Regulation

• Federal regulation of the Internet is also highly contested.
• Supporters argue that content originators should be protected from websites that facilitate the distribution of protected content.
• Foreign-based Internet companies can easily escape federal regulation.
Clicker Question

Which of the following is NOT an example of government attempts to ensure a diversity of opinion in news coverage?

A. Equal Time Rule  
B. Right of Rebuttal  
C. 1996 Telecommunications Act  
D. Fairness Doctrine
Clicker Question

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B. Right of Rebuttal
C. 1996 Telecommunications Act
D. Fairness Doctrine
Freedom of the Press

- Guaranteed in the First Amendment
- Prior restraint: an effort by a government agency to block the publication of material it deems libelous or harmful in some other way
Organization and Ownership of the Media

• 1996 Telecommunications Act led to media consolidation.
• The Internet can provide a counterweight to media consolidation.
• But there are surprisingly few distinct national sources for news.
Few Corporations Control the Majority of U.S. Media
What Affects News Coverage?

- Journalists play a critical role in shaping news coverage.
- Although most journalists strive for objectivity, personal biases inevitably shape their perspectives.
- What do journalists want?
  - Ratings
  - Career success
  - Professional prestige
Journalists

- In recent years there has been greater acceptance of partisanship among journalists.
- The media moguls William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951), Rupert Murdoch (born 1931), and others have shaped news coverage through their biases and business interests.
Do Journalists Bias the News?

- More journalists identify themselves as Democrats and liberals than as Republicans and conservatives.
- Most studies have failed to identify major biases in coverage of national politics, though some subtle biases do exist.
Newspaper Endorsements

YEAR

NEwspaper Endorsements (%)

Republican

Democratic

Neutral
Citizen Journalism

- The emergence of citizen journalism, enabled by the Internet, promotes a wider variety of perspectives.
- Citizen journalists played a major role in recent crises in Egypt, Libya, and Syria.
- Critics of citizen journalism express concern about upholding traditional journalistic standards and training.
News Sources: News Leaks

- Individuals shape news through the dissemination of confidential information.
- In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, a military analyst employed by the RAND Corporation, released to the New York Times the Pentagon Papers, a top-secret study of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.
- Edward Snowden, who leaked information about NSA wiretapping, is a more contemporary but no less controversial figure.
News Sources: Politicians

- Press conferences, speeches, and other powers of the bully pulpit allow presidents to set and shape news agendas.
- Government agencies sometimes release statistics strategically.
- Administration officials leak information to shape media and public impressions of news events (for example, the Valerie Plame scandal).
Manufactured “News”

- There have been recent cases of journalists paid by officials to slant news stories.
- Government videos designed to resemble actual news stories attempt to sway public opinion.
- Politicization of news undermines public faith in the media as an institution.
Clicker Question

What level of confidence do you have that the news media cover events in ways that inform political debate in our democracy?

A. highly confident
B. somewhat confident
C. somewhat dubious
D. highly dubious
Consumers

- The news business is ultimately geared toward making a profit.
- By attracting lucrative advertising, news outlets cater to an upscale audience.
- “If it bleeds, it leads.” News is tailored to consumer preferences for entertainment.
# Education Level and Attention to the News

<table>
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<th>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>HIGH (%)</th>
<th>MEDIUM (%)</th>
<th>LOW (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not a high school graduate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
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The Media and Conflict

• The media are sometimes accused of encouraging conflict and even violence because viewers tune in for dramatic stories.
• But protest as a strategy for attracting media coverage does not always work, as the media frequently focus on the conflict rather than the issues at stake.
Media Power and Responsibility

- The media play a powerful role in shaping public perception of news events.
  - Civil Rights Movement
  - War in Iraq
  - 2008 Presidential Election
- There is inherent tension between a free press and a responsible press.
Clicker Question

Is the media a democratic political institution?

A. Yes. Because consumers drive media coverage, the media is a reflection of popular will.

B. No. Journalistic biases and elite control of the media make the media less than democratic.