**Key Points—The Media and Politics**

1. What is the mass media?
   1. Medium – a means of communication that transmits information
   2. Media – the plural of medium
   3. Mass media – the means of communication that can reach large, widely dispersed audiences simultaneously
   4. Types of mass media
      1. Television
         1. Is all-pervasive
         2. Replaced newspapers as the primary source of political information for most Americans in the early 1960s (McClenaghan, 2009)
         3. Dominated historically by three major national networks
         4. Challenges to its power structure have been posed recently by
            1. Several independent broadcasting groups
            2. Cable broadcasters
            3. Non-profit public broadcasting
      2. The Internet
         1. Is quickly becoming the leading source of political information for US citizens (second only to television) (McClenaghan, 2009)
         2. Is used by other forms of media via websites
         3. Is used by almost all government agencies, interest groups, political parties, elected officials, and candidates’ campaign organizations
         4. Makes information available to the public in many ways, including
            1. Websites–pages on the internet owned and managed by various entities
            2. Blogs–websites devoted to commentary (sometimes political) and often open to comments from readers
            3. Podcasts–digital recordings that can be downloaded and listened to
      3. Newspapers
         1. Have carried regularly political news since their beginning
         2. Have a declining circulation due to newer media (e.g. Internet and television) but remain an important source of political information
      4. Radio
         1. Is a major source of information, but most stations spend minimal time on public affairs?
         2. Has talk radio shows devoted to political commentary that have large national audiences
      5. Magazines
         1. Have a long history in the US
         2. Most published today are trade or interest specific
         3. Some are devoted to news and public affairs and have a large circulation
2. What is the history of journalism and US politics?
   1. The nature of politics changes with the organization of and the technology available to the press
   2. Four major historical periods
      1. The Party Press
         1. Newspapers were the primary source of mass media
         2. Newspaper subscriptions were expensive and primarily owned by the elite
            1. Printing technology was labor intensive and slow
            2. Transportation available at the time was poor
         3. Newspapers were created by politicians to support their own party-specific political agendas, two politicians of whom were serving as President
            1. Thomas Jefferson, the National Intelligencer
            2. Andrew Jackson, the Washington Globe
      2. The Popular Press
         1. Technological changes made possible self-supporting, daily, mass-readership papers
            1. Printing technology advanced, making the printing process inexpensive and fast
            2. The invention of the telegraph (1840s) allowed news from Washington to be transmitted almost immediately to major cities
            3. Urbanization allowed citizens to support an inexpensive daily paper due to

Reduced costs (e.g. decreased need for transportation)

Increased income (e.g. advertising from local merchants)

* + - 1. The Associated Press was created to share systematically information via telegraph to newspaper editors across the country
         1. Was non-partisan
         2. Presented facts objectively
      2. Mass-readership papers
         1. Were subject to the biases of their publishers and editors instead of party funds
         2. Used sensationalism to sell papers
         3. Were often used to push political agendas (e.g. Spanish-American War)
         4. Created a common national culture
         5. Established the possibility of a “free” (non-government controlled) press
         6. Demonstrated the profitability of stories about public policy and political scandal
    1. Magazines of Opinion
       1. In the mid-1800s, national magazines that discussed political policy were created to satisfy the growing middle class’s desire for political reform
          1. They provided the means for developing a national constituency
          2. Some writers who contributed to the magazines were the first investigative reporters
       2. There was an increase in editors’ and writers’ power due to changes in
          1. Circulation needs
          2. Audience interests
          3. Managerial style
          4. Emergence of nationally known writers
    2. Electronic Journalism
       1. Radio and Television
          1. Two inventions changed the way news was gathered and disseminated
          2. They allowed politicians to communicate directly to citizens
          3. Broadcasts were

Easier to avoid than articles in newspapers

Expensive compared to newspaper ads

* + - * 1. The expense of electronic media required politicians to

Purchase expensive air time

Make controversial statements

Acquire a national reputation

* + - * 1. Today politicians

Have many electronic media options

Crave the media spotlight

* + - 1. The Internet
         1. Is the ultimate free market in political news
         2. Allows political activists and voters to communicate directly
         3. Impacts politics profoundly by making it easier to

Raise money by small donations

Organize people to attend meetings

Take instant (questionably reliable) opinion polls

Disseminate instant opponent criticism

Mobilize local followers

Target campaigners with contact names

1. How do mass media affect politics?
   1. Most citizens rely on the media for information about public issues
   2. Two areas that significantly show the media’s influence are
      1. The Public Agenda
         1. Public agenda – “the societal problems that the nation’s political leaders and the public agree need government attention” (McClenaghan, 2009)
         2. The media determine what issues the public will focus on and talk about by emphasizing some topics while downplaying others
         3. Several news organizations have a direct impact on the nation’s leaders who closely monitor these sources
      2. Electoral Politics
         1. Now that television and the Internet allow politicians to communicate directly with voters, they are less dependent on party organizations
         2. How voters perceive a politician’s image greatly affects votes
         3. Campaign managers and candidates use strategies to manipulate the voters’ perceptions
   3. There are limits on the media’s influence in US politics
      1. Only a small part of the public watches political events closely and understands them accurately
      2. Most people watch political news with selective attention; they focus on sources that agree with their beliefs and ignore sources that challenge their beliefs
      3. Most of the media’s content is apolitical
         1. This limits the time for political news
         2. Requires news editors to abbreviate stories
      4. Being an informed political participant requires effort
2. What are the rules that govern the media?
   1. Protecting the Media
      1. First Amendment
         1. States that “Congress shall make no law … abridging the freedom of the press”
         2. Means that print media are free from prior restraint (government censorship prior to publishing)
            1. Public officials may file a libel suit
            2. Libel – falsely written statements intended to damage a person’s reputation (Remy, 2010)
      2. The Right of Access
         1. Is supported more in the lower courts than in the Supreme Court
         2. Means that reporters may be given special access, but the law does not require it
      3. Confidentiality of Sources
         1. Most reporters believe that they have the right to maintain the confidentiality of their resources
         2. Some states have passed laws to support this right
         3. Most states and the federal government do not support this belief
         4. The Supreme Court generally rules for the government’s right to the information if it is an important part of a criminal investigation
   2. Regulating Print and Broadcast Media
      1. Most media in the US are privately owned, for-profit businesses and are subject to some government regulation
      2. Broadcasting shares public airwaves, which gives the federal government grounds for more regulation
      3. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
         1. Is a “government agency with the authority to regulate interstate and international communications by radio, television, telephone, telegraph, cable, and satellite” (Remy, 10)
         2. Has two major regulatory functions
            1. Content regulation

Fining stations for rules violations

Threatening not to renew a station’s license

* + - * 1. Ownership regulation
      1. Telecommunications Act of 1996
         1. Ended or reduced many of the FCC’s limits on media ownership
         2. Had a key objective to increase competition between owners, but led to a greater concentration of ownership
  1. Constraints on Campaigning
     1. Broadcasters must
        1. Provide equal access to candidates
        2. Charge the cheapest commercial advertising rate for comparable time
     2. Not all politicians campaign using television
        1. It depends upon whether the market aligns efficiently with their voters
        2. Market – “an area easily reached by a television channel” (Wilson, 2011)
        3. There are approximately 200 television markets in the US
        4. The media depends upon “horse-race journalism,” which is a concern for scholars
        5. Horse-race journalism – campaign coverage based on guesses about who is ahead instead of the candidates’ opinions on the issues (Wilson, 2011)

1. How does the US government interact with the media?
   1. Government constraints
      1. Reporters are dependent on the quality of their sources
      2. The government employs many press officers
         1. President
            1. The Press Secretary

Manages and informs the press for the president

Supervises a large staff

Briefs the president on potential questions

Attempts to control the news about cabinet departments

Coordinates briefings for non-White House reporters

* + - * 1. White House Press Corps

Is a group of reporters who?

Have a lounge in the White House

Wait for breaking stories and photo “ops”

Attend the daily press briefing

Provides coverage of the President that is highly

personalized

* + - 1. Congress
         1. House of Representatives

Does not receive much individual attention

Has gavel-to-gavel coverage provided by cable television

* + - * 1. Senate

Works in Washington, D.C., which provides many opportunities for publicity

Receives live coverage of its sessions on cable television

Has used the live coverage to incubate presidential candidates

* + 1. The four ways that reporters and public officials (or their press officers) communicate
       1. On the record – the reporter can give the official’s name
       2. Off the record – the reporter cannot use what the official says
       3. On background – the reporter can use what the official says, but cannot give the official’s name (i.e. a reporter may refer to the source as a high-ranking official)
       4. On deep background – the reporter can use the information, but it cannot be attributed to anyone
  1. News leaks
     1. The various aspects of the US government regularly leak stories favorable to their interests
     2. The branches of the US government compete for power and the press is one tool that they utilize to support their individual political agendas
     3. The US has an adversarial press; it tends to view official news at the national level with suspicion and prefers to find an unofficial source who will leak the “real story”
  2. News Releases and Briefings
     1. News release – “ready-made story prepared by officials for members of the press” (Remy, 2010)
     2. News briefing – a meeting in which a government official makes an announcement or gives an explanation and gives reporters a chance to ask questions about news releases
  3. Press Conferences
     1. Press conference – are usually carefully planned events that allow the press to ask some high-level official questions
     2. The White House staff may limit and/or request questions depending on the topic
  4. Media Events
     1. Media event – “a visually interesting event designed to reinforce the president’s position on some issue” (Remy, 2010)
  5. Sensationalism
     1. Historically, reporters would not report the moral failings of political figures
     2. The competition for viewers between news shows has increased greatly
     3. This competition is a strong incentive for sensational news stories that grab viewers’ attention