We have learned the impacts of group identification on the formation of public opinion.

How about the impacts of mass media?

How do citizens respond to political information given by mass media and campaign ads?

Discuss the nature of the news media and its possible biases.

Introduce models of media effects.
The Era of the New Media

- From objective journalist toward interpretative journalism.
- For the New York Times, in the 1960s, the vast majority of the news stories (91%) were descriptive. In the 1990s, the vast majority (84%) were interpretative.
- Journalists see their job as analyzing and interpreting for the public the often ambiguous or misleading messages being delivered by political leaders.
The Fragmentation of the Media

- The actual number of media outlets has skyrocketed over what was available ten or twenty years ago (e.g., MSNBC, CNN, and the Fox News Network).
- The Internet revolution offers unlimited access to political information any time of day.
Respondents were asked if they “regularly” used a particular source of mass media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local TV news</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightly network news</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print news magazine</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network TV magazines</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News Channel</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk radio</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online News</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some evidence suggests that in-depth coverage of issues decreases as competition increases.

Journalists produce better-quality news when insulated from market pressures.

In a fragmented media market, people have the ability to ideologically customize their sources of political information.

The fragmented media may contribute to a decline in political information. The news has to compete with entertainment for its audience.
Those interested in politics become more informed, while those uninterested become less informed about politics.

A related consequence of the fragmented media is a decline in the power of the president and other leaders to hold the people’s attention.

Cable/satellite TV had ended the “golden age” of presidential influence via television. In 1969, a routine press conference of President Nixon drew 59 percent of the potential national TV audience, while in 1995 a major prime-time news conference by President Clinton attracted only 6.5 percent of households with television.
Is there a liberal bias in the news media?

- Journalists are particularly more liberal than the public on social issues like abortion and the death penalty. However, they may be more conservative than the public when it comes to economic issues. Why?
- Conservative ownership may create a conservative bias.
- We have no conclusion on the claim that the political ideology of reporters affect the way they cover the news.
- Some research shows that network news coverage of presidential campaigns is balanced.
The tone of most media coverage appears to be more negative than positive.

Why has the press more negative toward politicians over the past thirty years?

Relations between politicians and the press have become increasingly adversarial.

A mutual dislike has arisen resulting in the negative coverage of political personalities.

The greater exposure to the media, the more likely people had a negative emotional reaction to Congress.
### Table: National TV News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days Watched During Week</th>
<th>Attention to Campaign News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None, very little 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>Some, quite a bit 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>A great deal 16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table: Daily Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days Read During Week</th>
<th>Attention to Campaign News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None, very little 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>Some, quite a bit 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>A great deal 9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Patterns of Attention to Newspaper and TV news, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper Reading</th>
<th>TV News Viewing</th>
<th>All cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular viewer</td>
<td>Occasional viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular reader</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional reader</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonreader</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All cases</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Growing dominance of television over newspapers as a news source
- The same individual who attended to one medium generally attended to the other
Responsiveness in 2004, by Media Attention

Percentage “very interested” in the election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TV News Viewing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular reader</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional reader</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonreader</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interest in the campaign makes one want to follow the campaign more closely both in newspapers and on television.

Following the campaign event in newspapers or on television makes one more interested.
Responsiveness in 2004, by Media Attention

Percentage with high information about candidate positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TV News Viewing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular reader</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional reader</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonreader</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Newspapers: More reading, more information

TV news: no relationship

The most informed of all are regular newspaper readers who do not watch television news → this is a problem of self-selection; people who choose newspapers over television are more cognitively skilled and therefore more informed to begin with.
The audience for Fox News and the O’Reilly Factor are predominantly Republican, while the audience for the CBS news and NPR leans Democratic.

The ability of people to ideologically customize their sources of political information will serve to polarize the electorate.

When people rely solely on news sources that fit their ideological niche, they become less open to alternative viewpoints → a bad sign for political tolerance and democratic citizenship

Mutz and Martin suggest that main stream news media, especially newspapers and television, produce an opportunity to be exposed to dissimilar political views.
Perceived Exposure to Dissimilar Political Views
Exposure to Dissimilar Political Views by Partisanship

![Bar chart showing exposure to dissimilar political views by partisanship and media sources.](chart.png)
“New Jersey is invaded by Martians!” on the radio in 1938
The use of media propaganda by Mussolini and Hitler
The hypodermic effect model
The minimal effect model
Recent studies: mass media have a modest impact on the formation of public opinion; scholars favor a more nuanced approach that emphasizes the search for subtle but meaningful consequences of media exposure.
The Minimal Effects Model

- Early researchers envisioned voters waffling in their choice of candidates somewhat in the way a consumer might change his or her choice of toothpaste from purchase to purchase, depending on the effectiveness of the latest advertising.

- Three important discoveries in the 40s and 50s
  - The anchor of partisanship
  - Perceptual screening
  - The importance of personal conversations

→ The messages on the mass media are less influential than they might appear.

- What is now clear that public opinion does not automatically flow in the direction of the news
Examples: no congruence between negative media reports and the public’s evaluation of the president
- President Reagan in the Iran-Contra scandal in 1986 and 1987
- President Clinton in the Lewinsky scandal in 1998
Many mass media researchers reject the minimalist interpretation.

The media has limited ability to change vote preferences in partisan elections or change opinions deeply rooted in partisanship or group identification.

There are methodological difficulties in the study of media effects: survey data often do not allow us to track the exposure of people to media information.
We consider two underlying processes of media effects: message awareness and message acceptance.

Suppose that the possibility of opinion change in response to a new political message depends on both (1) the likelihood of becoming aware of the message and (2) the likelihood of accepting it once becoming aware.

These likelihoods are conditional on the level of political sophistication.

Let’s think about three hypothetical scenarios.
For those low in political sophistication

- A probability of accepting a message = 0.9
- A probability of receiving a message = 0.1
- Thus, the probability of opinion change is $0.9 \times 0.1 = 0.09$

For those high in political sophistication

- A probability of accepting a message = 0.1
- A probability of receiving a message = 0.9
- Thus, the probability of opinion change is $0.1 \times 0.9 = 0.09$

For those at the middle range of political sophistication

- A probability of accepting a message = 0.5
- A probability of receiving a message = 0.5
- Thus, the probability of opinion change is $0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.25$
Individuals most susceptible to media effects are those with moderate levels of political sophistication.

People with the medium level of political sophistication are sufficiently interested to be aware of media content but lack the sophistication to completely resist media messages.

Media effects might be substantial if the media messages were one-sided.

Opinion change is not the main function of media effects.

Contemporary thinking about media effects focuses on three processes such as agenda setting, priming, and framing.
Agenda Setting

- “The media may not be successful much of time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling [people] what to think about” (Cohen 1963).
- The media set the political agenda for the public.
- The importance of problems is manipulated.
Experimental studies by Iyenger and Kinder (1987)

- Some participants were randomly selected to watch news stories on national political problems, while others were randomly selected to watch non-political stories.
- The importance of the problems increased for the participants who were exposed to the stories, while it did not increase for the participates who did not watch the news stories.

The public’s level of concern responds more to median concern than to the objective circumstances.
The least sophisticated respondents were the most responsive to experimental manipulation of the agenda.

When the media present only one side of an issue, public opinion respond to the dominant message → a possibility for media manipulation?
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- The public’s level of concern responds more to median concern than to the objective circumstances.
By setting the agenda, the media not only increase the perceived importance of an issue, they can also prime the public so the issue becomes a key ingredient in the way the president (or other relevant political figure) is evaluated.

When an issue is primed by the media, the president is allocated blame or credit for how that issue is being resolved.

Two mechanisms

1. Priming can increase the accessibility of information in short-term memory.
2. When the media focus attention on an issue, they make it clear, either explicitly or implicitly, that reporters and editors feel this issue is important.
There is a possibility that significant damage could be done to presidential support if the media get the facts wrong.

Example: the 1992 presidential election

- Objective economic indicator: better
- Media report: worse
- The majority of people perceived the economy got worse in 1992.
- Negative evaluation leads to vote against Bush.
A media frame provides meaning to unfolding events

Many issues can be characterized by multiple, conflicting aspects

A frame highlights what is important about an issue, such as causes, morality, the people involved, and proposed solutions.

Framing concerns the way media present issue content to the public, while agenda setting and priming concern the importance the media place on an issue.

Example: “free speech” and “public order” in rally by the Ku Klux Klan in Ohio.