Chapter 5
The Mass Media and the Political Agenda

Focus Questions

Q1  How has the role of the media changed over the course of American history?

A1  Since the beginning of the United States, news publications have been partisan and politically oriented. Thomas Paine’s publication, Common Sense, and the printed debates between the Anti-Federalists and Federalists demonstrate the effective use of the media to disseminate information in order to attempt to persuade the public to ratify the Constitution. Beginning in the 1820s, inexpensive newspapers affiliated with political parties provided political fodder to energize party supporters and discredit the opposition. In effect, news and current events, albeit sensationalized and biased (“yellow journalism”), became accessible to the masses. Through technological advances such as the telegraph, an event occurring in one city could be reported and disseminated to an audience in another region. News coverage began to gain a faithful audience that prompted subscriptions from these devoted readers. Furthermore, as businesses realized the benefits newspapers provided allowing them to advertise their products and services to a wide range of Americans, a new avenue of revenue through paid advertising was available to publishers. The influx of advertising and new subscribers began to replace the partisan biases within the papers’ news coverage. While the newspapers still concentrated on sensational stories, information journalism (muckrakers) began to uncover sordid business practices and brought corporate abuses to light in magazines and newspapers. Subsequently, Adolph Ochs, owner and publisher of The New York Times, initiated a move toward professionalism and objective reporting in the news. Consequently, the technological advances producing what we now consider the electronic media (telephone, television, radio, Internet, world wide web) has provided media ownership consolidation, but also accommodates diverse opinions and objectivity in news reporting (covering who, what, where, when, how, why). Yet, there is still a common perception that the mass media, specifically certain news agencies, are biased in their news reporting. Whether this is accurate or not, the current proliferation of print, audio, visual, and digital news sources has provided many avenues for individuals to gain immediate access to information. Yet, establishing what is newsworthy is still debatable. Given the competition among media outlets to get advertising revenue coupled with the public’s desire for sensational and scandalous stories, one may inquire if the media has largely reverted to the partisan press and yellow journalism of the late 1700s.

Q2  Does the increasing concentration of media control in the hands of a few private corporations threaten the accuracy and diversity of information available to citizens?

A2  Given five corporate entities (Disney, News Corporation, General Electric, Time Warner, Viacom) own the vast majority of the television, publishing, radio, film distribution, and online/multimedia outlets, it should not surprise anyone that these global media networks control the images and
words that influence the political agenda within the United States as well as the world. In turn, media conglomerates are careful not to criticize their parent companies, which raises a red flag as to what the major media outlets consider news. In turn, relatively few people determine what the six billion people in the world see, read, and hear. What is troubling is that corporations are beholden to the shareholders and thus need to turn a profit. This produces a dilemma where news agencies have to attract large audiences to generate advertising revenue by providing entertainment at the expense of information. Thus, modern trends in reporting the news may be seen as “infotainment” whereby the substance of news stories is watered down to sound bites and superficial images. Moreover, given the competitive nature of the modern mass media, reporters and journalists compete to gain access to newsmakers. Consequently, information disseminated may originate from a single source that has the ear of a particular person of importance. Since the 1990s, privately owned magazines and Internet websites have provided avenues for the dissemination of diverse political views that have traditionally not been covered by the large news corporations. In turn, these alternative news sources have challenged the hegemony of the mainstream media in determining what issues are considered newsworthy.

Q3 How do the media shape the ideas and information that citizens have about the world?

A3 The media acts as a gatekeeper deciding what is newsworthy. Therefore, the mainstream media shapes public opinion by choosing what constitutes news and what does not. There is a reciprocal relationship between journalist and newsmakers. Thus, prudent media outlets are more apt to get access to politicians if they are considered friendly or at least not hostile by them. So, while press conferences, formal interviews, and speeches are good sources for sterile, prepackaged, political information, individual reporters must establish trust with insiders and the politicians themselves to be the first to report “breaking” news, which advances his or her reputation and attracts large audiences. Consequently, both the newsmakers and the reporters are involved in framing the message the public will hear. Given the public’s short attention span and lack of specific knowledge concerning political events and the need for news organizations to increase ratings, news coverage is primarily concerned with the “here and now,” or episodic coverage, rather than thematic coverage linking the story to other events. As a result, news coverage is largely segmented and choppy rather than constant and detailed. In effect, public opinion is prone to change based upon how the issues are presented.

Q4 How do the media affect how elections are conducted and how government works in the United States?

A4 The relationship between political candidates and the mainstream media’s news agencies may be seen as mutually beneficial: The candidate gets favorable news coverage while the news outlet gets exclusive access to the candidate. Thus, media access is vital to the success of any political campaign as media expenditures for recent House, Senate, and presidential campaigns have illustrated. The media becomes an integral part of any political campaign and plays an important role in defining successful governance. Thus, an incumbent politician benefits from the free coverage the media provides when evaluating his or her performance. In the era of the candidate-centered campaign, the media tends to focus on the politicians’ lives and the events surrounding them, who is winning and losing, and how much money each candidate has raised rather than the issues discussed. This is known as horse-race journalism. Moreover, the media is a successful tool for a member of Congress or the president to make a direct appeal to the people to oppose or support a particular policy or proposed legislation. A prudent politician may increase the chance of
a bill passing and gaining support for his or her policy issue by briefly repeating the merits of said issue in a non-technical way via the media.

**Q5** What role should the media play in a democratic society, and what can we do to get our media to play this role?

**A5** Most people believe the media should ensure accurate reporting on the issues and provide the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies. However, relevant research on the effects of new technologies to increase access to political information suggests that those people who are interested and follow politics will use the Internet and watch 24-hour news channels to make a more informed opinion on political issues while those that are cynical and uninterested in politics will not. This has led to a relatively new news genre combining news with entertainment known as “infotainment” illustrated by programs such as *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*. These shows appeal to a younger audience but have not been shown to motivate these individuals to become more politically active.
Chapter Outline

I. The Mass Media

The modern media play several roles in our democracy. Television, radio, Internet, film, newspapers, magazines, professional journals and other forms of multimedia entertain, inform, and influence the public dialogue.

A. Historical Development of the Media

1. Throughout history, information was passed down from generation to generation through word of mouth.
2. In turn, the unique human ability to articulate thoughts and ideas through spoken and written languages has led to the formation of large and complex societies.
3. With the advent of the printing press, the first newspaper was distributed in Strasbourg in 1609.
4. Almost a century later, The Daily Courant became London’s first daily publication that disseminated information concerning entertainment, high society, and politics to the city’s population.
5. Recognizing the influence the paper had on shaping public opinion, the English courts developed the idea of seditious libel that decreed criticism of government officials and policies that reduced the prestige and influence of government, whether true or false, were illegal.
6. In the American colonies, the first newspaper was published in Boston with other daily publications following in New York and Virginia whereby local government officials sought to control and limit the information presented by the press.

B. The Partisan Press, 1776–1880

1. During the early years of the United States, newspapers were used as mediums to articulate a particular political idea, promote the party line, and discredit the opposition.
2. Therefore, one must remember that newspapers were used as partisan tools to persuade the mass public to support a particular politician, party platform, policy, or political campaign.
   a. Beginning in the 1820s, inexpensive newspapers affiliated with a political party provided political fodder to energize party supporters and discredit the position.
   b. In turn, the partisan press served to rally the party faithful rather than objectively inform the entire public.
3. To appeal to the masses, inexpensive newspapers were sold for a penny, hence the name—penny press—which increased newspapers’ distribution and influence.
4. Through technological advances such as the telegraph, an event occurring in one city could be reported and disseminated to an audience in another city.

C. Muckraker Journalism, 1880–1920

1. The influx of workers into the city spawned the relationship between newspapers and business.
2. Because newspapers had a large audience, merchants began to advertise their commodities within the publications.
3. This prompted a change in the newspapers’ foci from informing the public about partisan politics to providing news concerning current events and human interest stories.
   a. Referred to as yellow journalism, the newspapers began to operate as profit-maximizing businesses which focused on increasing sales by offering subscriptions and concentrating coverage on sensationalistic events that focused on fires, scandals, and the spectacularly unusual.
b. Also, while the newspapers still concentrated on sensational stories, information journalism, whose writers were known as muckrakers, began to emerge in numerous publications to an end of uncovering political and corporate corruption.
   1) Business practices and corporate abuses were brought to light in magazines such as McClure's and Collier's.
   2) Editors of the magazines, including Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell, and Upton Sinclair, included photographs within these publications to accentuate these corrupt and dangerous corporate practices prompting government to act to mandate worker safety standards, maximum working hours, and greater government intervention in economic matters.

D. The Evolution of the Modern Media
1. With the rise of the Progressive movement and America’s involvement in World War I the country was largely united which temporarily quelled the influence of the muckrakers.
2. Consequently, bureaucratic organization, efficiency, objectivity, and professionalism began to dominate the economic, social, and political landscape.
3. In the wake of these changes, Adolph Ochs, owner and publisher of The New York Times, initiated a move toward professionalism and objective reporting in the news.
4. The focus of print media changed:
   a. Journalists used multiple sources to corroborate information.
   b. News coverage presented both sides of an argument or political debate.
   c. Reporting was organized as an inverted pyramid whereby the most important information was placed at the top of an article explaining the “who, what, where, when, how and why of the event.”

E. The Rise of the Electronic Media
1. Beginning in 1920, a new means of mass communication—the radio—replaced the telegraph as a means to transmit news in “real time.”
2. In two years, around 600 radio stations were operating in the United States.
3. Competition and consolidation of these radio stations formed radio networks that still exist. These include:
   a. The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)
   b. Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS)
   c. American Broadcasting Company (ABC).
4. Congress responded to this new form of communication by using its regulatory powers to pass The Radio Act (1927) that created the Federal Radio Commission (FCC) to regulate the radio industry.
5. In 1941, CBS began to broadcast a few television programs in New York City.
6. This new visual media became the overwhelming broadcast medium beginning in the early 1950s which enabled the public to view:
   a. the 1952 Democratic and Republican Conventions;
   b. the first televised presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960;
   c. the Civil Rights Marches;
   d. the assassination of JFK.

F. The Modern Media Explosion
1. The technological advances producing what we now consider the electronic media (satellite telephone, television, radio, Internet, film, and the world wide web) has resulted in consolidating media ownership consolidation, but also provides diverse
opinions and objectivity in news reporting (covering who, what, where, when, how, why).

2. As a result of these new mediums used to disseminate information, newspaper and magazine readership has declined. However, the Internet has forced the print media to investigate new avenues to distribute their product. While elites disproportionately get their information from newspapers, the Internet may provide an avenue for digital news to reach the masses.

3. The mass public acquires most of its news from television and radio.
   a. Given almost every American household has a television, advertisers, politicians, as well as the entertainment industry allocate the bulk of their operating budgets to television broadcasting. Yet, there are indications that the public is not using television to access information concerning current events and politics; instead, the public’s attention is focused on reality shows, entertainment, and sporting events.
   b. As a result, there has been a boom in “talk radio” which has been dominated by politically conservative radio personalities such as Rush Limbaugh and Bill O’Reilly.

4. With the introduction of the first 24-hour cable news channel in 1980, Ted Turner’s CableNews Network provided “real time” access to events throughout the world via satellite communication. Consequently, news coverage was improved to provide immediate coverage of global events as they happen. By placing news affiliates in London, Italy, South America, Indonesia, and Hong Kong, reporters could be quickly deployed to provide the public with unprecedented coverage of world events. Because of CNN’s success, Fox and MSNBC also provide 24-hour news coverage.

5. Despite the aforementioned technological advances in the communication industry, research on the effects of new technologies to increase access to political information suggests that those people who are interested and follow politics will use the Internet and watch 24-hour news channels to make a more informed opinion on political issues while those that are cynical and uninterested in politics will not. This has led to a relatively new news genre combining news with entertainment known as “infotainment” illustrated by programs such as The Colbert Report and The Daily Show. These shows appeal to a younger audience but have not been shown to motivate these individuals to become more politically active.

II. Ownership and Regulation of the Media
The expansion of democratic government in the world has threatened state-owned media. Yet, the majority of radio and television stations continue to be government-owned.

A. Media Consolidation and Diffusion
   1. The U.S. media is privately owned.
   2. The communications industry is primarily controlled by five corporate entities: Disney, News Corporation, General Electric, Time Warner, and Viacom.
   3. Yet, the Internet, world wide web, and blog sites have created an avenue for diverse opinions to be broadcasted globally.

B. Public Regulation
   1. Congress created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1934 to:
      a. Regulate radio transmissions for the public interest.
      b. Assign radio frequencies.
      c. Establish hours of operation.
      d. Approve or deny broadcasting licenses.
e. Limit the number of media outlets any one corporation or individual may own in a single city.

2. Congress enacted the *Telecommunication Act of 1996* to de-regulate the communication industry with the hope that lifting ownership restrictions would further diversify the media.
   a. In fact, the market became even more consolidated.
   b. Pornography, graphic language, and violence became more common in television and radio programs.

3. In 2003, Congress began to demand more action by the five members who comprise the FCC. The regulatory agency began to flex its regulatory muscle by enforcing decency laws in the benefit of the public interest. Two examples are:
   a. Howard Stern’s million-dollar fine.
   b. Janet Jackson’s wardrobe malfunction during the 2004 Super Bowl’s half-time performance.

4. In June 2007, the Sixth Circuit ruled 2-1 in the case, *Fox et al. v. FCC*, that broadcasters were not financially responsible for violations of broadcasting standards that were a result of improper language or mishaps during live events.

5. One must remember that commercial television and radio generates revenue through advertising money.

6. Satellite radio, television, and the Internet have led to revenue being generated through subscriptions, which allows the channels to operate outside many FCC regulations. As a result, the programming cannot be regulated by the FCC’s standards and has prompted calls by some organizations for the government to intervene.

7. Consequently, governmental response to new communication technologies has been slow and largely ineffective in monitoring and enforcing antiquated laws designed to regulate only television, radio, and the print media.

### III. Media Influence and the Political Agenda

A. The Media, the Politicians, and Public Opinion

1. There is a reciprocal relationship between journalists and public officials. Journalists use public officials as sources for information; conversely, public officials use journalists to disseminate their political ideas to the public.

2. *The Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA) was passed by Congress in 1966. This requires government agencies to provide citizens, including the press, with most kinds of information in their possession.

B. Where Do the Media Get the News?

1. The relationship between the media and government officials is both cooperative and conflicting.
   a. Government officials want visibility and publicity to promote their achievements.
   b. Journalists want access and information but sometimes this exposes government failures and individual improprieties.

2. During times of war, tensions between government and the media become apparent.
   a. The First Gulf War established “press pools” to manage the information that was reported to the public.
   b. In the 2003, reporters covering the Iraq War were embedded within military units and were reporting the news in “real time.”
   c. Initially, the successful invasion and battle for Baghdad provided sensational news coverage and positive accounts to increase public support for the war effort.
d. Yet, this relationship fractured as a result of numerous scandals, questionable Bush administration policies, unsuccessful strategies to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis, and decreased support for the war.

C. Where Does the Public Get its News
1. Even with new avenues to access information concerning politics, the public tends to ignore political issues.
2. Conversely, the media is primarily accessed by individuals for entertainment purposes.
3. Given the public’s short attention span and lack of specific knowledge concerning political events and the need for news organizations to increase ratings, news coverage is primarily concerned with the “here and now,” or episodic coverage, rather than thematic coverage linking the story to other events.
4. As a result, news coverage is largely segmented and choppy rather than constant and detailed.

D. The Media and the Electoral Process
1. Total expenditures regarding the 2008 presidential race were $1.7 billion. This established a new benchmark for campaign revenues in a presidential race.
2. The media plays an invaluable role for candidates to “get their message out” to the public.
3. Yet, the press determines what issues will be covered but tends to focus on:
   a. The candidates’ personalities (flaws and strengths).
   b. Horse-race political coverage (who is winning and losing the race).
4. In the modern era of politics, money is necessary to win higher office.
   a. In 2006, campaigns for Congress raised an aggregate of $1.4 billion.
   b. Yet, money does not guarantee victory.
   c. To increase the probability of winning, candidates for public office must hire:
      1) media experts
      2) campaign consultants
      3) professional pollsters.

E. The Media Defining Successful Governance
1. The media influences how the public views government and politicians in the following ways:
   a. The agenda-setting effect: The extent to which the amount of media coverage of an issue affects the public’s attention to and interest in that issue.
   b. The educational effect: The public learns from what is discussed in the media and cannot learn about those issues not presented by the media.
   c. The framing effect: The way an issue is framed or presented in the media, either episodically or thematically, suggests to the public where praise or blame should be laid.
   d. The persuasion effect: The way an issue is presented by the media can sometimes change the substance of what people think about the issue.
2. Political scientists Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder assert issues can be framed in two ways:
   a. Episodically.
      1) Episodic framing places responsibility upon the individual.
      2) Television news primarily presents issues episodically.
   b. Thematically.
      1) Thematic framing emphasizes social patterns and political responsibility.
      2) Issue are discussed in a broader context.

F. The President: Passing His Program

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1. Candidates running for the presidency are heavily scrutinized by the news and the public.
2. By its character, the office of the presidency is easily the most publicly scrutinized position in the federal government:
   a. High visibility of the office.
   b. The centrality of the president to contemporary politics.
3. News agencies focus on numerous aspects of the presidency.
   a. Travels—some of the press corps actually flies on Air Force One.
   b. Interprets his stances on policy issues and the success of his political agenda.
   c. Evaluate his performance.
   d. Since the 1960s, the media has concentrated more upon covering presidents’ private lives including family members.
4. When the media frame events as resulting from presidential action, the public tends to evaluate the president in light of those events.
   a. When popularity is high, the presidential agenda is the focus of the media.
   b. When popularity is low, the media and political opponents are more vocal in their criticisms of the president.

G. Congress: Gridlock and Localism
1. Coverage of Congress is as diffused as that of the president is focused.
2. The character of Congress is mostly conflictual and the media portrays the institution and its members as “out of control.”
3. Furthermore, C-Span and C-Span II covers the proceedings of the House and Senate, respectively. Many find the coverage boring, adding to declining political participation.
4. In addition, media coverage of Congress follows a game frame (who’s winning and who’s losing) rather than in a policy frame.
5. Political scientist Mark Watts suggests a greater emphasis on a policy frame would likely improve the public’s opinion about Congress. Yet, he does not think this is likely to occur.

H. The Federal Court: Ideological Imbalance
1. Coverage of the court system is difficult because of different state laws dictating legal proceedings.
2. Coverage of the federal courts, specifically the Supreme Court, concentrates on:
   a. Whether the decision involves controversial issues such as abortion, gun control, and diversity issues.
   b. How the membership of the Court is changing and the effect of these changes on upholding legal precedents.
   c. The ideological composition of the Court in an attempt to predict how the Justices will decide the aforementioned cases.

IV. Media Responsibility in American Politics
A. Entertainment versus Information
1. “Hard” news is being displaced by a combination of information and entertainment known as “infotainment” programs.
2. For example, the newspaper, USA Today, has changed its format to a more tabloid style providing charts, special features, pictures, and a greater emphasis on entertainment.
3. The de-regulation of the media resulting from the Telecommunication Act of 1996 has consolidates power in five global media conglomerations.
4. Yet, increased governmental regulation of the media outlets has temporarily slowed the mergers.
5. New technologies and 24-hour news services have allowed the public to access an incredible amount of information.

V. Why Americans Distrust Politics
A. Americans distrust politics because what they see largely lacks substance.
B. Politicians use the media to feed the public simplistic solutions to complex problems.
C. The media tends to cover negative events that buttress the public’s skeptical view of society and politics.
D. Episodic framing portrays politics and politicians in a negative light:
   1. Concentrates on winners and losers: Politics is largely seen as a zero-sum game.
   2. Focuses on negative stories.
   3. Emphasizes conflict over cooperation.
Lecture Suggestions

Current Events Focus: Who Owns the Media?

I. Media Consolidation
   A. As of 2004, five conglomerates—the Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, General Electric, Time Warner, and Viacom—control many of the radio, television, film, and publishing companies.
   B. The consolidation of various media outlets with the telecommunication industry has been justified as necessary to streamline production studios as content providers with the mediums for the dissemination of the information through carriers including the Internet, telephone, radio, and cable.
   C. However, one may inquire into what effects further consolidation of media outlets may have on the quantity and quality of information.
      1. Editorial and programming decisions reside among a few individuals.
      2. Information is considered newsworthy based upon the size of the audience and the approval of the advertisers.
      3. Conversely, information about the conglomerates or their subsidiaries may be suppressed due to further consolidation.

   A. The Walt Disney Company
      1. Television
         a. Ten regional television stations including affiliates in New York, Chicago, and LA.
         b. ABC Television Network including ABC Family, The Disney Channel, ESPN, The History Channel, E Entertainment, Lifetime.
         c. Buena Vista, Touchstone, and Walt Disney Television.
      2. Publishing
         a. Books
            1) Hyperion
            2) Disney Children’s Publishing.
         b. Magazines
            1) Disney Magazine
            2) US Weekly (50 percent ownership)
            3) Video Business.
      3. Radio
         a. Own 64 stations within the United States
         b. Radio Disney
         c. ESPN Radio.
      4. Online/Multimedia
         a. ABC.com/Internet group
         b. ESPN.com
         c. NASCAR.com
         d. Go Network.
      5. Film
         a. Walt Disney Productions
         b. Touchstone Pictures
         c. Miramax
         d. Hollywood Pictures
B. News Corporation
1. Television
   a. 36 Fox stations in major U.S. cities
   b. Fox Television Network including FOX News, FX, SPEED Channel, Fox Movie
      Channel, Fox Sports
   c. Direct TV.
2. Publishing
   a. Books
      1) Harper Morrow.
   b. Magazines
      1) *The Weekly Standard*
      2) *TV Guide*.
   c. Newspapers
      1) *New York Post*
      2) Twenty Daily Papers in Australia (Murdoch).
3. Radio
   a. Classic FM
   b. Fox Sports Radio Network
   c. Sky Radio (England, Germany, Denmark).
4. Film
   a. 20th Century Fox
   b. Blue Sky Studios
   c. Fox Searchlight Pictures.
C. General Electric
1. Television
   a. 14 NBC stations
   b. 14 Telemundo Stations
   c. Paxson Communications
   d. NBC Television Network Studios
   e. CNBC
   f. MSNBC
   g. Bravo
   h. USA
   i. A&E
   j. History Channel.
2. Film
   a. Universal Pictures
   b. Focus Features.
D. Time Warner
1. Television
   a. Cable systems
      1) Time Warner
      2) Kablevision (Hungary).
   b. Networks
      1) CNN
      2) HBO
      3) TBS Superstation
      4) Cartoon Network

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5) Court TV
6) Turner Broadcasting (Movies, Classics, South, Latin).

C. Production companies
1) Warner Bros. Studios
2) Hanna-Barbera Cartoons.

2. Publishing
a. Books
   1) Little Brown
   2) Time, Inc.

3. Online/Multimedia
a. AOL
b. MapQuest
c. Netscape Communications
d. CompuServe Interactive Services.

4. Film
a. Warner Bros.
b. Castle Rock
c. Turner Original Productions
d. New Line Cinema
e. Warner Brothers International Theaters.

E. Viacom
1. Television
   a. Seventeen CBS stations
   b. Eighteen UPN Stations
   c. Five Independents.
2. Publishing
   a. Simon & Schuster.
3. Radio
   a. Infinity Broadcasting
   b. Westwood One
   c. TDI Worldwide.
4. Film
   a. Paramount Pictures
   b. Paramount Home Entertainment.

III. Conclusion
A. While the traditional media has become more consolidation, the increased use of the Internet, world wide web, and satellite systems has provided an opportunity for diverse information to be disseminated.
B. Consequently, rules and regulations governing the content of these new information sources has lagged far beyond the advances in technology which has prompted some to call for greater regulations of these new mediums of communication.
C. Yet, others believe the Internet provides a check on the consolidation and uniformity of the traditional media.
D. Finally, the question arises if government regulation of these new technologies is feasible.

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Projects, Exercises, and Activities

1. Watch the federally funded television networks, C-Span I and/or C-Span II, which provide coverage of House and Senate deliberations, respectively. Choose a single policy issue or particular debate on a proposed piece of legislation. First, briefly summarize the debate and identify the sponsors, co-sponsors and opponents of the bill. Next, compare your notes of the committee hearings or floor debates to the coverage presented by the media (television news networks, Internet blogs, newspapers, magazines, etc.). How does your summary and the debates/hearings compare to the media’s coverage? Is there an indication of selective perception on your part; conversely, did the media outlet decide not to cover certain aspects of the event(s)? What may be some reasons for the differences?

2. Professor Andrew R. Cline at the Southern Missouri University argues that, in addition to political orientation bias, there are key structural biases in the way news is reported through the media. Ask your students to visit Professor Cline’s site (http://rhetorica.net/bias.htm) and read about the various types of structural bias. Once they’ve gained an understanding, ask them to locate articles on a policy issue of their choice from both left and right leaning publications. What structural biases in the presentation of political issues can they identify across the political spectrum?

3. Once you’ve placed your students in groups of three to five, ask them to investigate media sources that focus on specialized communities (magazines, newspapers, and Internet sources focused on the Gay and Lesbian, African American, Hispanic, Arab American, Disabled, Blind or other communities). Once each group has selected a different community, ask them to explore the political issues that garner the most attention and focus in these publications. Students can report out to the entire class as a foundation for a discussion on media and diversity in politics.

For an additional enhancement, ask students to compare and contrast the issues found in their media sources with articles about the same issues found in mainstream media sources.
Additional Resources

Supplemental Readings


Websites
Drudge Report
This link is for the Drudge Report, which provides news (with a right-of-center bias) and has several links to other political news sites and blogs.

The Raw Story
This link provides news and analysis that is similar to the Drudge Report but is ideologically left-of-center.

Columbia Journalism Review
This is the website for Columbia School of Journalism’s publication, Columbia Journalism Review. The link above goes immediately to CJR’s Guide to What Major Media Companies Own that provides up-to-date information on what companies and individuals own which media outlets (Internet, radio, print, television, film, and publishing).
**Nieman Watch Dog**
This site is for the media watchdog group, Nieman Watchdog, affiliated with the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. This is a good site for media analysis and research exploring accuracy in news reporting.

**Roper Center**
This site provides a plethora of public opinion data collected over the past fifty years. The site is maintained by the University of Connecticut.

**World Newspapers Access**
Provides listings and links to all global newspapers, news sites, and magazines in English.

**Fox News**
This is the main Web page for Fox News which devotes a portion of its coverage to politics. It is a good place to develop a comparative political news content presentation because Fox has a conservative mission statement.

**MSNBC**
This is the main Web page for MSNBC which devotes a portion of its coverage to politics. It is a good place to develop a comparative political news content presentation because MSNBC has been found to promote a liberal agenda in its coverage.

**CNN**
This is the main Web page for CNN the world’s first 24-hour news channel; it has extensive political coverage, often with interactive web features, and has been found to be relatively neutral regarding its ideological position.

**Bill O'Reilly**
This is the main Web page for Bill O'Reilly a conservative TV journalist and broadcaster on Fox News; there are numerous videos and audio recordings from his perspective programs which you can use to stimulate class discussions.

**Rachel Maddow**
This is the main Web page for Rachel Maddow, a liberal TV broadcaster on MSNBC; there are a number of video clips which you can use to stimulate class discussions.

**Rush Limbaugh**
The first name in conservative talk radio, Rush Limbaugh is a firebrand in American political communications and you can get access to articles, videos, and audio clips from him which can be used to stimulate class discussions.

**Bill Maher**
A controversial liberal comedian and socio-political commentator, Bill Maher, tackles hot button topics. At this site you can get access to videos, a blog, and interviews/talk forums where this man takes on the right in a no-holds barred fashion.

The Daily Show
This site is the main Web page for, The Daily Show, a liberal leaning comedy show that lampoons the mainstream media. This is an excellent “breaking the ice” device to lessen tensions over controversial topics but also display their implied importance.

The Colbert Report
This entertaining show is an irreverent over-the-top portrayal of conservative views.