Public Opinion and the Media

I. Reviewing the Chapter

Chapter Focus

The purpose of this chapter is to explore what is meant by the phenomenon referred to as “public opinion” and to investigate the effects of public opinion on our democratic form of government. The chapter also examines the historical evolution, up to the present, of relations between government and the news media—how the media affect government and politics and how government seeks to affect the media. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. List the sources of our political attitudes, and indicate which are the most important sources. Assess the influence of various religious traditions on political attitudes.

2. Explain why there is no single cleavage between liberals and conservatives in this country and why there are crosscutting cleavages. Explain the significance of these facts. Assess the significance of race in explaining political attitudes.

3. Define political ideology and state why most Americans do not think ideologically. Summarize the liberal positions on the economy, civil rights, and political conduct. Describe the major policy packages in the Democratic party, and indicate which groups in the Democratic coalition can be identified with each package.

4. Identify which elite groups have become liberal, and compare their current attitudes with the past political preferences of these groups. Discuss the “new class” theory as an explanation for changes in attitudes. Analyze why these changes are causing strain in the political party system.

5. Describe the evolution of journalism in American political history, and describe the differences between the party press and the mass media of today.

6. Demonstrate how the characteristics of the electronic media have affected the actions of public officials and candidates for national office.

7. Describe the effect of the pattern of ownership and control of the media on the dissemination of news, and show how wire services and television networks have affected national news coverage. Discuss the influence of the national press.

8. Describe the rules that govern the media, and contrast the regulation of electronic and print media. Describe the effect of libel laws on freedom of the press and of government rules on broadcasters.

9. Assess the effect of the media on politics, and discuss why it is difficult to find evidence that can be used to make a meaningful and accurate assessment. Explain why the executive branch probably benefits at the expense of Congress.
10. Evaluate the impact of the media on public opinion and politics.

Study Outline

I. Introduction
   A. Government policy often at odds with public opinion
      1. Constitution designed to achieve goals, not to follow majority will
      2. Public opinion polls vague (see CHAPTER BOX)
      3. Government more attentive to elite views
   B. Status of media
      1. Media enjoys wide freedom in United States
      2. Media privately owned
   C. What is public opinion?
      1. Poorly informed
      2. Unstable
      3. Sensitive to wording of poll questions
   D. Americans and the Federal Government
      1. Steady decline in trust of government in Washington
      2. Distrust directed at government officials not people
      3. Reasons for distrust: Vietnam and political scandals
      4. Trust destined to decline after abnormally high levels of confidence in government in 1950s

II. The Origins of Political Attitudes
   A. The role of the family
      1. Party identification of family learned well
      2. Much continuity between generations
      3. Declining ability to pass on identification since 1950s
      4. Younger voters exhibit less partisanship
      5. Parents less influence on policy preferences
      6. Few families pass on clear ideologies
   B. Effects of religion
      1. People of different religious traditions have different attitudes on certain issues
      2. Religious traditions affect view of human nature and thus politics
      3. Impact of church endorsements unclear
   C. The “gender gap”
      1. Has existed as long as voting records exist
      2. Women GOP in 1950s but Democrat since late 1960s
      3. Male-female differences over social issues such as war, gun control, etc.
      4. Largest gender difference on use of force and future
   D. Effects of education
      1. College education usually makes voters more liberal
      2. Effect extends beyond end of college
      3. Faculty attitudes an important factor
      4. Effect growing as more go to college

III. Cleavages in Public Opinion
   A. Cross-cutting cleavages
      1. In past, income and occupational cleavages
      2. Today, more cleavages on race, religion, etc.
      3. No single factor explains differences in attitudes in the United States
IV. Political Ideology

A. Ideology: patterned set of political beliefs
B. Consistent attitudes
   1. Most citizens display little ideology; moderates dominate
   2. May have strong political pre-dispositions
   3. “Consistency” criterion somewhat arbitrary since poll questions simplistic
   4. Some believe ideology increased in 1960s
   5. Others argue that poll questions were worded differently
C. Activists
   1. Much more likely to have an ideology
   2. Result of better information and strong political convictions
D. Various categories of opinion
   1. Economic policy: liberals favor jobs for all, medical care, education, and taxation of rich
   2. Civil rights: liberals prefer desegregation, equal opportunity, etc.
   3. Public and political conduct: liberals tolerant of demonstrations, marijuana, etc.
E. Analyzing consistency
   1. Some “inconsistent” attitudes are consistent, leading to four categories of ideologies:
      a. Pure liberal: liberal on both economic and social issues
      b. Pure conservative: conservative on both economic and social issues
      c. Libertarian: conservative on economic issues, liberal on social issues
      d. Populist: liberal on economic issues, conservative on social issues
   2. Many still do not fit in any category
   3. Activists are often quite consistent
   4. Informed voter likely to be more ideological

V. Political Elites and the “New Class”

A. Shift to liberalism
   1. Elites differ from average citizen
   2. Elites defined: those who have disproportionate amount of some valued resource
   3. Elite shift by mid-1960s to liberalism
   4. Not an overwhelming change
B. The New Class
1. Traditional middle class: suburban, churchgoing, pro-business, conservative, and Republican
2. New class: younger, urban, non-churchgoing, liberal, postgraduates, and managerial professionals
3. Key to split: education
4. “Yuppies” not a distinct political group
5. Conflict is a cultural war
6. Policy divisions great on divorce, abortion, homosexuals, environment, and civil rights

VI. The Impact of the Media
A. Journalism in American political history: four periods
   1. The party press
      1. Parties created and subsidized various newspapers
      2. Appealed to wealthy, culturally advantaged elites
   2. The popular press
      1. Changes in society and technology led to mass readership and national culture
      2. Influence of publishers, editors (Hearst and yellow journalism)
   D. Magazines of opinion
      1. Middle class favors new progressive periodicals
      2. Individual writers gain national followings and editors more power
      3. Number of competing newspapers declines, as does sensationalism
   E. Electronic journalism
      1. Radio arrives in the 1920s, TV in the 1940s, and changes how news is gathered and disseminated
      2. Politicians could address voters directly
      3. But fewer politicians could be covered so “bold” tactics required
   F. “Talk radio”
      1. Controversial hosts who make statements and then respond to listeners
      2. Example: Rush Limbaugh

VII. The Structure of the Media
A. Degree of competition
   1. Newspapers—number of newspapers has not declined, but competition within cities
   2. Radio and television decentralized and locally owned due to FCC
B. The national media
   1. Broadcast services offset local orientation
   2. Consists of wire services, national magazines, TV networks, and national newspapers
   3. Significance: more important in D.C. and more liberal
   4. Roles played: gatekeeper, scorekeeper, and watchdog

VIII. Rules Governing the Media
A. Freedom of the press
   1. Newspapers almost entirely free, need no license
   2. Radio and television protected by courts
   3. Reporters want right to keep sources confidential (see CHAPTER BOX)
   4. Most states and federal government disagree on reporter confidentiality
B. Regulation and deregulation
   1. FCC licensing
   2. Recent movement to deregulate
3. Many regulations still in effect: equal time rule and personal attack rules

IX. Government and the News
   A. Prominence of the president
      1. Theodore Roosevelt: systematic cultivation of the press
      2. Franklin Roosevelt: press secretary a major instrument for cultivating press
      3. Press secretary today: large staff, many functions
      4. White House Press Corps
      5. Unparalleled personalization of government

B. Coverage of Congress
   1. Never equal to that of president
   2. House quite restrictive
   3. Senate more open

X. Interpreting Political News
   A. Public reliance on TV
      1. Most Americans get news from TV, but increasingly distrust what they see
      2. Media may possess different views/values versus general public
      3. Intense competition among TV networks for an audience
   B. Are news stories slanted?
      1. Various factors influence how stories are written
      2. Types of stories: routine, selected, and insider
   C. News Leaks
      1. Insider stories raise questions of informant’s motives
      2. Reliance on “leaks” a traditional device of gaining information
   D. The influence of media opinions on public opinion
      1. Does media change public thinking? Unlikely in most cases
      2. Media’s greatest influence over issues on which public has little information
      3. Media does place issues on the “public agenda”
      4. TV gives politicians access only if they provide what TV finds profitable: scandals, visuals, sound bites, and pettiness
      5. Politicians able to shape media through press officers, targeting 6 P.M. news, spin control, leaks, rewards, and penalties

Key Terms Match

Match the following terms and descriptions:

a. elites
b. equal-time rule
c. fairness doctrine
d. FCC
e. gatekeeper
f. gender gap

1. ___ Differences in political views between men and women.
2. ___ People who have a disproportionate amount of political power.
3. ___ Middle-income people who live in cities, do not attend church, and have mostly liberal political views.
4. ___ One who is liberal on both economic and personal-conduct issues.
5. ___ One who is conservative on both economic and personal-conduct issues.
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<tr>
<td><strong>g. ideology</strong></td>
<td><strong>6. ___</strong></td>
<td>One who is conservative on economic issues, liberal on personal-conduct issues.</td>
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<td><strong>h. libertarian</strong></td>
<td><strong>7. ___</strong></td>
<td>One who is liberal on economic issues, conservative on personal-conduct issues.</td>
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<td><strong>i. new class</strong></td>
<td><strong>8. ___</strong></td>
<td>Sensationalized news reporting.</td>
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<td><strong>j. party press</strong></td>
<td><strong>9. ___</strong></td>
<td>The government agency charged with regulating the electronic media.</td>
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<td><strong>k. personal-attack rule</strong></td>
<td><strong>10. ___</strong></td>
<td>A principle that formerly obligated broadcasters to present both sides of an issue.</td>
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<td><strong>l. popular press</strong></td>
<td><strong>11. ___</strong></td>
<td>An obligation of broadcasters to give all candidates equal access to the media.</td>
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<td><strong>m. populist</strong></td>
<td><strong>12. ___</strong></td>
<td>The role played by the national media in influencing what subjects become political issues and for how long.</td>
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<td><strong>n. prior restraint</strong></td>
<td><strong>13. ___</strong></td>
<td>A coherent and consistent set of beliefs about who ought to rule, what principles rulers should obey, and what policies they ought to pursue.</td>
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<td><strong>o. pure conservative</strong></td>
<td><strong>14. ___</strong></td>
<td>Newspapers created, sponsored, and controlled by political parties to further their interests.</td>
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<td><strong>p. pure libel</strong></td>
<td><strong>15. ___</strong></td>
<td>An FCC regulation that gives a person whose character is attacked on a broadcast a chance to respond.</td>
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<td><strong>q. scorekeeper</strong></td>
<td><strong>16. ___</strong></td>
<td>The use of key aids by politicians to shape the way a political event is interpreted by the media.</td>
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<td><strong>r. sound bite</strong></td>
<td><strong>17. ___</strong></td>
<td>Government censorship of the press, made difficult by the First Amendment.</td>
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<td><strong>s. spin control</strong></td>
<td><strong>18. ___</strong></td>
<td>The role played by the national media in investigating political personalities and exposing scandals.</td>
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<td><strong>t. watchdog</strong></td>
<td><strong>19. ___</strong></td>
<td>A brief portion of a political speech aired by broadcasters that, to viewers, appears to convey the whole message of the speech.</td>
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<td><strong>u. yellow journalism</strong></td>
<td><strong>20. ___</strong></td>
<td>Self-supporting daily newspapers aimed at a mass readership.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>21. ___</strong></td>
<td>The role played by the national media in keeping track of and helping make political reputations.</td>
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Did You Think That…?

A number of misconceptions are listed below. You should be able to refute each statement in the space provided, referring to information or argumentation contained in this chapter. Sample answers appear at the end of the Study Guide.

1. “The Founders intended that the government was to be run by the will of the majority.”

2. “Differences of opinion in the United States are clearly related to differences in class.”

3. “Most Americans take consistently liberal or conservative positions on issues.”

4. “Affluent people are always politically conservative.”

5. “Freedom of the press means that Congress cannot regulate the mass media.”

6. “The media simply act as messengers that carry objective news.”
7. “Media manipulation has had a major demonstrable effect on voting behavior in most elections.”

8. “News leaks usually hurt someone in government.”

Data Check

Table 4.2: The Gender Gap: Differences in Political Views of Women and Men
1. On which item was the gap most pronounced?

2. Which group is most likely to identify as a Democrat, men or women?

Table 4.3: White Versus Black Opinions
3. On what three issues is there greater discrepancy in opinion between whites and blacks?

4. On what issue is there the greatest agreement in opinion between whites and blacks?

Table 4.5: Journalist Opinion Versus Public Opinion
5. According to the table, are journalists more or less likely than the average citizen to favor capital punishment for murder? To be politically conservative? To support stricter controls on handguns? To support prayer in public schools?
II. Practicing for Exams

**True/False.** Read each statement carefully. Mark true statements \( T \). If any part of the statement is false, mark it \( F \), and write in the space provided a concise explanation of why the statement is false.

1. The Framers of the Constitution understood that the opinions of factions and interest groups would be heard most clearly by the government.  
   ___

2. Great Britain is more tolerant than the United States of reporters’ prying into the private lives of public figures.  
   ___

3. The government attends more to the views of a political elite than to popular views.  
   ___

4. Public opinion tends to stay relatively stable over time.  
   ___

5. Children appear to be more likely to accept their parents’ beliefs on policy than their parents’ party identification.  
   ___

6. Evangelical Christians have become attached to Democratic presidential candidates.  
   ___

7. The gender gap in American public opinion has existed as long as voting records exist.  
   ___

8. Social class is probably a better indicator of political attitudes in England or France than in the United States.  
   ___

9. Blacks are the least consistently liberal minority group within the Democratic party.  
   ___

10. Southern white voters remain loyal supporters of the Democratic party.  
    ___
11. In their political attitudes, Asian-Americans are more like Latinos and blacks than like whites.

12. Most Americans tend to think about politics in an ideological manner.

13. Political activists display more consistent attitudes than do average citizens.

14. A liberal on economic issues is one who favors government efforts to increase tax rates for wealthy individuals.

15. “Pure conservatives” oppose all sorts of government extension, whether into economic or lifestyle matters.

16. Individuals with college degrees tend to vote overwhelmingly Democratic.

17. The new class draws more power from governmental than business institutions.

18. Around the turn of the century, “yellow journalism” was supported by those who favored political reform.

19. The “media elite” tend to be more liberal than the U.S. public.

20. Because of its visual nature and larger audience, television plays a larger political role in America than do newspapers and magazines.

21. Federal regulation of the media is concentrated on the least competitive sector—radio and television.

22. Most states, unlike the federal government, have passed laws that force reporters to disclose their confidential sources.
23. The fairness doctrine obliges broadcasters to present contrasting sides of controversial issues.

24. According to the equal-time rule, broadcasters who sell advertising time to one candidate must sell equal amounts at equal rates to the candidate’s competitor(s).

25. Television stations get their FCC licenses renewed automatically unless some community group formally objects.

26. Insider stories concern public events that any reporter can find out about but that few reporters bother to cover.

27. The insider leak is a comparatively new phenomenon in American politics.

28. The sound bite is an effective way for candidates to discuss complex issues.

29. Presidents have been known to reward journalists by giving them exclusive interviews or insider stories.

30. In politics, spin control is often synonymous with making the best of a bad situation.

Multiple Choice. Circle the letter of the response that best answers the question or completes the statement.

1. Which of the following goals is not listed in the Preamble to the Constitution?
   a. justice
   b. domestic tranquility
   c. equality
   d. the general welfare
2. The Framers of the Constitution understood that __________ would be the chief source of opinion on most matters.
   a. the general public
   b. elected representatives
   c. factions and interest groups
   d. intellectuals

3. Compared with the media in other western democracies, media in the United States:
   a. are more nationally oriented.
   b. have a greater variety of extreme left- and right-wing views.
   c. are mostly privately owned.
   d. are controlled by fewer hands.

4. In adulthood, people whose party identification differs from their parents’ usually call themselves:
   a. radicals.
   b. independents.
   c. conservatives.
   d. Democrats.

5. In recent years the influence of the family on party identification has:
   a. decreased.
   b. increased.
   c. remained the same.
   d. disappeared.

6. Which religious group is most likely to have liberal political attitudes?
   a. Jews
   b. Protestants
   c. Catholics
   d. no difference

7. Which of the following factors appears to have the least effect on political attitudes?
   a. religion
   b. peer influence
   c. the gender gap
   d. higher education

8. Over the past fifty years the correlation between occupation and policy preferences has:
   a. remained the same.
   b. varied greatly.
   c. increased steadily.
   d. decreased steadily.

9. Which of the following groups display the most consistency in political attitudes?
   a. average citizens
   b. political activists
   c. blacks
   d. manual workers
10. Those who favor increased taxation of the rich are usually described as:
   a. Republicans.
   b. liberals.
   c. activists.
   d. conservatives.

11. According to the text, if you are in favor of reducing federal taxes and also quarantining AIDS victims, you would be labeled a:
   a. pure liberal.
   b. pure conservative.
   c. libertarian.
   d. populist.

12. According to the text, if you are in favor of greater government regulation of business and also the legalization of prayer in school, you would be labeled a:
   a. pure liberal.
   b. pure conservative.
   c. libertarian.
   d. populist.

13. The characteristic that is not found in the new middle class is:
   a. a postgraduate education.
   b. residence in or near big cities.
   c. an attitude favorable to business interests.
   d. a liberal position on social issues.

14. Which of the following was a milestone in the development of a reasonably nonpartisan and unbiased press?
   a. the establishment of the *Gazette of the United States* during the Washington administration
   b. the establishment of the Associated Press in 1848
   c. the creation of the *National Intelligence* by Jacksonian Democrats
   d. the rise of competition from radio in the 1920s

15. Which of the following was not among the achievements of the mass-based press, exemplified by Hearst and Pulitzer?
   a. instituting responsible and unbiased journalism
   b. beginning the creation of a national political culture
   c. proving the feasibility of a press free of government subsidy or control
   d. criticizing public policy and revealing public scandal

16. Which of the following was not associated with the rise of national magazines around the turn of the century?
   a. yellow journalism
   b. muckraking
   c. political patronage
   d. partisanship

17. The invention of radio was a politically important media development because it:
   a. allowed public officials to reach the public in a less-filtered manner.
   b. gave rise to the era of mass politics and a large electorate.
   c. rendered image more important than substance in seeking political office.
   d. reinforced the influence of political parties when it was first introduced.
18. One of Jimmy Carter’s signal achievements in dealing with the press in the 1976 primary campaign was:
   a. keeping a low profile.
   b. taking newsworthy positions on important issues.
   c. defusing an initial bias against him among reporters.
   d. getting himself mentioned with great frequency.

19. An irony concerning government regulation of the news media is that:
   a. American media are less regulated than foreign media despite the greater need for regulation here.
   b. legislation designed to intimidate the media has, in fact, made them more hostile toward officials.
   c. the least competitive part of the media is almost entirely unregulated, whereas the most competitive part is substantially regulated.
   d. the most influential media, the broadcast media, show highly concentrated patterns of ownership by a few large corporations.

20. The president of the United States is unlike the chief executive of other nations with regard to the:
   a. hostility with which he is normally treated by the press.
   b. use of the press secretary as an instrument for dealing with the press.
   c. legal protection he enjoys from stories that defame or ridicule him.
   d. close physical proximity between the press and the center of government.

21. In an age in which the media are very important, who among the following is best positioned to run for president?
   a. a House member
   b. a senator
   c. a governor
   d. a big-city mayor

22. Which of the following most influences editors while deciding which stories to include in the daily newspaper?
   a. They are tightly constrained by the volume of “hard” news that must be included.
   b. They are tightly constrained by the limited amount of material available to them.
   c. They are tightly constrained by the need to include popular or “catchy” feature stories.
   d. They have considerable latitude to express their ideological biases in the selection of “background” or “feature” stories.

23. Politicians have become more heavily dependent on the media as:
   a. the public has become better educated.
   b. public affairs have become much more complex.
   c. the scope of government has expanded.
   d. political party organizations have declined.
24. The content of radio and television is regulated in ways that newspapers and magazines are not. For example, broadcasters are required by law to:
   a. sell equal time to all candidates.
   b. allow individuals the right to reply to an attack that occurred on a regular news program.
   c. allow a candidate to petition for a station’s endorsement.
   d. present contrasting sides of controversial public issues.

25. Regarding their relationship with the media, American public officials generally:
   a. try to avoid the media to prevent damage to their reputations.
   b. spend a great deal of time cultivating the media.
   c. rely on the media to take the initiative on press coverage.
   d. rely on the media only to the extent the media can help set a political agenda.

26. According to recent polls, Americans claim to get most of their news from:
   a. television.
   b. local newspapers.
   c. national newspapers (New York Times, etc.).
   d. national news weeklies (Time, etc.).

27. The Associated Press and UPI generally supply newspapers with what type of stories?
   a. feature
   b. routine
   c. insider
   d. investigative

28. The aspect of news reporting in which the political ideology of journalists is most likely to come into play is the issue of:
   a. how to handle routine stories.
   b. how much space to give a story.
   c. how long to carry a story.
   d. which stories to cover.

29. One reason there are so many news leaks in the United States is that:
   a. most public officials receive some money from the media.
   b. government employs so many press officers.
   c. power is so decentralized.
   d. presidential rewards are so attractive.

30. On which of the following issues are the media likely to have the greatest influence on the national political agenda?
   a. an issue such as unemployment that affects people personally
   b. an issue such as the environment with which people have little personal experience
   c. an issue such as abortion or school prayer with which the courts have been involved
   d. an issue such as school taxes that affects people at the local level
Essay. Practice writing extended answers to the following questions. These test your ability to integrate and express the ideas that you have been studying in this chapter.

1. Discuss the comparative roles played by the family, religion, gender, and education in forming Americans’ political outlook. Of the four, which would you say has been gaining in importance recently, and why?

2. Explain what the words *liberal* and *conservative* mean in the United States today, compared with their earlier meanings. Discuss to what extent these terms are useful in characterizing the political attitudes of the average American.

3. Compare and contrast the “new class” and the traditional middle class, or “old class,” as to their makeup and their political beliefs and allegiances. What effect on American politics is likely to occur from the growth of the “new class”?

4. Discuss how media coverage of politics and political candidates has changed since the 1960s.

5. Compare and contrast the party press of the Federalist-Republican era with today’s mass media, listing some major changes in technology and society that have brought about this evolution.

6. Discuss the major ways in which the focus on electronic media rather than print media has changed the conduct of American politics.

7. Compare government regulation of the print media with that of radio and TV, also noting recent trends in the latter.

8. Describe and discuss the resources used by the press and by the government in the adversarial relations increasingly common between them.

III. Applying What You’ve Learned

Which Sources of Information Are the Best?

How much information can the public obtain from television news? Is it comparable to what can be obtained by reading a daily newspaper? This exercise might help you make up your own mind about adequate sources for keeping informed regarding public affairs.

1. Choose a network station (either ABC, CBS, or NBC) and prepare to watch the local news and the national news with a tape recorder or a VCR. Make arrangements with your library to obtain a copy of a good major newspaper such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Los Angeles Times*, or the *Atlanta Constitution*. Also arrange to obtain copies of a local newspaper.

2. For three days watch the news programs on television. Record any story dealing with foreign affairs. After watching for three days, answer these questions.

   a. How many stories on foreign affairs were broadcast by the national news? By the local news?
b. How many minutes did each story run? What was the average length of a foreign-affairs story on national news? On local news? (You can rerun the tape, using a watch, to compute the time of each story.)

c. How many words are contained in the average story broadcast on national news? On local news? (To compute this, first determine the approximate number of words per minute in a story by running the tape recorder or VCR for a minute and counting the words.)

3. Examine the major-newspaper and the local-newspaper coverage of the same stories for the same time period. Determine which stories in the newspapers dealt with the stories broadcast by the news programs.

a. Using a ruler, determine the number of column inches devoted to each story.

b. Count the number of words in each column inch, then multiply by the number of inches to determine the number of words in each story.

c. How many words are contained in the average story printed by the major newspaper?

d. How many words are contained in the average story printed by the local newspaper?

4. List all of the foreign-affairs stories covered by the national news program for the three-day period. List all of the foreign-affairs stories covered by the major newspaper for the three-day period. Which source covered more stories? Was there a significant difference?

5. Construct a table, such as the one shown here, to summarize your results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National News Show</th>
<th>Local News Show</th>
<th>National Press</th>
<th>Local Press</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Stories Covered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Words in Average Story</td>
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If you wish, you may substitute economic news, presidential news, or any other political topic for the foreign-affairs news.
Are the Media Critics of, or Apologists for, the System?

In addition to assessing the extent of coverage, political scientists are interested in determining the **content** of news stories, to see whether their **tone** is supportive of the political system. How do editorial writers and columnists portray political institutions and leaders?

By performing the following exercise, you can learn how to carry out content analysis on media portrayal of the presidency.

1. Arrange to obtain copies of a major newspaper for six days. If you cannot do so, obtain the *New York Times* on microfilm for a six-day period.
2. Examine any editorials or signed columns of opinion on the inside pages that make mention of the president.
3. After reading each article, evaluate it on each of the dimensions listed in the accompanying table, using a scale of 1-5. A “5” would mean that the article was favorable to the president. A “1” would mean that the article was unfavorable. For anything in between, use numbers 2, 3, and 4.

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<th>Article</th>
<th>Expertise of the Administration</th>
<th>Timeliness of the Decision</th>
<th>Success of the Policy</th>
<th>Honesty of Subordinates</th>
<th>Responsiveness of the Public</th>
<th>Secretiveness of Officials</th>
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</table>
4. Are most of the numbers clustered on the low side of the table? Do you think that it is a fair assessment of editorial writers and columnists to state that they view themselves in an adversary relationship with the White House? That they see themselves as perennial critics of the performance of the president? Or do you think that the newspapers are primarily apologists for the administration in power?

IV. Research and Resources

Suggested Readings


**Resources on the World Wide Web**

**Opinion polls:**

Gallup: www.gallup.com


**Media:**

To search many newspapers: www.ipl.org

CNN/TIME news: www.allpolitics.com

CBS News: www.cbsnews.com

Washington, D.C., newspapers:

*Washington Post*: www.washingtonpost.com

*Washington Times*: www.washtimes.com