



The Media Part II

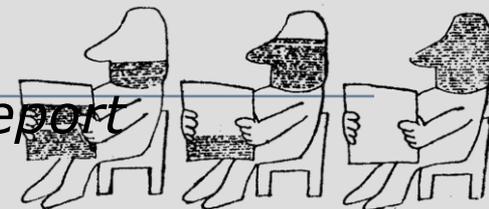
Those who rule have always had an interest in shaping the perceptions of those they wish to rule. But never in the history of humanity has their toolbox been so full. Advances in technology and psychology have enabled the messages of the rulers to permeate our consciousness to a degree no prior society could have imagined.

James Rozoff



National Influence of the Media

- Only a handful of media outlets are **influential nationally**.
 - *New York Times*
 - *Wall Street Journal*
 - *USA Today*
 - *Christian Science Monitor*
 - *Washington Post*
 - *Los Angeles Times*
- They have reach through their own circulation, but also influence what the five major national networks and cable news organizations decide to focus on.
- Wire services also nationalize the news.
- News magazines supplement other sources.
 - *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*





What Information Sources Do Americans Rely On?

- Tough question to answer:
 - We encounter different media during our day.
 - Most people say **television** when asked directly.
- TV has been the public's main source of information since in the 1960s.
 - But how much attention do we pay to this information? How much is retained?
 - **halo effect**: cognitive bias in which an observer's overall impression of a person, company, brand or product influences the observer's feelings and thoughts about that entity's character or properties
 - *news* not a well-defined concept
- decline in the audience for traditional news outlets
- internet an alternative to mainstream

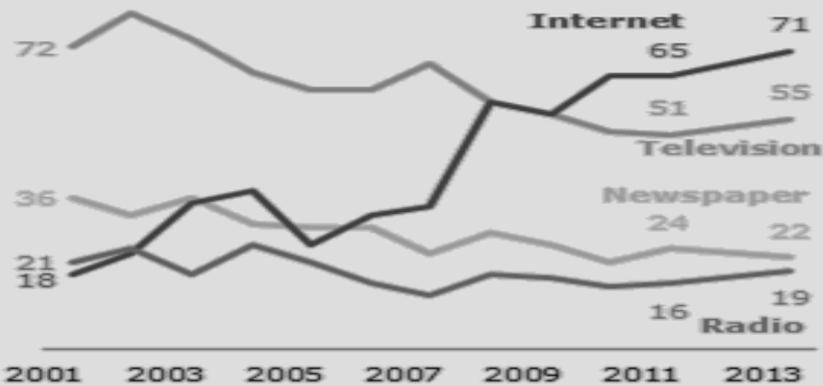




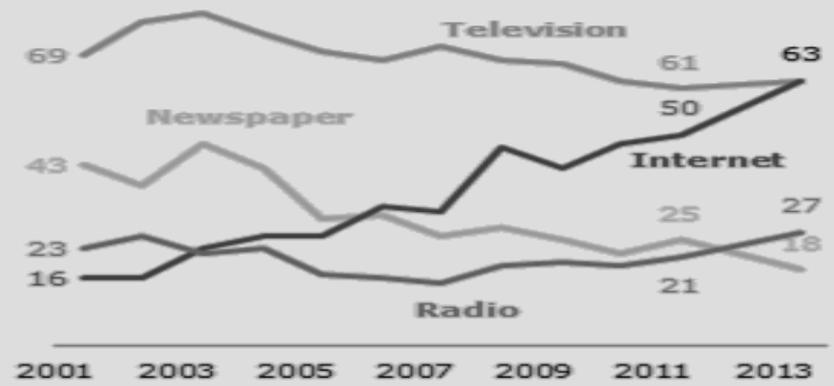
What Information Sources Do Americans Rely On?

Main Source for National and International News by Age Group

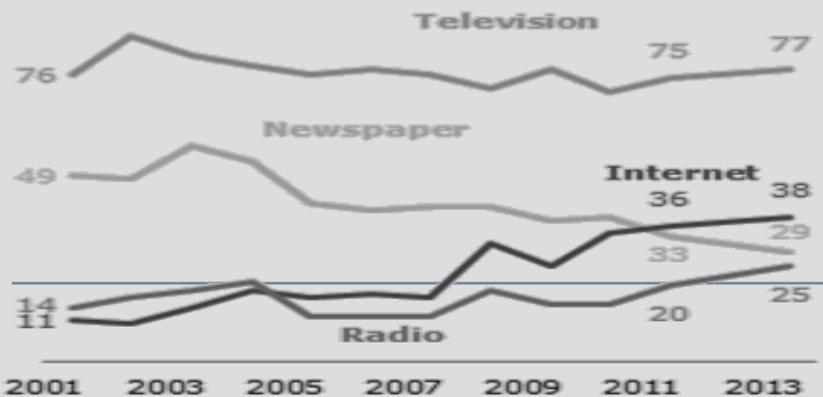
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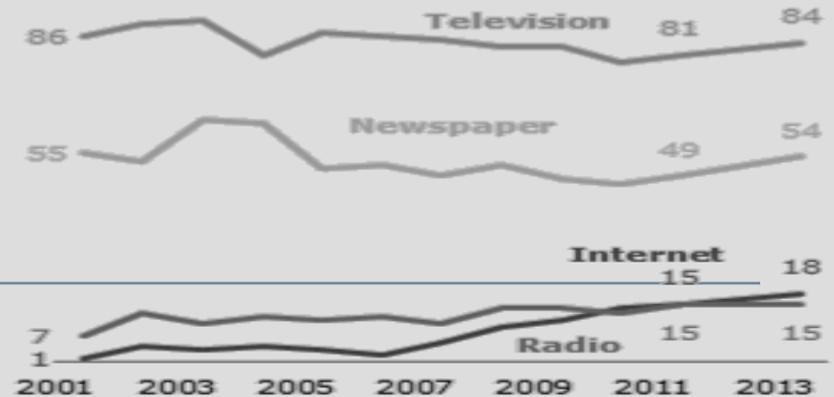
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65+





Political Newsmaking

- **the limited geography of political news:** serious national news comes from surprisingly few places ... expensive equipment, time for editing ... most TV news coverage is assigned to predictable events
 - **dependence on official sources:** beats and news-gathering routines encourage situation of **mutual dependence** by reporters and officials, dependence on **self-interested sources**
 - **beat reporting:** genre of journalism that can be described as the craft of in-depth reporting on a particular issue, sector, organization or institution over time, also known as specialized reporting
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Political Newsmaking

- **dependence on official sources**

- Some news is created or originated by these institutions and sources ... **spin**: a form of propaganda, achieved through providing a biased interpretation of an event or campaigning to persuade public opinion in favor or against some organization or public figure ... often implies the use of disingenuous, deceptive and highly manipulative tactics



- **staging**: allows the candidate to control what is said
- **leaking**: much of the news each day is based on information previously considered confidential, the public's right to know ... Journalists are rarely in a position to establish the truth of an issue themselves, since they didn't witness it personally.
- **trial balloon**: an intentional news leak for purpose of assessing public reaction



Political Newsmaking

- News coverage follows the contours of **elite debate** and has little relation to public opinion.
 - **newsworthiness**: editors' judgments are quick ...
elements: novelty, drama and human interest, relevance to American lives, high stakes, celebrity status
 - **templates**: generally agreed-upon slant ... public knows big story, point is to fill in the details
 - **episodic foreign coverage**: lack of affordability for foreign bureaus ... dependence on **stringers**: temporary teams responding to crises ... limited areas of the world are covered
 - **Military actions** are often used as excuse for media to follow different rules.
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Political Newsmaking

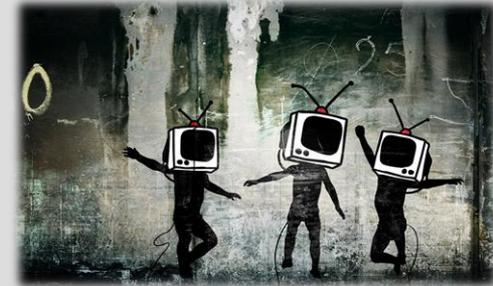
- **interpreting**
 - **informal rules** of objective journalism
 - bias often is hard to detect
 - **explicit interpretations** are generally avoided
 - **selection of experts, pundits**: academics or former government officials, generally the same ones are used, reflect a NYC-Washington view
- News provides more **entertainment** than information ... it is **superficial**. News is a business, giving people what they want.





Prevailing Themes in Political Newsmaking

- nationalism
 - approval of the American economic system
 - **negativity** and scandal
 - **infotainment**
 - limited, **fragmented** and incoherent political information
 - **superficial**: describes most news coverage today
 - Democratic and Republican encounters
 - flow of information must be free and full
 - scholars and media critics vs. free market and consumerism
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- questions about the media's civic responsibility





Media Coverage of Government

- Media coverage of government is similar to that of campaigns.
 - From the news media perspective, government and the work it does is pretty dull.
 - For that reason, there is relatively little news coverage of it.
 - When media do cover government...
 - emphasis is on **president**
 - emphasis is on **conflict**
 - emphasis is on the **negative**
 - **response**: Officials have exaggerated concern with the press.
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Media Coverage of Government

- communication between elected officials / public figures and media
 - **press release**: document offering an official comment or position
 - **press briefing**: relatively restricted session between a press secretary or aide and the press
 - **press conference**: an unrestricted session between an elected official and the press
 - **on background**: information provided to a journalist that will not be attributed to a named source
 - **deep background**: information provided to a journalist that will not be attributed to any source
 - **off-the-record**: information provided to a journalist that will not be released to the public
 - **on-the-record**: information provided to a journalist that can be released and attributed by name to the source





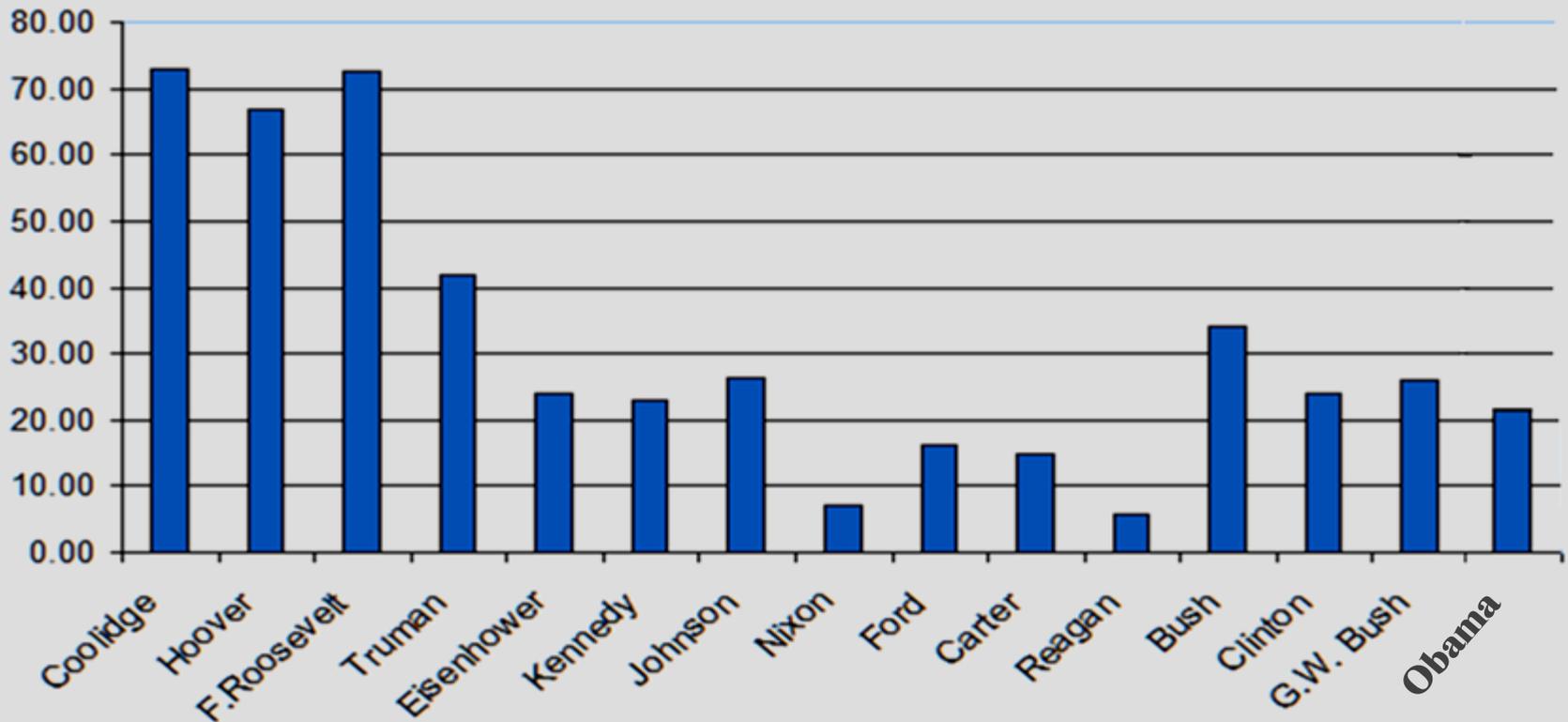
Covering the Presidency

- President is the focus of the most media coverage.
 - Easier to focus on one person, like the president, than on groups such as Congress or the courts.
 - can summon the press at will
 - FDR was first to **use press conference as a means to shape public opinion** and explain his actions.
 - **press secretary**: existed since Hoover's administration
 - president's main disseminator of information to the press
 - president gets the most coverage, but much of it is **negative** (LBJ: If one morning I walked on top of the water across the Potomac River, the headline that afternoon would read: 'President Can't Swim.')
 - George W Bush disliked press conferences.
 - strategy to control his image
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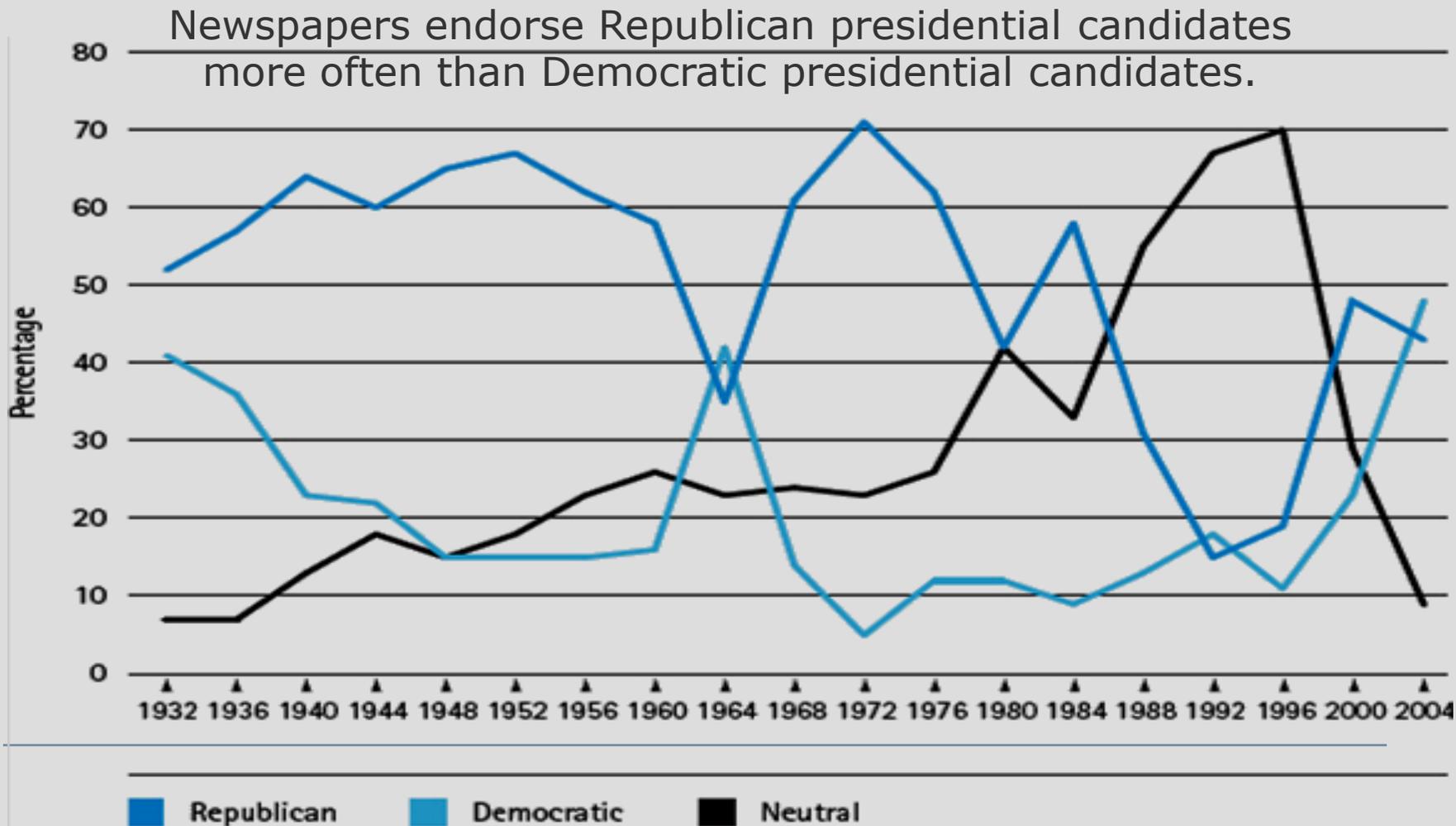
Covering the Presidency

Average News Conferences per Year





Covering the Presidency





Covering Congress

- Size of Congress and its decentralized nature make it difficult for the media to cover.
- Solve this problem by...
 - giving **leaders** most attention
 - key **committee chairs** command center stage
 - Local newspapers and broadcast stations normally devote some resources to covering their own representatives.
- Coverage tends to be **negative**.
 - focus on conflict
 - May be part of the reason people view Congress so negatively.
- Investigative hearings may be televised.
 - Joseph McCarthy
 - Enron and Worldcom





Covering Campaigns

- This is an area where the media are criticized heavily.
 - charge: The media provide **little coverage of policy** issues.
 - charge: The media **concentrate on** issues such as **character** at the expense of genuine policy and expertise issues.
 - charge: Reporters **intermediate** too much.
 - **media events**: events staged by a political candidate primarily for the purpose of being covered, often scripted and limited in what they will report ... candidates often use **media consultants** to help with their media image
 - **sound bites**: 30-second sound clips used on TV to convey the message of an entire speech ... which 30-seconds is used can make a huge difference
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Covering Campaigns



Officials want to control information about themselves and their policies, including the way such information is framed and presented by the media.



Covering Campaigns



portraits of Abraham Lincoln as "Abe the Rail Splitter" and of George W. Bush riding a mountain bike



Covering Campaigns

- **horse-race coverage:** focus is on polling data and public perception rather than candidate policies ... who's ahead, etc
- **advertising:** candidates rely heavily on media advertising to get out their message and persuade the public ... amount of money spend on advertising in the 2012 presidential election exceeded a record \$7,000,000,000
- **negative advertising** (attack ads): 2012 campaign noted for record-setting negativity
- **information about issues:** seemingly less and less provided with each election
- **election night reporting**
- provide **formal and informal settings** for audience to assess candidates





Covering Campaigns

Presidential candidates welcome invitations to appear with Oprah, Leno or Letterman, and to try to reformulate their messages in a light, comedic style that fits the program.





Covering Campaigns: Conventions



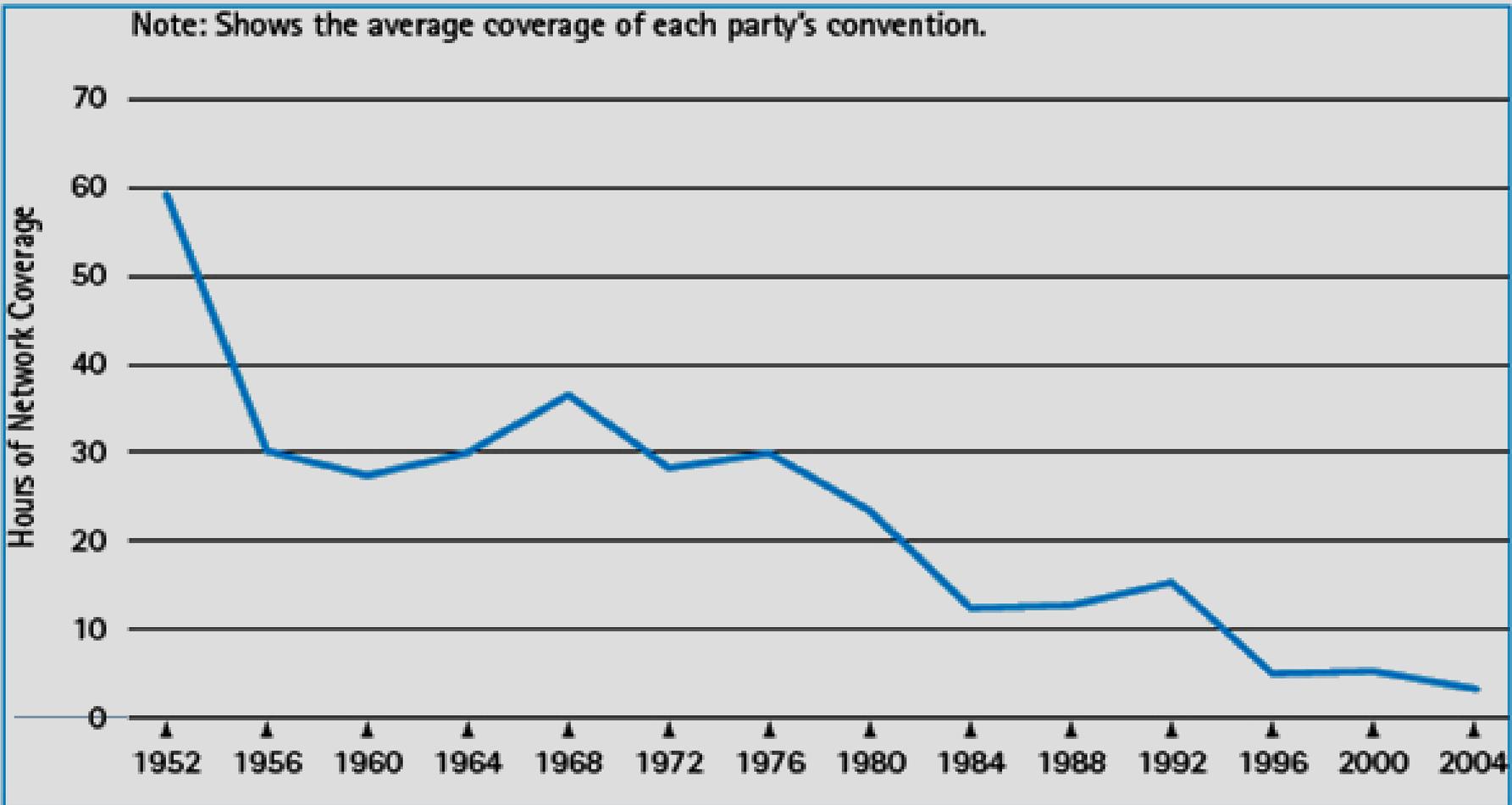
- Since 1972 and the stabilization of presidential nominations, conventions have lessened in importance.
 - Media coverage has dropped.
 - The more party managers try to package their message to please television, the less major networks are interested.
 - Networks will show interest if something they deem of interest is present.
 - In most years, the convention coverage venues are usually cable and the internet.
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Covering Campaigns: Conventions

Networks increasingly ignore National Political Conventions.

Note: Shows the average coverage of each party's convention.





Covering Campaigns: Presidential Debates

- No other campaign event earns the ratings that presidential debates earn.
- First televised debates were in 1960.
 - Nixon and Kennedy
 - **power of pictures**: Radio listeners thought Nixon won. TV viewers thought Kennedy won.
- Studies show that performance in the debates **can sway an undecided voter**.





Covering Campaigns: Local Elections

- Few independent sources cover local contests.
 - perhaps two- or three-minute story
 - When media do cover local campaigns, they **can have a great deal of influence.**
 - **Endorsements from newspapers** can matter.





Investigative Journalism

- ... reporters go beyond headlines and scrutinize public officials and public policy in order to find **wrongdoing**
- ***New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*** (1964): First Amendment protects publication of all statements, even false ones, about conduct of public officials except when statements are made with actual malice (with knowledge they are false or in reckless disregard of their truth or falsity)
- **anonymous sources**: using anonymous sources is a tried-and-true Washington ritual that receives almost no criticism in day-to-day reporting ... anonymity is sometimes warranted when investigating highly classified operations

What follows are a number of examples of investigative journalism (or lack of it) in the last few decades.



Investigative Journalism

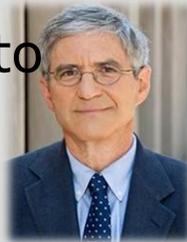
- **Robert Woodward, Carl Bernstein and Watergate:** major political scandal that occurred in 1970s as a result of a break-in at Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters at Watergate office complex in Washington and of Nixon administration's attempted cover-up ... led to numerous government investigations and eventual resignation of President Nixon
- **Seymore Hersh and CIA domestic spying:** CIA illegally spied on American antiwar movement, wire tapped reporters and placed them under surveillance, conducted illegal searches and opened sacks of first-class mail, and planned for assassination of foreign leaders
- **Nina Totenberg and Clarence Thomas:** disclosed allegations of sexual harassment lodged against Thomas by University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill ... led Senate Judiciary Committee to re-open Thomas's Supreme Court confirmation hearings





Investigative Journalism

- **Michael Isikoff and Monica Lewinsky:** uncovered her affair with Bill Clinton while she worked at White House ... led to Clinton's impeachment ... hours before going to print Isikoff's article was killed by top *Newsweek* executives
- **Bush and Iraq:** administration's careful campaign of deception and manipulation aimed at engineering support for war with Iraq and silencing war critics ... ignored all evidence to the contrary and punished in-house critics ... created The Office of Strategic Influence whose mission it was to conduct "covert disinformation and deception operations, planting false news items in the media and hiding their origins" and to "find ways to punish" those who conveyed the "wrong message" ... at the time, media (knowingly or unknowingly) supported all administration claims even in face of conflicting evidence





Investigative Journalism



- **Hersh and Osama bin Laden:** reported (1) bin Laden was a prisoner of Pakistani military and not in day-to-day leadership of Al Qaeda, (2) CIA lied about its role in finding bin Laden which it used to justify torture to public (bin Laden found thanks to a "walk-in" tip), (3) raid during which military said he was killed was a sham and produced little of intelligence value ... Defense Department openly threatened people if they talked, no longer any doubt that the administration has repeatedly misled public about incident but, except for Hersh, media have largely buried story
- **Hersh and the *Pentagon Papers*** (2013): Joint Chiefs of Staff deliberately subverted American foreign policy and formed a secret alliance with Syrian Pres Assad and Russian Pres Putin. Secretly provided "US intelligence to the militaries of other nations, on the understanding that it would be passed on to the Syrian army" in order to subvert Obama's Syria efforts, prop up Assad and aid him in destroying Daesh and other extremists. Also tricked CIA into shipping obsolete weapons to US-supported Syrian rebels.



Investigative Journalism

- **Glenn Greenwald, NSA metadata program and PRISM** (2013): leaked top secret court order from Bush administration that was granted by secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (FISA) court, shows (1) NSA has been collecting phone records of citizens both in the US and overseas in bulk and indiscriminately (2) PRISM operation has been conducting similar activities on internet ... contradicted a statement only months earlier by director of national intelligence that no such collection of US citizens' records existed ... Congress' USA Freedom Act ended phone activity in 2015
- Woodward and others and recent **assassination agreements** between US, Pakistan and Yemen





Investigative Journalism

This last example is not technically investigative journalism. I include it as an example of what the media can be but so often are not.

During the 1950s Red Scare, **Senator Joseph R. McCarthy** of Wisconsin, who believed Communist spies were hiding in the population, attempted to weed out and punish them through his public and nationally-televised Un-American Activities Committee hearings. McCarthy's hearings turned into a devastating campaign against innocent citizens backed by unproven facts, a campaign that held the nation in a grip of fear. Those McCarthy called before his committee, despite their protestations of innocence, lost jobs, careers, families, marriages and (sometimes) lives. Anyone who criticized his hearings soon wound up on McCarthy's list.



Investigative Journalism

Journalist **Edward R. Murrow**, on his weekly TV show *See It Now*, took on McCarthy, playing parts of McCarthy's speeches and comments, while criticizing and highlighting fallacies and contradictions. Murrow's analysis of McCarthy's weak charges and lack of evidence questioned McCarthy's credibility. Murrow's efforts finally paid off and McCarthy's witch hunt against innocent citizens ended in disgrace.

Murrow was a journalist with honesty, courage and a belief in journalism as an active part of the political process and a necessary tool within democracy. His career reflected that.

I encourage you to watch George Clooney's excellent film about Murrow and McCarthy, *Good Night and Good Luck*. It's frequently on TV or you may be able to find it on the internet. It's about democracy at its worst, journalism at its best and the closing remarks are about what the media can and should be ... plus it's a darn good movie.



(German TV stations and print media execute Truth)

Continued in The Media Part III