

Chapter Twelve

The Media

The Media

- Media: newspapers, television, radio, World Wide Web
- Most people's knowledge of politics comes from the media
- Laws and understandings in the U.S. give the media substantial freedom
- There is a long tradition of private media ownership in U.S.

The Media in History

- Changes in society and technology made possible self-supporting, mass readership daily newspapers
- The middle class favored new, progressive periodicals
- Radio arrives in 1920s, television in the late 1940s

The Media in History

- Shorter sound bites on the nightly news make it more difficult for candidates and officeholders to convey their message
- Politicians now have more sources—cable, early-morning news, news magazine shows
- 40% of American households access the Internet

Table 12.1: Decline in Viewership of the Television Networks

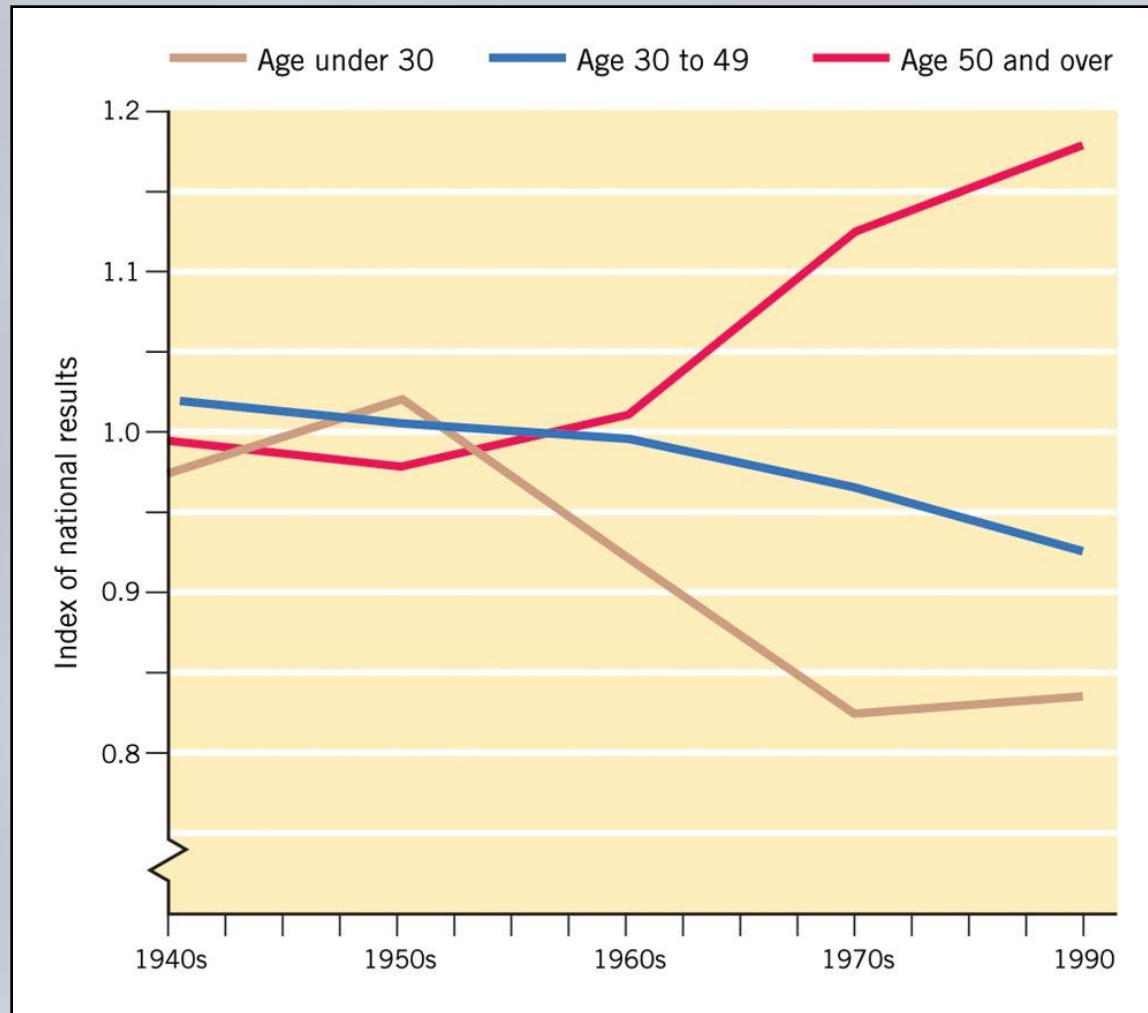
Table 12.1 Decline in Viewership of the Television Networks

“Big Three” Networks: Average Shares of Prime-Time Viewing Audience

Year	Share
1961	94%
1971	91
1981	83
1991	41
1997	33
2002	29

Source: Updated from *The Public Perspective* (September/October 1992): 6, reporting data provided by Nielsen Media Research and NBC. Used by permission of *The Public Perspective*, a publication of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut; Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau analysis of Nielsen data, April 25, 2002–May 21, 2002.

Figure 12.1: Young People Have Become Less Interested in Political News



Los Angeles Times, Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press (June 28, 1990).

Newspapers

- Number of daily newspapers has declined significantly
- Number of cities with multiple papers has declined
- Subscription rates have fallen as most people get their news from television

Role of the National Press

- Gatekeeper: influences what subjects become national political issues and for how long
- Scorekeeper: tracks political reputations and candidacies
- Watchdog: investigates personalities and exposes scandals

Rules Governing the Media

- After publication, newspapers may be sued for libel, obscenity, and incitement to illegal act
- The Supreme Court allows the government to compel reporters to divulge information in court if it bears on a crime
- Radio and television are licensed and regulated by the FCC

The Media and Campaigns

- Equal access for all candidates
- Rates no higher than the cheapest commercial rate
- Now stations and networks can sponsor debates limited to major candidates

Media Bias

- Members of the national media are generally more liberal than the average citizen
- Conservative media outlets have become more visible in recent years
- Talk radio is predominantly conservative
- Journalistic philosophy is that the news should be neutral and objective

Table 12.2: Journalist Opinion Versus Public Opinion

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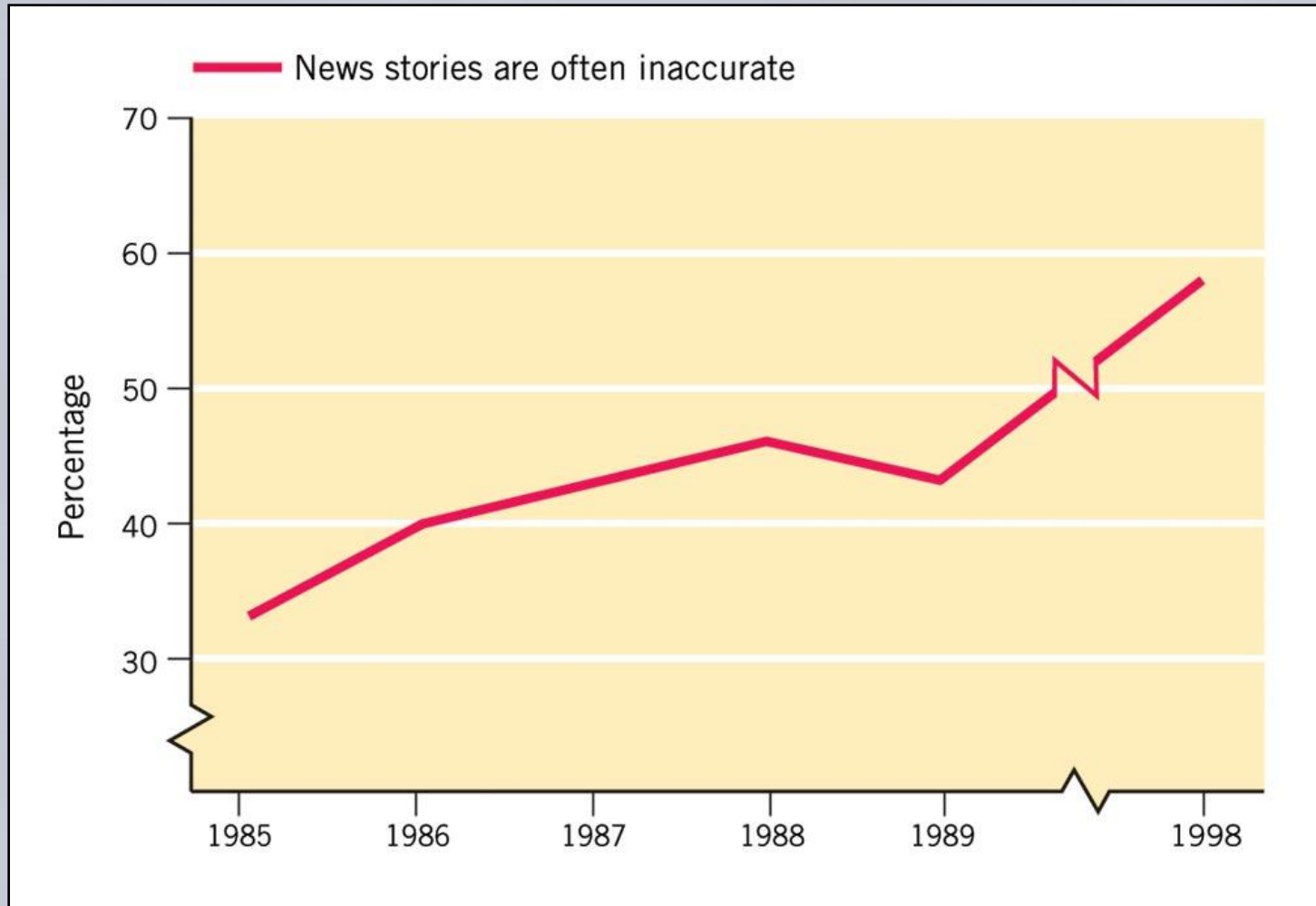
	Journalists	The Public
Self-described ideology:		
Liberal	55%	23%
Conservative	17	29
Favor government regulation of business	49	22
U.S. should withdraw investments from South Africa	62	31
Allow women to have abortions	82	49
Allow prayer in public schools	25	74
Favor "affirmative action"	81	56
Favor death penalty for murder	47	75
Want stricter controls on handguns	78	50
Increase defense budget	15	38
Favor hiring homosexuals	89	55

Sources: Los Angeles Times poll of about 3,000 citizens and 2,700 journalists nationwide, as reported in William Schneider and I. A. Lewis, "Views on the News," Public Opinion (August/September 1985): 7. Reprinted with permission of American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

Influence on the Public

- **Selective attention:** people remember or believe only what they want to
- Newspapers that endorsed incumbents gave them more positive coverage, and voters had more positive feelings about them
- Press coverage affects policy issues that people think are important

Figure 12.2: Public Perception of Accuracy in the Media



Pew Research Center, "The People and the Press" (February 1999), 13.

Coverage of Government

- The president receives the most coverage
- Gavel-to-gavel coverage of House proceedings since 1979 (C-SPAN)
- Senatorial use of televised committee hearings has turned the Senate into a presidential candidate incubator

The Adversarial Press

- Adversarial press since Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-contra
- Cynicism created era of attack journalism
- Adversarial media has made negative campaign advertising more socially acceptable

Sensationalism

- Intense competition among many media outlets means that each has a small share of the audience
- Sensationalism draws an audience and is cheaper than investigative reporting
- Reporters may not be checking sources carefully because there is such competition for stories

Government Constraints on the Media

- Reporters must strike a balance between expressing critical views and maintaining sources
- Governmental tools to fight back: numerous press officers, press releases, leaks, bypass the national press in favor of local media, presidential rewards and punishments