Chapter 7: The Mass Media and The Political Agenda

1. The Mass Media Today
   1. High-tech politics
      1. A politics in which the behavior of citizens and policymakers and the political agenda itself are increasingly shaped by technology.
   2. Mass media
      1. Television, radio, newspaper, magazines, the Internet, and other popular means of communication.
   3. Media events
      1. Events that are purposely staged for the media and that are significant just because the media are there.
   4. The media represents a key role in democracy as it allows for candidates to contact and engage with the voters.
2. The Development of Media Politics
   1. Press conferences
      1. Meetings of public officials with reporters.
   2. Investigative journalism
      1. The use of in-depth reporting to unearth scandals, scams, and schemes, at times putting reporters in adversarial relationships with political leaders.
      2. Example: Clinton-Lewinsky scandal
   3. Electronic Media
      1. Television, radio, and the internet as compared to print media.
   4. Print Media
      1. Newspapers and magazines, as compared to electronic media.
      2. Play a crucial role in democracy
      3. Newspapers are around 100,000 words while the average newscast is only 3,600 words. This means that more information can be fit in a newspaper than in a newscast and these words are more information-dense.
   5. The Emergence of Radio and Television
      1. Radio had an impact on World War II
      2. Television had an impact on the Vietnam War
      3. Visual power in the tele
         1. News has a larger impact than it does in print.
   6. Government Regulation of Electronic Media
      1. The FCC regulates communication via radio, television, cable and satellite.
      2. The number of frequencies is limited so the content on those frequencies must be regulated
      3. The FCC controls monopolies, conducts periodic examination of stations, and issues fair treatment guidelines for the frequencies.
   7. From Broadcasting to Narrowcasting: The Rise of Cable and Cable News
      1. Narrowcasting
         1. Media programming on cable TV or the Internet that is focused on a particular audience, in contrast to broadcasting.
         2. Cable is all about profit and keeping costs low
         3. Cable news organizations target certain types of people so advertisers can target those same groups as well.
      2. The potential of TV as a medium to better our politics and society is disappearing
   8. The Impact of the Internet
      1. The Internet has made it very east for individuals to get involved and informed about the political system.
      2. The Internet enables people with like minded political interests to connect and rally
      3. The Internet also enables people to share their opinions on blogs.
   9. Private Control of the Media
      1. America has a rich diversity of media sources.
      2. Journalism is big business, and most media outlets are privately owned.
      3. Although, the media is independent, they still depend on advertising dollars to make profit.
      4. This has led to some consolidation. 80% of the nations daily newspaper circulation is controlled by 3 major corporations.
3. Reporting the News
   1. Finding the News
      1. Beats
         1. Specific locations from which news frequently emanates, such as Congress or the White House. Most top reporters work a particular beat, thereby becoming a specialist in what goes on at that location.
      2. Trial balloons
         1. Intentional news leaks for the purpose of assessing the political reaction.
   2. Presenting the News
      1. Once the news is found it is compressed into 30-second news segments to fit in among other stories.
      2. Editors do not want to bore the audience, so the stories on the front page may not be the most important, but the ones that will draw the most attention.
      3. Analysis of news events rarely lasts more than a minute.
      4. Sound bites
         1. Short video clips of approximately 10 seconds Typically they are all that is shown from a politician’s speech on the nightly television news.
   3. Bias in the News
      1. A study found that while journalists tend not to favor one party over the other, they do tend to favor more liberal ideas than conservative ones.
      2. This could create some bias in the news.
      3. Talking head
         1. A shot of a person’s face talking directly into the camera. Because such shots are visually unstimulating, the major networks rarely show politicians talking for very long.
4. The News and Public Opinion
   1. The media can have a tremendous impact on public opinion.
   2. The media controls the technology that in turn controls much of what Americans believe about politics and government.
5. Policy Entrepreneurs and Agenda Setting
   1. Policy agenda
      1. The issues that attract the serious attention of public officials and other people actively involved in politics at the time.
   2. Policy entrepreneurs
      1. People who invest their political “capital” in an issue. According to John Kingdon, a policy entrepreneur “could be in our government, in elected, or appointed positions, in interest groups or research organization.”
6. Understanding the Mass Media
   1. The Media and the Scope of Government
      1. The media’s watchdog functions help keep politicians in check.
      2. A Pew Research Center poll showed that 62% of Americans said that the media’s criticism of political figures does more good than harm.
      3. With every new policy, the media questions and puts constraints on what the government can do
   2. Individualism in the Media
      1. The media allows candidates to directly communicate and interact with voters.
      2. It is easier to focus on an individual rather than a group
   3. Democracy and the Media
      1. “Information is the fuel of democracy”
      2. The media shows the people what they want to see, and this constrains comprehensive reporting
      3. The rise of the information society has not brought about the informed society.