Political Communication

1. **Mass media and politics**

The mass media are essential for politics because they allow the communication of political messages.

Politics as a result is dependent on media.

All political action is a form of political communication and it can occur on various levels.

There is face-to-face political communication.

Then there are the mass media, they are a one-way communication channel, which means they have a greater tendency to reinforce existing political values but not convert anyone.

Television may have eroded the role of opinion leaders in the United States, making them less important.

One long-term trend has been a declining interest among Americans in the news compared to previous generations.

Media appeal to different people at different levels, distinguished by age, income, and education levels.

The more educated, the more media people consume. Individuals with a college degree tend to read newspapers, while people with a high school degree tend to watch more television.

Young people love social media.

* 1. **Modern Mass Media**

NEWSPAPER:

Newspapers used to be big but are experiencing a decline in circulation as they struggle to compete with new forms of media.

Newspapers now are primarily status-quo-supporting sine they are mostly owned by big corporations.

Political impact is declining, and the content is mostly advertisements.

RADIO:

Radio has experienced a decline like newspapers. Three companies now own half of the radio stations in America.

Radio used to be more important, especially between the two wars, with the hallmark being Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats."

Ex. Fireside Chats

a series of 28 evening radio addresses given by U.S. Roosevelt between 1933 and 1944. Roosevelt spoke with familiarity to millions of Americans. Roosevelt was a great communicator on radio, and the fireside chats kept him in high public regard throughout his presidency. Their introduction was later described as a "revolutionary experiment with a nascent media platform”.

Radio reinforces both liberal and conservative views.

THE NEW SERVICES:

The New York offices of Associated Press produces news for most of the radio and television news programs.

The AP is independent and free of government influence, but it is in financial trouble.

The quality of the news services is somewhat limited.

THE ELITE MEDIA:

DEF: *elite media mean highly influential newspapers and magazines read by elites and the attentive public*

The elite media are read by a small fraction of the public but still carry the most clout and consist of papers such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and the Financial Times.

They have a great deal of influence on decision makers even though most Americans do not read them.

We call them elite because the people who read them are generally wealthier and better educated.

The elite press pursues investigative reporting and help to keep government accountable.

There are some small journals that are influential and cover a range of ideological perspectives such as the National Review and the American Prospect.

1. **Social Media**

Social media is still relatively new, but its impact is growing, especially among young people who are turning to the Internet for online news, since it is free and can be read anytime.

The Internet can often catch stories that are overlooked by the mainstream media. This is due in part to the independence of online news sources.

Ex. It was the online news source Talking Points that exposed the Bush administration's firing of U.S attorneys they deemed too liberal.

Social media, however, still require journalism.

One downside is that social media and the Internet do not always play by the rules of conventional journalism.

Many people refute the claim that the supply of online news sources makes for a citizenry that is more informed. Part of this is due to the partisan nature of online news and the self-selection of the readership.

Recently we have seen the effect that digital media can have on oppressive regimes and how it can work to undermine them.

Ex. The Twitter revolt in Iran and the uprisings of the Arab Spring

Ex. a dinner with Obama

A recent evolution of political advertisement was Obama's electoral video for the 2012 elections, which was spread through social media and internet.

1. **The Gian: Television**

Often, people referring to "the media" mean "television”, since it still had the greatest impact.

Election campaigns now revolve around acquisition of television time.

* 1. **Television News**

Television news is still the biggest source of news for most Americans.

In general, television favours the visual image. It also comes close to simulating face-to-face communication, providing a sense of personality and credibility.

Because television needs to know in advance what is going to happen, it creates an imbalance in the news because many events become newsworthy simply because television is there to cover it.

This allows for scripted media events and photo opportunities that are not necessarily news to dominate.

Television has a very short time frame, with the average story lasting only one minute.

In essence then, TV news is not analytical in nature but rather serves as a headline service. If citizens want more detail, they need to look somewhere else.

* 1. **Television and Politics**

Television has been influential on politics.

It has enhanced the power of incumbents through increased name recognition.

Because television is president centred, it has increased both presidential worship by citizens and the expectations of citizens on the office.

Ex. Kennedy vs Nixon and the role of TV

In 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon squared off in the first televised presidential debates in American history. The Kennedy-Nixon debates not only had a major impact on the election’s outcome but ushered in a new era in which crafting a public image and taking advantage of media exposure became essential ingredients of a successful political campaign. They also heralded the central role television has continued to play in the democratic process.

NOMINATION BY TELEVISION:

Television can proclaim winners, losers, and who has momentum, and these can have a major effect on the level of support that is received by a candidate. When announcing momentum candidates gain a bandwagon effect.

The effect is extremely powerful in the early contests and can create a bandwagon effect, which leads to more exposure, which leads to more coverage and so on.

It also leads to a focus on candidate personalities, which are easy to represent in the media, as opposed to issues.

Television has also led to a decline in the influence of political parties on the nomination process.

TELEVISION AND APATHY:

Robert Putnam has argued that the rise of television has contributed to the increase in passivity and apathy among citizens.

There is a strong correlation between the rise of television and the decline in voter turnout in the United States.

Voters are saturated with politics so far in advance that they lose interest.

American television campaigns have also become more expensive: most presidential campaign spending goes towards televisions costs.

This increases the importance of interest groups and money in American elections.

TELEVISION OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL:

The United States has truly little ownership and control of airwaves, which are regulated through the Radio Act of 1927, which states the airwaves should serve the public interest.

Since the invention of the telegraph, the communication industry is private and operates for profit (due in part to the First Amendment).

In European states the situation is quite different: telegraphy and telephones were soon taken over by the postal service.

1. **Are We Poorly Served?**

In general, the media do not really serve the interests of U.S. citizens.

This is due in part to the highly selective nature of news coverage in the United States, a result of structural bias in the media.

In general, the media favour the presidency, which reinforces a belief that the president is the government.

Americans grow up with the notion that the White House does most of the work and has most of the power, while other parts of the government count less, so State government and the actions of the bureaucracy receive little coverage.

The media wait until bureaucracy screws up and then act shocked that something went wrong.

There are no real state media markets, which minimizes the coverage of state politics.

The media is generally reactive, waiting until a problem explodes before covering it.

In general, the media really do not provide any comprehensive pictures of events that are occurring around the world.

* 1. **What Can Be Done?**

It is difficult because the mass media are ill equipped to provide meaning and context.

In addition, reporters are generalists, which reduces the opportunities for good analysis.

The biggest problem is citizens: how do you get people to pay attention?

Most are not interested in news and in-depth analysis.

* 1. **The Adversaries: Media and Government**

A healthy democracy requires a media that serves as a critic of government.

This has been well-established in the United States since the founding: Jefferson said that "Newspapers without government is better than government without newspapers."

The rise of the adversarial relationship between the media and government began in the 1960s, with the elite media becoming hostile to the executive branch. This is due in part to Watergate and the Vietnam War.

Does the press go too far in criticizing government?

Many argue that the press now believes it is always right and government is always wrong.

Republicans are concerned about liberal bias, while radicals worry about corporate bias, and media deference in the modern media.

The rise of internet has led to the willingness to investigate and uncover everything and let the public judge. Ex. Wikileaks