

# Unit 3

Interest Groups, Political Parties, and  
the Media

# Interest Groups

- Goal is to influence government and to promote a common interest
- Liberty v. Order: The government needs to balance the need for liberty against the value of an orderly society
  - By allowing people the freedom to join groups of differing opinions, **political factions are formed**

# Interest Groups

- Argument in favor of interest groups
  - Interest groups prevent the concentration power
- Argument against
  - Not all groups have equal resources or equal access

# Interest Groups

- Reasons for growth of interest groups
  - Americans have a propensity for joining groups
    - Based on ideas of Alexis de Tocqueville. He theorized that by banding together, Americans can create a society that is civil and just.
  - Economic developments / hardship
    - The Grange movement: the first political interest group worked toward providing governmental protection for American farmers

# Interest Groups

- Governmental policies
  - As government grows, more interest groups form in response
- Diversity of Population
  - Social, racial, and economic disparity creates a desire to protect the interest of fringe groups
- Diffusion of power
  - The sharing of political power allows for multiple venues for influencing government thus creating a need for more interest groups

# Interest Groups

## – **Weakness of political parties**

- When the needs of the community are not being met by political parties, the people turn to interest groups to promote their interests

## – Reform program (1970's)

- New regulations (Federal Election Campaign Acts & McCain-Feingold Bill) on campaign funding made it possible for more groups to form

## – Conservative reaction to Liberal Activism

- Interest groups were predominately liberal in the 1960's & '70's. Conservative groups formed to create balance

# Interest Groups

- Balance of Power
  - Nearly every interest group has a polar opposite
- Technology
  - New technology makes it easier to acquire the funds necessary to run an interest group and to gain access to politicians

# Types of Interest Groups

- Traditional:
- Goal: promote the economic interests of its members
- Types:
  - Agricultural (Grange, American Farm Bureau Federation [nation's largest interest group])
  - Labor Unions
    - AFL-CIO American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
    - UAW United Auto Workers
    - Teamsters
      - Union membership has been on a steady decline in recent years

# Types of Interest Groups

- Business Organizations (Chamber of Commerce, Nat. Ass. Of Manufacturers)
- Professional Organizations (AMA, ABA)
- Non Traditional / Protest
  - Goal: to protest the status of its members and to promote government action
  - Examples
    - NAACP National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
    - MALDEF Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
    - NOW National Organization of Women
    - ACT UP Aids Coalition to Unleash Power

# Types of Interest Groups

- Single Issue
  - Goal: to get government action on one overriding issue
  - Examples
    - Right to Life League
    - National Abortion Rights Action League
    - NRA National Rifle Association
    - MADD Mothers Against Drunk Driving
    - NORML National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
      - These groups create controversy and polarize the community; those in favor vs. those who oppose

# Types of Interest Groups

- Public Interest
  - Goal: bring about policies that are good for society as a whole
  - Examples
    - Public Citizen (a Nader group): Promotes consumer advocacy
    - League of Women Voters: Encourages people to become informed, register to vote, and to vote
    - Environmental Groups (Sierra Club, Wilderness Society)
  - PI Groups are non-profit: As such they are exempt from taxes and cannot be involved in election campaigns

# Types of Interest Groups

- Ideological
  - Goal: to convince government to implement policies that are consistent with their philosophies
  - Examples
    - Christian Coalition
    - American Way
    - Free Congress Foundation
    - ACLU American Civil Liberties Union
    - Various “think tanks” (Brookings Institute, Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute)

# Types of Interest Groups

- Governmental
  - Goal: protect the interests of state and local governments
  - Examples
    - National League of Cities
    - National Association of Governors
- Political Action Committees (PAC's)
  - Will be covered in detail later

# Interest Group Tactics

- The ways in which interest groups promote change in government
  - Mass media
  - Boycotts
  - **Litigation / Law Suits**
  - ***Amicus Curiae*** briefs
    - Legal challenges made on behalf of group members by interest groups to force a change in laws that discriminate. Examples include challenges on behalf of the disabled or minorities in civil rights cases
  - **Campaign contributions**
  - Endorsement of candidates
  - “Targeting” unfriendly candidates
  - Rating candidates on their support of issues “report cards”
  - Proposing initiatives, referendums, or recalls at the state and local levels
  - **Lobbying**
  - Mass mailing
    - New technology makes it possible to target specific segments of pop<sub>14</sub>

# Interest Groups

- Irrationality of joining an interest group
  - No single person will make much of a difference
  - Most people will gain the benefits of the interest groups lobbying efforts without having to join it
    - Free Rider problem
- Incentives to encourage membership
  - Material benefits: newsletters, t-shirts, subscription gifts (think holiday mailers)
  - Purposive benefits: because it feels good being part of something
  - Solidarity benefits: there is an advantage to joining, better health benefits, higher wages, etc.

# Factors Influencing Interest Group Strength

- Size
  - Larger pools of members lead to more success in the groups causes
  - As a group gains a greater of number of members the less focused on an issue the group becomes
- Spread
  - Are the group members dispersed across the nation or are they concentrated?
- Cohesiveness
  - How committed to the cause is the group?
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Resources

# Lobbying

- Interest groups that attempt to influence the government by providing information (lobbying)
  - **Interest group lobbying is most effective on narrow, technical issues that are not publicized**
- **Functions of a Lobbyist**
  - Influence government (campaign contributions)
  - **Provide information to government officials**
  - Testify at (Congressional) hearings
  - Help write legislation
    - Often, the bulk of a new bill has been drafted by a lobbying group prior to going to Congress for final revision
    - Half-jokingly referred to as the “Third House of Congress”

# Lobbying

- Regulations on Lobbying
  - 1946 Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act
- Provisions
  - Definition: a lobbyist as a person whose principle purpose is to influence legislation
  - Registration: all lobbyist are required to register
  - Disclosure: all information about the lobbyist is a matter of public record; employer, finances, legislation influenced, etc.
  - Publication: information must be published into Congressional Record every quarter (Freedom of Information Act)

# Lobbying

- Loopholes in the FRLA
  - “Principle Purpose” is ambiguous
  - Disclosure statements were filed but never analyzed
  - No method of enforcing law
  - Few check the Congressional Record
  - The Act only covers lobbying to Congress, not the Executive Branch
- FECA (Federal Employees Compensation Act) tried to bring election activities into the open

# Lobbying

- Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995
  - Expanded definition of a lobbyist to include part-time lobbyists
  - Also covers (and forces disclosure of) lobbying to the Executive Branch

# Lobbying

- Argument in favor of lobbying:
  - **Lobbyists provide useful information to government officials**
  - Provide a means by which people can actively participate in government / someone represents the “little-guy”
  - **Provide a means of representation based on interest rather than geography**
    - **Serve as a “linking mechanism” between the people and their government**
  - Protected by 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment
  - The potential loss of liberty by banning lobbying is worse than the potential harm lobbyists due through their abuses Madison, *Federalist 10*

# Lobbying

- Argument against lobbyists
  - The rich and powerful are over-represented
  - Average and poor people are under-represented
  - By safeguarding liberty, equality is sacrificed
  - Lobbying creates political polarization
    - This is especially true with controversial “single-issues”
  - Lobbying diffuses political power, making it more difficult for government to accomplish its goals
  - National interest is sacrificed for narrow interest

# Political Action Committees

# Political Action Committees

- PAC's: Groups whose purpose is to raise funds for candidates and to provide information on key issues
- Growth of PAC's
  - Steady increase in number of PAC's since 1974
  - Congress wanted to open up campaign contributions to the masses to stave off the “buying of politicians”
  - Impact of FECA
    - Individual contributions no more than \$2000
    - Individuals may contribute \$1000 to a PAC, with no limit on the number of PAC's they can contribute to
    - PAC's may contribute 2.5 (\$5000) times the amount an individual can with no limit to the number of separate donations

# PAC's

- Growth of PAC's
  - Steady growth 1972, contributions totaled \$8.5 million, 2000, \$250 million
  - Office holders have received ever-increasing amounts of campaign contributions from PAC's, a key component to their reelection
  - 30% increase in PAC spending
  - PAC's give money to incumbents facing no opposition

# PAC's

- PAC Strategies
  - Campaign Contributions (who gets the money?)
    - **Incumbents**
    - Winners
    - Those sharing a similar philosophy as the group
    - Those who are likely to grant access
    - People in positions of influence
      - Party leaders, committee chairs
    - **PAC money makes up the greatest percentage of Congressional campaign funds**
  - Voter Education Projects
    - Mailers, fliers, commercials
  - Independent expenditures (soft money, campaign ads)
  - Bundling
    - contributions from separate contributors are bundled together and given to the candidate at the same time (very influential)

# PAC's

- Who has PAC's
  - **Corporations**
    - **50% of all PAC's are run by corporations and the number is growing**
  - Ideological Organizations
    - 25% are groups that support a particular cause
  - Professional / Trade / Health Associations
    - 15%
  - Labor Unions
    - 10%
  - **Upper / Upper-Middle Classes are overrepresented while the poor are underrepresented**

# PAC's

- Dangers of PAC's
  - Ethical concerns
  - PAC's have special access to politicians
  - Increases campaign costs
  - Overrepresentation for the wealthy
  - Poor are underrepresented
  - Gives further incumbency advantage
- Defense of PAC's
  - PAC's provides the average person a venue to participate in government
  - Without PAC's the wealthy would have a greater advantage in running for office
  - Protected by 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment
  - Contributions are nonpartisan
  - No evidence that contributions influence voting behavior of politicians
  - PAC's provide political education
  - Political funding is diversified, many interests are represented

# Political Parties

# Functions of Political Parties

- Nominate Candidates
  - **Nominate candidates through primary elections**
  - **Growth of primaries has weakened the power of the party leaders**
    - **Candidates play an ever-increasing role in their political careers**
- Raise / spend campaign funds
- Register voters
- Simplify decisions for voters
  - Provide “cheat-sheets” for voters, short synopsis of issues so voters will be more likely to turn out and vote
  - Responsible for much of the campaign “mud-slinging” (personal attacks)

# Functions of Political Parties

- Unify diverse interests
  - In order to appeal to majority, political parties must take a moderate view that demonstrates “flexibility” on issues
  - No strong stands on issues
- Act as a moderating influence on government
  - Choose candidates that are acceptable to the masses
  - Fringe candidates weaken the party at the polls
- Reduce diffusion of power in government
  - In theory parties are forced to work together to overcome separation of powers
  - In practice parties rarely work together, divided along party lines
- Provide patronage
  - In theory the will of the people will be carried out

# Functions of Political Parties

- Inform the public
  - Provides a public forum for the people to meet the candidates
  - Again, in an effort to appeal to the masses, rarely does the public gain a true insight into who a candidate is and what he / she truly stands for
- Provide “**loyal opposition**”
  - Remain faithful to the government while opposing its policies
- Agents of **political socialization**
  - Teach the values of political participation (Americanism)
- **Provide a link between the people and government**

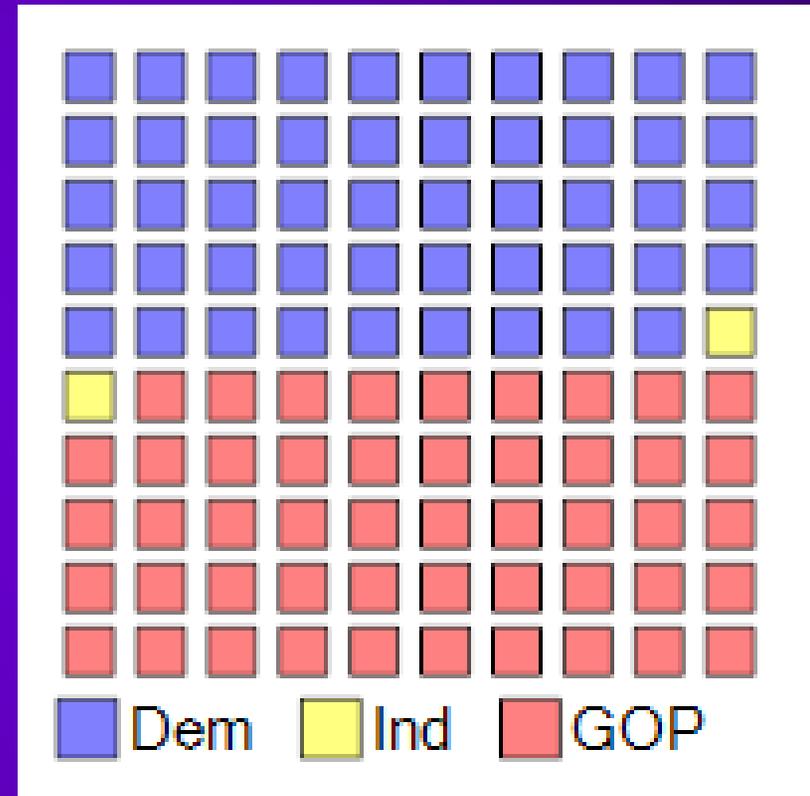
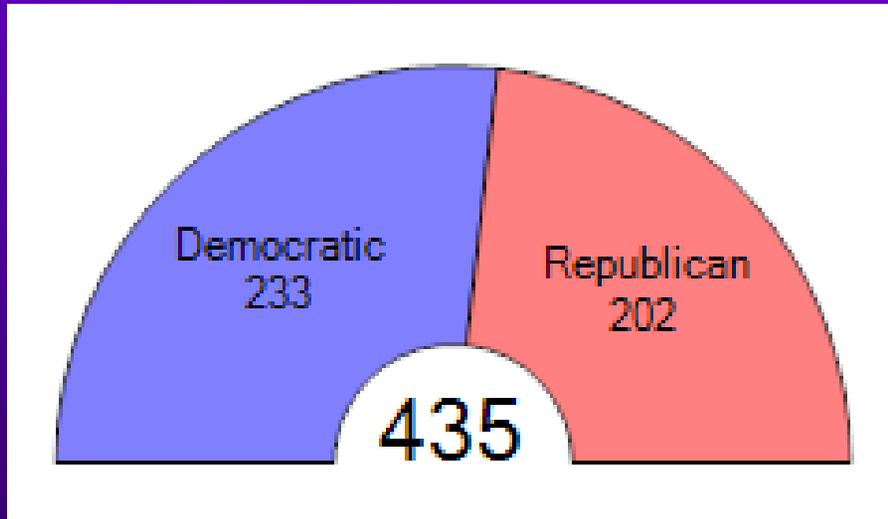
# Rise of Political Parties

- Origins
  - Framers feared the development of political parties
    - Dangers of **factions** talked about in Madison’s Federalist 10
    - Washington worried about “baneful effects of the spirit of party”
  - Parties became necessary to get things done, compromise was needed to overcome separation of power
  - Historical development (6 Party Systems in US History)
    - Review #'s 1-4
    - 5- **FDR’s Grand Coalition: brought together people from differing backgrounds**
    - 6- Era of Divided Government (present day)

# Rise of Political Parties

- Era of Divided Government (1968-Present)
  - Split ticket voting is common
  - Divided government
    - President and Congress from different parties
  - Voters becoming more independent / parties grow weaker
  - Election victory is by the narrowest of margins
- Relative Party Strengths
  - National Government
    - President: Republican
    - House: Democrats 233, Republicans 202, Independent 0
    - Senate: Democrats 49, Republicans, 49, Independent 2
  - State Government
    - Governors: Democrats 27, Republicans 23
    - State Legislatures: Democrats 21, Republicans 15, Split 13

# Relative Party Strength



# Rise of Political Parties

- Third Parties

- Types

- Doctrinal: hold a general philosophy (Communism, socialism, etc.)
    - Issue-Oriented: centered around a key issue (environmentalism, prohibition, etc.)
    - Personality Based: centered around a particularly charismatic leader (Perot's Reform Party, Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party)

- Contributions

- Raises issues that forces the other parties to address (tax-reform)
    - Provides a voice for the fringe element of society
    - Serves as a safety valve for society, prevents total disillusionment

# Rise of Political Parties

## – Effects of Third Parties

- Rarely win elections
- Strongly influence Presidential election
  - Siphon off votes to other candidates

## – Obstacles

- Public has a tradition of only two-parties
- **The nature of the “winner-takes-all” election process is more conducive to two-party system than multi-party system**
- **Electoral System makes it difficult for a 3<sup>rd</sup> candidate to truly be in the running**
- Hard to get candidates on the ballot
- Difficulty in raising enough money to run a successful campaign
- Lack of media coverage
- Often excluded from television debates

# Party Weaknesses

- Lack of strong rank-and-file members / limited grass roots organization
  - Open to anyone who wants to join
  - No annual dues
  - Active only during election time
  - American view of politics, “I’ll watch”
  - Small percentage are truly active
  - **Increase in the number of independents**

# Party Weaknesses

- Tension between party regulars and issue purists / candidate loyalists
  - Party regulars
    - Lower / middle class background
    - Tend to be older
    - Have less education
    - More pragmatic
    - Supportive of all the parties candidates and positions
      - *The type of person votes for the person based on party affiliation more so than voting for “the man”*
  - Issue purists / candidate loyalists
    - Middle / upper class background
    - Tend to be younger
    - Have higher levels of education
    - More ideological
    - More selective in support of candidates and positions
      - *The type of person who votes for the person or the issue rather than just voting the party ticket*

# Party Weaknesses

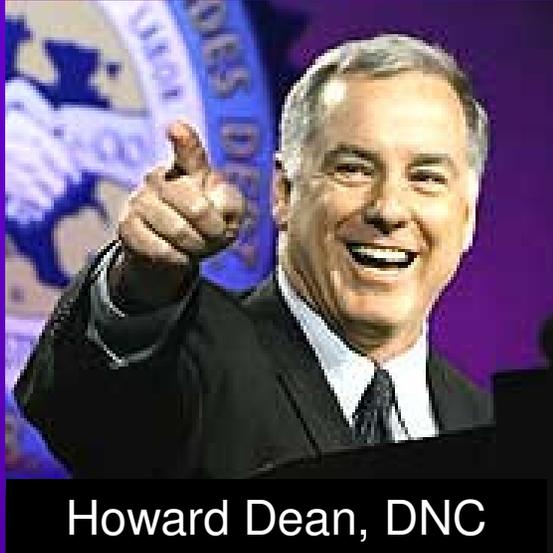
- Not responsive enough to social reform
  - Don't wish to alienate the middle and upper classes
    - Those with little to fear may take action as a means of gaining public support
  - Party passiveness
    - Refusal to take a stand on an issue until there is no other choice
  - Parties are slow to respond to changing situations
    - Parties favor the status quo



# Party Weaknesses

- Parties have lost their traditional functions
  - The nomination of candidates
    - Now handled by **primary elections / caucuses**
  - Funding of campaigns
    - Candidates are taking their campaigns into their own hands by hiring professional campaign staff and campaign managers (more effective with less rules / restrictions)
  - Unifying government
    - The government is more divided than ever
    - Conflict within the party weakens party power
  - Providing patronage
    - More of the day-to-day tasks of government are done by civil servants

# Party Weaknesses



Howard Dean, DNC



Mel Martinez, RNC

- **Parties are decentralized**
  - **Organized using the Federal model**
    1. **National convention**
    2. **National committee**
    3. **State committee**
    4. **Local committee**
  - Neither of the National Committees have any real power over the state and local committees
  - **Power Structure**
    - Presidential Election (National Convention)
    - Non-election year (National Committee)
  - Lack of local (grassroots) organization

# Impact of Parties on Government

- Congress
  - Majority party controls all committees
  - Majority party has chairmen on all committees
    - Minority party has a “ranking member” on each committee
    - The ranking member often becomes the chairman when party control changes
      - *Another advantage of incumbency*
      - *The longer you serve on a committee, the more likely you are to head it up*
  - Majority party control key leadership positions
  - Staffers are partisan (work for the party members)



# Impact of Parties on Government

- Executive Branch
  - Executive appointments to the White House Office of Administration are nearly all partisan (a reward for campaign supporters)
    - Regulated by the Hatch Act 1939
      - Denies Federal employees from participating in political campaigns using public funds
  - Other appointments to other top positions are “political appointees”
  - The creation of the Civil Service System has reduced party influence over the bureaucracy



# Impact of Parties on Government



- Judicial Branch
  - Nearly all appointments are partisan
- State and Local Governments
  - Most state government positions are partisan
  - Many local government positions are nonpartisan
    - School boards
    - City councils

# Political Party Reform

- Historical Abuses of Power
  - Nominations were controlled by bosses and caucuses
  - Politicians used the political machine for their own personal gain (Tweed, Daley, etc.)
  - Exclusion of the young, poor, and minorities
- Progressive Reforms
  - **Direct primary elections**
  - Nonpartisan elections at state and local levels
  - Expansion of the civil service
  - The use of initiatives, referendums, and recall elections
  - **17<sup>th</sup> Amendment**



# Political Party Reform

- Other weakening factors
  - Candidate centered campaigns
    - Federal Election Campaign Act 1974 made this possible
  - Increased use of campaign consultants (managers)
  - Public disenchantment with political parties (distrust of government)
  - Growth of interest groups
  - Increased dependence on mass media
    - Candidates deliver message through media rather than through the political party

# Political Party Reform

- Dealignment Theory
  - A trend in which a large portion of the electorate abandons its previous party affiliation
- Realignment Theory
  - A dramatic change in politics which is caused by changing the rules of elections
    - Examples include changes in campaign financing or voter eligibility laws
- Reforms of the Democratic Party
  - McGovern-Fraser Commission
    - During the 1968 national convention, the Democratic party adopted new guidelines for its Presidential nomination process
    - The selection of delegates would be conducted in the open rather than in secret
    - Affirmative action rules would be applied to include the previously disenfranchised

# Political Party Reform

- Results of reforms
  - The Democratic party begins to favor a more moderate candidates
    - Moderate delegates would have a better chance of winning
    - Brought about an end to extreme politics
  - Created *Super Tuesday*
    - During a Presidential election year, the majority of the Southern states hold their primary elections on the same day
    - This election is a strong indicator of who will earn the party nomination
  - Developed concept of the Super Delegate
    - Delegates to the national convention that are appointed by the party rather than earning their nomination through the primary election or caucus

# Mass Media

Shapers of public opinion

# Who are the Mass Media?

- Major (traditional) media
  - Newspapers
  - Television
  - Magazines
    - There is a trend towards the consolidation of media companies
    - There are very few independent media groups anymore
- New media
  - Internet
  - Cable news
  - Talk radio
    - Characteristics

# The Media and Public Opinion

- Does the media influence public opinion?
  - Yes
    - TV provides a human element of candidates and their causes
    - Sets national agenda
    - Media serves as a linking mechanism between the public and the government
  - No
    - Majority of the public has little interest in the news
    - Viewers tend to choose news programs that agree with their existing attitudes / opinions
    - Viewers impose their own meaning to the news (not likely to change their opinions if the story disagrees with their preconceived notions)
    - Family serves as a greater influence over voter behavior

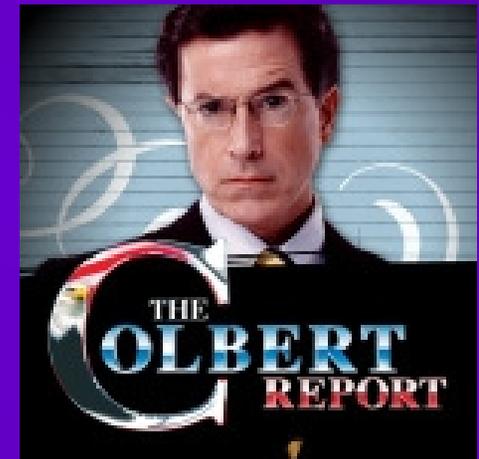
# The Media and Public Opinion



- Impact of newspapers
  - Public perception is that newspapers have a liberal bias
    - Reality, most publishers tend to be Republican
  - Both liberals and conservatives complain about bias
    - Conservatives view papers as liberal with a marked hostility towards middle-class values
    - Liberals claim that the publishers are conservative and therefore more concerned with economic issues rather than social problems
  - Lack of competition
    - Most cities have only one major newspaper
  - **Election coverage focuses on the day-to-day activities rather than the big issues**

# The Media and Public Opinion

- Impact of television
  - #1 method of getting news
    - TV news focuses on quantity of news not quality
    - Growing dependence on the sound bite
  - Concerns that TV has aligned with big government
    - Gives the President a larger forum to reach the people without going through journalists
    - There are fewer Presidential press conferences than before
    - The White House holds its own press conferences in such a way as to manipulate the press
  - Growing cynicism
  - Lack of competition (fewer news stations)
  - Leading to the decline in party power



# Effects of Media on Politics



- Represents a symbiotic relationship between the government and the press
  - Journalists need politicians to inform and entertain their audiences
  - Politicians need media exposure
- Roles of Media
  - **Gatekeeper: sets national agenda**
  - Scorekeeper: helps track progress of politicians (**horse race**)
  - Watchdog: scrutinize politicians, report on political shenanigans

# Effects of Media on Politics

- Nature of Media Influence
  - Most influential during agenda setting phase
  - Help to build candidate images
  - Provides a means for politicians to get public attention
  - Provide a link between the government and the people
    - Past: people – parties – government
    - Now: people – media – government
  - Contribute to increase in the cost of campaigns
  - Contribute to candidate centered campaigns
  - Increase the need for campaign consultants

# Effects of Media on Politics

- White House Manipulation of Media
  - The President has no trouble getting media coverage
  - The media is ready to give the President
    - Photo opportunities
    - Sound bites
    - Provide spin control
    - Willing to cover staged events
  - The media tends to cover Congress in a negative light
  - The Supreme Court receives the least amount of press coverage
  - Media is most influential
    - In primary elections rather than general elections
    - On undecided voters