

The background of the slide is a blurred image of the United States flag, showing the stars and stripes in soft focus. The colors are muted and the overall effect is a soft, patriotic backdrop.

# **THE NEWS MEDIA**

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**In this chapter we will cover...**

- **The American Press of Yesteryear**
- **The Contemporary Media**
- **How the Media Cover Politicians and Government**
- **The Media's Influence on the Public**
- **How Politicians Use the Media**
- **Government Regulation of the Electronic Media**

# A Complex Relationship

- The relationship between the media and policymakers is both subtle and complex.
- No easy conclusions about who influences whom in what circumstances can be drawn.
- Television has quickened the pace of the news but it by no means determines American public policy.
- However, it is also clear that the media is a powerful institution that affects multiple facets of American political life.

# The Media of Yesteryear

- The first (printed in the 1690s) American newspapers were controlled by the political parties.
- By the 1890s 'yellow journalism' sold millions of newspapers.
- Throughout the 19th century, payoffs to the press were common.

# Technological Advances

- Papers became cheaper and easier to produce and distribute, the telegraph and telephone made reporting simpler and faster.
- Radio became widely available in the 1920s and television was introduced in the late 1940s.
- Cable was invented in the 1970s, CNN was founded in 1980, and the Internet didn't become well-known until the late 1990s.

# A Reciprocal Relationship

- Politicians actively court the media's favor and ascribe to the media the power to make or break government policy.
- Research shows that the mass media have an effect both on public opinion and on the shape of policy choices decision makers face.

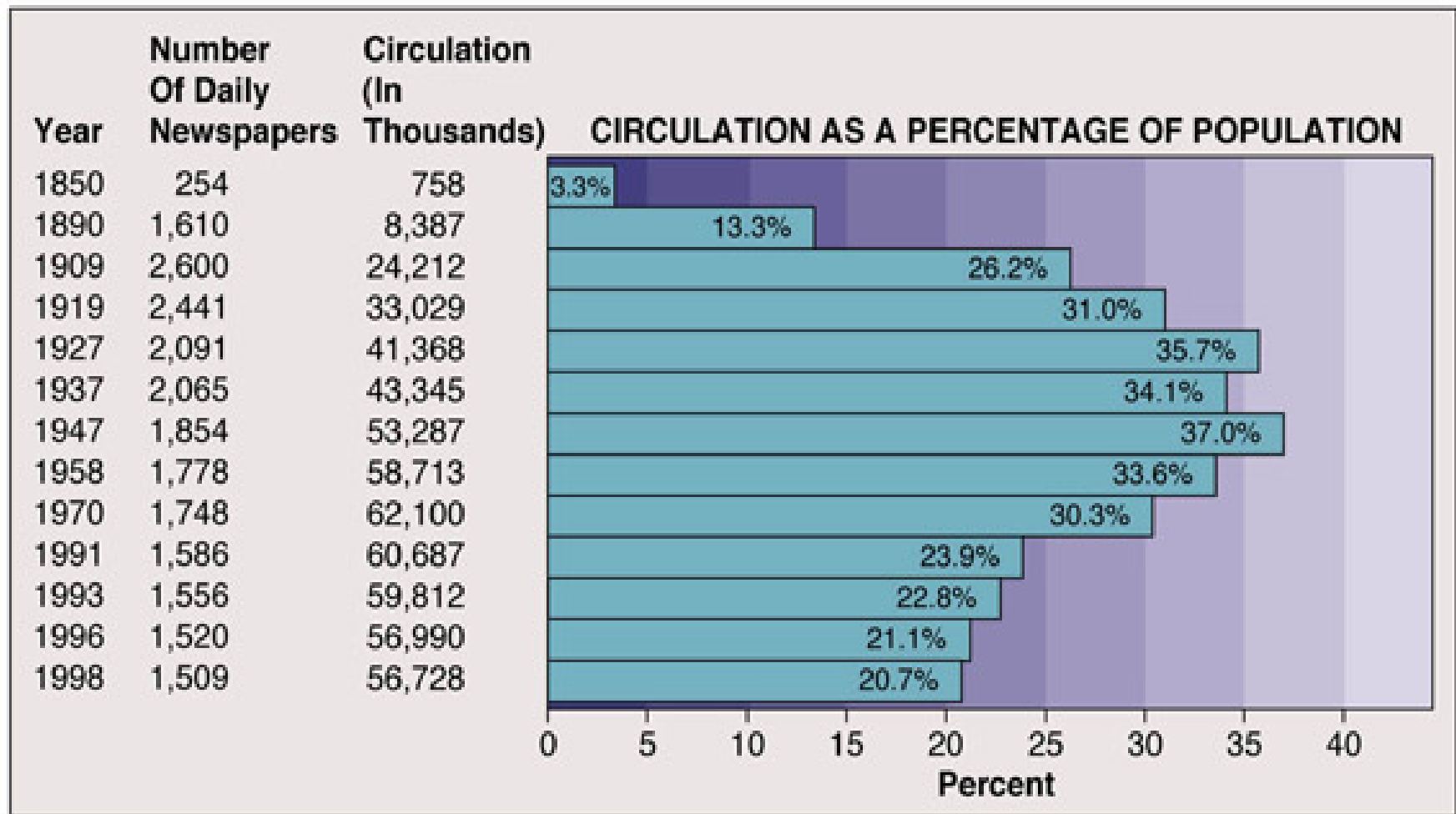
# The Contemporary Media

A number of newspapers have a national audience and are considered quite influential:

- *The New York Times*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *USA Today*
- *The Christian Science Monitor*
- *The Washington Post*
- *The Los Angeles Times*

These newspapers have a huge effect on television.

Figure 15.1 Circulation of Daily Newspapers, 1850-1998 (Selected Years)



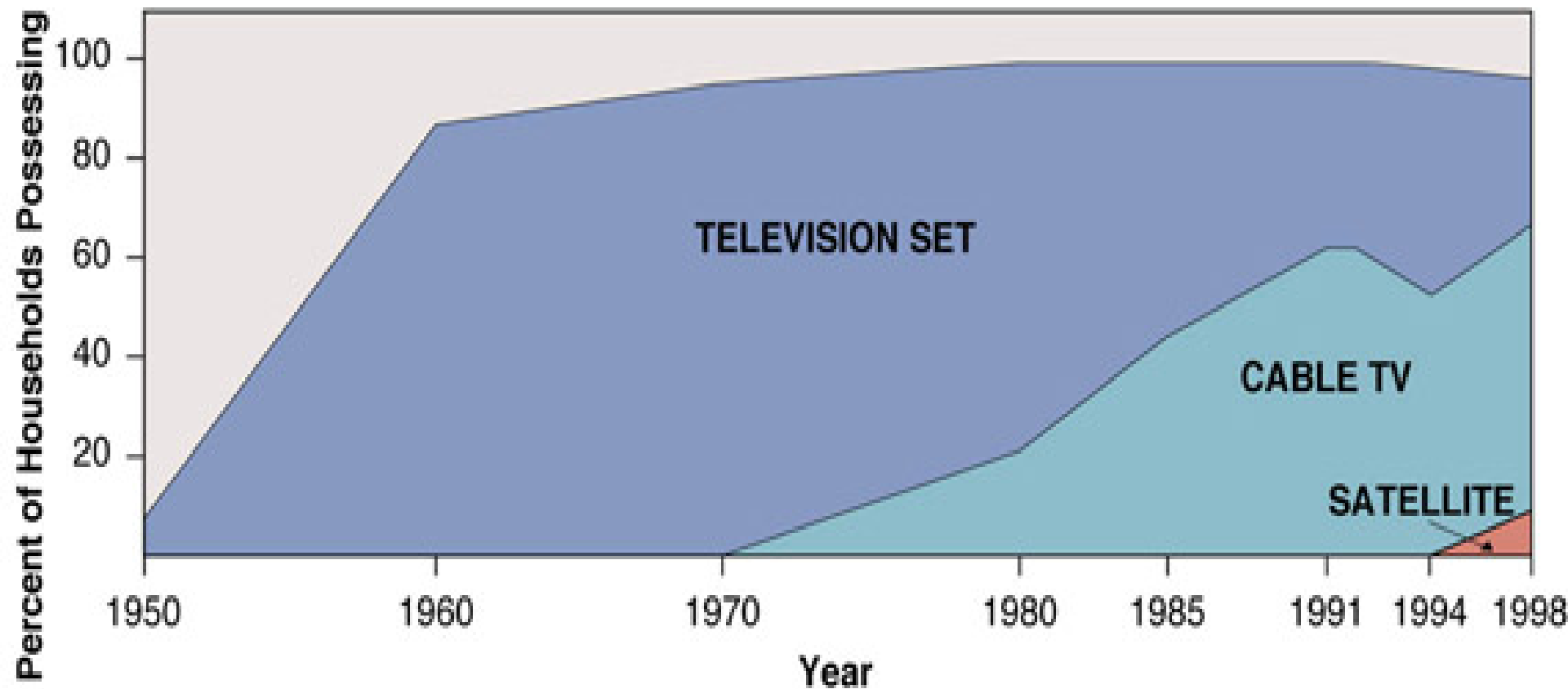
Over the last fifty years the percentage of Americans reading daily newspapers has steadily declined. This trend may suggest that Americans have become increasingly passive consumers of news, accepting news as it is handed to them from television or online sources rather than actively pursuing more detailed print information.

SOURCE: Adapted from Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 1997-1998 (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998), Table 4-2, pp.163-164. *The Editor & Publisher Yearbook 1998*.

# The Pace of the News

- The increasing rapid pace of electronic news and television's global coverage shortens the time frame for policy responses.
- In 1961, when the Berlin Wall went up, President Kennedy had 8 days to respond to the provocative action.
- In 1989, when the wall came down, President Bush was forced to respond overnight.

# Figure 15.2 Television in the American Home



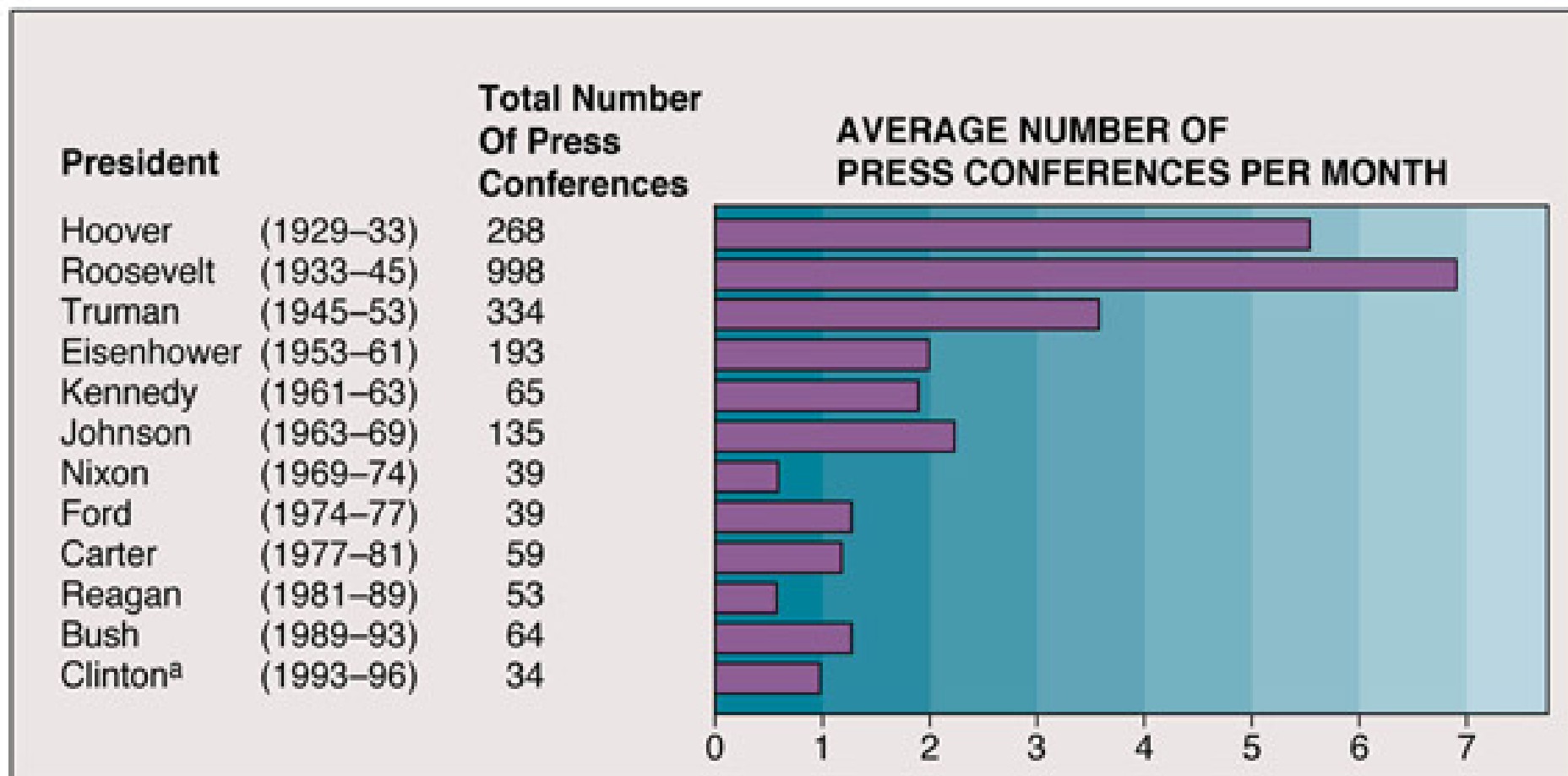
The growth of cable television has been tremendous over the last thirty years. Today, the majority of American households possess access to cable television. Moreover, satellite television, bringing literally hundreds of channels to viewers, is also on the rise. Smaller satellite dishes and lower prices are sure to make satellite television a more attractive media source in the future.

SOURCE: Adapted from Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 1997-1998* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998), Table 4-1, p.162. Television Bureau of Advertising.

# The Media and Politicians

- Research indicates that roughly 2/3s of officials in policy decisions reported that the media was their most rapid source of information.
- Over 4/5s indicated that the media were an important source of information.

# Figure 15.3 Presidential News Conferences, 1929-1996



The modern president has less need to give frequent presidential news conferences than was the case in the past. Today, presidents prefer to give a limited number of well planned news conferences rather than make more regular appearances. The modern president relies on advisors and a press team to provide the media with daily briefings.

<sup>a</sup>As of December 31, 1996.

SOURCE: Adapted from Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 1997-1998 (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998), Table 4-3, p.166.

# How Politicians Use the Media

- Politicians and government officials often stage media events in order to gain free media coverage.
- Candidates and politicians try to control or 'spin' media focus regarding campaign and policy issues.
- Candidates and politicians may 'leak' a story to the press in order to get their story out without being the focus of that story.

## *New York Times*

“I’ve said many times that I never learned from a classified document anything I couldn’t get earlier or later from the *New York Times*.”

John Kenneth Galbraith

# The Media and the Public

- Knowledge is power.
- 98% of all American households own at least one television.
- There are over 1500 newspapers with daily circulations of 60 million.
- There are 3 major weekly news magazines that claim nearly 10 million readers.

# Agenda Setting

- The mass media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling their audience what to think about.
- This power is greatest among those who are neither interested nor involved in politics and hence lack political sophistication.

# The Media's Role

The mass media perform a MEDIATING role – helping to shape political attitudes and choices but not DETERMINING them.

# Television Network Programming

- A full transcript of the typical nightly network news broadcasts – foreign and domestic – would not fill half of the front page of an average daily newspaper.
- Yet  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the American people routinely depend on this source for most of their foreign affairs information.

# The Inadvertent Audience

- Television provides the mass of American people with an infusion of policy information that most neither like nor want.
- There are three consequences of this forced media:
  1. Television may explain the decline of confidence in the nation's leadership.
  2. Being uninterested, Americans are unlikely to have strong convictions about issues as do those who regularly follow political affairs.
  3. Policy ideas must fit into "one-liners" that will fit into 30, 60, or 90 second slots on the evening news.

# Imperviousness of Beliefs

- Generally neither reading nor watching the news alters what people think.
- Selective perception is a pervasive human tendency.
- People search for “comfortable” information that “fits” with preexisting beliefs.
- People screen out or reject information with which they disagree.
- In short, we see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear.

# Government Regulation of the Electronic Media

- Print media are exempt from most governmental regulation.
- Electronic media are not.
- Airwaves are considered public property and are leased to networks and private broadcasters by the government.
- Government also allocates the use of frequencies and channels so that radio and TV do not overlap and jam each others' signals.

# The Media's Influence

- Do the media have too much influence on policymaking? If so why?
- If not, why do so many people think the media are so influential?
- How should a citizen use the media?
- Should we always believe the news media when they make claims?
- How can we become better consumers of information?