Media And Politics Essay, Research Paper

The media is an intricate part of American government, intertwined with the

practice of democracy, but to what extent does the media influence public opinion? To

answer that several aspects of media coverage have to be explored. The first fact is that

the media is America?s basic resource for all the news concerning American politics. The

second aspect is that the opinion expressed by the press influences the opinion adopted by

the public. Lastly the issues the media deem important help set the national agenda.

The most basic way the media influence public opinion is by offering knowledge

about government decisions and access to government information. Daily the press

deliver the raw information to the nation, whom in turn form into opinions. Without the

media it would take the public longer to become educated about governmental

proceedings. The media send messages across the nation. Before the advancement of

such media as the television, radio, and the Internet, a much smaller percentage of

Americans were informed about the issues concerning the nation.

The second way the media can influence public opinion is through their ability to

convey an overall tone to their readers and viewers according to their own sentiments.

Often a newspaper?s own feelings on a certain issue are expressed in their articles. When

the public reads about such issues they can adopt the attitude which the media portrayed.

The press my frame stories in a way that enhances the overall tone toward government

and politics. Unfortunately the most common trend is to hold a negative attitude toward

government. This negative tone has led to a national decline in voter participation. A

greater portion of the country now attains a skeptical view of the American government.

Most likely the largest way the media impact the public opinion is through agenda

setting. Because of the vast number of issues plaguing America today, the press has to

decide which they will cover and which they will not. Their reporting has a vital

connection to what the public comes to believe are the important issues in the country. If

the press repeatedly covers the gun control issue, then the nation itself comes to believe

that it is significant. What The New York Times run on their front cover today is what

constituents across the nation begin to feel is important. Because the nation deems it

important, than it is introduced into legislature tomorrow. The press possesses the

capability to create the impression that certain problems are of greater urgency than

others. Given the fact that both time and space are money to the press, those certain

problems are usually about political strategy, political infighting, political scandal and the

private lives of politicians. These tend to over take the less entertaining, but more

substantial stories because they do not make money.

One of the most ironic ways the media influences public opinion is by bringing the

candidates personally to each constituent through the use of television and radio. Could

one honestly say that Abraham Lincoln could be elected if he were running today?

Lincoln was not a very attractive man and did not have a very refined voice. How would

Lincoln have looked and sounded on television and radio? The public may be stubborn to

admit it, but it is true; the nation judges possible candidates upon appearances and

performances. If a presidential candidate could not speak in front of large groups, he

could never be elected in today?s society. It would not matter that his or her policies were

better than their running mates.

Guaranteed by the first amendment, the media will always be there to inform the

public and to decide what issues are important. Americans rely more and more on this

media to judge how our leaders campaign, govern, shape public policy, and communicate

their ideas. Being an independent check on all three branches of government, the media

serves as a fourth branch of government. However essential the media is to the balance of

government, the public must learn to make their own opinions and not just adopt those

portrayed by the press.

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