Graduate School Form 9
(Revised 7/94)

PURDUE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
Thesis Acceptance

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By Jonathan S. Morris

Entitled
The New Media and the Dramatization of American Politics

Complies with University regulations and meets the standards of the Graduate School for originality and quality

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Signed by the final examining committee:

Rosalee Clawson, chair

William Shaffer

Judson Jeffries

Eric Waltenburg

Approved by: _____ 11/26/02
Department Head Date

☐ is
This thesis ☒ is not to be regarded as confidential. _____
Major Professor

Format Approved by:

_____ or _____
Chair, Final Examining Committee Thesis Format Adviser

THE NEW MEDIA
AND THE DRAMATIZATION
OF AMERICAN POLITICS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Jonathan Sullivan Morris

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2002

For Professor Jerry Woodrow Morris

and

Professor Woodrow Wilson Morris,

two tough acts to follow.

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to the many people who have provided me advice and support throughout my graduate career. First and foremost, I would like to thank Rosalee A. Clawson, my dissertation advisor, for her support and guidance through the years. Rosie selflessly devoted countless hours to teaching me to be a scholar and professional. Because of Rosie's influence, I am a much better teacher, researcher, and writer than I would have been otherwise. Although my dissertation committee was the first for Rosie to chair, she handled the entire process with the grace of an experienced veteran. I am truly honored to call Rosie Clawson my mentor and friend. I thank my other committee members, Judson L. Jeffries, James McCann, and William Shaffer for their insightful comments and suggestions. I am grateful to Eric Waltenburg as well, who graciously filled-in for James McCann during my dissertation defense. His contributions are highly appreciated.

I also thank my close friends and graduate school colleagues Lars Hallstrom, Nicholas Guehlstorf, Richard Ridenour, Marie Witting, Viviana Abreu-Hernandez, and Elizabeth Frombgen. In their own unique ways, each of my friends contributed to making my graduate school experience not only educational, but also enjoyable. I especially want to thank my friend and colleague, Neil Strine, for his help in administering my dissertation experiment. This project would have been much more difficult without Mr. Strine's assistance.

Finally, I extend my appreciation to my family. Sue and Jerry Morris have been wonderful parents to me. Their guidance, support, and absolute refusal to let me quit has provided me the necessary strength to see this dissertation to its end. My brother Dave has also been a source of support, as well as a constant reminder that there is more to life than academics. My wife Erica, of course, has been my strongest supporter and best friend. Although she has no interest in political science, and has yet to read a word of this dissertation, she has shown an incredible degree of patience toward my career. I was lost before Erica came into my life, and through her unconditional love and support I have found myself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Morris, Jonathan S. Ph.D., Purdue University, December, 2002. The New Media and the Dramatization of American Politics. Major Professor: Rosalee A. Clawson.

In the 1990s, the "new media" emerged as a major political factor in the United States. As the decade wore on, more and more Americans made use of new news sources, such as cable news, political talk programs, and Internet news. While several studies have discussed the ways new media coverage of politics differs from traditional news, very little systematic analysis has been conducted. Furthermore, very little has been done to empirically examine the effect of the new media on public opinion. I argue that new media coverage of politics differs from traditional news by dramatizing the political process. I contend that the new media's coverage of conflict, scandal, sensationalism, and other aspects of political drama is more extensive than today's traditional media. This approach to covering politics provides a more entertaining picture of the political process, but also adversely affects approval for political leaders and the news media as an institution.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEW AMERICAN NEWS

News, at least in theory, is supposed to inform people, not merely entertain them.

-Lance W. Bennett (1983, 15)

Introduction

In Late April 2001, a young California woman, who was scheduled to arrive home from an internship in Washington, DC, vanished. This disappearance was not particularly unique in the context of a missing persons case. Across the nation, hundreds of young women vanish every year, with each individual case bringing little national attention. The parents of the missing intern were understandably distraught, and contacted the police to file a missing persons report. Because they were an affluent family, they hired a private investigator, which is also common under such circumstances. The parents of the missing intern then hired a public relations firm (Nolan 2001).

Of course, employing the services of a public relations firm is not standard practice in situations where an individual has disappeared. This, however, was not a standard Washington, DC missing persons case. The intern, Chandra Levy, was allegedly involved in an intimate affair with a married congressional Representative, Gary Condit (D-CA). The parents of Ms. Levy, through their public relations firm,

strategically leaked information regarding their daughter's relationship with the Congressman in order to keep the story in the news and increase the chances of finding her alive. Because the Levy's worked to keep this story in the news and because the missing woman was allegedly involved with a U.S. Congressman, the ensuing search for Chandra Levy became one of the most heavily covered political news stories in the last decade.

But was the story really political? Dan Rather and the executive director of *CBS Evening News* thought not. For the first month following Ms. Levy's disappearance, CBS refused to cover the story because of its tabloid nature and lack of legitimacy (Kohut 2001). If Dan Rather and company had things their way, the situation would have been handled no differently than other D.C. missing persons cases. The American public knows of Chandra Levy for one major reason—the "new media." New media sources such as cable news, talk shows on television and radio, and Internet news, took a much different approach to the Levy story than Dan Rather. New media coverage was saturated with up-to-the-minute news and speculation on the search for Ms. Levy, the Congressman's possible involvement, and their alleged intimate affair. Thanks to the Levy's and the media's close attention, the story changed daily; and sometimes even hourly. In many ways, the story resembled a dramatic movie, play, or television series. There were allegations of ethical violations, professional misconduct, adultery, deception, and murder. Also, the story had several plot twists and multiple characters who occupied roles ranging from tragic, to sinister, to even comic.

The intense coverage of the Levy disappearance in the new media brought the case into the national spotlight. Most traditional media sources (i.e., newspapers, nightly

network television, and newsmagazines), many of whom had learned a serious lesson by holding back on initial reports of the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Kalb 1998), quickly followed suit. As a consequence, the summer of 2001 became the summer of Gary Condit and Chandra Levy in the news. Media coverage was intense to say the least, and over three-fourths of the public followed the story in the news (Pew Research Center 2001). Also, ratings for the 24-hour cable news channels rose dramatically from the previous summer (Kempner 2001).

Political scandals are nothing new in American politics, and this project is not about political scandals. The interesting thing about the Gary Condit/Chandra Levy scandal is the nature of the media coverage and how that coverage reflects larger trends in today's political news. Coverage of the Levy disappearance illustrates the importance of new media in American politics and how that medium has the ability to significantly impact the political world. Equally important, the events of summer 2001 displayed that there are several differences in new and traditional media coverage of American politics. Consider the following example from *The O'Reilly Factor*, a political talk show on the Fox News Network. This is an exchange between talk show host Bill O'Reilly and his guest, Republican strategist Kim Serafin, immediately following Gary Condit's first televised interview with Connie Chung:

> SERAFIN: Yes. From a P.R. standpoint, it's a compete disaster. He should have admitted the affair. He should have come across as sensitive to the Levy's. I mean, these are two people that are -- who are rational, who are totally...
>
> O'REILLY: Right. Not saying she misunderstood and the aunt is crazy...
>
> SERAFIN: The only time that he said that he was sorry, he said "I'm sorry that Mrs. Levy misunderstood me. I'm sorry that she didn't understand what I

> was saying." He didn't apologize in any other context. He sounded defensive...
>
> O'REILLY: He's a hard guy, isn't he?
>
> SERAFIN: Yes, I thought he...
>
> O'REILLY: Would you date him?
>
> SERAFIN: Oh, my God, no.
>
> O'REILLY: All right. But I didn't say that to be condescending. You're a young woman and I mean, you're sizing him up. Chandra Levy was a young woman. This is a hard case, this guy.
>
> SERAFIN: Yes, I don't see the attraction.
>
> O'REILLY: I mean, this is a...
>
> SERAFIN: If he came across as stiff in real life...
>
> O'REILLY: This isn't Harrison Ford out there (*The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News Channel, 8/23/01).

Another news program on the Fox News Channel, *The Edge* hosted by Paula Zahn also covered the Levy disappearance quite closely. On July 17, 2001, Paula Zahn sought the expert opinion of Ms. Sylvia Brown to determine Ms. Levy's whereabouts. Sylvia Brown is a well know "psychic advisor" who charges $700 dollars for spiritual guidance over the telephone (Rutenberg 2001):

> BROWN: There are some trees down in a marshy area.... This is where the body is. This girl is not alive.
>
> ZAHN: How do you know this, Sylvia?
>
> BROWN: Because I am a psychic. I know she is there (*The Edge*, Fox News Channel, July 17, 2001).

The above examples are interesting for a few major reasons. First, although the legitimacy of this type of coverage has been criticized, *The O'Reilly Factor* and *The Edge*

marketed themselves as serious political news sources, contending that they provide important political news to Americans. Recent patterns in the public's media habits reflect that Americans go to these sources more often than before (Pew Research Center 2000). Paula Zahn, who saw her audience on Fox News almost triple from summer 2000 to summer 2001, defended her news coverage during the Levy search while arguing that the story provides a number of political and social issues to pursue. She said that, "This is not a one-dimensional story. Do politicians and celebrities get treated differently by the authorities? Was the D.C. police investigation compromised because it gets its funding from Congress? Where's the outrage from feminists who see this repeated pattern of the powerful having affairs, consensual relationships, with starry-eyed interns?" (Rutenberg 2001).

Second, the above programs represent a major divergence from traditional news coverage of politics in America. As mentioned earlier, Dan Rather and CBS Evening News did not want to cover the Levy story, and it is difficult to envision Rather, Jennings, or Brokaw publicly asking a correspondent if she would consider dating Gary Condit. Also, traditional newspapers like *The New York Times* or magazines like *Newsweek* are not in the practice of consulting psychics for political information. This difference in coverage is not just limited to coverage of the scandalous and sensational. As a whole, coverage of politics is different in the new media (Davis and Owen 1998). Consider how differently two sources approached covering President George W. Bush's budget proposal of 2001. The first example is from *Salon.com*, an Internet news source:

> Bush's own post-election economic hoedown was a tony Who's Who of industry titans who backed him, where never was heard a discouraging

> word about his plan to slash taxes and reward the wealthy individuals and industries that supported his presidential campaign....
>
> It's also worth asking whether worries about Bush's competence are worsening the current economic malaise. Everyone expected Cheney and Co. to be running the show, but it's Bush himself who's out in public every day, making loopy statements that need to be explained by his handlers. And if things really do go wrong, and the Reagan model of massive tax cuts and give-backs to the rich doesn't work, does anyone have confidence that Bush will have the intellectual capability and grasp of the issues to chart a new course?
>
> Clearly, if the economy continues to falter, and Bush gets his way with tax cuts, there will be nothing to soften the pain for the losers in our winner-take-all economy. The last recession, of course, was presided over by Bush père. And the prosperous Clinton years may now be bookended by another Bush recession. You'd think that the GOP would have learned its lesson about the dangers of deficits by now. But these days conservatism has come to stand for mad-dog economics.
>
> You can say this about conservatives: They're smarter and better organized than liberals. On Bush's right, his allies are plumping for even bigger tax cuts -- intending, no doubt, to make their president look like a moderate by comparison. But what they're not is true conservatives. They're shirking their responsibility to conserve the nation's resources, to hold off on rewarding themselves and their wealthy friends until we know that projected surpluses will actually materialize (Walsh 2001).

The above excerpt illustrates a focus on the new media journalist's freedom to subjectively approach what might be considered politically mundane. While it can never be said exactly for sure *why* this style is used in political news reporting, it is probably safe to say one reason is oriented around making the story more interesting to the public. This more subjective approach compares very differently with the more traditional, objective, format from *The New York Times*:

> President Bush today proposed a $1.96 trillion federal budget for next year that would cut taxes, increase spending on education, medical research and the military but scale back corporate subsidies, health care grants for poor areas, agricultural research and a host of other programs.
>
> Mr. Bush's tax and spending framework, his first detailed statement of priorities, immediately drew attacks from Democrats. They said the president's budget would provide a tax-cut windfall to the wealthy while raiding money needed to keep Medicare healthy and requiring cuts in the

> Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Interior, Justice, Labor and Transportation. But Mr. Bush said his plan would prudently restrain the growth of government spending and provide the money needed to address issues he considered priorities.
>
> At the same time, he repeated his case that the projected federal surplus of $5.6 trillion over the next decade made his $1.6 trillion tax cut in the same period affordable, even after going a long way toward eliminating the national debt and setting aside money to create private investment accounts in Social Security.
>
> Under his plan, Mr. Bush would begin phasing in reductions in the income tax rate and other provisions of his plan next year. But he has signaled that he would support efforts in Congress to begin phasing in the tax cut this year.
>
> "The surplus is not the government's money," Mr. Bush said in Omaha today in the first day of a two-day trip to sell his tax cut and budget plan. "The surplus is the people's money. And I'm here to ask you to join me in making that case to any federal official you can find" (Stevenson 2001).

In order to offer coverage beyond the scope of traditional news in newspapers, magazines, and network and local television, many new sources of news have created unique approaches to providing political information to the public (Davis and Owen 1998). As illustrated above, many newly created Internet news sites have taken more opinionated, conflictual, and even satirical approaches to politics (Barringer 2001).

Similar trends can be seen in cable news, televised talk shows, and radio talk shows. The expansion of new media has created a wider range of political news and perspectives accessible to the masses. The above examples illustrate some directions new media have taken in modern coverage of politics in America. The new media environment is changing the public face of American politics. Most of these changes have begun in the last 10-15 years, with many transformations (e.g., the boom of cable news and Internet news) just coming about in the last few. Due to this trend, the role of the new media in American politics has become pivotal. A significant portion of the American public now relies the new media for political news (Pew Research Center

2000). This project attempts to address two major research questions: Does the new media paint a different picture of politics than today's traditional counterparts? And if so, what are the effects?

New Political News in America

This study is an examination of the new media's political news coverage in America. Specifically, I will define new political news, compare it to traditional news, and develop a theory of how new media coverage influences today's American political world. Empirically, I will examine demographic trends in new and traditional news use, test for systematic differences in political coverage, and examine the effects of exposure to the new political news. Determining the uniqueness of the new news and understanding the effects on the public are the main purposes of this project.

This study is important because it aims to contribute toward understanding the nature of modern news coverage. Political news coverage today varies dramatically from what existed a quarter-century ago. The political media market has transformed since 1990 more than any other time in history (Morris 1999). The number of outlets has increased dramatically while the potential audience pool has remained relatively constant (Pew Research Center 2000). Competition for the American news audience is higher than ever before.

In order to draw in more of an audience, many news sources have changed their coverage styles (Davis and Owen 1998; Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Kalb 1998; Patterson 2000, 1994). Arguments on how the media's coverage of politics has changed vary. Today's coverage has been found to be more scandalous (Rozell 1994, 1996; Lichter and

Noyes 1996), conflictual (Fallows 1996; Jamieson 1992), game-oriented (Patterson 1994; Cappella and Jamieson 1997), negative (Lichter and Amundson 1994; Mann and Ornstein 1994), and "soft" (Patterson 2000). While it is generally accepted that there have been sweeping changes in the behavior of all facets of political news coverage, today's new media reflects the most dramatic divergence (Davis and Owen 1998; Williams and Delli Carpini 2001).

Almost a decade into the new media era, however, the nature of new media and its influence on the American public is still largely undetermined. Has this equalizing potential been realized? Does new media differ from traditional in terms of political news coverage? If new media does differ significantly from today's traditional news, is this difference instrumental in shaping today's political media landscape? As Chapter One will illustrate, findings point in many different directions, offering a wide range of perspectives on the shape and influence of the political news of today and tomorrow.

Scholarly disagreement over the nature of new media coverage, its points of divergence from traditional media, and its influence on the American political system stems from (a) a lack of agreement over what constitutes "new media," (b) failure to conduct systematic content analysis of new and traditional political news, and (c) incomplete causal testing of how new media impacts the American public. Previous political communication research into "new media" has generated several theoretical perspectives and interesting findings (see Chapter Two). However, many studies have overextended in an attempt to construct encompassing theories of how *all* new media influence the American political scene. Depending on which definition one looks at, the term "new media" casts a wide umbrella. All "politically relevant" media are often

brought under the fold of new media (Williams and Delli Carpini 2001). Rosen and Taylor (1992), for example, call new media "a mix of the serious, the slightly bizarre, and the au courant; in other words, the 'everywhere' culture" (40). Bart Simpson, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, televised political debates, Jerry Springer, rap music, public opinion polls, talk radio, C-SPAN, and the Internet are just some examples of communication mediums that have been classified as "new media."

This study will attempt to avoid the common pitfall of providing an over-generalized definition by focusing on *new political news* (or *new news*). In the short history of the new media, it is certainly true that a wide range of entertainment programs touch on issues that are politically relevant. Situation comedies, daytime talk shows, tabloids, and programs such as *Letterman*, *Leno*, or *The Daily Show* all tangentially address political issues from an entertainment angle, and are certainly relevant. And these forms new media certainly merit analysis from a political perspective, especially as some Americans have begun to passively rely on these types of entertainment as their only source of news (Delli Carpini and Williams 2001; Hess 2001; Hollander 1995). The purpose of this analysis, however, is to address new media sources that attempt to serve as legitimate political news sources—the very same sources that have begun stealing the traditional news audience since the early 1990s. The lines between entertainment and news have certainly blurred in the age of new media (Davis and Owen 1998; Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Hess 2001; Jackson 2001), but not to the point that news and entertainment should be classified in the same communication genre—at least not yet.

New Media and the Dramatization of American Politics

In order to compete with the established traditional news outlets, cable news, political talk shows on television and cable, and Internet news have taken new approaches to covering politics. Primarily, these approaches are designed to increase profit. Like most media, new news sources are working to make money as well as provide news (Cook 1998). The exceptions to this rule, such as the non-profit C-SPAN (Franzich and Sullivan 1996), are rare in the new media. Profit motive exists in traditional media as well, but it has been found that this motive manifests differently in the new media. Davis and Owen argue that, "The mainstream press has historical grounding in public service and in the professional norms of journalism... The traditional media have a sense of obligation to cover government affairs" (Davis and Owen 1998, 17-18). What approaches, then, are employed in the new media to capture the audience that might otherwise go to traditional sources for political news?

Many scholars have answered the above question by pointing to entertainment in the new media, where tabloids, comedy, sex, and the bizarre have been found to be dominate (Davis and Owen 1998; Delli Carpini and Williams 2001; Sparks and Tulloch 2000). By focusing on new media that fall outside the realm of "news," however, many studies have concluded that the entertainment aspect makes any presentation of "news" an afterthought. This project will not ignore the glaring fact that entertainment plays a role in today's new news. I will, however, dispute the conclusion of researchers such as Davis and Owen (1998), who contend that, in comparison to traditional news, "The new media rarely claim even the pretense of public service" (18). The David Lettermans and Jerry Springers of the media would agree they do not provide much legitimate news or

public service, and television and print tabloids would likely do the same. For example, Jerry Springer said in March 2000 that:

> I have a circus. You know, it's a stupid show. Let's be honest. And it's fun to do and -- but it doesn't take any talent. Anybody could do what I do. You know, I introduce outrageous guests or guests involved in outrageous situations, let them tell their stories. I mean, it's an entertaining show, obviously. That's why it does so well (*The Edge with Paula Zahn*, Fox News Network, 3/1/00).

Later in 2000, Springer made a similar comment while appearing on *Larry King Live*:

> KING: Do you ever think, though, Jerry, that you're the sideshow in the circus? We watch them because it's fascinating to watch.
>
> SPRINGER: It's a circus. We're not the sideshow; we are the circus. Yes, we are the circus. There's no question. Our show's the circus. It would be horrible if all American television was like our show (*Larry King Live*, CNN, 8/24/00).

Many other sources of new media, however, would vigorously disagree that their programming is not legitimate news. *Salon.com*, *Slate.com, The Drudge Report*, Chris Matthews, Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, Paula Zahn, and other providers of political news and debate believe they *are* providing a valuable public service by facilitating access to *legitimate* political news. Each source would give a different reason as to why they are a legitimate source of political news. Bill O'Reilly, for example, claims that his talk program on Fox News is "The No-Spin Zone," where unfair promotion of ideological political agendas will not be tolerated (O'Reilly 2000, 2001). Rush Limbaugh, on the other hand, promotes himself as an outlet for average Americans to voice opinions and transcend the traditional liberal media (Limbaugh 1993).

When one looks only at the new political *news* sources, the role of entertainment is still unclear. While many researchers point to the presence of "entertainment" in the new news, the characterization has not been clearly defined. In discussing media coverage of criminal justice procedure in the 1990s, Fox and Van Sickel (2001) argue that new media strive for commercial success by providing *personalization* and *serialization*. Personalization is "the presentation of events through a focus on the emotional personal human aspects of a story," and serialization refers to "the presentation of news as a series of short dramatic events (involving a relatively small number of recurring characters with specific roles) over an extended period of time" (27). While Fox and Van Sickel talk of these elements of entertainment in the context of criminal cases such as O.J. Simpson, JonBenet Ramsey, and William Kennedy Smith, their discussion translates well into the world of politics and the driving force behind today's new political news—*drama*.

Emphasis on dramatization in the news is a trend that has been examined for decades. Edward Jay Epstein (1973) uncovered a memo written in 1963 from Reuben Frank, the NBC Evening News executive producer, to his staff:

> Every new story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end. These are not only the essential of drama; they are the essential of narrative (Epstein 1973, 4-5).

Two decades later, Paletz and Entman (1981) noted that drama was often artificially generated in the modern world of television news. They observed that stories that lack compelling drama will "have drama grafted on" (16):

> Journalists have been known to highlight if not concoct conflict and to find characters to symbolize its different sides. One reason: to attract an audience that is thought to have little patience for the abstract, the technical, the ambiguous, the uncontroversial (Paletz and Entman 1981, 16).

Some elements of drama in the news predate television. The post-Revolutionary War partisan press focused heavily on negativity, scandal, and personal attacks. The partisan press era, which lasted through the end of the Jacksonian period of the 1830s, was characterized by "newspapers founded or subsidized to further the political fortunes of individuals or parties" (Knudson 2000, 25). West (2001) stated that, "The vigorous competition and partisan reporting of the early American press become hallmarks of the first few decades of the new republic. Bitter, personal attacks from opinionated newspaper editors were routine and marked the political discourse of the day... There was little effort at objectivity on the part of the reporters which limited their overall credibility with readers" (9).

There is a stark difference between today's news media and the partisan press of the early 1800s. Like today's new media, the partisan press was highly fragmented and characterized by high competition. In the partisan press, however, there were defined political objectives that far outweighed modern-day political goals. Darrell West pointed out that, "Unlike later periods of American life when journalists held tremendous power, neither reporters, nor editors, nor publishers displayed any independent judgment. They were controlled by forces from outside the industry, namely politicians, government officials, and party organizations" (West 2001, 9). Today's media, on the other hand, are much less beholding to the specific objectives of public officials or the parties. Instead, the dominant objective is profit, and today's new media political journalists pursue this

profit by making the political process more entertaining. Entertainment and profit were certainly desired by the owners of the partisan press, but these goals were dwarfed by the pursuit of votes.

Today's new political media have found their niche *by dramatizing American politics and the political process to an unprecedented level.* Increased drama leads to increased entertainment, which can increase profit potential. In his 1981 discussion of general news coverage in America, Lance W. Bennett had an interesting theory that, in many ways, has unfolded in the new media age:

> News, at least in theory, is supposed to inform people, not merely entertain them. The trend toward ever more dramatic and entertaining news may mean that a new form of mass communication is emerging. This evolving communication form may still go by the term 'news,' but it would be a serious mistake to assume that the traditional meanings of that term still apply (Bennett 1983, 15).

Today, as Bennett predicted, drama is transplanted into the news whenever possible. Nowhere is this trend more evident than in the new media's coverage of politics in America. With unprecedented frequency, the new news turns political events into dramatic stories with multiple plot lines, conflict, tragedy, a dynamic cast of participants, and the ever-present possibility of closure and redemption. Of course, drama is not present in all of today's new news, and events often occur that need no dramatization. Today, however, we are witnessing a movement by the new media to transplant drama into news whenever possible, especially where politics are involved. Titles and themes are often assigned to the stories. "The Search For Chandra" (Levy disappearance), and "Democracy in Crisis" (2000 Presidential Election and Florida

Recount) are some of the most recent dramatic themes that become prevalent in the new political news.

It has been observed that, "These days, it's hard to tell when you're watching *Inside Politics* (CNN) and when you've tuned in to *Melrose Place*. Both feature unhealthy quantities of lust, lies, betrayal and adultery, though the latter has more believable scripts" (Chapman 1999, A19). This is certainly overstating the case, but Chapman's contention illustrates an excellent point that the new news coverage of politics is constructed to bring out the dramatic. This is done to create intriguing plot lines in the news that the public feels compelled to follow, much like a daily soap opera or weekly dramatic series on television. The new media's ability to cover events continuously on cable and the Internet allows the opportunity to present updates in a much more timely and compelling fashion than traditional news. If the public becomes interested in a story and desires updates on how that story has transpired, the new media can provide information much better than daily newspapers, nightly network news, or weekly newsmagazines. In short, the new news presents stories dramatically because it is their best means of increasing an audience, thus increasing the potential for profit. Consider the following example:

> GERALDO RIVERA, host: Once again, the by-now-familiar seesawing over the fate of Chandra Levy. On the one hand, the distraught parents begging for help to end their nightmare. On the other, attorney Billy Martin openly challenging Gary Condit to tell all he knows. Although there is apparently no evidence linking the congressman to the disappearance of his young lover, an editorial in today's Ceres Courier, his hometown paper, calls for his resignation, citing the shattering of his previously sterling reputation and his failure to disclose the true nature of his relationship with Chandra. That theme was echoed in the international edition of The Wall Street Journal with the European observer columnist today commenting, quote, "Any time a

> public servant reveals himself to be a liar and deceiver, he violates some sacred trust. Nothing endangers democracy more than the sort of cynicism that may prompt a public servant to obstruct justice to save his own political behind."
>
> Hi, everybody. I'm Geraldo Rivera in Boston.
>
> Imagine for a second you're Gary Condit. You know--and I've got some news from a source very close to the congressman I'll relate to you in just a minute or so. But imagine you're Gary Condit. You're home to California from the Washington catastrophe that has probably wrecked your career if not your marriage; you're facing your wife and kids whose lives have also been turned on end by your misdeeds. And absolutely, worst of all, you're hearing every day from the grieving, distraught and angry parents of your missing young girlfriend, demanding if you have even a shred of decency to tell the world what you really know. If he wasn't such a coward, I would feel sorry for him (*Rivera Live*, CNBC, 8/8/01).

Contrary to the perceptions of many, new media's political coverage is not all sex, violence, and deception. Because these new sources on cable, radio, and the Internet are attempting to draw people from the traditional news audience, there are similarities in the *topics* covered. For instance, new media sources are not going to ignore coverage of legislative budget battles simply because sex and death are not involved. Such a tactic would damage their credibility, making it impossible to claim the status of "legitimate" political news provider. Instead, new media present political stories in a more dramatic *style* than traditional media in order to capture the attention of the public, and keep them coming back for more. Take, for instance, an example of an introduction to CNN's *Inside Politics*:

> ANNOUNCER: Live from Washington, this is Inside Politics with Judy Woodruff.
>
> (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

> UNIDENTIFIED MALE: There will be no July 4th recess. There will be no break until this bill is passed in the United States Senate. (END VIDEO CLIP)
>
> ANNOUNCER: The battle lines are drawn over patients' rights, testing the new balance of power in the Senate. Political groundbreaker Geraldine Ferraro faces a new challenge: cancer. Plus: Ford Explorers descend on the Capitol, where the safety of their tires is in question again. And in the Giuliani divorce battle, a judge asks, what about the children?
>
> JUDY WOODRUFF, CNN ANCHOR: Thank you for joining us. The opening of the Senate battle over patients' rights is proving to be a dramatic demonstration of just how the political tables have turned. Today, it is mostly Democrats who are trying to press ahead with their agenda, while it's mostly Republicans who are digging in their heels and holding up debate. Here is our congressional correspondent Kate Snow (*Inside Politics*, CNN, 6/19/01).

When actual dramatic events transpire in the world of politics, such as the impeachment of a President, pivotal votes in Congress, or unexpected tragedies involving mass casualties, both new and traditional media will cover the event closely (see Pew Research Center 2000, 2001; also see Chapter Three). With this in mind, it is important to reemphasize the point that dramatic coverage also exists in the traditional news (Bennett 1983; Epstein 1973; Gans 1979; Hovind 1999; Nimmo and Combs 1990; Paletz and Entman 1981). Because drama is intriguing and compelling, most news producers look to include it in their coverage (Gans 1979). Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) conclude that the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal was an excellent illustration of the modern erosion of the walls between news and entertainment:

> (The Clinton scandal) was done with maximum media attention and minimal public response. From this perspective, the public's attention to this unfolding drama was no different than it might have been to a particularly engrossing episode of *ER*, *The X-Files*, or *The Jerry Springer Show*. In short, national politics had been reduced to a sometimes amusing, sometimes melodramatic, but seldom relevant spectator sport (178).

Delli Carpini and Williams only briefly mention drama in the news, and discuss "entertainment" in a broad context. Their argument, however, reflects a larger consensus that, as a whole, today's media coverage of politics works to entertain more than ever before. A distinction must be made, however, when looking at political news coverage. Not all news sources approach drama the same way. The norms and values of traditional news, which are much more entrenched than the norms of the new news, keep the traditional media from covering politics in an overly dramatic way. Also, the structure of traditional news inhibits their ability to cover politics as dramatically as the new news. Traditional news cannot devote the endless hours of coverage to reporting, discussing, and debating the finer points of a dramatic story. The new news, on the other hand, does not have such limitations. The more open format and subjective nature of new political news coverage lends well to developing and maintaining dramatizations of the political world.

Car Crashes and Soap Operas

This project will argue that the new news incorporates aspects of drama into its coverage to attract a larger audience. Aspects of drama include increased focus on individual personalities, discussion of political conflict, a strong focus on scandal, and a more negative tone of coverage in comparison to traditional news. Also, political strategy should be prevalent in the new news as well. Strong focus on the development of stories should lead to a tendency for new media, especially talk shows, to foster discussion and debate over various strategic approaches and what outcomes those strategies may create.

If the style of new political news is indeed more dramatic than traditional counterparts, what consequence does that entail for the public's political attitudes? By showing the political world as a cycle of dramatic series and events, do the new media impact public opinion? I will argue that the new media's approach to covering American politics has worked in recent years to draw a larger audience. As Chapter Three will illustrate, use of the new media has gone up consistently over the last decade, while traditional use has dropped at an unprecedented rate. I will also attempt to show, however, that the dramatic presentation of news gives the political world the look of both a car crash and a soap opera. The new media often put an ugly face on American politics. The public knows the new media's portrayal of the news is going to be dramatic and ugly, yet it appears that they have trouble looking away—much like the drama of a car crash. Also, more than with traditional news, Americans go to the new media for updates on how the car crash is transpiring—much like a soap opera.

In the summer of 2001, survey data from the Pew Research Center indicated that the public did not show much interest in coverage of the disappearance of Chandra Levy (Pew Research Center 2001). The survey report, titled "Missing Intern Stirs Media Frenzy, Lukewarm Public Interest," found that less than half the public was closely following the news on the search for the former intern (16 percent very closely, 33 percent fairly closely), a number much lower than many major stories of the past and present. Indeed, the report even indicated that the Levy story wasn't even the biggest story of the summer. Andrew Kohut, Director of the Pew Research Center made the following argument:

> Past surveys show that the vast majority of the public is put off by coverage of these stories once it becomes so extensive as to be inescapable for viewers. Most Americans blanch at the blatant exploitation of the people being covered, and they indicated in surveys that they feel that the press pursues stories like these not to protect the public interest but to enlarge audiences. One can only question the wisdom of alienating a large percentage of a public that now has the ability to screen out the news it does not want...(Kohut 2001, B7).

One puzzling question arises from Kohut's accusations: Why, then, do new media's ratings sky rocket when dramatic political events come to the forefront of the public's attention? In July 2001, cable news networks saw their ratings go up significantly from the preceding year (e.g., CNN's ratings grew 44 percent, MSNBC was up 19 percent, and Fox News increased by 136 percent). Interestingly enough, the cable news channel that saw its ratings increase the most, FOX News, came under extensive scrutiny for covering the Levy case with the most intensity (Kurtz 2001; Rutenberg 2001). If the public is so fed up with the new media's style of coverage, as Kohut argues, why do their ratings continue to rise?

My proposed answer to this question is that, although the public is critical of the new media's style of incorporating the dramatic into its coverage of politics, they find it hard to look away, and sometimes will not even admit their interest in a story. The initial car-crash drama, coupled with continual updates, debates, and story line twists work for the new media to steal the traditional news audience, so they stick with it. The dramatic elements that new news tends to bring into its coverage, however, are some of the same elements to which the public will often react negatively. Portraying American politics in a dramatic sense may be the best way for new media to bring in a larger audience, but it also generates negativity in terms of public opinion toward political elites, political

institutions, and the political system as a whole. Although it may be intriguing for Americans to see dramatic politics, the scandal, conflict, personality focus, negativity, and strategy involved have been shown to aggravate Americans (Fallows 1996; Lichter and Noyes 1996; Patterson 1994; Cappella and Jamieson 1997). This project will test these contentions.

Study Design

To test the arguments discussed above, this project will (a) analyze survey data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2000), (b) conduct content analysis of new and traditional media coverage of politics from 1998, 1999, and 2000, and (c) experimentally analyze the effects of exposure to the dramatic style of political news coverage in the new media. Chapter Two will review the existing literature that has examined new media and develop a comprehensive theory of the new political news in America. Chapter Three will use survey data to gain an understanding of past and current trends in new media use. Chapter Three will also use factor analysis in an attempt to map the different dimensions of the modern news media. Does the public recognize a difference between today's new and traditional news? If so, what is the nature of that distinction, and are there differences recognized within the new political media?

Chapter Four will draw from a content analysis of new and traditional media to test the theory that the new news is indeed more dramatic in its coverage of American politics. Talk shows, cable news broadcasts, and Internet news will be compared to newspaper and nightly network coverage to determine the nature of the differences with regard to coverage of scandal, strategy, personalities, negativity, and other dramatic

elements. Additionally, I will test for differences in how different media incorporate the public into the coverage.

Chapter Five will examine the effects of new media exposure on the public. I will use experimental analysis to test for a *causal* link between exposure to the dramatic style of new media's political coverage and support for political elites, institutions, and the system as a whole. Subjects will be randomly assigned to experimental groups and given stimuli to replicate traditional and new media's styles of coverage. Chapter Six will conclude the study, formulate a final argument regarding the role of the new political news in America, and discuss possible avenues for further research.

The overarching goal of this analysis is to demonstrate that (a) the new media's political news is a significant departure from today's traditional news, and (b) exposure to the new media's style of news coverage has an impact on American's perception of the political system and the actors in it. If the arguments put forth in this study are supported by the data, the findings will have important implications for understanding the differing effects of today's media. Additionally, the findings of this analysis may also be helpful in comprehending the possible pitfalls involved as the new media becomes less new and more commonplace.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The last several years have seen a burgeoning of theoretical and empirical literature in the field of political communication on the topic of "new media". Primarily, this growth of research has taken place since the Internet boom in the middle 1990s, and continues to expand into the twenty-first century. The literature varies greatly in terms of theoretical foundations, research methodology, and findings. Furthermore, there is a great deal of variability regarding exactly what is meant by the term "new media". In essence, the existing literature on "new media" in political communication is oriented around three broad research questions. First, what are the "new media," and what are the traditional media? What exactly are the criteria used to differentiate these different forms of communication? Second, how do new and traditional media differ in terms of coverage of politics, policy, and the political process? Finally, if there is a discernable difference in new and traditional political coverage, what are the effects of new media on the American public?

This chapter will examine how political scientists and communication scholars have attempted to answer the above research questions. The purpose of this review is to illustrate what aspects of new media have been adequately cultivated, and what areas are in need of more systematic, thorough analysis. This review will begin with an

examination of how scholars have defined the new media in the context of American politics.

Definitions of New Media

The term "new media" carries a great deal of ambiguity. Because the media's role in America is so multifaceted, clearly defining the "new media" is a difficult and complex undertaking. In many ways, the perception of "new" and "traditional" media is individually determined by the news consumer. What older Americans view as new media might be considered traditional by the younger users. A perfect example of this is cable news, which did not become prominent until the late 1980s with the growing accessibility of CNN, CNN Headline News, and C-SPAN.[1] Most young Americans cannot remember a time when 24-hour news was not available simply by turning on the television. The remainder of Americans, however, can recall when the only news available on television was local and network nightly news. Of course, this fact contributes to the strong tendency for young Americans to use new media more than the older population (see Chapter Three). The newsgathering habits of Americans are quite stable. Thus, young Americans are much more likely to use new media because, to them, it is not so new.

Varying perspectives of what constitute new media do not only exist within the mass public, but also among scholars and journalists. As this chapter will show, scholars have taken different approaches to defining and measuring new media. Before this study

[1] CNN was started June 1, 1980, CNN Headline News started January 1, 1982, and C-SPAN started March 19, 1979 (Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Frantzich and Sullivan 1996).

can move forward, it is necessary to examine these definitions and create an operational understanding of new and traditional media in America.

The theoretical and empirical definitions of new media have ranged from broad to quite narrow. All recent media scholars include the Internet as the most obvious form of new media because it uses a new form of technology. The new technology criterion has led some scholars to consider the Internet as the only true "new" media (Hill and Hughes 1998). Others isolate the Internet as a caveat of the new media, citing the unique combination of new technology, populist potential, and recent exponential growth in use (Johnson et al. 1999). The most common practice in the literature, however, has been to classify the Internet as only one part of the larger new media genre (Davis and Owen 1998; Barnett 1997; Grossman 1995).

Except for the Internet, there are varying ideas on what constitutes the "new" in "new media." Some researchers give specific explanations, while others have ideas that are more abstract. Some researchers specifically articulate which forms of media are new and which are traditional, while others only give examples. There are several instances of this trend in the literature. Graber (1996) asks, "Beyond new technological advances, what makes the 'new' media new? She answers the question by pointing to "the empowerment of the media users," which, she says, is ultimately unfulfilled. This definition, however, leaves confusion over what media sources "empower" and which do not. When discussing recent elections, Johnson et al. (1999) say that, "candidates relied on a host of nontraditional media such as the Internet, radio and television talk shows, morning talk shows, MTV, and late night talk shows to present their message directly to the American people—much to the chagrin of the mainstream press" (99). This

statement is what Johnson et al. use to define new and traditional media. Is *direct* communication the criteria of new media, or is the definition more complex? No definitive answer is given in many cases.

Other definitions of new media are more ambiguous. Rosen and Taylor (1992) say that new news is "the hodgepodge that covers everything from Jay Leno's monologue to Larry King's talk show to David Letterman's top ten list, from rap music to talk radio to public affairs programming on cable, from Spike Lee to Bart Simpson to Public Enemy, from tabloid television to MTV to C-SPAN, from 'infotainment' shows to long-format interviews to call-in show that spire to create a plebiscitary rather than a representative democracy—in other words, a mix of the serious, the slightly bizarre and the au courant; in other words, the 'everywhere' culture" (39-40). Grossman (1995) speaks optimistically of how the "new electronic republic" will spawn a more democratic political future, but offers little detail regarding his ideas of what aspects of media constitute this new republic. Fox and Van Sickel (2001) say, "at least three characteristics—*new technology*, *commercialism*, and *populism*—distinguish the new media environment" (91). Are these attributes *exclusive* to new media? Are all three characteristics necessary for a medium to be considered *new*? If so, what media contain all three of these characteristics? While such an approach is helpful in discerning the differences between new and traditional media, the definition of new media is still cloudy.

There is also a good deal of disagreement over which aspects of a communication medium constitute "new media." This debate exists even within the Internet. Some scholars claim Internet news is being "traditionalized" by the same actors that dominate

the traditional news sources. Most major local and national news sources now present news on the World Wide Web, and it is these web sites that are the most widely used Internet news sources. This situation, some argue, has created an era of "politics as usual" on the Internet, where a potentially revolutionary new media source is being normalized and dominated by traditional news sources (Davis 1999; Margolis and Resnick 2000).

Along with talk radio, the Internet is one of the few media that are almost universally considered "new." There are some studies, however, that have excluded talk radio as new media despite the fact that the number of talk radio programs more than doubled in the 1990s (Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Pew Research Center 1997). National Public Radio (NPR), a mix of news and local and national talk shows, has been considered new media (Davis and Owen 1998) as well as traditional (Johnson et al. 1999), even though the number of frequent NPR listeners has doubled since 1990 (see Chapter Three).

Another frequently recognized new source of news is cable, though some specific aspects are in debate. The talk show aspect of cable news, which is becoming more and more prevalent, is largely considered new media along with network morning and late night talk shows (Davis 1997). Cable news in general is not so clear. While 24-hour news channels are relatively new and have grown considerably in the 1990s with the creation of CNBC, MSNBC, and FOX News, outlets such as CNN and C-SPAN have been considered traditional because they are established and "elite broadcast outlets" (Johnson et al. 1999, 105).

Finally, many entertainment-based programs have been considered new media. "Infotainment" is an important aspect of new media (Brants and Neijens 1998; Graber 1996; Just et al. 1996). Late night talk shows such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman* have become more political in nature, especially when it comes to hosting political figures and candidates as guests. This trend undoubtedly stems from Governor Bill Clinton's highly successful appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show* as a candidate for president in 1992 (Davis and Owen 1998; Maltese 1994). The early 1990s also saw the beginning of Music Television's (MTV) political coverage, which has been widely cited as new media due to its unique mix of news, entertainment, and "narrowcasted" attention on issues facing young Americans (Georges 1993). Print and televised tabloids are often referred to as new media as well, even though such sources tend to deal only with tangentially political issues, such as scandals and personalities (Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Sabato et al. 2000; Sparks and Tulloch 2000; Davis and Owen 1998). Even daytime circus talk shows such as *Ricky Lake* and *Jerry Springer* are often considered new media in American politics despite the fact that they rarely cover politics at all (Davis and Owen 1998).

Some daytime talk shows such as *Oprah* have some political news content (the show hosted both major party candidates for president in 2000), as do nighttime programs such as *Letterman* and *Leno*. From time-to-time, political figures do appear as guests on these programs, and jokes are often made at the expense of those who have been involved in political scandals and/or unpopular events. While these broadcasts do not attempt to serve as legitimate political news providers, some of the public do use entertainment talk shows as basis for political knowledge and candidate evaluations (Davis and Owen 1998;

Hollander 1995). Due to this trend, political leaders now use entertainment-based talk shows to expose their personal side to viewers. For example, as a guest on *Letterman* in 1996 Vice President Al Gore told a joke at his own expense that he had heard earlier on television. He asked, "How do you distinguish Al Gore in a room full of secret service agents?" The answer Gore provided was, "Al Gore is the uptight one."

The above discussion reflects the reality that any definition of new media can be challenged and debated. However, a great deal of confusion has been created by a failure of many researchers to define specifically what constitutes new and traditional media. The most comprehensive theoretical and operational definition of new media comes from Davis and Owen (1998), who recognize that defining new media is "an important, albeit somewhat challenging task." They argue that the new media are "qualitatively and quantitatively different from mainstream press" (7). Their definition is very specific and quite exhaustive:

> New media are mass communication forms with primarily nonpolitical origins that have acquired political roles. These roles need not be largely political in nature; in some instances they are only tangentially so. What distinguishes these communication forms from more traditional ones, such as newspapers and nightly television news, is the degree to which they offer political discussion opportunities that attract public officials, candidates, citizens, and even members of the mainstream press corps. In particular, the new media enhance the public's ability to become actors, rather than merely spectators in the realm of media politics. Further, to a greater extent than traditional media have historically, the new media place a high premium on entertainment (Davis and Owen 1998, 7).

Davis and Owen argue that, overall, new media are populist in nature and more entertainment-oriented than traditional news. They focus their definition even further by stating that:

> The new media constitute a highly diverse range of communication formats.... For many forms, the term *new* is a misnomer. They involve old media technologies that have been newly discovered or reinvigorated as a political media. It is the extent of their politicization that is new, not their existence. Thus there is a sense of novelty even in those media that have existed for some time (Davis and Owen 1998, 7-8).

Although Davis and Owen speak of new media as a single entity, they do recognize two ways of presenting new media: new media with old technology (political talk radio, television talk, electronic town hall meetings, television news magazines, MTV news, and print and TV tabloids), and new media with new technology (Internet). Furthermore, they recognize that many new media now use a mix of old and new technologies, such as CNN's *Talkback Live*, which allows viewers to email questions and comments into a live studio broadcast.

Differences in New and Traditional News Coverage

Different types of media often cover the same political or social event differently (Graber 1996b; Just et al. 1996). Television differs from radio, which differs from newspapers, which differs from the Internet, and so on. Different forms of coverage often have various effects on the viewing audiences, thus influencing the political attitudes of the public (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998). The suspicion that new and traditional media differ in their approach to covering politics and the political process is the driving force behind the study of new media in America.

It has been argued that the lines between new and traditional media are now obscured. Davis and Owen (1998) state that, "the boundaries between traditional and new media have become somewhat blurred as the two categories of media borrow

techniques from one another. In some, although not all, respects, the differences between the two forms of media are a matter of degree, rather than substance" (p.17). However, most scholars do recognize specific differences, and have discussed several aspects that set non-traditional news apart from traditional news. While conceding the similarities, Davis and Owen point out the following points of diversion:

> First they (new media) vary in their respective approaches to political news, which, in turn, shapes the content of that news. Further, there is a distinct contrast in their political goals. The new media have a clear anti-institutional bias. As such, they have been less proximate to politicians than the traditional press. Finally, using mechanisms such as regular newsletters and publications, some new media practitioners develop closer linkages to their audiences than mainstream press journalists (Davis and Owen 1998, 17).

New media play by a new set of rules, where the ethics and norms of traditional news do not apply to the same degree. According to the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, journalists are expected to (1) seek the truth and report it, (2) minimize harm to human beings, (3) act independently, and (4) be accountable to the public and each other. The argument among some scholars and journalists is that the new media have largely abandoned the first and last of these four cornerstones of journalistic ethics, thus pushing much of today's political news into the business of rumors and rushes to judgment (Kalb 2001, 1998; Bernstien 1992). Many researchers specify that the main difference is the way new media are entertainment-oriented (Brants and Neijens 1998; Davis and Owen 1998; Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Hollander 1995; Kalb 1998; Rosen and Taylor 1992; Sparks and Tulloch 2000). Also, in many cases, the new media are unabashedly profit-driven. This allows new media to step outside the boundaries that constrain traditional reporters and cover more stories about personalities and political scandals. Certainly, stories of this nature are quite frivolous and not considered

legitimate political news. These stories have, however, proven to be entertaining to the public and, therefore, more apt to draw a large audience.

While many do agree on the new media's tendency to gravitate toward entertainment more than traditional news, it is not necessarily viewed as a catastrophic flaw. A number of researchers point out the more positive ways in which new media depart from the old. The first difference is the new media's populist potential (Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Davis and Owen 1998; Davis 1997; Graber 1996; Grossman 1995; Rosen and Taylor 1992). Unlike the traditional media journalists who have become established political actors (Daurtrich and Hartley 1999; Cook 1998), new media often find themselves on the outside looking in. This has compelled new media to take a strong anti-institutional approach, and forge more direct ties with the mass public (Johnson et al. 1999; Davis and Owen 1998; Jones 1997; Munson 1993). In this sense, the new media perform a vital democratic function by educating the masses on the perils of the government establishment and allowing increased access to the political process.

Secondly, some argue that the new media have diversified political coverage in America by increasing the volume of information. Diversified coverage, combined with new ways to filter out irrelevant information, makes it easier for individuals to access news that is personally important to them (Tewksbury and Althaus 1999; Grossman 1995). Groups previously slighted by mainstream press now have the ability to access new news sources devoted almost exclusively to them. A perfect example of this diversified coverage is Black Entertainment Television (BET), which frequently airs talk shows and news programs devoted to issues concerning the African American community. Another example would be Music Television (MTV), which airs news and

political coverage focusing on the primary concerns of younger Americans (Georges 1993).

A third argument is that many new media sources have learned from the mistakes of the traditional news, and thus avoided some of the pitfalls that damaged journalist's credibility in the eyes of the public (Duartrich and Hartely 1999). Some contend traditional media has slipped into an ego-driven cycle of stingingly negative political coverage that is more and more journalist-centered (Fallows 1996; Lichter and Noyes 1996; Patterson 1994). Furthermore, it is thought that the traditional media cover much of politics as a game, focusing on political strategy, or the "horserace" aspects of the political world instead of public policy issues (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1994). Many new media have witnessed these trends in traditional coverage and attempted to eliminate the game aspects and journalist-focus from their political news programming (Fratzich and Sullivan 1996; Rosen and Taylor 1992). Nowhere is this more evident than with C-SPAN, which takes great care to offer political coverage without any journalist interpretation, thus providing a more legitimate link (although not widely used) between masses and political elites.

Effects of New Media on the Public and the Political System

Before the 1980s political scientists and communications scholars subscribed to the theory of "minimal consequences," suggesting that media coverage of politics and the political process has little or no effect on mass political behavior. Media coverage, it was thought, only served to reinforce preexisting, socialized beliefs (Patterson and McClure 1976; Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). More recent survey and experimental findings, however,

have uncovered the media's strong ability to shape the political attitudes of the public through processes such as agenda setting, priming, and framing (Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). The preceding section discussed the hypothesized ways new and traditional media coverage of politics differs. Do these approaches to covering politics have different effects on the political attitudes of the viewing public? Many have attempted to answer this question, and a wide range of arguments has been produced as a result.

One common argument is that the existence of new media gives the public more of an opportunity to participate in the political world. As mentioned before, many researchers feel that the open, interactive nature of new media has the *potential* to make our political process more democratic by involving more Americans (Margolis and Resnick 2000; Davis and Owen 1998; Grossman 1995). In the context of presidential elections, the new news has the "promise of turning the campaign into a giant conference call" (Rosen and Taylor 1992, 41). Whether or not this great democratic potential has been realized is a source of much disagreement. Some think this potential is being realized, and that the effects have been positive. Steven Hess says that, "Any time you expose more people to the men and women who run our government, or aspire to run it, it's a good thing... MTV and Donahue reach people who don't read newspapers or watch the network news. Maybe the candidates aren't being asked hardball questions that political reporters ask, but we are learning some things" (Rosen and Taylor 1993, 44). Grossman (1995) contends that the information age has yielded an "electronic republic." In his estimation, we are moving toward, "the twenty-first century's electronic version of the meeting place on the hill near the Acropolis, where twenty-five hundred years ago

Athenian citizens assembled to govern themselves" (49). The electronic republic, Grossman says, "is likely to extend government decision making from the few in the center of power to the many on the outside who may wish to participate" (49). Finally, Groper (1996) is more particular, and explains that a future growth of email access to Americans, if organized correctly, will reinvigorate American political institutions and the democratic systems as a whole.

Other scholars do not share the optimism that the new media's great equalizing potential has been, or ever will be, realized. Barber (1998) is suspicious of a virtual democracy where individuals are linked only through electronics. A lack of face-to-face interaction, he argues, could potentially lead to an unraveling of a civil social and political society. Wilhelm (2000) harshly criticizes "neofuturists," which are the people who, "view technology as the great equalizer, possessing magical powers that can wake up a sleepwalking democracy" (21). He asserts that the political world of new media, or "cyberdemocracy," is full of threats to individual liberty and equality that America is currently unable to overcome. Davis and Owen (1998) recognize the populist nature of the new media but argue that the potential to return power to the masses is ultimately doomed by the new media's shameless pursuit of profit. Commercialism, it is thought, drives the new media, and devotion to profit over other loftier goals will undercut any chance of meaningful democratic transition (Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Davis and Owen 1998). Furthermore, new media may create as many problems as it can solve. Barnett (1997) says that, "Although the inadequacies of traditional media pose serious problems for discourse and democracy, the empirical and conceptual difficulties surrounding new media make their contribution to the political process equally problematic" (193).

New media is thought by many to have a negligible impact on the political system and the public's ability to participate. Even after warning of the many perils the new media can cause, Barnett (1997) recognizes that, "While new media may offer some opportunities for elite groups at the margins, traditional mass media will continue to dominate the discourse and conduct of politics" (193). It is thought that "politics as usual" will prevail in the new media world, and the information revolution is nothing new. When discussing the possibilities of democracy and cyberspace, Margolis and Resnick (2000) argue that, "The democratic hopes attached to the Internet resemble those that have been hitched to other communications media when they were new. From the popular press to community access cable television, each of these media has made its impact on political and civic life, but none has fostered the enlightened democratic participation that its ardent boosters expected" (103). Many public opinion studies have found similar trends. While new media exposure has been shown to positively impact interest in politics and political campaigns, most non-traditional media are not correlated with political knowledge on issues or candidates (Johnson et al. 1999; McLeod et al. 1996; Hollander 1995; Chaffee et al. 1994). It has even been argued that exposure to entertainment-oriented new media (e.g., late night talk shows) can be detrimental to viewers because it gives them the illusion that they are politically informed when, in fact, they are not (Hollander 1995).

Shortcomings in Existing New Media Research

As the above discussion illustrates, there are many perspectives regarding what constitutes new media, how they differ from traditional media, and what effects new

media have on the public and the system as a whole. Given that almost all research on new media is less than a decade old, this is certainly a burgeoning area of study. The literature shows that scholars are recognizing differences in new and traditional media, and research is now attempting to systematically identify the ways in which new media have an impact on American politics. There are, however, some shortcomings in the existing literature, and it is important to address these areas of concern.

First, many studies of new media fail to define specifically a theoretical or operational definition of "new media" in the American political context. An understanding of what constitutes new media is imperative before any study can empirically measure the concept, and many studies fail to take this step or provide broad descriptions based primarily on examples. Those researchers who do take specific steps to define new media often create descriptions that are far too encompassing, including communication elements that cannot be considered news, and are only tangentially political in nature.

Second, most studies fail to systematically recognize differences between new and traditional media coverage of politics. Most research theorizes about differences in coverage, but empirical evidence of these expected differences is often lacking. Sometimes researchers assume differences in new and traditional coverage and test for the effects on public opinion (see Davis and Owen 1998; Hollander 1995). While understanding the effects of new media is important, a failure to illustrate empirically different trends in new and traditional political coverage leaves too many unanswered concerns regarding the content of the political coverage itself.

Third, studies that examine the effect of new media coverage on public opinion sometimes presume conclusions beyond the scope of the data. Most studies rely on survey data to test for the effect of new media coverage on the public's political participation, perceptions of political leaders, and attitudes toward the system as a whole. This method has yielded many interesting findings, but most researchers fail to go beyond the use of correlational data, and do not provide definite answers regarding causation. Survey data fails to answer the question of whether or not exposure to new media causes a given political attitude, or if a given attitude causes an individual to use new media. In the study of media effects, this is a common problem that is often overcome by combining correlational data with the more internally valid experimental analysis (Kinder and Palfrey 1993; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). There are also several limitations to experimental analysis, but the high level of control in experiments provides the opportunity to make directional, causal statements between the independent and dependent variables (Campbell and Stanley 1963). Most new media research makes causal statements regarding effects on the public, but often relies exclusively on surveys of national or regional cross-sections.

A Definition and Theory of New Political Media in America

The preceding literature review illustrates that new media are perceived largely as a hodgepodge of news, entertainment, and technology. The spectrum of new media has become as wide as the range of traditional media, if not wider. The shortcoming of many new media studies has been the tendency to speak broadly of new media in the context of

political news. This project will attempt to avoid such a pitfall by examining specific attributes of the most prevalent new political media.

Traditional media are sources of political news which have been in existence for at least the majority of the twentieth century and whose role in providing political news has remained fairly constant. Traditional political media include newspapers, newsmagazines, and network and local television news. Forms of news radio are also traditional news, but political news on the radio has become so closely intertwined with talk shows and new news formats (National Public Radio) that very little of today's popular radio news resembles what existed decades ago (Davis 1997; Hollander 1996).

New political media (or new political news) are *publicly recognized daily sources of political news and perspectives that have recently been developed and are now widely available and accessible*. These sources provide political news and discussion in formats that were rarely used in the past, but they have increased in usage over the last few decades. Compared to traditional news, *new political news is more open, extensive, and entertaining than traditional news coverage*. This includes cable news, political talk radio, daily cable talk shows, and Internet news. Although technology comes into play for many new political media sources, it is not a necessary condition. Many new political media rely on old technology but use that technology as a new manner of providing news and discussing political issues.

The *openness* of new political news is the tendency to include more participants into the news process. Contrary to the arguments of Davis and Owen (1998), this is not necessarily a populist attribute, because mostly the participants in the process are political elites—journalists, pundits, strategists, and elected officials. The journalist in this

environment plays a much more dynamic role, providing more subjectivity both on their part and the part of other news participants. Primarily, the old-fashion journalist-mediated news is left to the traditional sources (who also have begun to shy away from it), and the new news is moving in the direction of interactive political coverage. This approach generates a more open discussion, and provides for the representation of more opinions and perspectives.

Extensive coverage is another new political news feature. Twenty-four hour coverage and constantly updated Internet news now provide Americans with the convenience of anytime-access to political news. Headlines endlessly roll across the screen of cable news, Internet news sources provide up-to-the-minute coverage, and talk shows often give breaking news. This format generates a great deal of latitude to pursue political news. This latitude could be used to pursue a wider range of policy issues and present more policy information to the public. With a few exceptions (i.e., non-profit news source such as C-SPAN or *Thomas.gov*), most new media appear not to use their latitude in this way. Instead, it is my contention that new media use their extended coverage not to broaden their political news coverage, but instead focus on creating an *entertaining* news environment (Davis and Owen 1998; Fox and Van Sickel 2001).

Entertainment is the third defining attribute of the new media. While all of today's media seek to entertain the public to some extent, the new media take their intent to entertain to unprecedented levels. Several scholars and journalists have discussed the role of entertainment in the new media, but this project will contend that the entertainment focus in the new media's political news coverage manifests most specifically in the tendency to dwell on the *dramatic*.

This project will examine new sources of political news that focus on providing legitimate *political news*. The study will discuss some qualities of the "softer" aspects of new media, such as entertainment-based talk shows and specialty channels, but the nature of entertainment-based media is beyond the scope of this analysis. MTV, *Oprah*, *Late Night with David Letterman, The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, The Daily Show with John Stewart,* and even *The Simpson's* have all been referred to as new media, but it is evident that providing political news and/or perspectives is not a primary or secondary goal of such programming. Political references have become more prevalent in today's entertainment industry (Davis and Owen 1998; Graber 1997), but Americans do not consider these aspects of entertainment to be viable "news" (Pew Research Center 2000).

This is not to say that entertainment-based new media are not important in the context of modern American political communication. Using entertainment programming to expose a more personal side of a political leader or candidate has proven valuable in the last decade and thus merits scholarly attention. The purpose of this project, however, is to examine legitimate new media versus legitimate traditional news. Entertainment programs that infrequently and haphazardly cover political news and personalities are an important aspect of new media, but fall outside the scope of this study. As mentioned before, the new media have become widely diverse—possibly more so than traditional media. And, previous researchers have attempted to apply blanket theories to this extremely complex communication medium, producing significantly differing conclusions. Jerry Springer, Arsenio Hall, Rush Limbaugh, and Chris Matthews each are quite different from one another, with each medium using a unique approach to covering American politics. The exponential growth of new media now

merits separate examinations of the various facets. Thus, in order to provide a more accurate definition of *new political news* and avoid the pitfall of overly broad generalizations, media that are primarily entertainment will not be included in the analysis portion of this study.

Confusion over how new and traditional media vary is a result of differing conceptions of what exactly constitutes the new media. Those who include entertainment programming as new media often claim that the medium is "softer" than traditional media, giving political elites a chance to dodge harsh traditional questions and situations in exchange for more personable, light-hearted public interaction (see Hollander 1995; Patterson 2000). For example, during the 2000 presidential election, both candidates individually appeared on *Oprah* to discuss personal life and experiences in a friendly environment. Issues of policy were expressly off-limits. While this is new media in the broader sense of the word, it does not constitute new political media because the everyday programming of *Oprah* is largely non-political and not news-oriented, much like *Jerry Springer*, *Leno*, or *Letterman*. When entertainment-oriented media that dabble in the political world from time-to-time are treated as a different entity of today's news, the face of new political media takes a somewhat harder edge. Cable news, Internet news, and most political talk shows are not always friendly environments. Quite often new political news is framed as negative and conflictual environments where traditional media's decorum does not apply. In this environment, new news journalists and users (sometimes through interactive means) can aggressively pursue questions, criticisms, and theories that would be off limits in the traditional media, often resulting in inflammatory

coverage. Stories that would be covered in a more straightforward fashion in traditional news often get swept up in the new media's cycle of dramatization.

Elements of Drama in the New News

As stated in Chapter One, this project argues that the new political news presents its coverage in a style that is much more *dramatic* than traditional news. Drama in the new news takes several forms. First, the stories are *personalized* to a great degree. The human element is what drives dramatic stories. The introduction of identifiable characters is necessary for the viewers of a drama to relate on a human level. Many political events often focus around one or a few individuals, and coverage of such events is given a great deal of overall media attention. In recent years, however, it has been recognized that the media go out of their way to focus coverage on individual actors instead of policy and process. Often, journalists will forgo covering the important issues to focus on the dynamics of personalities (Fallows 1996; Lichter and Amundson 1994; Rozell 1994, 1996). While this trend is certainly evident in all media, it is particularly present in the new media. Because new media is interested in *hooking* the audience into actively following long-running stories, they spend a great deal of time working to develop the characters involved. In this sense, the new media will not only spend a great deal of time covering stories that involve significant individual characters, they will also work to personalize stories where individual actors are not so identifiable. Budget battles and debate over issues such as social security and healthcare often are covered in new media not as issues of policy or process, but as stories of personalities.

A second element of drama in the news is the scandalous and sensational. Viewers are typically not compelled to watch the ordinary or mundane. Instead, good drama relies on the unexpected and unbelievable. Incorporating such elements into news coverage draws the viewer in and compels interest as the story unfolds. The tendency to gravitate toward the scandalous and sensational is present in all of today's news (Fallows 1996; Mann and Ornstein 1994; Sabato 1993; Sabato et al. 2000). The new news, however, has found that intense and prolonged focus on scandalous events typically leads to increased ratings. Therefore, the scandalous and sensational events in American politics are more intensely covered in the new news than in traditional news. Rutenburg (2001) noted that:

> In the dual world of Condit-saturated television, there is, on one side, Dan Rather of CBS barely reporting the Levy case, on principle. On the other are the cable new networks, which seem to be talking about almost nothing else all day, even though the police say that Mr. Condit is not a suspect (Rutenburg 2001, 1C).

The nature of political scandals and sensational events provide the perfect material for long, dramatic stories. New news has resultantly capitalized on the opportunity to make non-stop coverage of political scandals a major aspect of their political news coverage.

The third element of drama in the news is conflict. Conflict, in essence, is the most basic and necessary component of a dramatic story. Drama cannot exist without conflict. Of course, it is not difficult to find conflict in the American political system, especially given that the system was designed to foster it as a necessary component of representative democracy (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). The new media, however, take coverage of this inherent political conflict to the highest level, covering it as much as possible in order to perpetuate a story and generate dramatic angles. Consider as an

example Bill O'Reilly's response to how traditional press (Connie Chung) and some entertainment based magazines handled initial interviews with Gary Condit in August, 2001:

> O'REILLY: Yes. He's (Condit) trying to save his seat. He's trying to save his political career. And his advisers said, look, you know, you can't run and hide much longer. You've got to cherry-pick who you're going (to) -- so, he gives an interview to "People" magazine, totally terrible. If you read that interview you'll see, you'll get nothing out of it. "Vanity Fair" got a little bit out of it. Chung didn't do badly. I would have done it in a much more confrontational way, but she didn't do badly. She showed him for the evasive guy he is and then he's going to talk to KOVR TV in Sacramento tomorrow, so he's cherry-picking (*The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News Channel, 8/23/01).

O'Reilly's reference to "cherry-picking" illustrates his opinion that Gary Condit chose to have interviews conducted in the least confrontational environment, which includes traditional news and entertainment-based media. O'Reilly does not try to hide the fact that his approach to interviewing Condit would have been much more confrontational. Condit undoubtedly had knowledge of the new news' confrontational style, and thus steered clear of the likes of journalists such as Bill O'Reilly, Chris Matthews, or Rush Limbaugh.

Negativity stems from the conflictual nature of the new news, and is the fourth aspect of dramatic coverage. To maintain a desired level of dramatic conflict in their news coverage, the new news journalists will often cover American politics with a very negative tone. There is much more criticism in the new news of political leaders, institutions, and the system as a whole. Furthermore, the journalists will often encourage negativity on the part of talk show guests and even the audience, which often generates conflictual drama. Partly, this negative approach to politics is the result of the new news being left out of the inner circle, which consists primarily of political elites and

traditional journalists (Davis and Owen 1998). In recent years, however, the new news has gained a great deal of power and legitimacy in the political world, and thus have forced their way into ranks similar to that of traditional journalists. The negativity, however, remains primarily due to the fact that it perpetuates drama and, in talk shows, provides an endless supply of discussion and debate.

Typically, drama cannot be maintained in a straight news environment. There are, of course, exceptions. Straight coverage of breaking news events is sometimes dramatic simply because of the nature of the event. As time draws on, however, journalists must go beyond objective news coverage to maintain the drama in a political news story. To keep a story dramatic, the coverage must take a more subjective tone. Allowing more subjectivity into news coverage provides more freedom to discuss an issue or event from several possible angles. This approach makes it easier for journalists to implant new dramatic angles to a political news story that may be losing some of its dramatic steam. Thus, the provision of political analysis is often necessary to maintain drama in the political news. Subjective analysis and opinion, therefore, comprise the fifth component of dramatic news coverage in the new news.

The sixth element of the new news' dramatic coverage is a game-schematic approach. This perspective has been articulated in the past as a critique of mainstream campaign coverage. Patterson (1994) argues that modern political journalists have drifted into a "game schematic" approach to covering political campaigns. That is, American political journalists have an inclination to cover political news as a long-running competition with strategies, winners, and losers:

> The dominant schema for the reporter is structured around the notion that politics is a strategic game. When journalists encounter new information during an election they tend to interpret it within a schematic framework according to which candidates compete for advantage. The candidates play the game well or poorly (Patterson 1994, 57).

This criticism has been echoed by several researchers (Dautrich and Hartley 1999; Fallows 1996; Lichter and Noyes 1996). Covering politics as a game is more dramatic than covering the particulars of public policy proposals and initiatives. "The game schema dominates the journalist's outlook in part because it conforms to the conventions of the news process.... The plotlike nature of the game makes it doubly attractive. The campaign 'is naturally structured, long-lasting dramatic sequence with changing scenes.' The game provides the running story in which today's developments relate to yesterday's, and probably tomorrow's events" (Patterson 1994, 61).[2]

The tendency of traditional journalists to focus on politics as a game has been overshadowed by the new media, who have taken this practice to a much higher level. The more a political event can be framed in the context of a sporting event, or a "horserace," the easier it is to attract viewers and keep them coming back to "check the scores." The nature of new news' continuous coverage of politics fits very well with game schema. Many new media outlets provide for countless updates, debate, and discussion regarding current situations of the players in various political "games," such as elections, budget battles, policy initiatives, and political scandals. There is a wide range of perspectives regarding who is ahead, who is behind, and what strategies should be employed to win these political games. *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, a political talk show on CNBC and MSNBC is an example of a new media source devoting itself to

detailed coverage of politics as a game. Below is a transcript excerpt of Matthews discussing strategy with regard to President Clinton in 1999:

> MATTHEWS: Let's talk strategy here, everybody. The president clearly has got some new head of steam. I don't know what's going on with his psyche, but he's got something going on that wasn't there three weeks ago. I don't know whether he knows it's getting to be over with, but I've been watching this guy. He's been amazing the last few weeks.
> ... This guy's good for every--it seems like he's out there feeding the Democratic army, which will get them 45 percent (of the vote in the 2000 Presidential election). That's all he needs in a three-way race. Pat Buchanan gets 15 percent or 10 percent or even--that means that the Republicans are split. Isn't this the strategy here? Pick a fight with the Republicans, circle the wagons, get everybody partisan as hell, like Harry Truman did in '48, and win for Gore (*Hardball with Chris Matthews*, 10/18/99).

Matthews even has a segment on the show titled, "Winners and Losers of the week," where he often discusses who has helped their position in the political game, and who has hurt themselves.

The Effects of Drama in the New News

In an episode of the hit comedy *Seinfeld*, the main character, Jerry, goes to great lengths to hide the fact that he regularly watches *Melrose Place*, which is known as trashy, scandalous drama full conflict, deceit, and sex. Jerry is addicted to watching *Melrose Place*, but ashamed of the fact that he cannot stop. The combination of public opinion data and cable news ratings during the Gary Condit scandal indicate Jerry's predicament may have also existed with the American people. A relatively small percentage of Americans reported following the Gary Condit scandal in the news. Cable news ratings, however, indicate that the percentage of viewers rose dramatically while the

---

[2] Portions of this quotation were taken by Patterson from Barber (1978, 117-118).

scandal was being intensely covered. Americans followed the Gary Condit/Chandra Levy drama closely in the new media but apparently did not want to admit it.

The Gary Condit scandal is an extreme example of dramatization of politics in the new news. Most political news stories are not so "trashy" or "tabloid" that they generate a sense of shame among viewers. Questions do arise, however, regarding the effects of exposure to the new media's dramatic coverage of politics in America. Does the new media's approach to covering politics influence public opinion with regard to support for political institutions, leaders, or the system as a whole. Also, could it be that the new media's flare for the dramatic influences the viewing public's tendency to participate in the political system?

If the new news does, in fact, cover American politics with a focus on the elements of drama discussed above, there may very well be some significant effects. Turning American politics into a series of long-running dramatic stories may work to draw some of an audience away from the traditional news, but the problem is that many of these elements of drama have been shown to influence public opinion in some negative ways. Discussion of political strategy, personality clashes, scandals, and extended debate have been shown to adversely influence viewers perceptions of political institutions, leaders, and the political system (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Jamieson 1992; Mann and Ornstein 1994). Also, exposure to high levels of political conflict has been shown to lower support for political institutions (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998, 1995). Furthermore, excess conflict and negativity in the news has been shown to have negative effects on political participation, especially with regard to voter turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). These findings point to a tremendous ability of the new media's

political coverage to impact the American public. The new news takes an approach to coverage that works to draw the audience in and get them hooked (drama), but this coverage highlights many aspects of politics that provoke negative reactions regarding support and participation.

Conclusion

Do the new political media cover American politics differently than traditional news, and what effects are there? This project argues that America's new news dramatizes American politics and process more than traditional media. The proposed effect is lower approval from new media viewers with regard to political institutions, leaders, and the political system as a whole.

This study has both theoretical and empirical importance for the fields of American politics and political communication. The shift in the media market over the last decade has been dramatic to say the least, and the news habits of many Americans have resultantly changed. In terms of market and audience size, the new political media is growing while traditional news is on the decline (see Chapter Three). For many American news consumers, and particularly young adults, some form of new media is now a regular part of a news routine. If, in fact, new media are shown to spend more time than traditional news covering politics as a drama, it is important to examine the effects on mass opinion and participation. This will be especially important if the practices of the new media begin to infiltrate traditional media, which is quickly losing users. By systematically testing for differences in coverage across several new and traditional political news sources, and by using *both* experimental and correlational data

to measure effects of exposure, this project will provide a more accurate picture of the new media environment in the American political system. The next chapter (Chapter Three) of this analysis will use survey data from April 2000 to map demographic trends in new and traditional media use. Chapter Four will draw from extensive content analysis to test for the difference between new and traditional news coverage of American politics. Chapter Five will test for the effects of exposure to new media's dramatic news style, and Chapter Six will provide closing remarks.

CHAPTER THREE: PATTERNS OF NEW AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA USE

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago the landscape of the American media was dramatically different than that of today. Electronic media was non-existent, cable television was in its infancy, and political talk programs were sparsely scattered throughout the world of radio, network news, and public television. Daily newspapers and network news were the dominant providers of political information to the American people. In the 1970s, over 80 percent of Americans regularly watched one of the network nightly news programs on ABC, CBS, or NBC (Kalb 1998), and 79 percent regularly read a daily newspaper.[3] In recent decades, those numbers have dropped significantly. As of April, 2000, 31 percent of the public reported regularly watching the nightly news on ABC, CBS, or NBC. Daily newspaper readership has also dropped to 63 percent.

The emergence of the new media has changed the media audience by altering the news choices. Today, there is no dominant provider of news in America. The media market has become larger and more competitive than ever. From 24-hour cable news networks to always-accessible Internet news websites, people now have a countless number of sources to consult when they are in need of news. The question then arises of who uses what news sources. Does race, gender, age, income, or education have an

[3] Data on daily newspaper use was taken from the General Social Survey (1972-1982). Respondents were asked how often they read the daily newspaper. Those who responded "everyday" or "a few times a week"

impact on news habits among the public? Furthermore, does the public make distinctions between new and traditional media sources? Finally, how has new and traditional media use changed in recent years, and what does this indicate for the future of political news in America? Using data taken from a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press in April 2000, this chapter will address these questions and paint a descriptive picture of new and traditional media use in America.

Dimensions of the Media

Now that Americans have such a wide variety of media to choose from, it is assumed that the public would select sources that best fit their personal tastes and convenience. Style, substance, and ideology of the news provider would undoubtedly play a role in this selection process. When making decisions regarding news usage, do Americans make clear distinctions between different groups of media sources?

The existing argument has been that Americans make clear distinctions between new and traditional news, although the lines have been somewhat blurred in recent years (Davis and Owen 1998; Kalb 1998). Using survey data from 1996, Davis and Owen found that there was a clear, identifiable, "new media factor." They found that the traditional factor explained the most variance, followed by a new news media factor. The new news media factor they discovered, however, was less than compelling. Survey items that loaded on the new news media factor were (1) online computer use, (2) watching CNN, (3) watching MTV, (4) reading newspapers, and (5) reading magazines.

---

were considered to regularly read the newspaper.

Analysis of recent survey data from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press presents a much more defined picture of new and traditional media use.[4] The Pew Research Center for People and the Press offers a biannual survey that measures exposure to a wide range of media outlets. The data from the most recent analysis provides the opportunity to examine patterns of use among the public. Table 3.1 presents the results of a factor analysis run on survey data from April 2000.[5] The principle components analysis shows that, similar to 1996, the media exposure items load on four significant factors. The content of the factors, however, does not point a single "new media factor." Instead, there are three different dimensions of new media. The first and most significant dimension is the cable news factor. It is noteworthy that the cable news factor is now the dominant dimension, as opposed to the traditional news factor in 1996. New media are no longer the "supplement" to traditional news coverage. The public clearly recognizes cable news channels as a definable group of news sources with similar characteristics. These channels are similar in that they provide 24-hour access to news. Furthermore, the cable channels provide a number of political talk shows that encourage political discussion on the part of guests and (sometimes) the public.

[4] Data was obtained from the April 2000 biannual survey on media consumption, Pew Research Center for People and the Press.
[5] See Appendix A for details on how the media exposure items were measured.

Table 3.1
Factor Analysis of Media Sources[a]

News Source	Factor 1 Cable News	Factor 2 Talk Radio/ Internet	Factor 3 Traditional Media	Factor 4 Print and TV Tabloid
CNN	**.716**[b]	.077	.193	-.039
C-SPAN	**.661**	.169	.059	-.058
CNBC	**.780**	.006	.092	.092
FOX News	**.454**	.078	.065	**.443**
MSNBC	**.770**	.039	.076	.087
NPR	.046	**.679**	.059	-.059
Magazines	.248	**.464**	**.266**	-.139
Talk Radio	.021	**.763**	.016	.153
Internet	.233	**.515**	-.171	-.189
Newspaper	.108	.186	**.527**	-.241
Network TV	.178	-.019	**.763**	.121
Local TV	.080	.016	**.745**	.174
Tabloid TV	.105	-.050	.146	**.677**
Print Tabloid	-.003	.055	.092	**.742**
% Variance	22.41%	11.71%	9.09%	7.95%

[a]Cell entries are rotated principle component factors (varimax rotation).
[b]Bold entries are values over .25.

The second new media factor is not as clear as the first. Both the talk radio and National Public Radio (NPR) items load on the second factor, but Internet news and newsmagazines also significantly load on Factor One as well (see Table 3.1). NPR and talk radio load most significantly. Talk radio has been recognized as one of the most prevalent new media sources of the 1990s (Hollander 1996). NPR, on the other hand, could be considered traditional news radio, but has been shown to be more of a new media due to a growing focus on talk shows at the national and local level (Davis and Owen 1998).

While the underlying similarities between talk radio and NPR are obvious, it is interesting that Internet news and newsmagazines also load on Factor Two. At first glance, it is difficult to see what these media sources have in common, especially

considering that newsmagazines are widely considered traditional. There is, however, one major similarity among these four news sources: Income. For primarily ideological reasons, talk radio and NPR are used primarily by those with high incomes (Jones 1999; Davis and Owen 1998). Likewise, because computers, Internet access, and magazine subscriptions cost money, more wealthy Americans use newsmagazines and Internet news (Putnam 2000).

Because three of the four items on Factor Two are considered new media, and because newsmagazines are the weakest, Factor Two is considered a new media factor. Table 3.1 shows that Factor Three is the only traditional media dimension. Newspapers network TV news, local TV news, and newsmagazines all load on Factor Three, illustrating convincingly that Americans still distinguish traditional news from the various types of new media.

The third and final new media factor is the tabloid dimension (Factor Four). Table 3.1 shows that both print tabloids[6] and TV tabloids[7] are viewed by the public to have similar characteristics, which is not surprising given that such news is known to thrive on unsubstantiated gossip (Fox and Van Sickel 2001). This "tabloid" factor differs from the other three because the news sources in this dimension are not widely considered "legitimate" political news. Non-legitimate political news certainly is an important aspect of today's political landscape, but the factor solutions displayed in Table 3.1 illustrate that the public differentiates between legitimate political news and entertainment-based programming that sometimes addresses political issues.

---

[6] Magazines such as The National Enquirer, The Sun, or The Star.
[7] Television shows such as Entertainment Tonight or Access Hollywood.

Interestingly, the FOX Cable News Channel also loads on the "tabloid" factor, although to a much lesser extent than print or television tabloids. This unique factor loading for FOX News is due in part to the fact that FOX News was relatively new at the time of the survey. The newness of FOX News most likely confused some respondents, who may have thought the question referred to the FOX Network.

The findings from the above factor analysis show that it is unwarranted to think of new versus traditional media as a two dimensional concept. While traditional media seem to be viewed by Americans as having similarities, new media are much more complex. The fact that four significant factors were extracted from only 14 items indicates the multidimensionality of today's media. Therefore, it is important not to classify the new media as a single entity, which has been common practice in earlier literature. Legitimate news sources within the larger new media genre are recognized by the public as an entity separate from entertainment-based programs, such as print and television tabloids. Because of this high degree of variation outside the realm of traditional news, the next portion of this chapter will look at who uses different new and traditional media sources. If, in fact, Americans view media along several dimensions, then it is logical to think that different groups make use of different news sources.

The New and Traditional Media Audience

The recent growth of new media sources has significantly fragmented the political news audience (Webster 1996). Before attempting to understand differences in political coverage across news sources or the effects of exposure, it should be understood who is more apt to use various outlets. Davis and Owen (1998) used survey data from 1996 to

paint a descriptive picture of the 1990s new media audience. In the rapidly changing news media environment, however, such data is already outdated. For example, since 1996 the Internet news business flourished and then began to recess in 2000 due to slow profits. Also, MSNBC, CNBC, and FOX News have grown from infancy to legitimate news sources since 1996.[8] Finally, Davis and Owen failed to compare new media users to the traditional news audience. This section of the analysis will look at both the new and traditional audience for trends across race, gender, age, income, and education.

Traditional News

Table 3.2 gives the breakdown of the traditional news audience. With regard to race, there is little variation across traditional news habits, except that blacks are somewhat more apt to watch the news on television than whites. Likewise, women reported watching traditional news on television more than men.

The age demographic shows an interesting trend across all traditional news sources. It has been argued that news gathering habits are hard to break, and it is this rationale that is used to explain why younger Americans tend to gravitate more toward new media while their elders stick to traditional sources (Davis and Owen 1998; Georges 1993; Hollander 1995). The age breakdown in Table 3.2 certainly substantiates such an argument. In all cases of traditional media, usage increases as age increases. This increase is most dramatic in traditional TV news and reading daily newspapers. Of course, another argument for this disparity is that older Americans are simply more politically active and knowledgeable than younger groups (Miller and Shanks 1996). In

[8] CNN was the only survey item used for cable news exposure in the 1996 Pew Research Center Survey on

order to determine which of these arguments is most accurate, we will have to examine whether or not new media usage decreases as dramatically as age increases.

Income and education impact traditional media use in the expected ways. The more educated and affluent one becomes, the higher the tendency to rely on newspapers and magazines for political news. With local and network television news habits, however, income and education have little impact. There are some logical reasons why the wealthy and educated make more use of newspapers and magazines. First, educated Americans will be more apt to read news than the lesser educated. The more time people spend in school, the more developed their reading habits. Second, and more importantly, newspaper and magazines subscriptions cost money, which is a legitimate deterrent for relying on such sources. Why would poorer Americans pay to read the news in a paper or magazine when they can watch it on television for free?

Cable News

Table 3.3 provides the descriptive breakdown of the cable news audience. Although the public recognizes cable news as a one-dimensional medium, it is apparent that usage does vary across cable channels. The most recognizable and established cable news channel, CNN, is still the most widely used except among African Americans, who disproportionately reported watching FOX News more than whites.[9] C-SPAN, on the other hand, is watched much less than any other channel. In no demographic group does regular C-SPAN viewership go above six percent. Primarily, only the most politically

---

media usage.

[9] Fox News was in its infancy at the time this survey was conducted. Since then, Fox News has become the highest-ranking cable news channel.

educated and active Americans view C-SPAN on a regular basis, although it's audience has grown steadily since the channel's creation in 1979 (Frantzich and Sullivan 1996).

In each case, the black population watches slightly more cable news than the white population. This difference ranges from one percent (C-SPAN) to 13 percent (FOX News). Again, this finding illustrates the tendency of African Americans to get their news from television more than other groups.

With the exception of the FOX News Channel, older Americans seem more apt than younger Americans to watch the news on cable television. This finding cast doubt on previous assumptions that younger Americans are the primary consumers of new media. At least with cable news, this does not seem to be the case.

Those individuals with a higher income watch CNN, MSNBC, and CNBC more than lower income brackets. It is interesting that the richest Americans (more than $100,000 per year) watch more cable news than others. Given that many cable news channels pay close attention to economic events and continually cover the stock market, it is not surprising that those with more vested in the system would pay more attention (Kerbel 1994). Also, with the exception of FOX News and CNBC, the more educated Americans were regular viewers of cable news. There was very little variation across the CNBC audience, and the FOX News audience appears to be less educated than viewers of other cable channels.

Internet News

Table 3.4 shows the demographic breakdown of Internet news users and people who *ever* go online. The first column illustrates the percent of people who ever go

online, and the second column is the percent who go online for news at least three times a week. This distinction is an important one. Davis and Owen (1998) presented a descriptive profile of Internet new users, but based that profile on individuals who reported *ever* going online to use the World Wide Web or email. Given the exponential growth of Internet traffic over the past half-decade, it is important to make the distinction between Internet users and the Internet news audience. In fact, more people regularly go online for news today than went online at all in 1996.[10] Table 3.4 illustrates the dramatic distinction between people who go online and people who regularly use the Internet for news. On average less than half of Internet users regularly go online for the news.

Both race and gender are associated with Internet news use. Whites are more apt to go online for news than blacks, and men more than women. These relationships also hold for going online at all. Like newspaper and magazine subscriptions, computers and Internet access from home cost money, of which blacks and women have less. Also, whites and men are more likely to have jobs that provide computers and Internet access from work.[11]

The relationship between age and Internet use is strong. As age goes up, there is a subsequent drop in both Internet news use and Internet use as a whole (see Table 3.4). According to the findings, a person in the 18 to 29 age group is almost four times as likely to go online than a person of 70 years or older. It can also be seen that the youngest age group is over four times as likely to go online regularly for news than the

---

[10] Twenty-five percent of Americans now go online for news at least three times a week. In 1996, only 21 percent reported *ever* going online to access the web or send or receive email (Source: Pew Research Center's Biannual Study on Media Consumption, April, 2000).

[11] Seventy-five percent of men have access to a computer at home, work, or school compared to 68 percent of women. Seventy-one percent of whites have access to a computer at home, work, or school compared to

oldest group. Finally, income and education both appear to have a high, positive correlation with Internet and Internet news use. The educated and affluent Americans make much more use of the Internet than poorer Americans do.

New Media on the Radio

The talk radio audience has been painted as a socially active group with high levels of education and political involvement (Jones 1999; Owen 1996). Also, it has been a long-standing assumption that talk radio listeners are primarily white and male (Jones 1999; Munson 1993). Table 3.5 shows that today's talk radio listeners are not nearly as divided along racial lines as previously thought. In fact, a higher percentage of blacks (17 percent) regularly listen to talk radio than whites (15 percent). This trend is reflective of the fact that the talk radio market has shifted away from exclusively catering to white, conservative Americans. Black and more liberally focused talk radio programs are becoming more prevalent, especially at the local level (Davis and Owen 1998).

The proportion of male talk radio listeners still outnumbers women. Men listen to talk radio almost twice as much as women. This difference can be attributed to the disproportionate number of male radio talk show hosts (Munson 1993). The difference between men and women is not as pronounced at the NPR level, which is likely a reflection of NPR covering more local programming, which tends to be less representative of stereotypical talk radio (i.e., white, male, and conservative).

As is the case with most new and traditional media, age does play a role in talk radio and NPR listening habits. Neither the youngest (18-29) nor the oldest Americans

---

64 percent of blacks (Source: Pew Research Center's Biannual Study on Media Consumption, April, 2000).

(70 years or older) spend much time listening to NPR or talk radio (see Table 3.5). Instead, the most frequent listeners are those in the middle-age groups. Those in their thirties and fifties listen regularly to talk radio the most, while all middle-ages seem more apt to listen to NPR. Table 3.5 also shows that income and education have an impact on both NPR and talk radio listening. Talk radio use steadily increases in both groups. The highest income groups are almost three times as likely to listen to talk radio. Likewise, those with at least a college education listen to talk radio three times as much as people who never completed high school. The same relationship regarding income and education exist for NPR listeners, but is not nearly as dramatic. Again, this trend illustrates that NPR has a broader appeal than the more narrow talk radio programs.

Print and Television Tabloids

As Table 3.6 illustrates, tabloids are the least-used news source examined in this analysis. Very few Americans are frequent users of print tabloids like *The National Enquirer*, *The Star*, or *The Sun*. The first column of Table 3.6 shows that there isn't a great deal of variation in print tabloid use across demographic groups. Some variation that is apparent, however, is that those with less education and lower incomes are more likely to regularly read tabloids, which is interesting given that such publications are not free. Televised tabloid news, such as *Entertainment Tonight* or *A Current Affair* are more commonly used because they are on evening television at no cost to the consumer. Also, TV tabloids are used more because they carry greater legitimacy with the public than the common "supermarket tabloid" (Fox and Van Sickel 2001; Sparks and Tullock 2000). Blacks are much more likely to watch TV tabloids than whites, and younger Americans

watch more than older Americans. Income doesn't have much of an impact on viewing habits, but those with a college education reported watching less than others.

Comparing Media Audiences

Table 3.7 summarizes the variation in media use across all sources examined in this chapter. It is easy to see that traditional media are still the most frequently used. However, significant portions of the population now rely on new media for news, especially cable news, talk radio, and the Internet. In the past decade, there has been a substantial drop in traditional media use coupled with significant increases in new media, thus illustrating the need to closely examine the demographic breakdowns of various audiences (see discussion in following section).

The preceding discussion brought out a number of differences within various media sources. When we look across demographic groups, there are some interesting trends as well. Most striking is that the traditional news audience appears to be the most diverse. All races and genders seem to make similar use of traditional news sources, with the exception of African Americans using local news somewhat more than whites. The only other source with similar racial diversity, surprisingly, is the radio new media audience. The cable news, tabloid, and Internet audiences all have different rates of use across races, thus indicating that the new media audience is more racially divided than the traditional audience. Similar differences exist for men and women, although the variation is not as dramatic.

In traditional media, the evidence points to different rates of regular use across different age, income and education brackets. This difference appears to be even more

pronounced, however, in many new media sources. Internet use especially seems relegated to the young, rich, and educated. Many researchers argue that the Internet provides the public with the ability to re-seize political power and create a more Jeffersonian America (Kush 2000; Morris 1999; Hill and Hughes 1998). The reality, however, is that those who are out of power—the poor and the uneducated—generally don't even have access to a computer, much less the Internet. While its use is growing dramatically, the Internet has yet to fulfill any promise of providing power to the masses via a more direct democratic process (Margolis and Resnick 2000).

The dramatic difference is the demographic composition of the new media is, in part, the result of "narrow casting," in which specific groups are targeted as potential audiences (Davis and Owen 1998). Nevertheless, the fragmentation and variation in audiences should not be ignored; especially if there are systematic differences in the way various media dimensions cover people, politics, and the political process. The following chapter will test for suspected differences in coverage. The final section of this chapter will examine changes in new and traditional media use over time.

Table 3.2
Traditional Media Audience*

	Network TV (%)	Local TV (%)	Newspapers (%)	News Magazines (%)
Race				
White	31	55	65	13
Black	35	64	63	14
Other	22	46	54	16
Sex				
Male	28	53	65	14
Female	33	57	62	13
Age				
18-29	18	44	50	13
30-39	20	50	58	12
40-49	27	55	66	14
50-59	39	62	70	18
60-69	52	68	74	12
70+	49	63	75	14
Income				
$0-9,999	30	51	48	8
$10,000-19,999	33	58	60	7
$20,000-29,999	28	53	56	13
$30,000-39,999	30	59	60	13
$40,000-49,999	28	55	60	16
$50,000-74,999	29	53	70	13
$75,000-99,999	26	53	74	18
$100,000+	33	53	74	23
Education				
< High School	29	56	54	4
High School	32	60	61	8
Some College	31	55	65	15
College+	30	50	70	22

*Data was taken from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biannual Study of Media Consumption, April 2000. Cell entries are the percentage of survey respondents who reported using the media source "regularly."

Table 3.3
Cable News Audience*

	CNN (%)	MSNBC (%)	CNBC (%)	Fox News (%)	C-SPAN (%)
Race					
White	21	11	12	16	4
Black	24	14	17	29	5
Other	24	10	14	14	2
Sex					
Male	24	12	14	17	5
Female	20	11	11	17	3
Age					
18-29	17	11	9	16	3
30-39	21	11	13	17	3
40-49	23	10	12	16	3
50-59	22	13	13	16	6
60-69	23	11	15	22	6
70+	26	13	17	17	5
Income					
$0-9,999	19	9	13	17	5
$10,000-19,999	21	11	11	20	3
$20,000-29,999	15	11	8	20	2
$30,000-39,999	22	10	12	21	5
$40,000-49,999	17	9	9	14	4
$50,000-74,999	25	13	16	14	4
$75,000-99,999	18	13	14	13	3
$100,000+	33	15	18	18	5
Education					
< High School	17	9	14	24	3
High School	20	11	12	20	3
Some College	23	11	12	17	4
College+	25	13	14	11	5

*Data was taken from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biannual Study of Media Consumption, April 2000. Cell entries are the percentage of survey respondents who reported using the media source "regularly."

Table 3.4
Internet News Audience*

	Ever Go Online to Access Internet or World Wide Web (%)	Go Online for News at Least 3 Times a Week (%)
Race		
White	58	25
Black	42	18
Other	68	35
Sex		
Male	62	32
Female	53	19
Age		
18-29	77	33
30-39	67	30
40-49	64	28
50-59	55	23
60-69	37	16
70+	20	8
Income		
$0-9,999	26	11
$10,000-19,999	35	9
$20,000-29,999	46	17
$30,000-39,999	57	23
$40,000-49,999	57	23
$50,000-74,999	77	34
$75,000-99,999	83	42
$100,000+	85	45
Education		
< High School	20	8
High School	41	13
Some College	67	29
College+	81	40

*Data was taken from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biannual Study of Media Consumption, April 2000. Cell entries are percentages.

Table 3.5

New Media on the Radio*

	Listen to Talk Radio (%)	Listen to NPR (%)
Race		
White	15	17
Black	17	14
Other	8	10
Sex		
Male	20	17
Female	11	14
Age		
18-29	12	12
30-39	20	17
40-49	13	19
50-59	19	17
60-69	14	17
70+	10	14
Income		
$0-9,999	7	15
$10,000-19,999	9	15
$20,000-29,999	9	12
$30,000-39,999	15	18
$40,000-49,999	20	18
$50,000-74,999	20	16
$75,000-99,999	20	19
$100,000+	21	27
Education		
< High School	7	13
High School	11	12
Some College	15	14
College+	21	22

*Data was taken from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biannual Study of Media Consumption, April 2000. Cell entries are the percentage of survey respondents who reported using the media source "regularly."

Table 3.6

Tabloid News Audience*

	Read Tabloids (%)	Watch Tabloid TV Programs (%)
Race		
White	2	6
Black	5	22
Other	3	15
Sex		
Male	2	7
Female	3	9
Age		
18-29	2	11
30-39	2	9
40-49	2	6
50-59	3	8
60-69	3	6
70+	3	7
Income		
$0-9,999	6	12
$10,000-19,999	3	14
$20,000-29,999	2	8
$30,000-39,999	3	10
$40,000-49,999	2	5
$50,000-74,999	2	6
$75,000-99,999	1	6
$100,000+	3	10
Education		
< High School	4	10
High School	4	10
Some College	2	10
College+	1	4

*Data was taken from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biannual Study of Media Consumption, April 2000. Cell entries are the percentage of survey respondents who reported using the media source "regularly."

Table 3.7

Regular Users of New and Traditional Media Sources*

Source	Regular Users (%)
Traditional News	
Newspaper	64
Network TV News	31
Local TV News	55
Newsmagazines	14
Cable News	
CNN	22
C-SPAN	4
CNBC	13
FOX News	17
MSNBC	13
Radio/Internet	
Talk Radio	15
NPR	16
Ever go Online	57
Internet News	25
Tabloid News	
Print Tabloid	3
TV Tabloid	8

*Data was taken from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biannual Study of Media Consumption, April 2000.

Trends in Media Use Over Time

Although data on patterns of new and traditional media over time are quite limited, recent surveys provide a chance to modestly track changes in use over the last decade. The limited data prohibits systematic analysis for variation over time, but a simple plotting of changes in audience behavior since 1990 reveals some interesting trends, especially in the last few years.

In order to insure validity, only questions asked the same way over several years were used in this study. This restriction, of course, is limiting because many new media have just recently become prevalent in the last couple of years. Therefore, there are

several new media sources that cannot be tracked over time because survey questionnaires have just begun to address their use. The most striking example of this limitation is the omission of cable news items in past surveys. As the earlier factor analysis illustrated, the cable news dimension is the most identifiable to the public, even more than traditional news. However, only CNN and C-SPAN existed throughout the 1990s, thus prohibiting any look at how use of CNBC, FOX News, or MSNBC has changed over time. Recognizing that the data are somewhat limited, this section will look at the changes in media use during the extremely short history of the new media age.

The data from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press offer a look at changes in traditional media use since 1990. Figures 3.1 through 3.4 paint an interesting picture. In the case of newspaper, local TV news, network TV news, and newsmagazine use, the drop-off in regular users is quite evident. Traditional media use primarily began to drop significantly in 1993, when the country had concluded a dramatic presidential election and the Internet was gaining public notoriety. This drop was steady throughout the middle and late 1990s, with the only upward bump taking place with newspapers and network TV news in 1998, when the Monica Lewinsky case was originally broken. This increase was temporary, as can be seen from the subsequent drop in use for all media from 1998 to 2000.

While use of all traditional media has fallen in the past decade, the drop in traditional television news is most striking. Since May 1993, the number of regular network news viewers has dropped by almost 50 percent.[12] In that same time period, the

[12] In May 1993, sixty percent of respondents reported regularly watching network television news. In April 2000, the proportion of regular viewers had dropped to 31 percent (Source: Pew Research Center's Biannual Study on Media Consumption, April, 2000).

regular local TV news audience has dropped by almost 30 percent.[13] This trend probably has very little to do with any changes on the part of network and local television broadcasters, producers, or owners. Instead, the main reason for this decrease is the fact that the growing cable news market has fragmented the audience pool (Davis and Owen 1998; Grossman 1995). In addition to having three network broadcasts to choose from, the average television viewer now has more than twice that number of choices thanks to the outbreak of cable news channels. Coupled with the growth of 24-hour access to news via the Internet, cable news has severely diluted the traditional evening network and local TV news audience.

The decline in regular newspaper readers is often attributed to the Internet. Of course, the majority of online news readers now go to Internet news sites that are owned by major traditional news owners, such as *nyt.com, abcnews.com,* etc. (Margolis and Resnick 2000). Nevertheless, a 15 percent drop in the number of newspaper readers since the 1992 presidential election has hit the printing industry hard. Both the raw number of daily newspapers available and the overall circulation of newspapers has dropped in recent years (Norris 2000). Many researchers have argued that modern movement away from reading newspapers and toward other, less cognitive sources has contributed to American's diminishing ability understand complex policy issues (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998; Patterson 1980). In this sense, the drop in newspaper circulation and readership is somewhat disconcerting. The following chapters will examine this issue in more detail.

---

[13] In May 1993, seventy seven percent of respondents reported regularly watching local television news. In April 2000, the proportion of regular viewers had dropped to 55 percent (Source: Pew Research Center's Biannual Study on Media Consumption, April, 2000).

The decrease in newsmagazine readership is somewhat less pronounced than the other traditional media sources. Given that the newsmagazine survey item barely loaded on the "traditional news factor," this is not all too surprising (see Table 3.1). Also, the relative stability of the newsmagazine readership can be attributed to the fact that no alternative media source has effectively moved into the magazine market. Unlike newspapers or traditional TV news, magazines never provided "breaking" news, or daily news. Instead, magazines provide detailed information on current news and issues. Nevertheless, despite the uniqueness of magazines as a traditional news source, readership has still dropped since 1993.[14]

The trends in new media use since the 1990s have much more variability than traditional news. Figures 3.5 through 3.11 illustrate how new media use has recently changed. Because some new media didn't become prevalent until the middle or even late 1990s, the data are somewhat incomplete. However, the figures show convincingly that not all new media audiences have grown, and not all have shrunk. First, Figures 3.5 and 3.6 paint a picture that the number of regular cable news viewers is on the downslide. The always-small C-SPAN audience has decreased slightly in recent years, and the percentage of regular CNN viewers is down significantly. In fact, the drop in the CNN audience since 1993 is comparable to the decline in traditional media use. Again, this trend can be attributed primarily to the fragmentation of the cable television audience, which gives the cable news consumers more choices in 24-hour news channels. CNN, of

[14] Since May 1993, Newsmagazine readership has dropped from 24 percent to 14 percent (Source: Pew Research Center's Biannual Study on Media Consumption, April, 2000).

course, is still the most-watched cable news station (see Table 3.7), but that dominance is dwindling in a manner similar to local and network TV news.

Figures 3.7 and 3.8 illustrate the trends in online and online news use. Since 1995, the percentage of Americans who go online at home or at work has risen steadily and dramatically (see Figure 3.7). Today, over half of the public logs-on to the Internet either at home or at work, and this trend shows no sign of leveling-off. Furthermore, Figure 3.8 illustrates that the proportion of online users who regularly read Internet news has also risen dramatically since 1995.

The data on radio new media are somewhat conflicting. Figure 3.9 shows how interactive talk radio use held fairly steady through most of the 1990s, but then dropped-off at the end of the decade. The last three samples indicate that, since the beginning of the Lewinsky scandal, the regular talk radio audience has diminished by nearly one-third. The proportion of regular NPR listeners, however, has risen steadily (see Figure 3.10). Since 1990, the percentage of regular NPR listeners has tripled, and the NPR audience was one of the few new or traditional media that didn't erode from 1998 to 2000. The rise in NPR use is somewhat of a mystery considering all other aspects of radio use has fallen through the 1990s. Even more interesting is that NPR, because of its combination of talk shows, national news, local coverage, and political and non-political content, could conceivably be considered traditional news radio. Previous researchers, however, have discussed NPR as part of the new media, and the above factor analysis placed NPR on the same dimension as talk radio and Internet news. These trends, combined with the upward movement in NPR use, indicates the news source is more new than traditional.

The final figure, Figure 3.11 shows that the print tabloid audience, which is quite small, has diminished slightly in the new media age. This is not surprising given that the availability of free televised tabloids has recently increased. Unfortunately, the data on televised tabloids are incomplete and, therefore, do not allow for any illustration of use over time. However, the 1990s gave birth to several television tabloid programs, and this growth has most likely fragmented the small tabloid market in a manner similar to cable news.

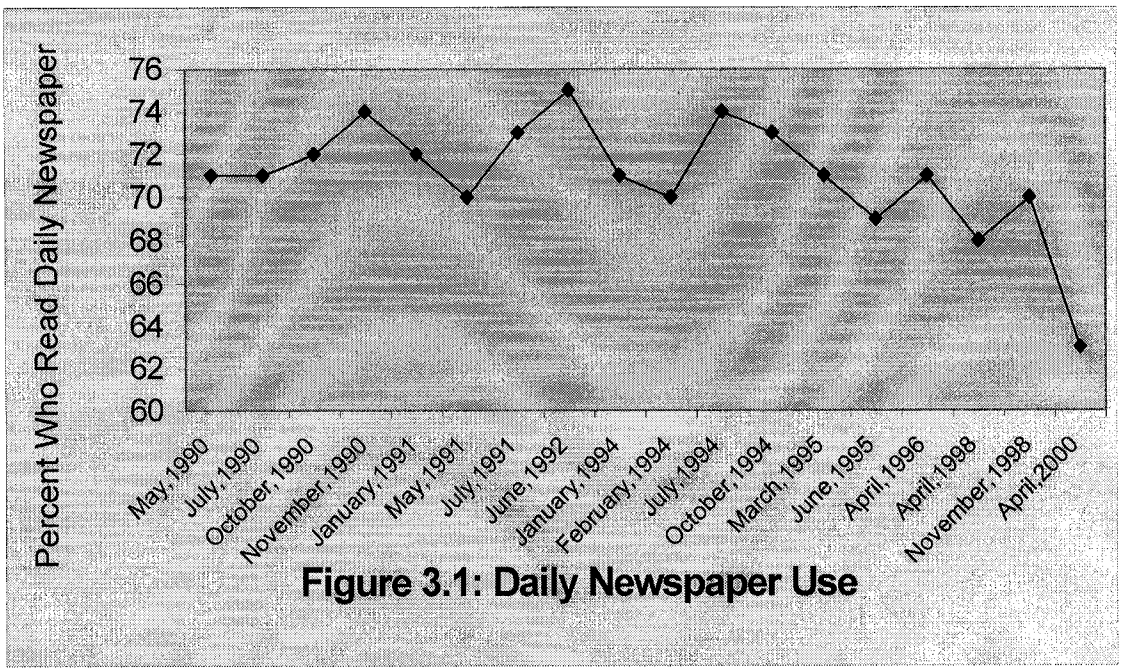

Figure 3.1: Daily Newspaper Use

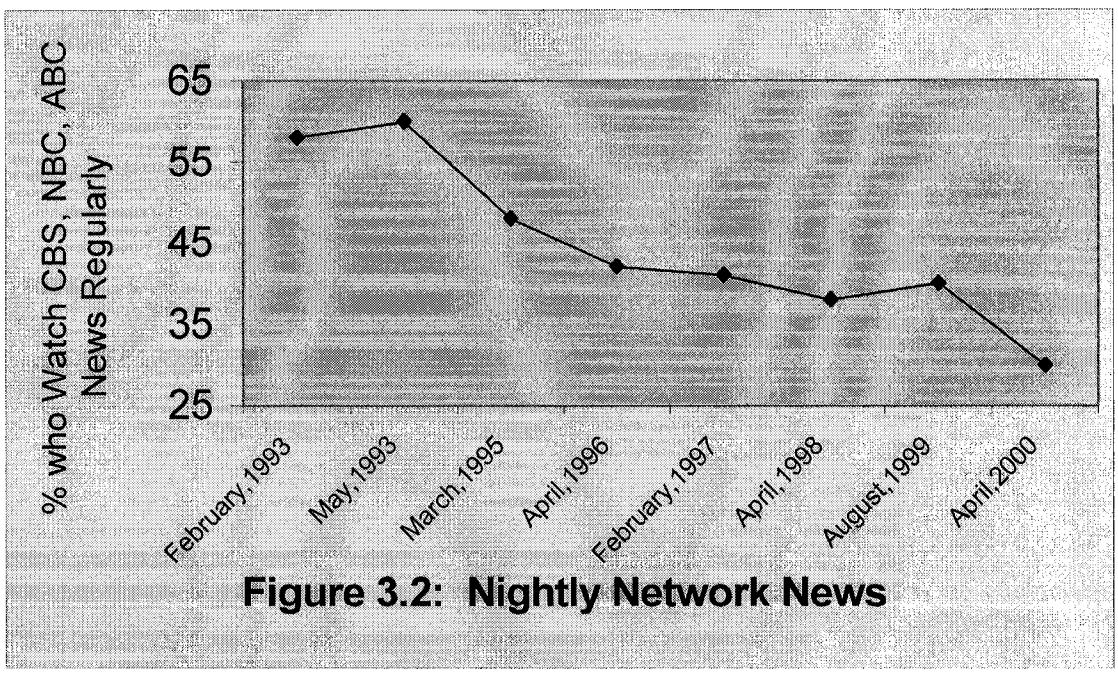

Figure 3.2: Nightly Network News

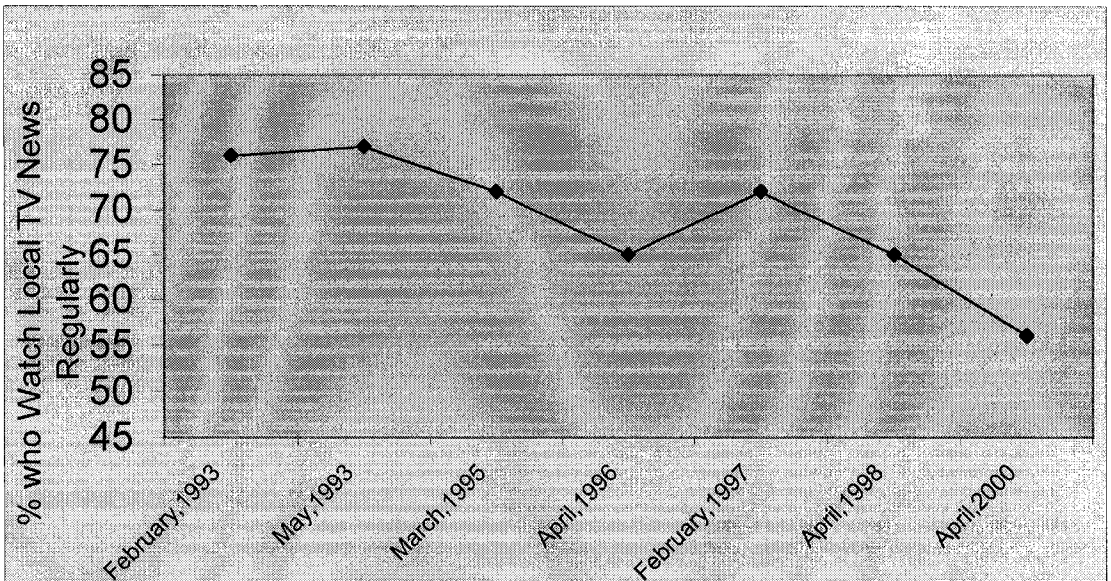

Figure 3.3: Local TV News

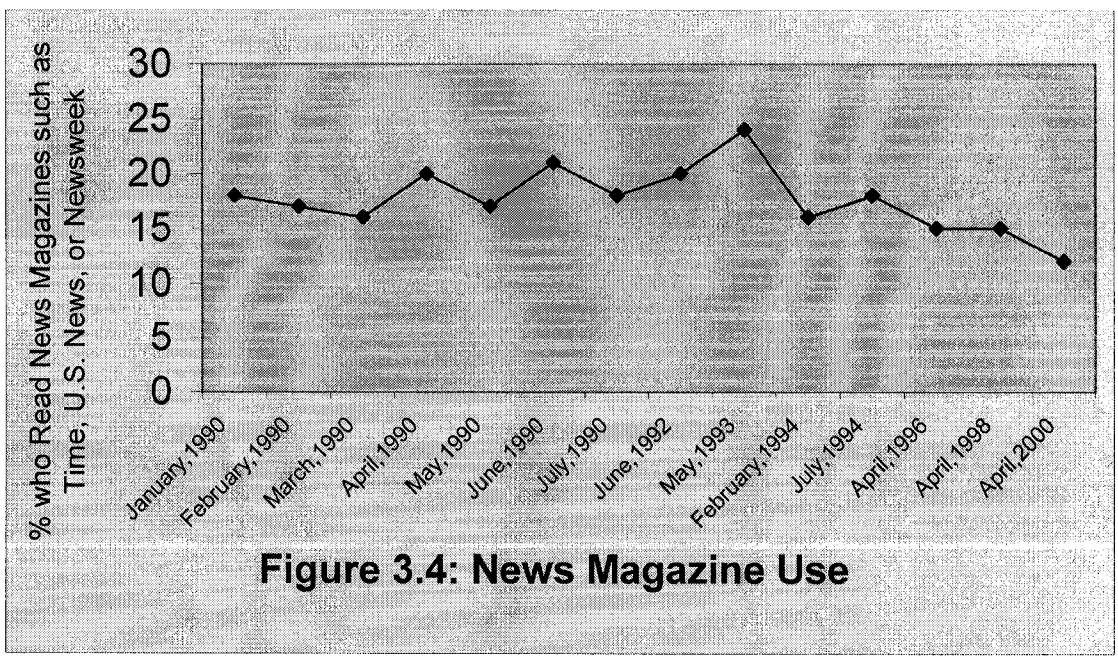

Figure 3.4: News Magazine Use

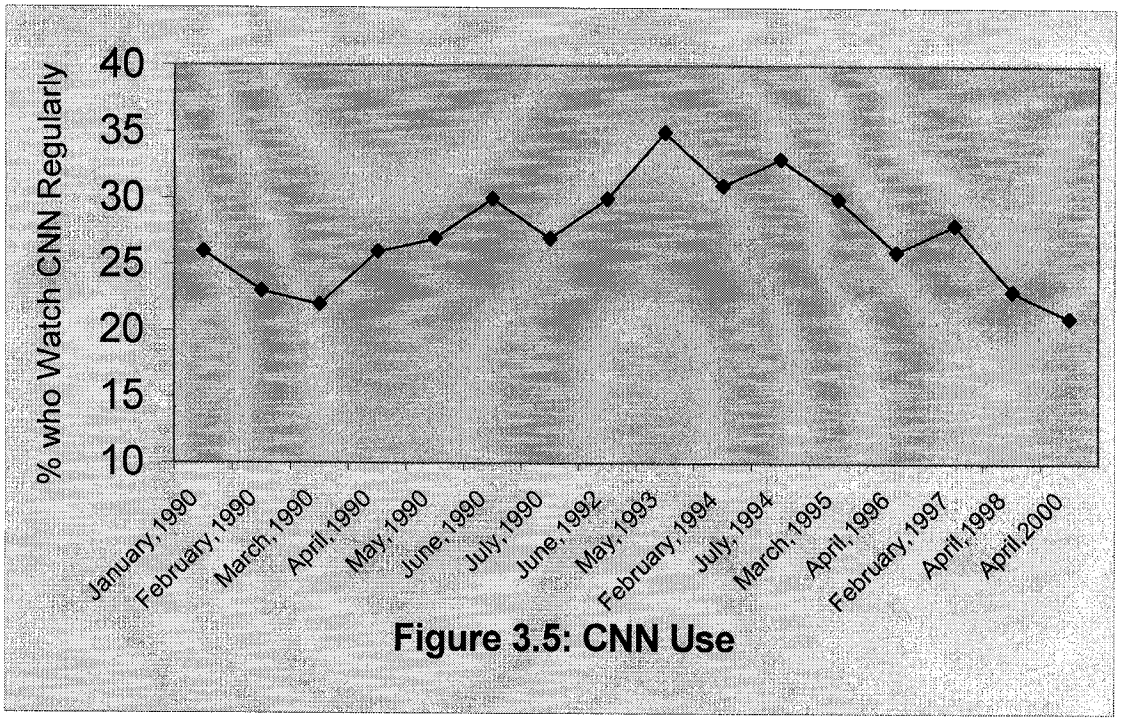

Figure 3.5: CNN Use

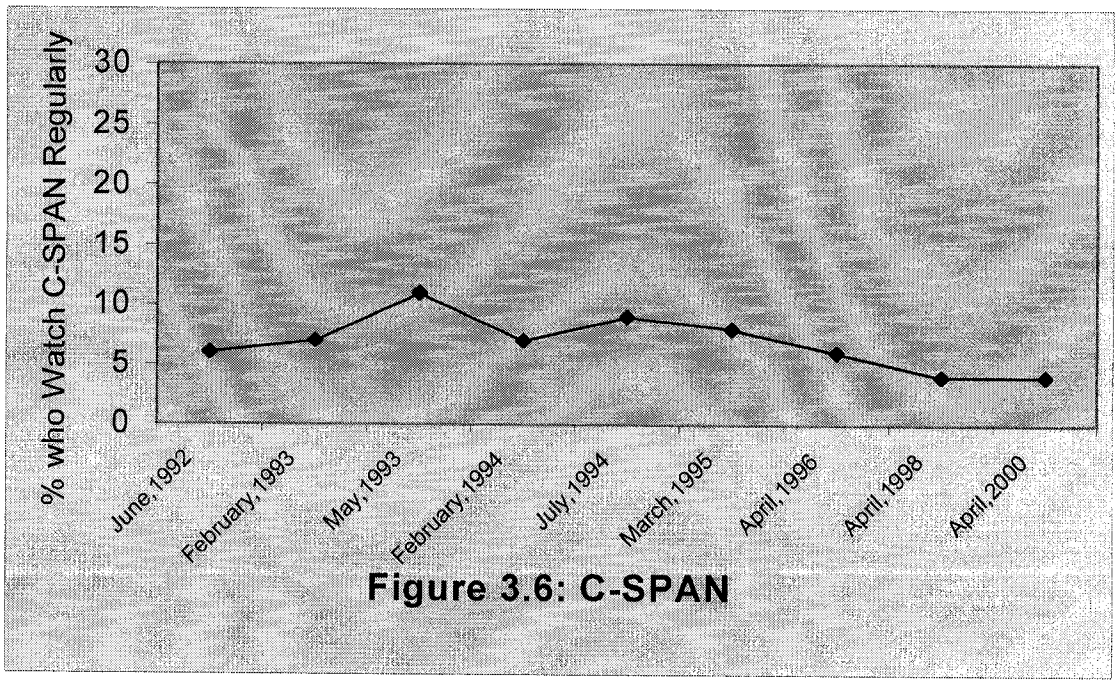

Figure 3.6: C-SPAN

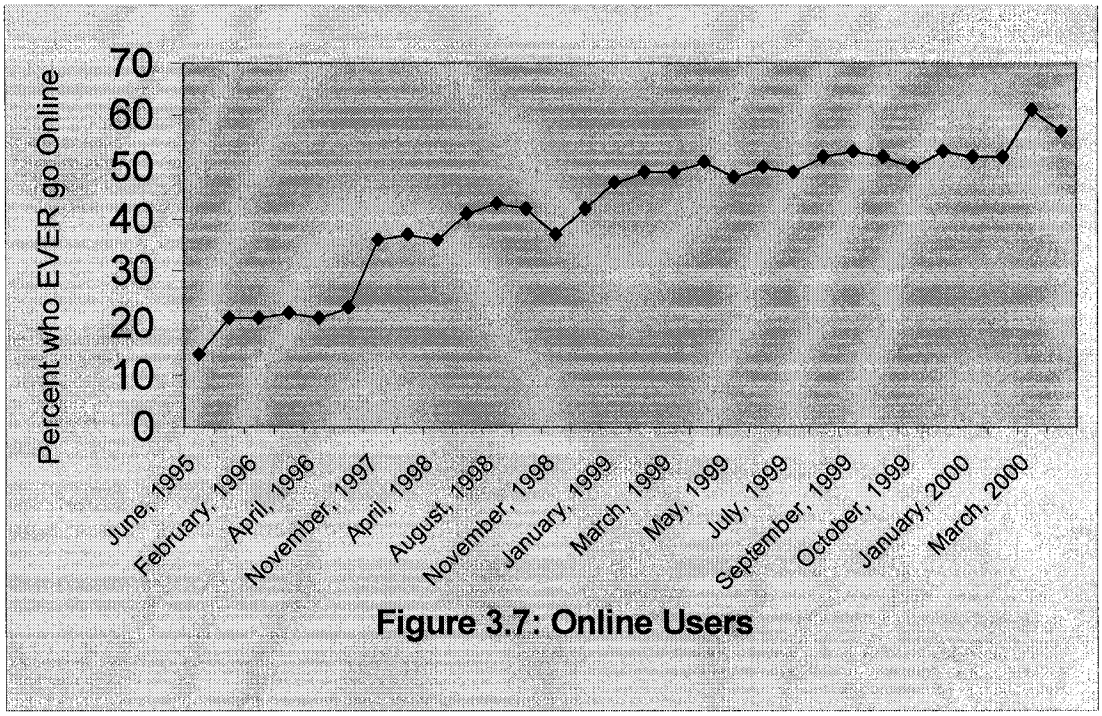

Figure 3.7: Online Users

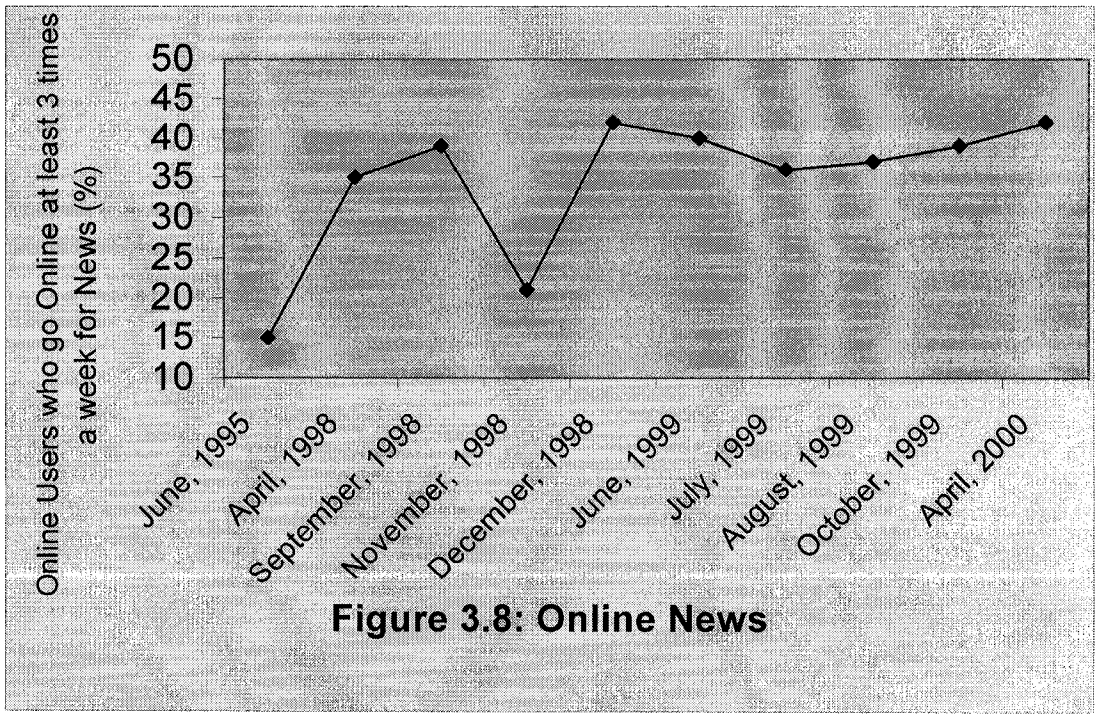

Figure 3.8: Online News

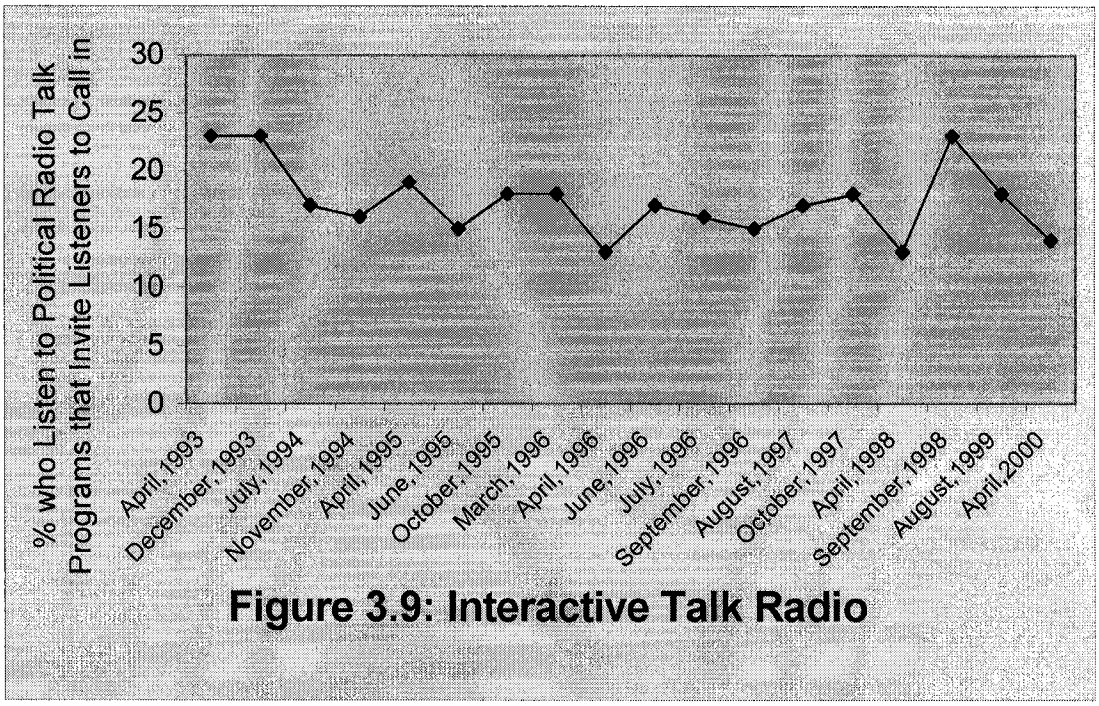

Figure 3.9: Interactive Talk Radio

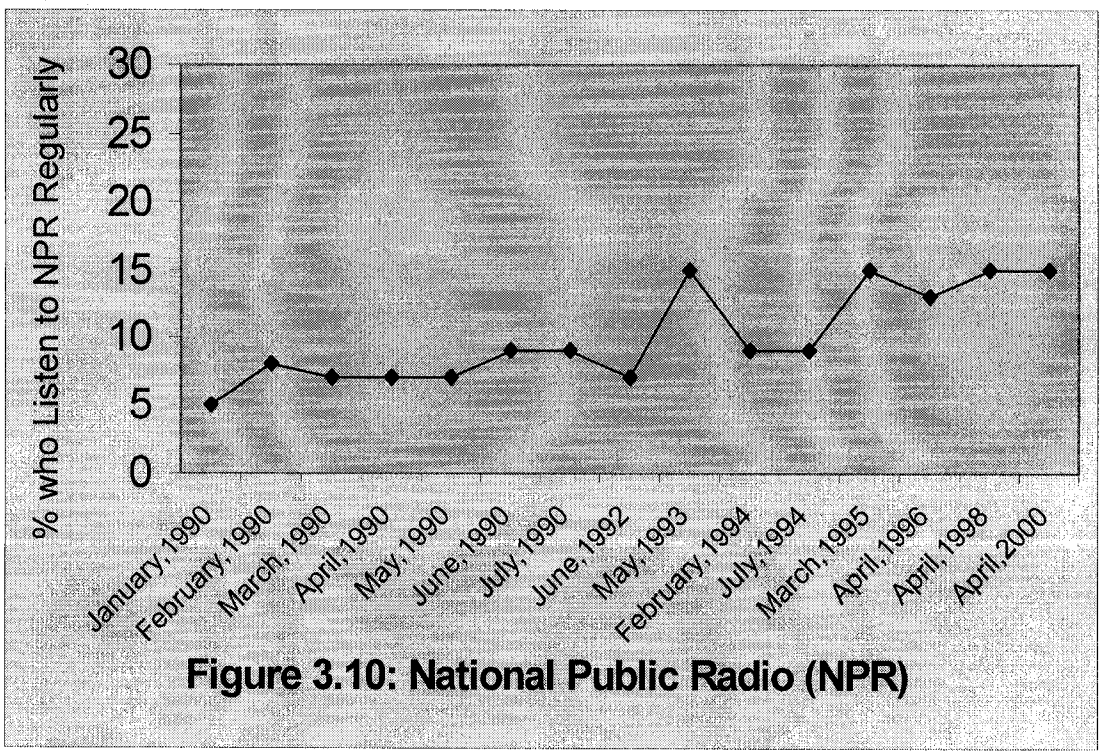

Figure 3.10: National Public Radio (NPR)

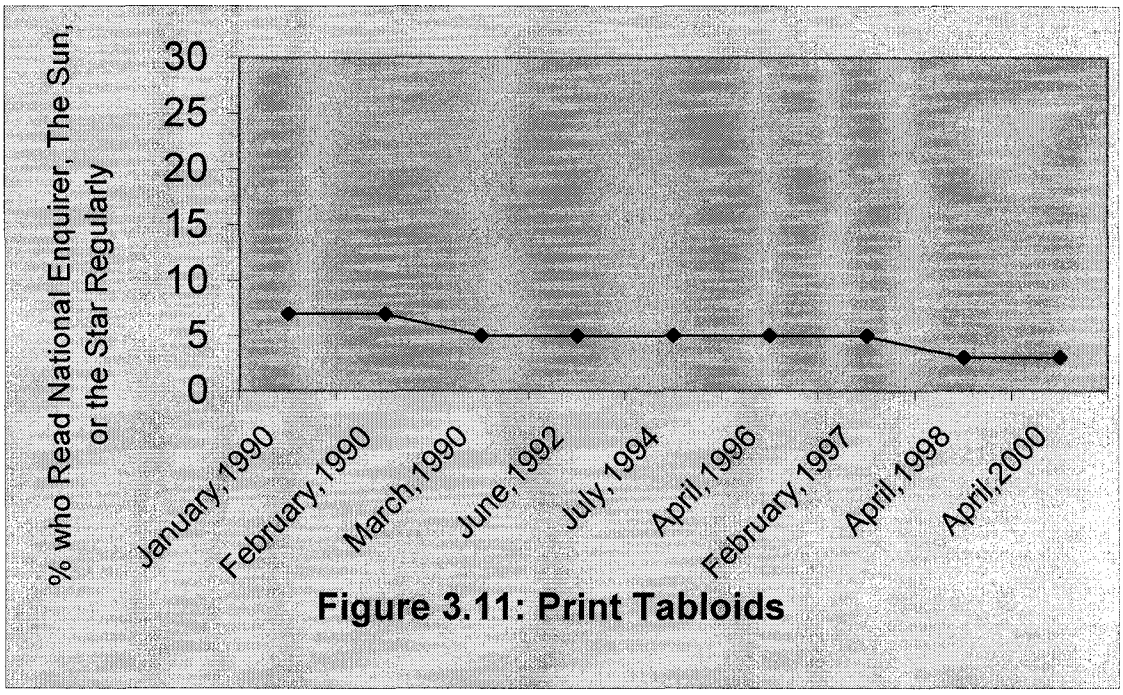

Figure 3.11: Print Tabloids

Conclusion

Above all, this chapter has illustrated that the news media are not one-dimensional. While many researchers have grouped the modern media into two groups (new and traditional), the preceding analyses indicate a different picture. The public does view traditional media as a single entity, but no such simplicity exists regarding mass perceptions of the new media. The factor analysis in Table 3.1 illustrates that there are three dimensions of new media in the public's view. Cable news, Internet news, and talk radio are recognized by the public as different from entertainment-based new media programming, such as print and television tabloids. Furthermore, the descriptive breakdown of media audience demographics indicates there is significant variation across the different dimensions of new and traditional media.

The final portion of this chapter, which looked at trends in media use over the last decade, illustrates some significant trends. First, the traditional media audience has consistently eroded over the 1990s. The network TV news audience has been cut in half over a period of a few short years, and local TV, newspaper, and newsmagazine use has significantly dropped as well. The various new media audiences do not show such a convincing trend. The analysis conducted in this study revealed that the two measures of cable news, CNN and C-SPAN, have dropped considerably. This drop, however, is probably not a product of a decline in the cable news audience as much as it is a fragmentation of the market, with the creation of CNBC, FOX News, and MSNBC in the middle and late 1990s. The percentage of Americans who access the Internet at home or work continues to increase, while the percentage of online users who regularly use the web for news has held fairly steady just below 50 percent. This trend, therefore, illustrates that more and more Americans continue to use the Internet to get their political information. The talk radio audience has started to diminish in recent years, but the percentage of regular NPR listeners is on the rise. Finally, the print tabloid audience appears to be diminishing, but this is likely a product of the growth in television tabloid programs.

Although the examination of media use over time illustrated some interesting trends, a great deal of future work needs to be conducted in this area. As the years pass and the various dimensions of new media continue to mature, current trends will most likely change. For example, following the last data point in the above analysis (April 2000), media use on all levels likely increased with the unfolding of the closest presidential election in American history. With this in mind, future researchers should

attempt to build on the existing temporal data so that more exhaustive time-series analyses can be conducted. The following chapter in this study will build on the information uncovered here in attempt to understand how different new and traditional media sources cover politics and the political process differently. Only by understanding exactly how different sources cover political news can we begin to systematically test the impact of coverage on the mass public.

CHAPTER FOUR: DRAMA IN NEW AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Introduction

As discussed earlier, many recent studies have addressed differences between new and traditional media coverage of politics. Systematic analyses of these suspected differences, however, are quite rare. Through full-text content analysis of six different media outlets, this chapter will examine how coverage of politics and process varies across mediums. The question driving this chapter is: Do the new media cover politics and process in America with a more *dramatic* style than traditional media? To address this question, I analyze four new media sources and two traditional. The content analysis points to an increased level of drama in the new media's political news coverage. The findings are relevant for illustrating tendencies in coverage and formulating stimuli for experimental analyses.

The Uniqueness of New Media's Political Coverage

Criticism of new media's political news coverage comes from several angles. New media are thought to be too entertainment oriented, "soft," biased, conflictual, and ethically unconstrained. Of course, new media's contribution to American politics has been praised as well. This praise is based on the assumption that, because of new media, Americans have the ability to witness more of politics and the political process than ever

before. While the quality of the information available is in debate, there is little dispute over the fact that new media have greatly increased the quantity of accessible political news.

What is it that the new news covers? And, how does this coverage differ from traditional news coverage? As Chapter Two discussed, the existing literature points to several possible differences, although little has been empirically validated. A common theme in the literature, however, is that new media are more extensive than traditional media. More time is allotted to the new media to cover politics. Newspapers are published daily; network and local news comprise only a few hours of each morning and evening; and newsmagazines are circulated weekly at best. The limited scope of traditional news cannot compete with endless hours of political coverage on cable news, Internet news, and talk radio. Increased time and resources allow many new news sources the freedom to cover more political issues from a wider range of angles. New political news, therefore, have great *potential* to expose the public to more information regarding policy and procedure, thus making the public more aware of the American political world (Davis and Owen 1998; Rosen and Taylor 1992). Is this potential, however, being realized? This project argues that, primarily, this potential is going unfulfilled. Instead, new media's extensive political coverage tends to focus on the *dramatic aspects* of the political world. New news sources try to bring out drama in their coverage of politics, turning politics into many long-running series of dramatic stories with various characters and plot lines. The purpose of this approach to news coverage, I contend, is to gain a loyal and involved audience. In the entertainment industry, programmers work to compel viewers to closely follow characters and plots in soap

operas, television series, movie trilogies, etc. In a similar manner, the new news covers politics in a style that promotes the creation and development of drama in the news. When there are compelling stories in the news with dynamic characters and constantly twisting plot lines, the new media experiences a boost in ratings. Therefore, they work to illustrate and develop the dramatic aspects of the news. Not only does the new news focus more on dramatic issues and events in politics, there is also effort to inject drama into stories that lack much flare in reality.

There are, of course, some new media sources that forgo drama to provide detailed information on American public policy and the political process. Internet sites such as *Thomas.com* from the Library of Congress provide full-text detail of legislative bills, speeches, and extension of remarks. Also, watchdog groups and special interest organizations use the Internet to provide details on elite voting, use of public funds, etc. The cable channels C-SPAN and C-SPAN II provide unimpeded coverage by following congressional floor proceedings, committee hearings, campaigns, and a wide array of debate over issues of social policy. These new media sources, however, are used by the public on a limited scale. Very few Americans use the Internet (or any other source) to extensively research the details public policy issues and the law-making process (Margolis and Resnick 2000). Furthermore, C-SPAN, while widely available to the public, is regularly viewed by less than five percent of the American public (Frantzich and Sullivan 1996; see Chapter Three).

Heralded by many as a potential equalizer in the American political world, the potential of the new political news has ultimately been unfulfilled. Elements of politics and process are present in new news coverage, but these elements are secondary to the

presentation of the dramatic story. In a classical sense, a model democratic citizen is deliberative, informed on policy and process, and knowledgeable about the political process. Coverage that would provide the political information to generate such a public does not appear to be evident in the new news. Instead, politics in the new media is framed as a series of long-running stories full of dynamic characters, scandals, twisting plot lines, and continuous conflict. As with a soap opera or weekly television drama, the stories are in constant flux. Some days there are surprising twists to the story, and other days very little happens—but the updates are frequent so that the viewer is reminded of the current point in the story.

This chapter argues that new media's political coverage focuses on the dramatic aspects of politics and process more than traditional media counterparts. Much like fictional dramatization in television, movies, or novels, the dramatization of the American political world in the new media is intended to captivate an audience and keep them coming back to see how the story transpires. This approach to political coverage, however, largely does not contain elements that would contribute positively to the public's knowledge of policy and procedure, and certainly would not enhance positive feelings toward political leaders or the system as a whole.

Elements of Drama in the New News

Drama in the new news takes several forms. First, the stories are *personalized* to a great degree. The human element is what drives dramatic stories. The introduction of identifiable characters is necessary for the viewers of a drama to relate on a human level. Political events often do revolve around one or a few individuals, and coverage of such

events are given a great deal of overall media attention. In recent years, however, it has been recognized that the media go out of their way to focus coverage on individual actors instead of policy and process. Often, journalists will forgo covering the important issues to focus on the dynamics of personalities (Fallows 1996; Lichter and Amundson 1994; Rozell 1994, 1996). While this trend is certainly evident in all media, it is particularly present in the new media. Because new media is interested in *hooking* the audience into actively following long-running stories, they spend a great deal of time working to develop the characters involved. In this sense, the new media will not only spend a great deal of time covering stories that involve significant individual characters, they will also work to personalize stories where individual actors are not so identifiable. Budget battles and debate over issues such as social security and healthcare often are covered in new media not as issues of policy or process, but as stories of personalities.

A second element of drama in the news is the scandalous and sensational. Viewers are not typically drawn to the ordinary or mundane. Instead, good drama relies on the unexpected and extraordinary. Incorporating such elements into news coverage draws the viewer in, and compels him or her to follow the story as it unfolds. The tendency to gravitate toward the scandalous and sensational is present in all of today's news (Fallows 1996; Mann and Ornstein 1994; Sabato 1993; Sabato et al. 2000). The new news, however, has found that intense and prolonged focus on scandalous events typically leads to increased ratings. Therefore, the scandalous and sensational events in American politics are more intensely covered in the new news than in traditional news. Rutenburg (2001) noted that:

> In the dual world of Condit-saturated television, there is, on one side, Dan Rather of CBS barely reporting the Levy case, on principle. On the other are the cable new networks, which seem to be talking about almost nothing else all day, even though the police say that Mr. Condit is not a suspect (Rutenburg 2001, 1C).

The nature of political scandals and sensational events provide the perfect material for long, dramatic stories. New news has resultantly capitalized on the opportunity to shamelessly make non-stop coverage of political scandals a major aspect of their political news coverage.

The third element of drama in the news is conflict. Conflict is the most basic and necessary component of a dramatic story. Drama cannot exist without conflict between groups and/or individuals. Of course, it is not difficult to find conflict in the American political system, especially given that the system was designed to foster it as a necessary component of representative democracy (see Madison, *The Federalist Papers #10*). The new media, however, take coverage of this inherent political conflict to the highest level, covering it as much as possible so to perpetuate a story and generate dramatic angles. Consider as an example Bill O'Reilly's response to how traditional press (Connie Chung) and some entertainment based magazines handled initial interviews with Gary Condit in August 2001:

> O'REILLY: Yes. He's (Condit) trying to save his seat. He's trying to save his political career. And his advisers said, look, you know, you can't run and hide much longer. You've got to cherry-pick who you're going (to) -- so, he gives an interview to "People" magazine, totally terrible. If you read that interview you'll see, you'll get nothing out of it. "Vanity Fair" got a little bit out of it. Chung didn't do badly. I would have done it in a much more confrontational way, but she didn't do badly. She showed him for the evasive guy he is and then he's going to talk to KOVR TV in Sacramento tomorrow, so he's cherry-picking (*The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News Channel, 8/23/01).

O'Reilly's reference to "cherry-picking" illustrates his opinion that Gary Condit chose to have interviews conducted in the least confrontational environment, which includes traditional news and entertainment-based media. O'Reilly does not try to hide the fact that his approach to interviewing Condit would have been "much more confrontational." Condit undoubtedly had knowledge of the new news' confrontational style, and thus steered clear of the likes of journalists such as Bill O'Reilly, Chris Matthews, or Rush Limbaugh.

Negativity stems from the conflictual nature of the new news, and is the fourth aspect of its dramatic coverage. To maintain a desired level of dramatic conflict in their news coverage, the new news journalists will often cover American politics with a very negative tone. In the new news there is much more criticism of political leaders, institutions, and the system as a whole. Furthermore, the journalists will often encourage negativity on the part of talk show guests and even the audience, which often generates conflictual drama. Partly, this negative approach to politics is the result of the new news being left out of the inner circle, which consists primarily of political elites and traditional journalists (Davis and Owen 1998). In recent years, however, the new news has gained a great deal of power and legitimacy in the political world, and thus have forced their way into ranks similar to that of traditional journalists. The negativity, however, remains primarily due to the fact that it perpetuates drama and—especially in talk shows—provides an endless supply of discussion and debate.

Typically, drama cannot be maintained in a straight news environment. There are, of course, exceptions. Straight coverage of breaking news events is sometimes dramatic simply because of the nature of the event. As time draws on, however,

journalists must go beyond objective news coverage to maintain the drama in a political news story. To keep a story dramatic, the coverage must take a more subjective tone. Allowing more subjectivity into news coverage provides more freedom to discuss an issue or event from several possible angles. This approach makes it easier for journalists to implant new dramatic angles into a political news story that may be losing some of its dramatic steam. Thus, the provision for political analysis is often necessary to maintain drama in the news. Subjective analysis and opinion, therefore, is the fifth component of dramatic news coverage in the new news.

The final element of the new news' dramatic coverage is the game-schematic approach. This perspective has been articulated in the past as a critique of mainstream campaign coverage. Patterson (1994) argues that modern political journalists have fallen into a "game schematic" approach to covering political campaigns. That is, American political journalists have an inclination to cover politics as a long-running competition with strategies, winners, and losers:

> The dominant schema for the reporter is structured around the notion that politics is a strategic game. When journalists encounter new information during an election they tend to interpret it within a schematic framework according to which candidates compete for advantage. The candidates play the game well or poorly (Patterson 1994, 57).

This criticism has been echoed by several researchers (Dautrich and Hartley 1999; Fallows 1996; Lichter and Noyes 1996). Covering politics as a game is more dramatic than covering the particulars of public policy proposals and initiatives (Hovind 1999). "The game schema dominates the journalist's outlook in part because it conforms to the conventions of the news process... The plotlike nature of the game makes it doubly attractive. The campaign 'is a naturally structured, long-lasting dramatic sequence with

changing scenes.' The game provides the running story in which today's developments relate to yesterday's, and probably tomorrow's events" (Patterson 1994, 61).[15]

The tendency of traditional journalists to focus on politics as a game has been taken to even a higher level in the new media. The more a political event can be framed in the context of a sporting event, or a "horserace," the easier it is to attract viewers and keep them coming back to "check the scores." The nature of new news' continuous coverage of politics fits very well with game schema. Many new media outlets provide for countless updates, debate, and discussion regarding current situations of the players in various political "games," such as elections, budget battles, policy initiatives, and political scandals. There is a wide range of perspectives regarding who is ahead, who is behind, and what strategies should be employed to win these political games. *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, a political talk show on CNBC and MSNBC, is an example of a new media source devoting itself to detailed coverage of politics as a game. Below is a transcript excerpt of Matthews discussing strategy with regard to President Clinton in 1999:

> MATTHEWS: Let's talk strategy here, everybody. The president clearly has got some new head of steam. I don't know what's going on with his psyche, but he's got something going on that wasn't there three weeks ago. I don't know whether he knows it's getting to be over with, but I've been watching this guy. He's been amazing the last few weeks.
> ... This guy's good for every--it seems like he's out there feeding the Democratic army, which will get them 45 percent (of the vote in the 2000 Presidential election). That's all he needs in a three-way race. Pat Buchanan gets 15 percent or 10 percent or even--that means that the Republicans are split. Isn't this the strategy here? Pick a fight with the Republicans, circle the wagons, get everybody partisan as hell, like Harry Truman did in '48, and win for Gore (*Hardball with Chris Matthews*, 10/18/99).

[15] Portions of this quotation were taken by Patterson from Epstein (1973, xi).

Matthews even has a segment on the show titled, "Winners and Losers of the Week," where he often discusses who has helped their position in the political game, and who has hurt themselves.

Hypotheses

Drawing from the above discussion on the differences between new and traditional political coverage, this chapter poses to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis One: The new news *personalizes* its political coverage more than traditional media, focusing more on individual personalities and interaction.

Hypothesis Two: The new news covers political *scandal* and *sensational* events more frequently than traditional media.

Hypothesis Three: The new news focuses its political coverage more on *conflict* than traditional media.

Hypothesis Four: The new news is more *negative* in its coverage of politics than traditional news.

Hypothesis Five: The new news is more *subjective* in its coverage of politics than traditional news, allowing for more voicing of personal opinions and analysis.

Hypothesis Six: The new news' coverage of politics discusses *political strategy* more than traditional media.

The above hypotheses reflect the overall expectation that the new news covers American politics and process in a more *dramatic style* than traditional media. The following section will discuss how content analysis of newspapers, television transcripts, and Internet news sources will be use to test these hypotheses.

Research Design and Sampling Procedure

The media sources selected for this study were chosen on the basis of their representation of different types of new and traditional news. The new political media programs were (a) *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, (b) *Talkback Live*, (c) *Salon.com*, and (d) *CNN Today*. *Hardball* is a prime time political talk show broadcast on CNBC and MSNBC. This program was selected to represent the most obvious example of cable talk programming in which political elites are involved in highly conflictual debate over policy issues, political events, and personalities. Elected officials, political strategists, and representatives from parties and interest groups are frequent guests on *Hardball*. Very few public call-ins or emailed opinions are taken on *Hardball*.

The second program, *Talkback Live*, is representative of the more inclusive talk programs in the new media, which actively encourages viewer feedback. *Talkback Live* is a CNN talk program based on current-day political and social issues. Unlike Hardball, *Talkback Live* is focused around the theme of allowing the public to "talk back" to political elites and each other. *Talkback Live* is marketed as CNN's "interactive talk program." Like *Hardball*, *Talkback Live* does host political elites as guests, but the clear objective of the program is to foster direct communication between elites and the public. Viewers are able to participate in the political discussion on *Talkback* via telephone calls, emails, and satellite connections from remote locations around the country. Also, host Bobbie Batista frequently encourages questions and comments from the live studio audience.

Salon.com is the third type of new media source examined in the analysis. *Salon.com* is an exclusively online new media publication that began in 1996. Like most

Internet new publications, *Salon.com* is updated hourly and has several daily political news columns. *Salon.com* is representative of the Internet aspect of new media because, like *The Drudge Report*, and *Slate.com*, *Salon.com* was created exclusively for the Internet and still available only online. Furthermore, *Salon.com* is representative of many Internet new media sources because of its practice of going beyond the bounds of traditional news with a more conflictual, inflammatory, and opinionated approach to political news coverage. *Salon.com* is well known for its shocking and satirical columns on policy, politics, and political figures. Therefore, it is an excellent example of Internet news in America.

The final new media source is *CNN Today*. As the title suggest, this is a daily news programs on CNN that covers timely political and social issues and events. This final new news source is the most similar to traditional media in that *CNN Today* is an anchor-based daily news show, much like traditional nightly news on CBS, NBC, and ABC. The major difference is that the new media program is broadcast on a cable news channel devoted to covering the news twenty-four hours a day (CNN). By definition, CNN is a new media source because it emerged in the last twenty years from non-political origins (cable television). Therefore, it follows that CNN news may take a different approach to covering politics and the democratic process than traditional network news.

In addition to new media, two traditional news mediums were analyzed as well. The first was *CBS Evening News*. A nightly network television news program, *CBS Evening News* is a half-hour national broadcast that follows local news. This program is representative of national network news because the other two major networks follow the

exact same pattern. *ABC World News Tonight* and *NBC Nightly News*, like *CBS News*, typically follow local news and last a half-hour. Each program is anchor-based and covers many of the same political issues in very similar styles (Just et al. 1996). *CBS Evening News* was selected for this particular analysis because it has the most complete and accessible transcript archives.

The other traditional news source was *The New York Times*. The *Times* was selected to represent traditional print coverage. This was an ideal representation of traditional print news because of the *Times* reputation as one of the foremost and prominent publications in the United States. The *Times* is often cited as a legitimate news source by other national and local media, and frequently regarded as the most accurate gauge of the pulse of mainstream news (Graber 1997; Durr et al 1997).

Sampling and Search Procedure

The vast amount of coverage from each of the selected new and traditional media outlets exceeds the scope of this analysis. Any attempt to analyze each political news story since the beginning of the new media phenomenon would yield a population size well into the tens of thousands. Instead, a simple random sample of each of the six news sources was taken from the years 1998, 1999, and 2000 (the most recent complete years). Specifically, one month was randomly selected from each year, and up to 40 stories, or show segments, were sampled for each source for each year. If the total number of political stories for a given news source in a month did not reach 40 for each month, then all stories matching the search criteria were coded. Once the sample was taken from the search criteria, irrelevant stories were discarded. For each year, a random sample of

political news stories from each of the six new and traditional media sources was taken within the randomly selected month. The months selected were August 1998, October 1999, and June 2000. This approach provides for valid comparisons of how the media sources vary in their coverage of similar issues and events. In total, 532 news stories were sampled and coded for the three years. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of the sample.

Table 4.1
Content Analysis Sample Breakdown: Number of Stories

News Source	August 1998	October 1999	June 2000	Total
Hardball	40	36	32	108
Talkback Live	32	11	12	55
Salon.com	24	29	32	85
CNN Today	33	32	29	94
CBS Evening News	33	33	33	99
New York Times	36	28	27	91
Total	198	165	169	532

Due to the fact that some stories in the sample were discarded do to irrelevant content, there is a small degree of variability across sources. The unique news source in the sample turned out to be *Talkback Live*. Although *Talkback Live* markets itself as a political talk show on CNN, there were many days in which the topic of discussion departed from American politics, and thus was not identified as a political news story by the Lexis-Nexis search. Thus, in 1999 and 2000, the number of stories sampled is smaller than the other news source. The numbers are, however, large enough to still merit comparison.

Transcripts from *Hardball*, *Talkback Live*, *CNN Today*, and *CBS Evening News* were accessed through the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, an online archive of print and televised news programs. Newspaper stories from the *New York Times* were also analyzed on Lexis-Nexis. Political news coverage on *Salon.com* was accessed through the website's online archive.

Because Lexis-Nexis does not archive news stories or transcripts by topic, a search engine had to be used to locate political news coverage. To control for possible variation in coverage across geographic regions and various localities, only national sources and national issues were of interest in this analysis. Thus, a search term needed to be used that would isolate national political issues. To account for this need, the media sources accessed through Lexis-Nexis were searched by looking for four different words: "Clinton", "President", "Congress," or and variation of the word "Politics".[16] If any of these words were mentioned in the title or opening paragraphs of the political news story, they were identified by the Lexis-Nexis search engine.

There were two exceptions to the above search. First, because *Salon.com* was not archived on Lexis-Nexis, there was no way to conduct such a search. *Salon.com* does, however, archive their past news stories by subject, thus allowing for access to a comprehensive list of all political news stories published by the site for a given time period. Political stories were then sampled from this category. Second, the large number of stories published in the *New York Times* yielded a search result of over one thousand stories, thus requiring a narrower search. Searching for the keywords in the title of the

[16] To find variation of the term "politic," the word was entered into the search engine as "politic!". The exclamation point at the end of the term allowed for word such as "politics", or "political" to be located by the search. Thus, the entire search term entered was as follows: Clinton OR President OR Congress OR

story, instead of the title and opening paragraphs narrowed the search. Also, the search was further narrowed by only searching stories contained in the first section of the newspaper.

Of course, no computerized search is perfect. The above search procedure did yield some stories that fell outside the parameters of what could be considered national political news. For example, the search terms would sometimes locate stories on subjects such as the Library of "Congress," the entertainer George "Clinton," or the "President" and General Manager of a sports franchise. Such stories were discarded from the analysis if they fell into the sample.[17]

In the searching and sampling of political coverage on the talk shows, *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, and *Talkback Live*, another variation had to be accounted for. Unlike the other new and traditional media sources that cover politics either through written stories (*Salon.com* and the *New York Times*) or televised news segments *(CNN Today* or *CBS Evening New*), the talk shows are programs that cover one or several political subjects over an hour-long broadcast. Commercial breaks were used as markers in order to allow for comparison between the talk shows and the other new and traditional media sources. Thus, segments of talk shows were used to compare with the more conventional news stories. The program's content between each commercial was considered comparable to a news segment or story. For each show sampled, the lead segment of the show was coded as well as one other randomly selected segment from the

---

Politic!. The order in which the terms were entered was of no consequence to the search.

[17] When irrelevant stories fell into the sample, that story was discarded and the next available story was then included.

remaining hour. Any segments deemed by coders to be irrelevant to national politics were restricted from the analysis.

Content Analysis Variables

The purpose of this content analysis is to understand how coverage of politics and process vary across new and traditional media sources. Specifically, the goal is to illustrate if the new news does, in fact, present political news in a more dramatic fashion than traditional news. To conduct such a task, the content analysis was set up to code for several variables that reflect the presence of drama in a political news story. Table 4.2 outlines the major variables and coding descriptions. The intercoder reliability was .87.[18]

The coding was not intended to identify major frames of new and traditional media coverage. Instead, to test for overall differences regarding the presence of drama, the coding was structured around identifying whether or not various elements of drama were present in the stories. Thus, if a story mentioned or discussed in any of the variables listed in Table 4.2, then the story was recorded as containing that element of drama.

[18] Intercoder reliability was tested between two coders. Both coders were political science undergradutation students, and blind to the project. Each coder was instructed to code the same fifty stories taken from the sample (fifty stories comprised approximately ten percent of the entire sample). The coders agreed 87 percent of the time.

Table 4.2
Content Analysis Variables

Variable	Description
Political Strategy	Discussion of the strategies political actors (elected or non-elected) use (or should use) to achieve political goals or influence public opinion. Often discussed within the context of elections or negotiating and passing policy initiatives.
Individual Personality Traits	Any specific mention of a political actor's personality, personal issues, or behavior (morals, attitudes, demeanor, etc.)
Political Scandal	Any mention of a event that was widely considered scandalous (Monica Lewinsky affair, the investigation of Al Gores fundraising in 1996, etc.)
Conflict	Discussion of conflict between political leaders, parties, or institutions over policy or non-policy issues. This could also include conflict between guests and/or hosts of a talk show.
Type of Coverage*	
Straight News	The story was simply reported with little or no evidence of journalist interpretation.
Analysis	The story was comprised primarily of political opinions and analyses given by journalists, political consultants, or public officials.
Mix	The story contains roughly an equal amount of straight news and analysis.
Tone of Coverage*	
Positive	The story primarily reflects favorably on the subjects or issues at hand.
Negative	The story primarily reflects negatively on the subjects or issues at hand.
Neutral	The story is simply reported with no apparent favorable or unfavorable element, or when the amount of favorable and unfavorable coverage is roughly equal.

*Categories are mutually exclusive for each story.

Findings: New Versus Traditional Media Coverage

The content analysis shows that there are quite a few differences in new and traditional media coverage of politics and process. Many of these differences are quite striking. Table 4.3 illustrates the findings of the content analysis. The overall findings point toward confirming the general contention that the new media cover the aforementioned elements of drama much more than traditional media. The results indicate that the new news *personalizes* political coverage more than traditional news. Discussion of individual personalities and personality traits were present in 60 percent of the sample of new news. This number is much larger than traditional media, which discussed the same topics only 23 percent of the time. Thus, Hypothesis One can be accepted. Consider, as an example, the following discussion of Newt Gingrich in 1998 which delves into his past and present personal life:

> So don't expect Gingrich to hector Clinton about adulterous sex. He's been there and done that. That's a Pandora's Box he'd rather not re-open.
>
> As a high school student -- precocious, lonely, overweight -- Newt secretly romanced his geometry teacher, a buxom, matronly woman named Jackie Battley. The furtive romance with his 24-year-old teacher included nighttime sessions in the back of a car in remote areas of Fort Benning, Ga. Once, Newt and Jackie were so worked up, they got their car caught in a tank trap on the military base and had to call his best friend to rescue them before a daylight exposé, according to the friend's widow, Linda Tilton. Defying his stepfather, a stern Army colonel, Newt pursued Jackie, married her and promptly had two children.
>
> The most notorious incident in Gingrich's marriage-- first reported by David Osborne in Mother Jones magazine in 1984 -- was when he cornered Jackie in her hospital room where she was recovering from uterine cancer surgery and insisted on discussing the terms of the divorce he was seeking. Shortly after that infamous encounter, Gingrich refused to pay his alimony and child-support payments. The First Baptist Church in his hometown had to take up a collection to support the family Gingrich had deserted. Six months after divorcing Jackie, Gingrich married a younger woman, Marianne, with whom he had been having an affair. They are still married, despite persistent

> (though unproven) rumors that Gingrich has had other dalliances (Talbot 1998).

Not only does the above article represent a dramatic portrayal of a political leader, it also illustrates the new media's tendency to focus on the scandalous. Table 4.3 outlines the frequency of scandalous coverage in the new and traditional news. It should be noted that the percentage of stories that mention scandal is quite high. Thirty-nine percent of the entire sample mentioned a political scandal in some capacity. The reason for this high number is that the month sampled in 1998—August—was the height of the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, which proved one of the most closely covered news stories of all time in all sources of media. Considering the story involved only the second presidential impeachment in US history, coverage was extensive in the media. Of the new and traditional coverage sampled in August 1998, eighty-four percent contained at least some mention of scandal. This is quite abnormal considering the other two months sampled—October, 1999 and June, 2000—mention scandal in only 14 and 12 percent of the stories respectively. Nevertheless, sampling political news from a time of heavy scandal provides a glimpse into how the behavior of new and traditional news varies during periods of scandalous and sensational "feeding frenzies." When it comes to the hypothesis regarding scandal in the new news, it can be seen that there is a difference between new and traditional media. Scandal was mentioned in 42 percent of the new media sample, compared to 35 percent of traditional coverage, illustrating the tendency of new media to discuss scandal more than the traditional media. This difference is significant at $p < .05$, and confirms Hypothesis Two.

Conflict is prevalent in all political news coverage. The findings indicate that overall, 83 percent of the stories in the sample contain at least some discussion of political conflict. Conflict has always been present in the news, and has become even more evident in the past few decades (Fallows 1996; Mann and Ornstein 1994). Even though conflict is frequently mentioned in all media, it is more prevalent in the new news (see Table 4.3). Conflict was found in 85 percent of the new media sample compared to 80 percent of the traditional sample. While this difference is not overwhelming, it is statistically significant at $p<.10$, therefore confirming Hypothesis Three and illustrating significant conflict in a large portion of all of today's political news.

The tone of the new news is also more negative than traditional news. While more than half of the new news sample is negative coverage, only 37 percent of traditional news have such a tone, thus confirming Hypothesis Four. Neutral coverage, on the other hand, is more prevalent in the traditional news. Positive coverage, while infrequent in both types of news, is less rare in the traditional media. These differences are statistically significant and show that the tone of new news coverage varies from traditional in the direction of negativity.

The findings also uncover drastic differences regarding subjectivity and opinion in the news. New media are much more analysis-based in their political coverage, offering a wide range of different points of view, frequently failing to provide information in a "straight news" format. Overall, only a quarter of the new media sample give the news in a "straight" format, compared to 86 percent of traditional news. This significant difference allows for the acceptance of Hypothesis Five.

Discussion of political strategy, while present in all media, resonates with more frequency in new media. In total, over two-thirds of the entire sample of new and traditional media contain some discussion of strategy. This substantiates the arguments from researchers such as Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and Patterson (1994) who contend that coverage of strategy is dominant in modern political news. As hypothesized, the new news takes this obsession with political strategy even further, with 78 percent of the sample containing at least some discussion of it. This frequency is significantly higher than that of traditional media (66 percent), and confirms Hypothesis Six. Not only is the frequency of strategic discussion high in the new media, the intensity is extreme as well. Consider the following discussion on *Hardball* during the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal as an example:

> MATTHEWS: Let's talk about the president. It seems to me that everybody agrees that he's--your brother's a basketball player, and we're watching in--the NBA playoffs now. You have that shot clock and you have that game clock, and everybody plays the clock. It looks to me like Clinton has been playing down that clock. Every time he gets the ball, I'm gonna use up the whole 24 seconds.' I--and it--and eventually, this year is passing quickly. If you were the president, b--b--Ben, would you want to move this case...
>
> Mr. JONES: Well, y--you know, Chris--Chris--Chris--Chris...
>
> MATTHEWS: ...forward or would you want to--or would you want to slow down the game a little?
>
> Mr. JONES: ...it's, like--no, no, Chris, if he could, he'd go into the four corners, like we used to at Carolina, remember?
>
> MATTHEWS: Right.
>
> Mr. JONES: Can't do that anymore. The clock is running.
>
> MATTHEWS: That's the freeze. Yeah.

> Mr. JONES: Yeah. And--and--and it's gonna--you know, the clock's gonna keep running up--it's gonna get--you know, Starr's gonna score a few more. And that's what's happening--Starr is winning, the president is slipping in the polls. And sooner or later, it would be nice if he just got out and told the truth, wouldn't it? (*Hardball with Chris Matthews*, 6/8/98).

In the above example, the political world is likened to a sporting event, where the "clock" is running out and the defense is attempting to "stall." In this sense, the new news not only borrows tricks from the entertainment world to create drama, but also from the sports world.

Of course, discussion of political strategy is not limited to times when the subject is scandal. New media's focus on strategy and the "horserace" is present during times of election as well. For instance, in October, 1999, *Salon.com*'s Jake Tapper wrote one of many articles about the Democratic primary as a "street fight." In discussing a debate between Al Gore and Bill Bradley, Tapper observed that:

> Gore's relentless enthusiasm and his lust to enter into the political fray painted a stark contrast with Bradley's speech and style and, indeed, the two campaigns each man is waging. When all is said and done about the boring clones Democrats will have to choose from, the two men laid out a very distinct choice for voters. Gore is rah-rah and boo-hiss and ready to scrap; he delivers direct appeals to union members and farmers and party loyalists; he walks into a room and wants to shake everyone's hand and tell them "what's in my heart." Bradley is cool and thoughtful, bespectacled and remote; he wants politics to go in a lofty direction; he seems to only reluctantly mingle with the riff-raff (Tapper 1999).

Although Tapper states in the above article that "the two men laid out a very distinct choice for voters," he discusses the choice only in terms of personality traits and strategies on how the men market themselves. As is often the case in new media, details of policy plans dim in comparison to the focus on the dramatic aspect of the story.

Table 4.3
New Versus Traditional News Coverage

Variable	New Media	Traditional Media
Personality Coverage***	60%	23%
Political Scandal**	42	35
Conflict*	85	80
Tone of Coverage		
Positive*	7	12
Negative***	51	37
Neutral**	42	51
Type of Coverage		
Straight News***	26	86
Analysis***	49	8
Mix***	25	6
Political Strategy**	78	66

Note: Categories for "Type of Coverage," and "Tone of Coverage" are mutually exclusive for each story.
*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01 (one-tailed difference of means test).

Variation Within Media Outlets

Table 4.3 displays the six different media outlets into two possible headings: new or traditional political news. Most previous research has taken this approach to studying new media in American politics, and this analysis has uncovered several interesting differences using the new versus traditional distinction. When looking across different media sources, however, it is just as important to examine differences *within* the groups as it is to examine differences *across* groups.

Tables 4.4 shows that there is a good deal of variation within some of the new and traditional media in the sample, and that some subtle trends may be overlooked by using only the new versus traditional distinction. There are, in fact, a few cases where a particular new media outlet shows coverage tendencies that are closer to traditional news than the other new sources. This trend merits examining each of the four new media sources in the sample individually.

Hardball with Chris Matthews

As mentioned before, *Hardball with Chris Matthews* was included in the sample because it represented the strategy-based, conflict-oriented political talk shows on cable news. Many cable news shows follow a similar pattern, such as *The O'Reilly Factor* (FOX News), *Heraldo Live* (CNBC), *The Spin Room* (CNN), or *Crossfire* (CNN). These programs are focused on the primary goal of providing political analysis rather than straight news.

The results of the *Hardball* content analysis illustrate that the show is indeed full of strategic discussion, analysis, and conflict (see Table 4.4). Ninety-three percent of the *Hardball* coverage contained some discussion of strategy; easily the highest of all media sources in the sample. Also, 96 percent of the coverage was political analysis, rather than straight news or a mix of news. This approach sets this type of talk show apart from many other new media because programs like *Hardball* do not attempt to provide news to viewers. Instead, the assumption is that viewers are already somewhat acquainted with the issues and have tuned in to hear different sides of the story in spirited debate.

What sets programs like *Hardball* apart from other news is not necessarily their discussion of political conflict, but the fact that the interaction between people on the show is very conflictual. Discussion of conflict is certainly present at a high rate, especially regarding parties and individuals. But the arguing that often takes place *between* the host and/or guests is quite frequent and extreme. Major interruptions and inaudible "cross talk" are commonplace on such shows. Consider the following example where the participants are discussing President Clinton:

Prof. ESTRICH: Well, because if you went to any speech that Bill Clinton has ever given, certainly anyone I've ever heard in my life, it is very common for him to go off text and associate in a very personal way with where he is and how it connects to that audience. And I think...

MATTHEWS: You think that he connects in any historic fashion to Nelson Mandela?

Prof. ESTRICH: Oh, I think he connects in a historic fashion to the cause of racial equality in this country and I--I don't think his Mandela story--I mean, this is what's gotten wild. I mean, with all due respect, I--I happen to see that across the street. I don't think his Mandela story was intended to say, 'I am Nelson Mandela and what I've gone through is like what this man went through.' I mean, th--that's not fair. We're getting a little bit silly here. I mean, I--I think he was talking about, you know, people with great courage.

MATTHEWS: You don't think it was delusional. You don't think it was narcissistic at all for the president of the United States to presume some sort of moral equality between him and a man who's spent...

Prof. ESTRICH: You guys...

MATTHEWS: ...28 years in jail for fighting racial prejudice and here he is...

Prof. ESTRICH: I--I don't think--Chris, come on.

MATTHEWS: ...in the dock fe--for a matter involving sexual misbehavior...

Prof. ESTRICH: I don't...

MATTHEWS: ...for which he has yet to be held accountable. And you're--and here's a man who spent 28 years for something he did because he deeply believed in it and accepted the consequences of it, and here's a president who has yet to accept, it seems to me, the consequences. He's on one hand saying, 'It's a private matter. Leave me alone.'

Prof. ESTRICH: You feed him the consequences every day.

MATTHEWS: And you're agreeing with that argument, it's a private matter, at the same moment...

Prof. ESTRICH: No.

MATTHEWS: ...he's saying, 'I have nothing to apologize for. But here's something for the dogs out there to eat. I'll give 'em a few scraps.'

> Prof. ESTRICH: But--but Chris--I mean, you know--come on, Chris.
>
> MATTHEWS: I'll say something for them to quiet them down to stop their yapping.
>
> Prof. ESTRICH: Wait, Chris, that's wrong. You are yapping (*Hardball with Chris Matthews*, 8/28/98).

These types of interactions on the cable news talk show circuit have been prevalent for years and are becoming more common. In fact, *Hardball* has been the subject of satire on *Saturday Night Live*, which parodies Chris Matthews' aggressive interview as well as excessive conflict between the guests on the show. Bill O'Reilly has also been parodied by *Saturday Night Live* for continuously contradicting his guests, even on issues that are largely considered fact. The guests on *Hardball* and *The O'Reilly Factor* often interrupt and contradict each other, and this behavior seems to be condoned and even encouraged on these types of cable and radio talk programs. The effect of this ongoing personal conflict on talk show viewers has yet to be shown. Such effects need to be addressed, however, given the increased visibility of conflictual political coverage in the new news.

The nature of programs like *Hardball* provide an explanation as to why the new news may not be as inclusive as previous scholars have argued. Many cable talk programs have moved away from inclusion of viewers because it disrupts the flow of the conflictual interaction between the host and guests. Consider a comment from Bill O'Reilly on a rare day when calls were taken on his program:

> O'REILLY: All right. Let's take another break. We're going to come back with this flurry of phone calls, pop, pop, pop, pop. And more analysis. 1-888-TELLFOX. Please keep it pithy. And the callers are pretty good. They are keeping it pithy tonight. Way to go. Be right back (*The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News Network, 6/13/01).

In this situation, O'Reilly was clearly uncomfortable with including callers in the conversation. It appears, in fact, that he was not interested in *including* Americans in the discussion. Instead, O'Reilly was only interested in hearing quick, "pithy" comments, which could be used to generate more analysis between him and the show's guests. When questions and comments are taken from viewers, it is more difficult for the host to control the direction of the coverage. Because programs like *Hardball* appear to be oriented much around the discussion of political strategy, a level of political sophistication is needed on the part of the participants. The average viewer may not have the political knowledge necessary to actively participate in game-schematic discussions with professional consultants, strategists, and politicians. Thus, public participation is not a productive element.

Talkback Live

Although *Talkback Live* is a cable news talk show (CNN), it has several aspects that distinguish it from programs like *Hardball* or *O'Reilly*. Unlike many political talk programs on cable or radio, *Talkback*'s major goal is to be "the interactive town hall meeting." During the broadcast, email and chat room comments are shown on the bottom of the television screen, and questions are taken by telephone, email, satellite, and the live audience. In short, *Talkback Live* is illustrative of inclusive media, providing the image that the public has the chance to become involved in the process.

Because the inclusive program is interested in making the viewer feel involved, a better mix of news and analysis is provided. This approach does not, however, appear to provide much coverage of policy details or the democratic process. Instead, the inclusive

format seems to cover more news on scandal and individual personalities. This tendency shows that allowing the public more involvement in the news process does not necessarily mean the coverage will be of higher quality. In fact, it appears that, whenever possible, audience participants on *Talkback Live* talk of scandals and personalities instead of policy and process.

Salon.com

Due to the vastness of the Internet at the turn of the century, it would be impossible to select any single Internet news site that could adequately represent the entire lot. Instead, *Salon.com* was selected for this study to represent only the popular news sites created exclusively for the Internet, such as *The Drudge Report* or *Slate.com*. Many of these types of Internet sites have attempted to distinguish themselves from traditional news by offering more satirical and inflammatory political coverage in addition to standard wire service. Also, Internet sites have made news in the last few years by breaking big news stories before their traditional counterparts because of their standards and use of sources are a bit looser (Kalb 1998). Most traditional news sources have created web sites. Local newspapers, national newspapers, television news, and newsmagazines almost all have sites on the Internet which provide online versions of the news they present through traditional means. Qualitatively, these sites differ very little from their basic coverage, and are not considered "new" in this analysis. This has been discussed in the literature, and merits further investigation. Such an investigation, however, is beyond the scope of this particular analysis.

The data surprisingly show that *Salon.com* is not as scandal-focused as other new media sources. Both talk shows cover scandal more than *Salon.com*. The Internet news coverage is still quite negative compared to traditional news, and it tends to lean more toward analysis and a mix of news and analysis. Straight news is more common on the Internet than in talk shows, but much less than traditional news. The focus on individual personalities in the news is higher on *Salon.com* than any other news source.

CNN Today

CNN Today, in many ways, resembles traditional network news in terms of style and format. The program is a daily news program covering not only politics, but also a wide range of issues. In addition, *CNN Today* is an anchor-based news show much like any local or network nightly news broadcast. What makes *CNN Today* a "new" news source is (a) the fact that the program is aired on a 24-hour news channel, and (b) it runs for several hours a day, thus providing the ability to cover more issues more extensively.

In almost all respects, however, the nature of *CNN Today*'s political coverage reflects that of traditional media. Coverage of political strategy, personality traits, and scandal on *CNN Today* is closer to traditional media than the new media in the sample. Also, *CNN Today* has a very neutral tone of coverage and more of a straight news format, which can be seen in traditional news.

Although a new news source, *CNN Today* does not appear to have fallen into the pitfall of turning its focus toward the development and perpetuation of political drama. Ironically, this format may be partially responsible for the recent decline in CNN's ratings in comparison to other cable news networks (see Chapter Three). The more a new

media source emulates traditional news, the smaller its audience. Resultantly, there appears to be a pattern of new media (on cable news at least) trying to find inventive ways of providing basic news in non-traditional format (i.e., newsbreaks). This pattern is most observable on the flashy, colorful style of the FOX News Channel, and the newly revamped CNN Headline News, which provides single sentence summaries of news in text along with several tickers and colorful graphics. CNN has also begun moving in this direction. Talk shows such as *Crossfire* and *The Spin Room* are getting more coverage, and CNN has even begun employing unconventional journalists, such as the controversial Paula Zahn (fired by Fox News in August 2001 over a contract dispute) and former models and actresses. Whether this movement away from conventional journalism will halt the recent declines in CNN's audience is not yet evident.

Table 4.4
Breakdown of New and Traditional Coverage

Variable	New Media				Traditional Media	
	Hardball	Talkback Live	Salon	CNN Today	New York Times	CBS News
Personality Traits	76%	62%	81%	22%	30%	35%
Scandal	46	53	38	35	36	35
Political Conflict	87	76	92	82	84	76
Tone of Coverage*						
Positive	5	9	8	7	9	15
Negative	66	58	65	30	37	37
Neutral	28	33	27	63	54	47
Type of Coverage*						
Straight News	1	2	22	73	84	88
Analysis	96	55	32	6	11	5
Mix	3	44	46	20	5	7
Political Strategy	93	67	89	57	70	63

Note: Categories for "Type of Coverage," and "Tone of Coverage" are mutually exclusive for each story.

Conclusion: Political Drama in the News

This chapter displays quite clearly that there are many distinguishable differences in how new and traditional media cover American politics. When new and traditional media are examined as two separate entities, several aspects of drama appear more prevalent in the new news. As a whole, new news coverage appears to dwell on personalities, scandal, conflict, negativity, strategy, and other elements that create a more dramatic picture of the political world. Also, in comparison to traditional news, new media are much less apt to provide straight and neutral news. Instead, political analysis is a common theme.

The content analysis also uncovered a good deal of variation within the new media sample. Although there are several distinct differences between the new and traditional media samples, the difference *within* the new media should not be ignored. *Talkback Live*, for example, differs from the coverage on *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, even though both programs are cable talk shows. Also, the analysis of *CNN Today* revealed that its coverage resembles the coverage of traditional news more than some of the new media sources.

The variation within the new media points toward the possibility that there is not a single formula for bringing political drama into the news. The Internet source, *Salon.com*, appears to bring out the dramatic by focusing on personalities, conflict, negativity, and political strategy. The talk show *Hardball with Chris Matthews* and *Talkback Live* follow a similar pattern, with an even more intense focus on scandal, subjective political analysis, and political strategy.

CNN Today appears to reflect the traditional media's approach to coverage of American politics. Drama is present in traditional news coverage, but this focus on the dramatic appears to diminish in comparison to *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, *Salon.com*, and *Talkback Live*. Drama was identified years ago as a strong determinant of the quality of a news story. Herbert Gans (1979) argued that "the best story reports dramatic activities or emotions" (171). He also, however, discussed several rules that traditional journalists apply to determine a story's suitability, including substantive considerations. These considerations include (a) the hierarchical rank and significance of the story's main figures, (b) the impact on the nation and the national interest, (c) the impact on large numbers of people, and (d) the significance for the past and future.

In traditional news coverage of politics, drama is something that journalists want to include because it is what intrigues viewers. Drama, however, cannot take such a prominent center-stage role in the traditional media. In traditional news, there is a wider range of concerns that must be addressed to determine the importance of a political news story. Because the traditional media have the norms of adhering to the many rules of what makes a news story significant, they do not have the freedom to chase drama in their coverage. The new news, on the other hand, are not nearly as constrained as the traditional news, and therefore have the freedom to include more drama in their coverage. Most likely, it is the hope of the new media programmers and producers that the increased drama will build a stronger viewer audience.

All of these findings point toward the trend that, with the exception of *CNN Today*, new media in this content analysis focus their energy on coverage of political drama more than traditional media. The new media gravitate toward such coverage

because it is the most effective manner of drawing an audience away from the traditional news sources, which are still more recognizable to the public. What effect does this type of coverage have on this increasing new media audience? This issue will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE EFFECTS OF DRAMATIC POLITICAL NEWS

Introduction

The findings from past studies have pointed to several possible differences in new and traditional coverage of the news. The previous chapter explored the theory that today's "new news" presents the political world to the public with more of a dramatic flare than traditional news. The content analysis presents evidence that such a trend exists. Samples of various political news sources point to the prevalence of several elements of drama and sensationalism in the new media's political news coverage. New media have expanded the world of political news by pursing an entertainment imperative in their news presentation. Dramatizing the news appears to be a strategy employed by the new media to attract and maintain an interested audience.

What, then, is the effect of accentuated drama in new political news coverage? How does the public respond to such coverage of politics? More particularly, does dramatic news presentation influence public opinion toward political leaders, institutions, and the system as a whole? This chapter will attempt to answer this latter question by empirically testing the effects of exposure to dramatically framed news on individuals. Experimental analysis is used to measure systematically the causal relationship between dramatic news and public opinion. The results point to several interesting trends. Exposure to dramatic news is found to influence support for some institutions and

political leaders. Additionally, interest in politics and attitudes toward the media also vary as a result of exposure to dramatic news. Ultimately, the findings point toward the strong possibility that enhancing news coverage with elements of drama is not a benign process—there are consequences.

The Effects of New Media's Dramatic News Coverage on Public Opinion

While little has been done to systematically examine drama in new news coverage of politics and the political process, much can be learned from existing studies that broadly examine new media. As the literature review in Chapter Two illustrates, several studies over the last decade have undertaken this task, and the results point in several contradictory directions. Most researchers agree that the technology in many new media sources has the potential to involve more Americans in the political process and promote democratic responsiveness (Davis and Owen 1998; Graber 1996; Groper 1996; Grossman 1995; Margolis and Resnick 2000; Rosen and Taylor 1992). The degree to which this actually takes place, however, is a source of disagreement. Some argue the American political system prospers from the existence of new media's news coverage, pointing to the medium's ability to provoke more informed participation and a more positive sentiment on the part of the electorate (Groper 1996; Grossman 1995; Rosen and Taylor 1992). The contradictory findings are that new media have a more adverse effect, suppressing turnout and negatively influencing political knowledge among the public (Hollander 1995). Others have found that new media's effect on public opinion, political knowledge, and participation is negligible. Though exposure to new media has sometimes been shown to correlate positively with interest in politics and campaigns,

there is little impact on attitudes and participation (Chaffee et al. 1994; Johnson et al. 1999; McLeod et al. 1996).

Studies of drama in the news reach back several decades. Network evening news coverage has especially been singled-out as a news source that over-dramatizes the political world (Altheide 1974; Bennett 1983; Epstein 1973; Gans 1979). A "dramatic," or "melodramatic" imperative has been found to exist in mainstream news and modern campaign coverage (Hovind 1999; Nimmo and Combs 1990). Objective characteristics of political news and events do not define the coverage. Instead, political news is defined by its dramatic presentation by the media. The dramatic embellishment of the story defines the public's perception of reality more than the event itself (Altheid 1974; Bennett 1983; Delli Carpini and William 2001).

A public that understands politics in a dramatic content is not reacting to the realities of the political world, but a "hyper-reality" (Delli Carpini and Williams 2001), which is created and perpetuated by the dramatic narrative. From this perspective, researchers have speculated on the effects of dramatic news on the public. The result of the dramatic imperative, according to some, is a disillusioned public (Nimmo and Combs 1990; Bennett 1983). The focus on drama in the news compels the public to base its understanding and evaluation of politics not on policy, but on the dramatic story. The political world is understood by the public in terms of characters, conflict, and the evolution of the story. Substance loses out to the portrayal of the people and the political process surrounding the substance—if substance exists at all (Bennett 1983). Empirical findings on the specific effects of drama, however, are not explicit. How then,

do the elements of dramatic news influence public perception of the political world, political actors, and political institutions?

While past research has not empirically examined this question in the context of new or traditional news, a number of studies have analyzed *specific elements* of drama. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) used laboratory and field experiments to find if strategically framed news generates cynicism on the part of viewers. Negativity in the news and in political advertising also fosters a cynical viewing public, lowering efficacy, quelling political interest, and depressing turnout (Iyengar and Kinder 1995). Low public esteem toward Congress has been attributed to negative media coverage of the membership and institution (Rozell 1994, 1996) as well as a tendency to dwell on individual personalities rather than policy and process (Mann and Ornstein 1994).

The various elements of drama, while entertaining and often compelling, may have considerable implications for the mass public. The above literature that has examined specific aspects of dramatic narrative indicated dramatic portrayals of government and politics can continue to a contemptuous public with regard to support for institutions, leaders, and the system as a whole. In this sense, the practice of attracting an audience with dramatic news coverage could be problematic in the context of popular support for political leaders and institutions, and the system as a whole

The utility of dramatic news is the entertainment value. Drama entertains and generates interest on the part of the viewer. Compelling drama can sustain interest over extended periods of time. While personal motives for gathering news vary from one individual to another, the entertainment factor needs to be understood in a more comprehensive manner.

Drama generates interest on the part of today's news audience. Unfortunately, while political drama entertains and increases interest, it also has the potential to generate negative attitudes in the public. *Although Americans are entertained by the dramatic news that is so prevalent in the new media, a byproduct is cynicism toward, and contempt for, political leaders and institutions.* Political car-crashes and government soap operas are generally more entertaining for the public than straight news, but the end result is not positive regarding popular support for institutions, processes, and leaders.

What is it about the dramatic imperative in political news that breeds contempt on the part of the public? The answer can be found in the particulars of drama or the elements that make a story dramatic. *Drama is broadly defined as a story of human conflict or struggle told through a series of related events.* But, the elements present in dramatic narratives can be discussed more specifically. Conflict is an obvious element, as is personalization of the issue or event. These two aspects of drama necessitate a focus on individual personalities as well. Also, scandal and negativity in the news perpetuates drama, as does the inevitable strategic analysis that takes place as a story unfolds in dramatic fashion. The public's response to drama in the news is not the result of dramatization in general, but the combined effect of various ingredients of dramatized politics. In separate analyses, political news focusing on conflict, individual personalities, negativity, and strategies have been shown to influence adversely public esteem toward political leaders, institutions, and the political system. This chapter will test whether or not news stories containing elements of drama does negatively affect public support. Specifically, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis One: Exposure to dramatic news lowers support for political leaders more than news with less drama.

Hypothesis Two: Exposure to dramatic news increases cynicism toward the political system more than news with less drama.

Hypothesis Three: Exposure to dramatic news lowers support for political institutions more than news with less drama.

Hypothesis Four: Dramatic news is considered more entertaining than news with less drama.

These hypotheses reflect the general theory that dramatic news, while entertaining, drives cynicism on the part of the viewer. As the preceding discussion illustrates, dramatically framed news contains elements that have been shown to induce negative responses on the part of the viewer. Testing the above four hypotheses will provide empirical evidence regarding the effects of dramatically framed news on public opinion toward political leaders, institutions, and the political system as a whole.

Experiment Design

The purpose of the experiment is to examine systematically the effects of dramatic news on public opinion compared to news that lacks drama. The analysis uses an experimental design in which subjects are exposed to one of two frames of the same news story: the dramatic frame or the non-dramatic frame. This focus eliminates the necessity of a control group, as the lack of exposure to any news at all falls outside the scope of this study. Taking this approach simplifies the experiment and strengthens the validity of the findings by increasing the number of subjects in each group.

Subjects were taken on a voluntary basis from political science courses at a large Midwestern University. Students were randomly assigned for exposure to either a

dramatic frame or a non-dramatic frame of a news story on efforts by the President and Congress to stimulate the U.S. economy. Following exposure to one of the two news stories, subjects were given a posttest questionnaire measuring political attitudes, interest, efficacy, and several other items. Students were told that they were participating in a study on political attitudes, and were instructed to read the newspaper article attached to the front of the survey and then fill out the questionnaire. A total of 281 subjects participated in the experiment (142 dramatic frame, 139 non-dramatic).

There was no pretest used in this design. Thus, this was a posttest-only experimental design (Campbell and Stanley 1963). In an experimental design where no pretest exists, the effect of the independent variable can still be assessed on the condition that subjects are randomly assigned to experimental groups. Experimental design theory allows the assumption that systematic error will be evenly distributed across groups, and significant differences in the posttest can be attributed to the experimental treatment (Campbell and Stanley 1963). Pretests are valuable in assessing individual change as a direct result of the experimental stimulus. Pretests, however, are dangerous as well. The information contained in a pretest has the potential to bias posttest responses. Therefore, the validity of the independent variable can be threatened as a result of a pretest. For this reason, a pretest was not used in this experimental analysis.

Both stories were fictional, but presented to subjects as actual print news stories. The experiment administrator informed subjects that the story was taken from a national newspaper, and the article was also formatted in a manner that visually resembles print stories. Both stories revolved around the debate over an economic stimulus package, and a large portion of the stories were identical to each other to maintain control over

extraneous factors. The non-dramatic frame presented the story in a straight manner, and did not illuminate the elements of drama (conflict, personalities, scandal, political strategy, and negativity). The dramatic frame was a dramatized version of the same story. Dramatic flare was added to the article by injecting dramatic elements into the story. These additions did not alter the story fundamentally, but did change the presentation from a straight format to a dramatic presentation.

The stimulus for this experiment was based on the findings from the previous content analysis of new and traditional news coverage that found significant differences in dramatic coverage of politics. The content analysis findings show that traditional news contains less drama than new news, but it is by no means drama-free. For this reason, elements such as conflict and political strategy are included in both frames, but discussed to a lesser extent in the non-dramatic frame. Appendix B contains the stimuli used in the experiment. Section One is the non-dramatic frame of the news story, and Section Two is the dramatic frame. The bolded portion in each frame denotes text that is exclusive to that story.

Because this project is a comparison between new and traditional coverage of political news, it could be argued that newer mediums should be used to examine the effects of exposure to dramatized new news. Most news coverage in the new media, of course, is televised, broadcast, or transmitted via the Internet, so it may be more realistic to present the dramatic frame in such a context. This approach, however, was not used because it would have sacrificed experimental control in favor of impact and mundane realism, which jeopardizes validity (Kinder and Palfrey 1993). Using real televised news stories would damage validity because the experimental stimulus could not be

manipulated while keeping all other factors constant. This situation could cause differences in dependent variables that are not a result of the experimental stimulus.

Creating an experimental stimulus and environment that closely mirrors the "real world" is important, but if control over manipulation and administration of the independent variable is lost as a result, causal inference is impossible (Campbell and Stanley 1963). Because the controlled environment of an experiment allows for the use of causal inference, the maintenance of that control is vital, even if mundane realism is jeopardized as a result. Presenting the stimulus in print form allowed for maximum control over extraneous factors and gave the best opportunity to manipulate the independent variable in the experiment. Also, while some degree of mundane realism may have been sacrificed by not presenting the dramatic frame in a new media format, the news was presented to the subjects as an actual story taken from a national newspaper. As a result, subjects were under the impression they were being exposed to legitimate news. Since this project is focused on the presentation of news in a dramatic format, an acceptable degree of realism was maintained, and control over the experimental stimulus was maximized.

Measurement and Operationalization

The posttest questionnaire used several items to measure political attitudes on leaders, institutions, as well as the political system as a whole. Subjects were also asked to provide demographic information, political attitudes, and several measures of political knowledge were included as well. The completed questionnaires were sorted by news frame (dramatic or non-dramatic). The questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

As Hypotheses One through Four in this chapter illustrate, the major purpose of this analysis is to understand how exposure to dramatic political news influences support for political leaders, political cynicism, support for political institutions, and interest in the news. Several items in the posttest questionnaire are included to operationalize these concepts and provide valid measures of support. First, three different survey items are used to measure the concept of support for political leaders. Support for the President, for example, is measured in the questionnaire by asking subjects, "Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the President is handling his job?" Support for leaders in Congress is measured by asking, "Overall, how would you rate the performance of the leaders of Congress?" Support for local political leaders is measured by asking, "Overall, how would you rate the performance of our leaders in the state of Indiana?" Table 5.1 shows that these items load on a single dimension, and thus can be used to measure a single concept—support for political leaders.

Table 5.1
Factor Analysis: Support for Political Leaders

Survey Item	Factor 1[a]
1. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the President is handling his job? (1=strongly disapprove, 2=disapprove, 3=neither approve or disapprove, 4=approve, 5=strongly approve)	.546
2. Overall, how would you rate the performance of the leaders of Congress? (1=poor, 2=only fair, 3=good, 4=excellent)	.778
3. Overall, how would you rate the performance of our political leaders in the state of Indiana? (1=poor, 2=only fair, 3=good, 4=excellent)	.746
Eigenvalue	1.46

[a] Cell entries are principle component factors.

Political cynicism is the second item. Erber and Lau (1990) simply define political cynicism as "distrust" toward government (236). It is important to recognize, however, that cynicism is a more complex concept, and thus should be measured accordingly (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Chen 1992). Cappella and Jamieson (1997) discuss political cynicism as a multidimensional concept. Two major aspects of cynicism, according to Cappella and Jamieson, are distrust toward government officials and a lack of political efficacy. This analysis measures both distrust and political efficacy as representations of cynicism. Efficacy is measured by asking subjects to agree or disagree with a series of non-efficacious political statements. For example, subjects were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think." High agreement in this case would indicate a lack of political efficacy (or high inefficacy). Table 5.2 illustrates the exact wording for these survey items. Additionally, Table 5.2 also shows that each item loads on a single dimension.

Within the efficacy items illustrated in Table 5.2, it is important to distinguish between internal and external efficacy (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991). According to Cappella and Jamieson (1997), efficacy can refer to a person's ability to understand and participate in politics (internal) or a person's perception of the effectiveness of government (external). In Table 5.2, questions one, two, and three measure the lack of external efficacy. The last item in Table 5.2 measures the lack of internal efficacy (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991). For each variable in Table 5.2, higher values reflect a lack of efficacy. Not surprisingly, the internal efficacy item loads the weakest on the efficacy factor.

The second aspect of cynicism—distrust—is measured using two different survey items. These two items are statements in which the respondent is asked to either disagree or agree. The first item stated, "Today, I trust the U.S. Congress to do the right thing," and the second item stated, "Today, I trust the President to do the right thing." Responses to the two survey items were moderately correlated (r=.58), and therefore can be combined into a single measure of trust.

Table 5.2
Factor Analysis: Political Inefficacy Items

Survey Item	Factor 1[a]
1. I don't think public officials care much what people like me think. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.841
2. Generally speaking, those we elect to Congress lose touch with the people pretty quickly. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.768
3. People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.818
4. Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.366
Eigenvalue	2.10

[a] Cell entries are principle component factors.

Third, support for political institutions is measure by several items that ask subjects to rate the performance of national political institutions as well as their ability to work together. For example, subjects were asked to answer the question, "Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the United States Congress is handling its job?" A

second measure of institutional support asked, "Overall, how would you rate the ability of Congress to work with the President in passing laws?" Support for the media as a political institution was measured by asking subjects to agree or disagree with a series of positive statements about the media. For example, subjects were asked to agree or disagree (on a five point scale) with a statement that said, "Today, I trust the media to cover political events fairly and accurately." High agreement reflects high approval for the news media. Table 5.3 gives the exact questions used to measure support for the news media, and shows that the items load on a single dimension.

Table 5.3
Factor Analysis: Trust in the News Media

Survey Item	Factor 1[a]
1. Today, I trust the media to cover political events fairly and accurately. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.923
2. Today, I trust newspapers to cover political events fairly and accurately. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.857
3. Today, I trust network television news (ABC, CBS, NBC) to cover political events fairly and accurately. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.921
4. Today, I trust cable new channels (FOX News, MSNBC, CNN) to cover political events fairly and accurately. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.821
5. Today, I trust tabloids (The National Enquirer, The Star, The Sun) to cover political events fairly and accurately. (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree)	.401
Eigenvalue	3.27

[a] Cell entries are principle component factors.

The final concept, the entertainment value of the experimental stimulus (the article), is measured by asking subjects to agree or disagree with statements about the article. The first statement says, "I was interested in the political news story attached to this questionnaire," and the second statement says, "I would like to read more about the story attached to this questionnaire." High agreement with these statements reflects high levels of interest in the stimulus. Due to the high correlation between these two items (r=.85), they are combined into a single additive measure.

Multivariate analysis is used to measure the effect of dramatic news while controlling for factors that are known to influence public opinion toward leaders, institutions, and the political system as a whole (party identification, political knowledge, and demographic variables). Because items in the survey are measured at the ordinal level, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is not advisable. In these cases, ordered probit is used, which accounts for an ordered dependent variable. In cases where multiple ordinal measures are combined into a single additive index, OLS regression is used.[19]

Findings

The experiment findings point toward the possibility that the effects of dramatized news are not benign. Although some of the above hypotheses were falsified by the results, some interesting trends do emerge. The effect of dramatized news on support for

[19] In the models that use an additive index as the dependent variable, ordered probit and OLS regression analysis was conducted. Because there was no substantive or significant difference between the ordered probit and OLS findings, the OLS findings were presented.

individual political leaders did not prove overwhelmingly significant. Hypothesis One contends that a news frame that dramatizes political interaction would lower public esteem for political leaders. Table 5.4 shows this hypothesized effect does not exist when support for President Bush, congressional leaders, or state leaders are examined individually.

A more convincing picture is conveyed when each of the three leadership support measures are combined into a single additive measure, which provides a more comprehensive look at support for political leaders as a whole—not simply one leader or leaders from a single institution. The principle components analysis shown in Table 5.1 illustrates that the three items load on a single dimension, and thus can be combined into a one-dimensional measure of political leadership support. This broader measure of support is negatively influenced by exposure to the dramatic frame. Table 5.5 shows exposure to dramatic news has a negative effect on the indexed measure of support for political leaders. Not surprisingly, support for political leaders is also significantly influenced by party identification and political knowledge, with the more knowledgeable subjects displaying higher levels of disapproval.

While this finding should not be over-generalized, the comprehensiveness of the indexed measure does provide enough evidence to accept the contention that brief exposure to a dramatic political news story may negatively influence support for some political leaders. Therefore, Hypothesis One cannot be rejected.

Table 5.4
Support for Political Leaders

Variable	President Bush[a]	Congressional Leaders[b]	State Leaders[c]
Dramatic Frame[d]	-.18	-.11	-.20
	(.14)	(.15)	(.14)
Political	-.05	-.03	-.10*
Knowledge[e]	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Party ID[f]	.44*	-.02	.02
	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)
Race[g]	.31*	.28	-.08
	(.23)	(.24)	(.28)
Gender[h]	-.07	-.23*	.11
	(.16)	(.16)	(.15)
Education[i]	-.02	-.02	-.12*
	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
Family Income	.02	.08*	.03
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Cut 1	-.51	-162	-1.41
Cut 2	.55	.11	-.23
Cut 3	1.26	2.50	1.47
Cut 4	3.35	--	--
Log Likelihood	-263.56	-219.61	-276.45
x^2 (7)	92.55*	9.70	11.00
N	253	254	247

*p<.05 (one-tailed test)
Note: Cell entries are ordered probit estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses.
[a] Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the President is handling his job? 1=strongly disapprove...5=strongly approve.
[b] Overall, how would you rate the performance of the leaders of Congress? 1=poor; 2=only fair; 3=good; 4=excellent.
[c] Overall, how would you rate the performance of our political leaders in the state of Indiana? 1=poor; 2=only fair; 3=good; 4=excellent.
[d] 1=subjects exposed to dramatic news frame; 0=non-dramatic news frame.
[e] 0 to 5 scale. 0=lowest knowledge...5=highest knowledge.
[f] 7 point scale. 1=strong Democrat...7=strong Republican.
[g] 1=white; 0=non-white.
[h] 1=male; 0=female.
[i] number of years spent in college.

Table 5.5
Support for Political Leaders

Variable	Leadership Support Index[a]
Dramatic Frame	-.38*
	(.19)
Political Knowledge	-.15*
	(.07)
Party ID	.27*
	(.07)
Race	.41
	(.32)
Gender	.00
	(.21)
Education	-.13
	(.10)
Family Income	.08
	(.05)
Constant	7.48
	(.48)
Adjusted R^2	.12
N	247

*p<.05 (one-tailed test)
Note: Cell entries are OLS estimate with standard errors in parentheses.
[a] Dependent variable is an additive indexed measure of support, combining responses from the three items listed in Table 5.1. The scale ranges from 3 (lowest possible support for political leaders) to 13 (highest possible support for political leaders).

Hypothesis Two states that dramatic news increases political cynicism. This hypothesis is driven by the theory that elements of dramatic narrative paint a picture of the political world that is frustrating to the public, and this frustration creates a cynical view of the system. To measure the effect of dramatic news on political cynicism, the posttest survey contains several items that gauged external political inefficacy, internal inefficacy, and trust in public officials. Table 5.6 shows the effect of the dramatic news frame on the various components of political cynicism. As the coefficients show, the relationships are in the hypothesized direction. Internal and external inefficacy are positively correlated with exposure to dramatic news. Likewise, trust in government

officials drops as a result of exposure to the dramatic frame. Also, political knowledge negatively correlates with inefficacy, and partisan identification understandably correlates strongly with trust in government officials as well. However, the effect of drama on any aspect of cynicism does not reach statistical significance, so Hypothesis Two must be rejected.[20]

[20] Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) argue that less partisan voters become more cynical and inefficacious as a result of negative advertising. This contention was tested with regard to dramatic news by running the analysis for only partisan moderates (independents and weak partisans). The results did not differ from the results on all subjects, indicating neutral partisans were not apt to respond negatively to political drama.

Table 5.6
Political Cynicism

Variable	External Inefficacy[a]	Internal Inefficacy[b]	Trust in Public Officials[c]
Dramatic Frame	.28	.07	-.11
	(.39)	(.15)	(.22)
Political Knowledge	-.32*	-.26*	.01
	(.12)	(.05)	(.08)
Party ID	-.10	.07	.28*
	(.11)	(.05)	(.08)
Race	-.73	-.25	.19
	(.55)	(.24)	(.36)
Gender	.24	-.11	.18
	(.37)	(.16)	(.24)
Education	-.00	-.09	-.03
	(.17)	(.08)	(.11)
Family Income	-.03	-.05	.09
	(.09)	(.04)	(.06)
Constant	11.23*	4.20*	5.15*
	(.83)	(.37)	(.55)
Adjusted R^2	.02	.11	.06
N	254	254	253

*p<.05 (one-tailed test)
Note: Cell entries are OLS estimate with standard errors in parentheses.
[a] The indexed measure was a scale of 3 (lowest possible external inefficacy) to 15 (highest possible external inefficacy). The external Inefficacy index was based on respondent agreement with the following three statements: (1) I don't think public officials care much what people like me think; (2) Generally speaking, those we elect to Congress lose touch with the people pretty quickly; and (3) People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Respondents could either agree or disagree with each of the three statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree).
[b] Internal inefficacy was based on respondent agreement with the following statement: Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. Respondents could either agree or disagree with the statement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree). Low scores indicated low inefficacy, and high scores indicated high levels of inefficacy.
[c] The indexed measure was a scale of 2 (lowest possible trust) to 10 (highest possible trust). The trust index was based on respondent agreement with the following two statements: (1) Today, I trust the U.S. Congress to do the right thing; and (2) Today, I trust the President to do the right thing. Respondents could either agree or disagree with the statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree). Low scores indicated low trust, and high scores indicated high levels of trust.

Table 5.7 shows the effect of drama on support for political institutions. Hypothesis Three states that institutional support suffers as a result of exposure to dramatic news. This hypothesis is driven by the argument that portraying political

institutions in a dramatic light will make the institutions appear inefficient and unresponsive, and thus draw negative responses. Two indicators of institutional support are used in the models reported in Table 5.7. The first indicator, reported in the first column of Table 5.7, measures support for Congress. The second indicator, reported in the second column of Table 5.7, measures respondents' ratings of Congress and the president's ability to work together in passing laws. These two items examine institutional support from two different angles, looking at support for a single institution (Congress) and faith in the two most powerful institutions to work together effectively in performing their constitutional roles (Congress and the President working together to pass legislation). The items had a weakly moderate relationship (r=.35), and thus were not combined into a single index measure.

The results, however, do not substantiate Hypothesis Three. It is clear from the findings reported in Table 5.7 that support for Congress is not influenced by dramatic news coverage. Likewise, faith in the ability of the legislature and executive branches to work together in passing laws does not depend on dramatic news either. In fact, none of the predictors included in the model significantly correlated with either measure of institutional support.

Table 5.7
Institutional Support

Variable	Support for Congress[a]	Faith in Congressional and Presidential Cooperation[b]
Dramatic Frame	.01	.02
	(.14)	(.14)
Political Knowledge	.04	-.04
	(.05)	(.05)
Party ID	.07	.05
	(.05)	(.05)
Race	.21	.04
	(.23)	(.24)
Gender	-.06	-.11
	(.16)	(.18)
Education	-.02	.04
	(.07)	(.07)
Family Income	.04	.05
	(.04)	(.04)
Cut 1	-1.97	-1.23
Cut 2	-.28	.48
Cut 3	.75	2.68
Cut 4	3.41	--
Log Likelihood	-264.90	-231.98
x^2 (7)	6.84	5.00
N	254	254

*p<.05 (one-tailed test)
Note: Cell entries are ordered probit estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses.
[a] 1=strongly disapprove...5=strongly approve.
[b] 1=poor; 2=only fair; 3=good; 4=excellent.

Although support for governmental institutions does not appear to vary as a result of exposure to dramatic political news coverage, opinion toward the news media is a different situation. The news media, often referred to as the "fourth branch of government," has continued to gain recognition as a viable political institution in American politics, and is now widely recognized as such (Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999; Dautrich and Hartley 1999). The first column of Table 5.8 shows trust in the media's ability to fairly and accurately cover politics drops as a result of exposure to dramatic news coverage. Additionally, political knowledge is a significant predictor as well,

indicating that more knowledgeable individuals are more skeptical of the news media. Family income, on the other hand, positively correlates with support for the news media. The dependent variable used in the first column of Table 5.8 is an additive index of five separate survey items measuring trust in the media (see Table 5.3 for exact question wording of each item in the index). The factor loadings in Table 5.3 shows that these five survey items are one-dimensional, and can be combined into a single measure of trust in the media.

Table 5.8
Trust in the News Media

Variable	Trust in the News Media[a]
Dramatic Frame	-1.08*
	(.53)
Political Knowledge	-.27*
	(.18)
Party ID	.10
	(.18)
Race	-.04
	(.86)
Gender	.03
	(.57)
Education	-.36
	(.26)
Family Income	.25*
	(.14)
Constant	13.87*
	(1.30)
Adjusted R^2	.02
N	253

*p<.05 (one-tailed test)
Note: Cell entries are OLS estimate with standard errors in parentheses.
[a] The indexed measure was a scale of 5 (lowest possible trust) to 25 (highest possible trust). The media trust index was based on respondent agreement with each of the following five statements: (1) Today, I trust the media to cover political events fairly and accurately; (2) Today, I trust newspapers to cover political events fairly and accurately; (3) Today, I trust network television news (ABC, CBS, NBC) to cover political events fairly and accurately; (4) Today, I trust cable news channels (Fox News, MSNBC, CNN) to cover political events fairly and accurately; and (5) Today, I trust tabloids to cover political events fairly and accurately. Respondents could either agree or disagree with each of the five statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree).

This finding illustrated in Table 5.8 indicates that trust in the media as an institution suffers from dramatized political news coverage. The indexed measure of trust in the media is negatively influenced by exposure to the dramatic news frame. By dramatizing the news to gain a larger audience, the media jeopardize their own legitimacy. Taking the liberty to inject dramatic elements into a story appears to backfire in this respect. Dramatizing the political world plays into many of the preexisting criticisms held in the public—the media are too negative, too preoccupied with conflict and scandal, and too subjective (Fallows 1996). The amount of variance explained by this model, however, is quite limiting. Table 5.8 illustrates an adjusted R-squared of .02, which is certainly low. However, although the model itself predicts little variation in the dependent variable, the dramatic news exposure variable is still significant. When all independent variables in the model are held at their mean, the presence of drama decreases trust in the media by 5.4 percent.[21]

Why, then, would new media outlets produce overly dramatic news? Would not the possible loss of credibility with the public be a deterrent to dramatizing news? The first column in Table 5.9 provides an answer to this concern. Although dramatically framed news may provoke less-than-positive attitudes toward the news media as a whole, it has great potential to capture public interest and attention. The results in the first column of Table 5.9 illustrate that exposure to the dramatic frame of news increases interest in the story. Additionally, interest in the experimental news story is also positively correlated with political knowledge, which is not surprising given that political

[21] $y^* = 12.70$ when drama = 1; $y^* = 13.78$ when drama = 0.

knowledge has been found to determine an individual's interest in political news. The gender effect is interesting as well, indicating that men generally respond more favorably than women to news stories about inter-branch governmental conflict.

Overall, subjects in the dramatic news group displayed more interest in the story than subjects exposed to the less dramatic story, implying that a dramatic story can generate higher levels of interest and capture public interest, while a less dramatic version of the same story fails to do so. Thus, there is a great payoff for the media outlets that can successfully dramatize the news—more interested viewers who are more compelled to follow the drama as it unfolds over a period of a day, weeks, or even months. This finding supports Hypothesis Four, which states that dramatic news is considered more entertaining than news lacking drama.

It is important to note, however, that the interest dramatic news generates for a story does not translate into broader political interests. The second column of Table 5.9 shows no relationship between the dramatic frame and interest in national and international affairs (general political interest). Political knowledge was the only variable in the model to significantly correlate with general political interest. This finding regarding the effect of dramatic news on *general political interest* is important because it displays that a dramatic news environment only narrowly stimulates public interest. Because the increase in interest appears to apply only to the dramatized story, there is no larger benefit of creating a more politically interested or engaged public.

Table 5.9
Political Interest

Variable	Interest in Experimental News Story[a]	General Political Interest[b]
Dramatic Frame	.52*	.11
	(.27)	(.23)
Political Knowledge	.29*	.58*
	(.09)	(.08)
Party ID	.06	.01
	(.09)	(.08)
Race	.39	-.31
	(.44)	(.38)
Gender	.52*	.06
	(.29)	(.25)
Education	-.13	.10
	(.14)	(.12)
Family Income	.07	.10
	(.07)	(.06)
Constant	4.20*	4.98*
	(.66)	(.57)
Adjusted R^2	.08	.20
N	254	254

*p<.05 (one-tailed test)
Note: Cell entries are OLS estimate with standard errors in parentheses.
[a] The indexed measure was a scale of 2 (lowest interest) to 10 (highest possible interest). The index was based on respondent agreement with the both of the two following statements: (1) I was interested in the political news story attached to this questionnaire; and (2) I would like to read more about the story attached to this questionnaire. Respondents could either agree or disagree with each statement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree). The two items are strongly correlated (r=.85), and thus can be combined into a single additive measure.
[b] The indexed measure was a scale of 2 (lowest interest) to 10 (highest possible interest). The index was based on respondent agreement with the both of the two following statements: (1) I have a great deal of interest in national affairs; and (2) I have a great deal of interest in international affairs. The two items are strongly correlated (r=.78), and thus can be combined into a single additive measure.

Discussion

Drama intrigues viewers, and dramatic news benefits journalists wishing to capture the public's attention. Drama, however, cannot take such a center-stage role in the traditional media. Traditional sources of news have a wider range of concerns that must be addressed to determine the importance of a news story. Because the traditional

media have the norms of adhering to the many rules of what makes a news story significant, they do not have the unfettered freedom to inject drama creatively into their coverage. The new news media, on the other hand, appear not to have the same ethical or institutional constraints as the traditional news, and therefore have the freedom to include more drama in their coverage. The evidence strongly suggests that increased drama can build a stronger news audience.

The experimental analysis reported in this chapter illustrates that dramatically framed political news has an impact on the public, although the effects are not as pronounced as hypothesized. The findings indicate that support for political leaders can erode as a result of exposure dramatized news. Also, attitudes toward the media can change as well. Subjects exposed to the dramatic frame of news illustrated much more hostility toward the news media than subjects exposed to straight news. Finally, an equally compelling finding was that subjects expressed more interest in dramatic news, and expressed a greater willingness to follow the story in the future. This interest, however, was limited to the news story contained in the experimental stimulus and did not translate into broader issues of domestic or international politics.

The null effect of dramatic news on public support for governmental political institutions and cynicism toward the system as a whole are surprising, especially considering the indications from earlier literature. Instead, the public's negative response to dramatically framed news is directed only toward political leaders and the news media. One possibility for this finding is that the measures of cynicism do not accurately gauge the concept. This possibility, however, seems unlikely given that many of the measures have been used in previous studies and shown to be valid.

In part, these null findings are likely the result of the public's growing tendency to view the media and political leaders as increasingly separate from the larger institutions or the political system as a whole. Our political system has become increasingly candidate-centered and personalized (Patterson 1994), and the media continues to grow in visibility as a viable political entity itself. As a result, support for government institutions and feelings toward the political system as a whole does not suffer as a result of exposure to a dramatized story regarding the actions of political leaders.

Although the negative effects of dramatized news are not as broad sweeping as hypothesized, this chapter provides significant empirical and theoretical contribution to understanding media effects in America. If dramatizing the news does indeed damage the credibility of our political leaders, there could be further erosion of public confidence if the new media's dramatic coverage continues to expand. Also troubling is the negative influence the new media's over-dramatization can have on trust in the media. As new media sources continue to "spice" their political news coverage in the continuous quest to capture and keep an audience, support for the entire institution may continue to plummet as a consequence. Because Americans rely heavily on the media to follow political news and events, a further erosion of trust in the institution could discourage political learning and participation.

Theoretically, these findings address the issue of entertainment in the news. As Chapter Two discusses, a number of studies have discussed the role of "entertainment" in new and traditional media (see Davis and Owen 1998; Fox and Van Sickel 2000). However, these previous discussions of entertainment in the new media were far too general, referring to "entertainment" and "humor" as broad concepts that have more

prevalence in the new media. As a consequence, there has been an unclear understanding of how attempts to create more entertaining political news influences the American public. This analysis has developed a more comprehensive theory that the over-dramatization of politics is the element of entertainment that differentiates the "new news" from "traditional news."

Dramatic news does have a discernable effect on the public. By focusing on individual elements of drama, such as conflict, negativity, and political strategy, earlier analyses have found negative effects regarding public support for political leaders and the system as a whole (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Fallows 1996; Patterson 1994). The contribution of this analysis has been to show that these elements of drama, which are more prevalent in the new media's political news coverage, work together to negatively influence support for political leaders and trust in the news media as an institution.

The media's presentation of political news has changed significantly in the last decade. As these transformations in format and style of news presentation continue, future study will be necessary to examine how the political news environment influences the American public. If the new media's approach to covering politics becomes less new and more mainstream, a great deal more analysis will be needed.

The following chapter will summarize the finding from this project and outline the significance of the new media's role as a legitimate modern news source. Additionally, Chapter Six will also discuss possible future avenues of research that could provide answers to emerging questions regarding political news, representation, and public discourse in America.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Project Summary

The research questions this project intended to address were, (a) how does today's new news coverage of American politics differ from today's traditional news, and (b) does the new news' approach to covering politics influence the public opinion? To answer these questions, several approaches were taken. Chapters One and Two created a theoretical and operational understanding of today's "new news," and differentiated new media that attempt to provide legitimate political news from broader entertainment-based programming. Additionally, Chapters One and Two illustrated the highlights of today's "new media," and proposed the argument that the "dramatic imperative" is what differentiates new and traditional media coverage of politics in America. In order to create a compelling story that will captivate viewers and encourage continuing interest, the new media over-dramatize the political process to a greater extent than traditional news.

Chapter Three reported survey data from the Pew Charitable Trust's Center for People and the Press to illustrated trends in new and traditional media usage. The data show that, although the media do not break down into two unique and exclusive dimensional concepts, the public does make distinctions between new and traditional media sources. The demographic data illustrated that younger Americans are more apt to

rely on new media sources for political news, and the temporal data indicated that new media sources have grown significantly in popularity in the last decade while traditional news usage has decreased notably.

Chapter Four reported findings from a content analysis that tested for the degree of drama present in new and traditional news coverage of politics. The content analysis examined stories and transcripts from MSNBC's *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, CNN's *CNN Today* and *Talkback Live*, *Salon.com* on the Internet, *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*, and *The New York Times*. The content analysis discovered that many elements of drama (conflict, negativity, scandal, personalization, subjective political analysis, and political strategy) were indeed more prevalent in new news coverage than traditional news.

Chapter Five reported the results from an experimental analysis in which subjects were exposed to either dramatic or non-dramatic frames of political news and given a posttest questionnaire to measure the effect of drama on support for political leaders, institutions, and the political system as a whole. The experiment results found that, although dramatic news has little discernable effect on public support for government institutions and the political system as a whole, drama did significantly lower trust in the news media and support for political leaders. Also, dramatic news was found to be more entertaining that non-dramatic news. The findings point toward the strong possibility that dramatically-framed news, while often entertaining and compelling, has the potential to undermine approval for political leaders and damage the credibility of the news media as a political institution.

Discussion

The intent of this project was to contribute to the general understanding of the changing American political news climate. The nature of political news presentation in the United States has changed more drastically in the last decade than ever before. Talk shows, cable news, and Internet news are now widely available and frequently used sources of political information. For example, as of January 2002, almost one in six Americans reported using the Internet as a "primary" source of news. Additionally, over half the public acknowledged cable news as a primary source of political information as well (Althaus 2002). A decade ago, these sources were hardly utilized and sparsely available to the public. The availability of political news, as well as the number of potential news sources, continues to increase. This availability has resulted in the most fragmented American news audience in history. And, as Chapter Three demonstrated, the fragmented news environment appears to benefit the new media sources. Overall, new media use is on the rise while usage of traditional sources has plummeted.

The new media take a different approach to covering politics in America than the traditional sources. The exact nature of this difference, however, has yet to be clearly defined in the literature. Also, there is little agreement on what effect the new media have on the American public. Chapter Two illustrates the wide range of perspectives scholars and journalists have proposed on the uniqueness of the new media. Based on a review of recent literature, there is a serious lack of consensus on how new media differ from their traditional counterparts. Agreements do exist on the *potential* of the new media to provide a more democratic political environment in America (Davis and Owen 1998; Margolis and Resnick 2000). Perspectives on how this potential has materialized,

however, differ significantly. Has the new media effectively "opened-up" our political process, creating a more democratic America? Has citizen participation and political knowledge solidified as a result of the information age and the fragmented modern news environment? Or, has the effect of the new media environment been innocuous? Is the modern new news the same failed political communication revolution that resulted from the emergence to radio and broadcast television? Is it instead possible that the new media's coverage of politics has had a negative influence on the political system? Does public support for political leaders, institutions, or the system as a whole suffer as a result of the way the new media present the American political scene? No concrete answer has yet to materialize in political science or mass communication literature.

The lack of consensus over (1) how new media differ from traditional, and (2) the effect the new media have on the American public can be attributed in part to issues of operationalization and measurement. Chapter Two illustrates that existing literature has failed to define and properly measure "new media" as a concept. The fundamental question of "what are new media?" has been answered in a number of different ways. Often, the answers have been extremely broad. Rosen and Taylor (1992), for example, characterize the new news as "the everywhere culture" (40). Attempts to make overarching statements regarding general trends in the new media have created disagreement among media scholars.

As a media genre, the new media are vast and diverse. For this reason, to study all new media as a single entity would be problematic. In fact, there is more diversity within the new media genre than in the traditional media. For example, research looking to find similarities between tabloid news, C-SPAN, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, The*

Drudge Report, and Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* has proven difficult. Findings based on this research have been compelling, but are often overreaching and vague. For this reason, it has become obvious that specific *aspects* of the "new media" must be examined separately in order to understand the new media's role in America's present and future.

This project specifically examined "new political news." News as a concept, of course, is subjective. However, the term is necessary to define a pivotal difference among many new media sources: Entertainment-based programming versus legitimate news. This project was an examination of programs that market themselves as *legitimate providers of political news*, such as cable news channels, political talk shows, and Internet news. This approach eliminated comedy programs and political satire (entertainment-based new media) from the scope of research. Certainly, entertainment-based programs such as *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, *Late Night with David Letterman,* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno,* or *Jerry Springer* have importance in today's political environment. Programs that are geared primarily to entertain, but often touch on timely political issues, are becoming increasingly common. As a result, Americans are more exposed to entertainment and comedy of a political nature more than ever before. The content of these programs, as well as any subsequent effect on the American public, deserve careful analysis from political scientists and communication scholars. For example, recent research has uncovered subtle relationships between exposure to late night political comedy (Leno and Letterman) and presidential candidate evaluations (Goldthwait 2002).

As Chapters One and Two discuss, the fundamental differences between entertainment-based new media and legitimate "new news" are enough to merit separate analyses. Jay Leno, John Stewart, and especially Jerry Springer have publicly stated that their main purpose is to entertain, not provide serious news. Journalists such as Bill O'Reilly, Paula Zahn, Rush Limbaugh, and Matt Drudge, however, would be unlikely to make such a claim about the legitimacy of their own programs, which are marketed as serious sources of political news and debate.

Distinguishing legitimate new news from entertainment-based new media does not insinuate that the new news lacks an entertainment imperative. On the contrary, this project argues that entertainment plays a significant role in dictating the style of new media's political news coverage. Specifically, this analysis has shown that dramatic news is more prevalent in the new news. A dramatized presentation of political news has become the norm in the new news. The new media's desire to capture the audience away from traditional news propels this dramatic imperative. The elements of drama—scandal, conflict, negativity, personality focus, and negativity—are certainly present in traditional news as well as new news, but this analysis found new media's political news to be significantly more dramatic. The professional norms and practices of political journalism have changed across the board, creating an environment of more active and subjective news reporting in America (Kalb 1999, 2001). But, the new media has taken this approach to political reporting to a new level. The Internet, cable news, and talk show journalists have taken advantage of a news medium that lacks a strong sense of history, ethics, or protocol. Certainly, the ethics and protocol in some traditional political news mediums have eroded as well (Kalb 2001), but the new media play by more relaxed rules

regarding sourcing, subjectivity, and accountability. This relaxed code of conduct among new media's editors, producers, and journalists has opened the door for a more entertaining picture of politics in the new media.

Many scholars have pointed to the broad concept of entertainment to distinguish between new and traditional news. This particular project, however, examined how entertainment is injected into new news programs. The argument has been that the entertainment imperative in the new media's political news coverage takes the form of dramatic narrative. To make political news more entertaining, the new media present information in a dramatic fashion that exceeds that of traditional political news. This practice is intended to use the compelling nature of dramatic narrative to generate public interest in a political story or event. This presentation style is not only intended to generate interest in a story, issue or event, it is intended to create familiarity with the involved characters. Ultimately, the ideal outcome is to create public addiction to a story and the unfolding drama that surrounds it.

What, then, is the effect of the new media's tendency to focus on the dramatic when covering politics and policy in America? The literature review in Chapter Two displays the wide range of arguments regarding the new media's effect on public opinion. Depending on the definition used to distinguish "new" from "traditional" media, theories on how new media influences the public have varied. This analysis, which focused exclusively on the dramatic imperative in new political news, provides a more poignant answer to questions on the effect of new media. This project hypothesized that the new media's dramatic presentation of news would have a detrimental effect on public support for government leaders, institutions, and the system as a whole. While the new media's

dramatic news style certainly can be compelling at times, the elements that make news dramatic are the same elements that have been shown to influence adversely public trust and esteem for public leaders, institutions, and processes.

The experiment results reported in Chapter Five illustrate that dramatically framed news, which is more prevalent in the new media, does influence the public. Experiment subjects were exposed to either a dramatic or non-dramatic frame of the same story on negotiations on a proposed economic stimulus plan. The results from the posttest questionnaire illustrate that, when compared to non-dramatic news, exposure to dramatically framed news negatively impacts support for political leaders. Dramatic news also negatively influences trust and support for the news media's ability to fairly and accurately cover politics. Finally, the results illustrate the tendency of the public to be more intrigued by a story presented in a dramatic style. Subjects exposed to the dramatic frame reported a higher level of interest as well as a desire to learn more about the story. This interest, however, applied only to the story in the experimental stimuli, and did not extend other issues.

Implications

The findings from this analysis illustrate trends that are significant regarding the public's perception of politics, policy, and the political process. The new media are becoming more prevalent providers of political news each year. As of mid-January 2002, for example, cable TV news was found to be the most frequently used primary news source among Americans (Althaus 2002). Also, Internet news and talk radio use increased greatly in the 1990s. The increased use of new media creates a situation in

which dramatic presentation of political news is more visible to the public. Furthermore, recent research has found that the growing popularity of new media has influenced the coverage style of traditional sources (Davis and Owen 1998). Traditional news sources, especially network and local television, have begun to change their presentation style in order to compete with the new media's growing popularity with the public. If traditional media continue to follow new media's lead with regard to news presentation style, we can expect to see an overall increase in the levels of drama present in the news as a whole.

From the perspective of a news provider, dramatizing political news makes sense. As the experiment results in Chapter Five illustrate, dramatic news is more effective than straight news in generating interest in a story. In other words, individuals are compelled by dramatic news. This intrigue, however, is problematic given the detrimental effects of dramatic political news on support for political leaders and trust in the media. The nature of new media coverage of politics, in this respect, can be linked to present and future decays in public cynicism toward the major figures involved in the political process.

The strong effect dramatic news has on trust in the news media is particularly problematic for the present and future. Dramatic news certainly compels interest, but an unfortunate side effect is higher levels of distain for the media, which is largely the result of the overt focus on conflict, negativity, scandal, and political strategy. As media effects become better understood by scholars and the news media becomes more recognizable as a political institution, the significance of how the public views the media becomes increasingly evident (Cook 1998; Daurtrich and Hartley 1999). The media are the institution through which the American public sees the entire political landscape. If

cynicism toward that institution persists, it has the potential to influence how the public views all actors and interactions in the political world (Sparrow 1999). Distrust of the media's reporting of political issues and events could potentially poison public opinion. The degree to which public opinion has already been poisoned by new and traditional media coverage has been the topic for much debate among scholars and journalists, but the findings from this analysis point toward the strong possibility that further dramatization of politics has the potential to make the public increasingly cynical.

The New versus Traditional Media Distinction

This analysis has discussed many theoretical differences between new and traditional news in great detail. Differences in substance and style of political news presentation have been primarily used to define how the media sources vary. In some cases, technology has been used as a differentiating characteristic as well, although technology only applies realistically when discussing the Internet. This project used the standard "new" versus "traditional" distinction so to best address the previous literature on the subject. As is always the case, however, the concept of what is "new" and what is "traditional" is constantly in flux. Today's new media is tomorrow's traditional news.

With this fact in mind, it is important to discuss the nature of today's definitions of "new" and "traditional" news, and address how the distinction may apply in the future. The definition of new media in this analysis did not focus on new technology. Instead, new media has been defined in this project as news sources that have recently become readily available to the public and are frequently used as legitimate news sources. What sets the new media apart is the freedom new media reporters and journalist enjoy to

present political news in non-traditional formats. According to the findings from this analysis, this latitude in the new media has been used to present political news in a more dramatic format, which creates a more entertaining and compelling story for the news consumer.

The actual elements of drama are not new to political journalism, and this project has recognized that the new media are not the first communication medium to over-dramatize the political process. The elements of drama discussed in this project have been present in the news for years (Bennett 1983; Epstein 1973; Gans 1979), and accusations of over-dramatized news and election campaign coverage date back several decades (Hovind 1999). Instead, the contention put forth in this study has been that today's new media have been able to effectively free themselves from the constraints of institutional norms and ethics to pursue the dramatic imperative to unprecedented levels. The new media have not created a new style of journalism; they have instead modified the preexisting practice of dramatizing political news and created a dramatic imperative in the new news—or what could also be termed hyper dramatic news environment.

The analyses conducted in the project have directly and indirectly addressed the validity of the new media as a single entity or concept. The findings from Chapters Three and Four illustrate that the new media as a theoretical construct is valid, although not as clearly defined as earlier analyses have suggested. Table 3.1 in Chapter Three demonstrates that the public does distinguish a "traditional media" dimension and multiple dimensions of "new media." The distinction between new and traditional media is still valid, although the new media as a whole is multidimensional. This project has contributed to a clearer understanding of "new news" by providing a more concrete

definition of legitimate sources new news differs from the wider genre of "new media." Legitimate new news sources are more recognizable by the public and clearly distinguished from traditional sources of news.

Changes in new media, and subsequent changes in traditional media to remain economically competitive, certainly have contributed to blurring the lines between what is considered "new" and what is considered "traditional media." The concept of "new media" is certainly in flux and will take on a completely different meaning in the upcoming decades. Nevertheless, it is still important to strive to make distinctions between current-day "new" and "traditional" news. This approach is important because it helps provide a greater understanding of the evolution of political news in America. A greater understanding of the historical transformations of political news can provide a useful tool in gaining a greater theoretical grasp of the extent of media effects in America.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Studies

While this study has illustrated the presence of drama in today's new media coverage of politics and process, there are several issues concerning the coexistence of new media, traditional media, drama, and entertainment that need further examination. The first important avenue of research, which fell outside the scope of this analysis, is political humor. Late night entertainment talk shows have been included in broader analyses of the new media genre, but rarely analyzed separately. David Letterman, Jay Leno, and John Stewart are all examples of entertainment talk show hosts that have increasingly included political humor as part of their programs. Also, programs such as

Saturday Night Live have used political humor for years. While these programs do not constitute legitimate political news per se, there is much to be learned regarding how political humor can influence public opinion. Recent research conducted by Dannagal Goldthwaite (2002) offers insight into the relationship between political jokes about Presidential candidates and public evaluation of those candidates. It would definitely be beneficial to extend the scope of such a study to understand not only how humor influences evaluation of political candidates, but also the political system and stereotypes of politicians as a whole.

A second area in need of additional research is cable news. Recent data now show that cable news has recently surpassed newspapers and network broadcast news as the most frequently used source of political information (Althaus 2002). Is the content and style of cable news up to the task of being the nation's top news provider? Results from Chapters Four and Five in this study suggest that cable news' over-dramatization of the political process could have problematic repercussions regarding public support for political leaders and the media. Also, recent trends in the daytime and primetime cable news programming suggest the medium is becoming increasingly focused on policy issues as a result of the growing focus on entertainment. A systematic analysis of the transformation of the content over time could prove interesting to uncover the degree of policy information today's cable news provides.

Another issue in need of further examination is the role of the Internet in today's American political world. The recent Internet boom has prompted a large number of studies on the issue, but a great deal of study is still needed. For instance, the democratic value of the Internet has yet to be determined. Has the existence of the Internet

dramatically influenced political participation, political knowledge, or democratic responsiveness? Several studies have addressed this issue and concluded that the effect of the Internet is minimal (see Margolis and Resnick, 2000). If the Internet is indeed a failure in bringing the masses and political elites closer, further study is necessary to understand the nature of that failure.

Finally, although the scope of this project was limited to understanding the new media and the effect new media have on the public, it is evident that the evolving landscape of political communication in America has a number of indirect effects. The new media's approach to politics and news as a whole also influences the political system directly. As a result of new media, traditional sources of news are in a serious state of transition. This analysis illustrates compelling differences between today's new and traditional news, but it is safe to say that these differences will not remain constant. The success of the new media has forced the traditional media to alter their approach to politics and news in general. Furthermore, political elites today operate much differently as a result of new media. Cable news, talk shows, and the Internet have all greatly influenced the campaign style and governing behavior of candidates, public officials, and political parties.

The new media's impact on the public and the political process is still largely uncertain, but this analysis has certainly shed light on the new media in America. Most importantly, this analysis illustrates that the new media are more prevalent than ever in American politics, and there are discernable differences in how new and traditional media cover the political process. The effect of the new media on America is not benign, and much more remains to be discovered as the new media become more mainstream.

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

Althaus, Scott L. 2002. "American News Consumption during Times of National Crisis." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 25:517-521.

Altheide, David L. 1974. *Creating Reality: How TV News Distorts Events.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Ansolabehere, Steven, and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink & Polarize the Electorate.* New York: Free Press.

Barber, Benjamin R. 1998. *A Passion for Democracy: American Essays.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Barber, James D. 1978. "Characters in the Campaign: The Literary Problem." in *Race for the Presidency*, ed. James D. Barber. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Barnett, Steven. 1997. "New Media, Old Problems: New Technology and the Political Process." *European Journal of Communication* 12(2):193-218.

Barringer, Felicity. 2001. "Growing Audience is turning to Established Media Online." *The New York Times*, 27 August 2001, A17.

Bennett, Lance W. 1983. *News: The Politics of Illusion.* New York: Longman.

Bernstein, Carl. 1992. "The Idiot Culture." *The New Republic*, 8 June 1999, 24-25.

Brants, Kees, and Peter Neijens. 1998. "The Infotainment of Politics." *Political Communication* 15(2):149-164.

Campbell, Donald T., and Julian C. Stanley. 1963. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Cappella, Joseph N., and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 1997. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Chaffee, Steven H., Xinshu Zhao, and Glenn Leshner. 1994. "Political Knowledge and the Campaign Media of 1992." *Communication Research* 21(June):305-324.

Chapman, Steve. 1999. "Could 2000 be the Real Year of the Woman?" *Chicago Tribune*, 7 January 1999, Section A19.

Chen, Kevin. 1992. *Political Alienation and Voter Turnout in the United States, 1960-1988*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press.

Clawson, Rosalee A., and Jonathan S. Morris. 2000. "People and Process: Media Coverage of Congress in the 1990s." Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.

Cook, Timothy E. 1998. *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Dautrich, Kenneth, and Thomas H. Hartley. 1999. *How the News Media Fail American Voters: Causes, Consequences, and Remedies*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Davis, Richard. 1997. "Understanding Broadcast Political Talk." *Political Communication* 14 (July):323-332.

Davis, Richard. 1999. *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Davis, Richard and Diana Owen. 1998. *The New Media and American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Bruce A. Williams. 2001. "Let us Infotain You: Politics in the New Media Environment." In Bennet and Entman, ed. *Mediated Politics: Communication and the Future of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Durr, Robert H., John B. Gilmour, and Christina Wolbrecht. 1997. "Explaining Congressional Approval." *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (January):175-207.

Epstein, Edward J. 1973. *News from Nowhere*. New York: Random House.

Erber, Ralph, and Richard R. Lau. 1990. "Political Cynicism Revisited: An Information-Processing Reconciliation of Policy-Based and Incumbency-Based Interpretations of Changes in Trust and Government." *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (February):236-253.

Fallows, James. 1996. *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Fox, Richard L., and Robert W. Van Sickel. 2001. *Tabloid Justice: Criminal Justice in an Age of Media Frenzy*. Boulder, CO: Rienner Press.

Frantzich, Stephen, and John Sullivan. 1996. *The C-SPAN Revolution*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Vintage Books.

Georges, Christopher. 1993. "Mock the Vote: MTV's New Political Coverage." *Washington Monthly,* 15 May, 59-64.

Goldthwaite, Dannagal. 2002. "Pinocchio v. Dumbo: Priming Candidate Caricature Attributes in Late-night Comedy Programs in Election 2000 and the Moderating Effects of Political Knowledge." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA.

Graber, Doris A. 1996. "The 'New' Media and Politics: What does the Future Hold?" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 2 (March):33-36.

Graber, Doris A. 1996b. *Mass Media and American Politics*, Fifth Edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Graber, Doris A. 1997. "Media as Opinion Resources: Are the 1990s a New Ballgame?" In *Understanding Public Opinion,* ed. Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Groper, Richard. 1996. "Electronic Mail and the Reinvigoration of American Democracy." *Social Science Computer Review* 14(2):157-168.

Grossman, Lawrence K. 1995. *The Electronic Republic*. New York: Penguin Books.

Hess, Verena K. 2001. "The Role of Political Comedy in the 2000 Election Campaign: Examining Content and Third-Person Effects." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA.

Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1998. "The Media's Role in Public Negativity Toward Congress: Distinguishing Emotional Reactions and Cognitive Evaluations." *American Journal of Political Science* 42:475-498.

Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hill, Kevin A., and John E. Hughes. 1998. *Cybercitizen: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hollander, Barry A. 1995. "The New News and the 1992 Presidential Campaign: Perceived versus Actual Political Knowledge." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72(3):786-798.

Hollander, Barry A. 1996. "Talk Radio: Predictors of Use and Effects on Attitudes About Government." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73(1):102-113.

Hovind, Mark B. 1999. "The Melodramatic Imperative: Television's Model for Presidential Election Coverage." In *The Electronic Election: Perspectives on the 1996 Campaign Communication*, ed. Kaid, Lynda Lee, and Dianne G. Bystrom. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Iyengar, Shanto, and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jackson, David J. 2001. "Outside the Small Circle of Friends: The Political Influence of Entertainment Television." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Franscisco.

Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 1992. *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Thomas J, Mahmoud A.M. Braima, and Jayanthi Sothirajah. 1999. "Doing the Traditional Media Sidestep: Comparing the Effects of the Internet and Other Nontraditional Media with Traditional Media in the 1996 Presidential Campaign." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 76(1):99-123.

Jones, David A. 1999. "Political Talk Radio: The Limbaugh Effect on Primary Voters." *Political Communication* 15 (July):367-381.

Just, Marion, Ann Crigler, Dean Alger, Timothy Cook, Montague Kern, and Darrell West. 1996. *Crosstalk : Citizens, Candidates, and the Media in a Presidential Campaign.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kalb, Marvin L. 1998. "The Rise of the 'New News': A Case Study of Two Root Causes of the Modern Scandal Coverage." Presented to the Joan Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Harvard University, JFK School of Government.

Kalb, Marvin L. 2001. *One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and Thirteen days that Tarnished American Journalism.* New York: Free Press.

Kamiya, Gary. 1998. "Kenneth Starr, Porn Legend." August 25. www.salon.com/news/1998/08/25newsb.html (June 7, 2001).

Kempner, Matt. 2001. "Stories Boost TV Audience." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* 2 August 2001, Section A12.

Kerbel, Matthew R. 1994. *Edited for Television: CNN, ABC, and the 1992 Presidential Campaign.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Kinder, Donald R., and Thomas R. Palfrey. 1993. *Experimental Foundations in Political Science.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Knudson, Jerry W. 2000. *In the News: American Journalists View Their Craft.* Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources.

Kohut, Andrew. 2001. "America is Getting Sick and Tired of Scandal News." *The San Diego Union-Tribute*, 25 July 2001, Section B7.

Kush, Christopher. 2000. *Cybercitizen: How to use your Computer to Fight for ALL the Cases you Care About.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Lazarsfeld, Paul F., Benard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet. 1948. *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up his Mind in a Presidential Campaign.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Lichter, Robert S., and Richard Noyes. 1996. *Good Intentions Make Bad News: Why Americans Hate Campaign Journalism.* Lanham, MD: Littlefield Publishers.

Lichter, Robert S., and Daniel Amundson. 1994. "Less News is Worse News: Television Coverage of Congress, 1972-92." In *Congress, the Press, and the Public*, ed. Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution.

Limbaugh, Rush H. 1993. *See, I Told You so.* New York: Pocket Press.

Maltese, John A. 1994. *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*, Second Edition, Revised. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Mann, Thomas, and Norman Ornstein. 1994. *Congress, the Press, and the Public.* Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution.

Margolis, Michael, and David Resnick. 2000. *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace 'Revolution.'* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

McAdams, Deborah D. 2000. "News Blues Ensues." *Broadcasting and Cable*. 21 February, 38-44 .

McLeod, Jack M., Zhongshi Guo, Katie Daily, Catherine A. Steele, Huiping Huang, Edward Horowitz, and Huailin Chen. 1996. "The Impact of Traditional and Nontraditional Media Forms in the 1992 Presidential Election." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73(2):401-416.

Miller, Warren, and Merrill Shanks. 1996. *The New American Voter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Morris, Dick. 1999. *Vote.com: How Big Money and the Media are Losing their Influence, and the Internet is Giving Power Back to the People.* Los Angeles: Renaissance Books.

Munson, Wayne. 1993. *All Talk: The Talk show in Media Culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Niemi, Richard G., Stephen C. Craig, and Franco Mattei. 1991. "Measuring Internal Political Efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study." *The American Political Science Review* 85 (December):1407-1413.

Nimmo, Dan C., and James E. Combs. 1990. *Mediated Political Realities*. New York: Longman.

Nolan, Martin F. 2001. "An Unsavory Recipe Feeds Condit Story." *The Boston Globe*, 19 July, Section A17.

Norris, Pippa. 2000. *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

O'Reilly, Bill. 2000. *The O'Reilly Factor: The Good, the Bad, and the Completely Ridiculous in American Life*. New York: Broadway Books.

O'Reilly, Bill. 2001. *The No Spin Zone: Confrontations with the Powerful and Famous in America*. New York: Broadway Books.

Owen, Diana. 1996. "Who's Talking, Who's Listening? The New Politics of Radio Talk Shows." In *Broken Contract: Changing Relationships Between Americans and their Government*, ed. Steven C. Craig. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Paletz, David L., and Robert M. Entman. 1981. *Media Power in Politics*. New York: Free Press.

Patterson, Thomas E. 1980. *The Mass Media Election.* New York: Praeger.

Patterson, Thomas E. 1994. *Out of Order*. New York: Random House.

Patterson, Thomas E. 2000. "Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy—And What News Outlets Can do About it." Presented to the Joan Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Harvard University, JFK School of Government.

Patterson, Thomas E., and Robert D. McClure. 1976. *The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Elections.* New York: Putnam.

Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 2000. "Investors go Online for Quotes, Advice: Internet Sapping Broadcast News Audience." June 11. www.people-press.org (September 4, 2001).

Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 2001. "Missing Intern Stirs Media Frenzy, Lukewarm Public Interest." July 18. www.people-press.org (August 10, 2001).

Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 1997. "Stock Market Down, New Media Up." November 9. www.people-press.org (August 25, 2000).

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Rosen, Jay, and Paul Taylor. 1992. *The New News v. The Old News: The Press and Politics in the 1990s.* New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press.

Rozell, Mark. 1994. "Press Coverage of Congress, 1946-1992." In *Congress, the Press, and the Public*, ed. Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution.

Rozell, Mark. 1996. *In Contempt of Congress: Postwar Press Coverage on Capitol Hill.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rutenburg, Jim. 2001. "Cable's Instinct for the Racy and Repetitive." *The New York Times*, July 30, Section C1.

Sabato, Larry J. 1993. *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism has Transformed American Politics.* New York: Free Press.

Sabato, Larry J., Mark Stencel, and Robert S. Lichter. 2000. *Peepshow: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Sparks, Collin, and John Tulloch. 2000. *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates over Media Standards*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Press.

Sparrow, Bartholomew H. 1999. *Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution. Baltimore*: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stevenson, Richard W. 2001. "The President's Budget: The Proposal; President Unveils 1.96 Trillion Plan that Trims Taxes." *The New York Times*, March 1, Section A1.

Talbot, Stephen. 1998. "Newt's Glass House: Why Newt Gingrich is Reluctant to cast the first Stone at Adulterer President Clinton." www.salon.com, August 28, 1998.

Tapper, Jake. 1999. "Street-fighting man: In a Joint Appearance with Sen. Bill Bradley in Iowa, Al Gore comes out Swinging." www.salon.com, October 10, 1999.

Tewksbury, David, and Scott L. Althaus. 2000. "Differences in Knowledge Acquisition Among Readers of the Paper and Online Versions of a National Newspaper." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 77(3):457-479.

Walsh, Joan. 2001. "Dubya's Mad-Dog Economics: Who Says this Surplus-Squandering Hothead is 'Conservative'?" www.salon.com, March 16, 2001.

Webster, James G. 1996. "Audience Behavior in the New Media Environment." *Journal of Communication* 36 (Summer):77-91.

West, Darrell M. 2001. *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment*. Boston: St. Martin's Press.

Wilhelm, Anthony G. 2000. *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*. New York: Rutledge Press.

Williams, Bruce A., and Michael Delli Carpini. 2001. "Political Relevance in the New Media Environment." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

The survey data used in Chapter Three was taken from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press Biennial Media Consumption Survey. The random digit dial telephone survey was conducted on April 20, 2000 (N=3142). Tables 3.1 through 3.7 use the data to illustrate cross-sectional trends. Figures 3.1 through 3.11 illustrate trends over time, which are provided in the Pew online survey report (www.people-press.org). The report of the April 20, 2000 survey provides current aggregate findings as well as findings from past surveys that asked the same questions, allowing the ability to track changes over time. The survey questions are listed below.

Media Exposure Variables

(Q). Now I'd like to know how often you watch or listen to certain TV and radio programs. For each that I read, tell me if you watch or listen to it regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never. How often do you…

1. Watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC or NBC? This is different from the local news shows about the area where you live. (Network TV)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

2. Watch local news about your viewing area? This usually comes on before the national news and then later at night at 10 or 11. (Local TV)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

3. Watch Cable News Network? (CNN)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

4. Watch C-SPAN? (C-SPAN)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

5. Listen to National Public Radio (NPR)?

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

6. Watch CNBC? (CNBC)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

7. Watch Fox News CABLE Channel? (Fox News)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

8. Watch MSNBC? (MSNBC)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

9. Watch Entertainment Tonight or Access Hollywood? (Tabloid TV)

   1=never
   2=hardly ever
   3=sometimes
   4=regularly

(Q). Now I'd like to know how often you read certain types of publications. As I read each, tell me if you read them regularly, sometimes, hardly ever or never. How about...

10. News magazines such as Time, U.S. News, or Newsweek? (Magazines)

1=never
2=hardly ever
3=sometimes
4=regularly

11. The National Enquirer, The Sun, or The Star? (Print Tabloid)

1=never
2=hardly ever
3=sometimes
4=regularly

12. How often, if ever, do you listen to radio shows that invite listeners to call in to discuss current events, public issues and politics? (Talk Radio)

1=never
2=hardly ever
3=sometimes
4=regularly

13. How frequently do you go online to get NEWS...Would you say every day, 3 to 5 days a week, 1 or 2 days a week, once every few weeks, or less often? (Internet)

1=never
2=once every few weeks, or less often
3=1 to 2 days a week
4=3 to 5 days a week, or everyday

14. Do you happen to read any daily newspaper or newspapers regularly, or not? (Newspaper)

1=not regularly
4=regularly

Demographic Variables

(Q). What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or other? (Race)

1=white, non-hispanic
0=race other than white

(Q). What is your sex? (Sex)
1=male
0=female

(Q). What is your age? (Age)

_____ years

(Q). Last year, that is in 1999, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category. (Income)

1=less than $10,000
2=$10,000 to under $20,000
3=$20,000 to under $30,000
4=$30,000 to under $40,000
5=$40,000 to under $50,000
6=$50,000 to under $75,000
7=$75,000 to under $100,000
8=$100,000 or more

(Q). What is the last grade or class that you completed in school? (Education)

1=none, or grade 1-8
2=high school incomplete
3=high school graduate (or GED certificate)
4=business, technical, or vocational school AFTER high school
5=some college, no 4-year degree
6=college graduate
7=post graduate training or professional schooling after college

Appendix B: Experimental Stimulus

*Note: The stylistic presentation of the experimental stimulus shown below differs slightly from the stimulus shown to the subjects. When the stimulus was shown to the subjects, it was presented to resemble the column format of a newspaper article. Also, no sections were bolded in the presentation of the stimulus to subjects. The bolded sections in Part I and Part II designate the sections of the stimulus that were unique to that particular experimental condition.

Part 1: Non-dramatic Frame

CONGRESS, PRESIDENT DEBATE ECONOMIC PLAN

PRESIDENT URGING UP TO $75 BILLION TO REVIVE ECONOMY

By Sue Ellen

President Bush has recently urged Congress to pass a package of tax cuts and additional spending worth up to $75 Billion as part of an economic stimulus package.

Republican and Democratic leaders said they would support an economic recovery plan of the scale suggested by Mr. Bush. But they said there was no agreement yet on the plan's components, and some Republicans expressed concerns about spending increases.

Democrats were largely displeased with many of the President's proposals.

In particular, Democrats demanded that the individual income tax cuts go primarily or exclusively to low- and middle-income people. Under the across-the-board reduction in tax rates favored by the administration, the benefits would accrue mostly to upper-income people, who pay the most in income taxes.

But in a sign of the tricky task the administration faces in piecing together a plan that can win broad bipartisan support, the White House's approach came in for heavy criticism from Republicans on Capitol Hill, especially conservatives who object to increased government spending and tax cuts that would be limited to low-income people. They said that the White House was caving in to demands from Democrats too quickly and dissipating the economic impact of the stimulus plan in the process.

Lawmakers want to use the recovery package to address a wide range of economic issues. Congressman Jack Miller, Republican of Arizona, urged with a great deal

of enthusiasm that the administration support construction of a natural gas pipeline from his state to Chicago. Congressman Benjamin Johnson, Democrat of Minnesota, is strongly opposed to spending the stimulus money in such a manner.

As a practical matter, the legislative maneuvers are as much a political exercise as a fiscal and economic one. President Bush's political strategy is to position himself as the voice of moderation and to portray liberal Democrats as overly partisan. In accordance with this strategy, the President used his recent radio and television address to challenge his opponents to negotiate with him to generate comprehensive stimulus plan.

As a response, House and Senate strategists said this week that congressional Democrats were likely to create their own version of an economic stimulus plan, confronting the President with the possibility of a potentially slow and bitter debate over how the money should be spent.

Part II: Dramatic frame

A NATION CHALLENGED: THE ECONOMY

A DRAMATIC BATTLE IN CONGRESS SET TO BEGIN OVER AMERICA'S FUTURE

By Sue Ellen

President Bush has recently urged Congress to pass a package of tax cuts and additional spending worth up to $75 Billion as part of an economic stimulus package.

Republican and Democratic leaders said they would support an economic recovery plan of the scale suggested by Mr. Bush. But they said there was no agreement yet on the plan's components, and some Republicans expressed concerns about spending increases.

Several characters have emerged as key players in the debate over where the stimulus money should go. The process now resembles a game of who can claim the most pork. Congressman Jack Miller, Republican of Arizona, urged with a great deal of enthusiasm that the administration support construction of a natural gas pipeline from his state to Chicago. His overbearing personality coupled with a reputation for generating controversy in the House created a dramatic response from the opposition.

Congressman Benjamin Johnson, Democrat of Minnesota, is strongly opposed to spending the stimulus money in such a manner. Johnson said, "We will not be bullied. It's time the American public became aware of

the way Mr. Miller and others like him are abusing their power. These congressmen, Democrat and Republican, have manipulated their way to power by slyly stealing from the American public."

Democrats were largely displeased with many of the President's proposals.

In particular, Democrats demanded that the individual income tax cuts go primarily or exclusively to low- and middle-income people. Under the across-the-board reduction in tax rates favored by the administration, the benefits would accrue mostly to upper-income people, who pay the most in income taxes.

But in a sign of the tricky task the administration faces in piecing together a plan that can win broad bipartisan support, the White House's approach came in for heavy criticism from Republicans on Capitol Hill, especially conservatives who object to increased government spending and tax cuts that would be limited to low-income people. They said that the White House was caving in to demands from Democrats too quickly and dissipating the economic impact of the stimulus plan in the process.

As a practical matter, the legislative maneuvers are as much a political exercise as a fiscal and economic one. President Bush's political strategy is to position himself as the voice of moderation and to portray liberal Democrats as overly partisan. In accordance with this strategy, the President used his recent radio and television address to challenge his opponents to negotiate with him to generate comprehensive stimulus plan.

As a response, House and Senate strategists said this week that congressional Democrats were likely to create their own version of an economic stimulus plan, confronting the President with the possibility of a potentially slow and bitter debate over how the money should be spent.

Appendix C: Experiment Posttest Questionnaire

Below is the questionnaire given to experiment subjects following exposure to the stimuli. Regardless of experimental group, the posttest questionnaire was the same for each respondent.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please clearly indicate your answer by circling the response that best answers the question for you.

First, we would like to ask about your attitude towards the government and the news media.

Section A

1. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the United States Congress is handling its job?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve

2. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the President is handling his job?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve

3. Overall, how would you rate the ability of Congress to work with the President of the United States in passing laws?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

4. Overall, how would you rate the job the federal government, as a whole, is doing?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

5. Overall, how would you rate the performance of all the Senators and representatives in Congress?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

6. Overall, how would you rate the performance of the leaders of Congress?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

7. Overall, how would you rate the performance of our political leaders in the state of Indiana?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

8. Overall, how would you rate the performance of your own representative in Congress?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

9. Overall, how would you rate the performance of the news media in covering politics in America?

1	2	3	4
Poor	Only Fair	Good	Excellent

10. On a 10-point thermometer scale, how do you feel about political parties? The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward political parties. The lower the number, the colder or less favorable you feel toward political parties. You would answer 5 if you feel neither warm nor cold towards political parties.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cold				Neutral					Warm

11. On a 10-point thermometer scale, how do you feel about the news media? The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward the news media. The lower the number, the colder or less favorable you feel toward the news media. You would answer 5 if you feel neither warm nor cold towards the news media.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cold				Neutral					Warm

Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Section B

1. I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Generally speaking, those we elect to Congress lose touch with the people pretty quickly.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

3. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

5. The events of September 11th have not significantly changed the behavior of politicians in Washington.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

6. The American news media only care about making news entertaining and dramatic. Providing real news is not a concern.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

7. The American news media care more about profit than providing legitimate news.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I enjoy following politics in the news.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

9. I feel it is important for Americans to trust their political leaders.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

10. Today, I trust the U.S. Congress to do the right thing.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

11. Today, I trust the President to do the right thing.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

12. Today, I trust the media to cover political events fairly and accurately.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

13. Today, I trust newspapers to cover political events fairly and accurately.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

14. Today, I trust network television news (ABC, CBS, NBC) to cover political events fairly and accurately.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

15. Today, I trust cable news channels (Fox News, MSNBC, CNN) to cover political events fairly and accurately.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

16. Today, I trust tabloids (The National Enquirer, The Star, The Sun) to cover political events fairly and accurately.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

17. I was interested in the political news story attached to this questionnaire.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

18. I would like to read more about the story attached to this questionnaire.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

19. I have a great deal of interest in national affairs.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

20. I have a great deal of interest in international affairs.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

In this section we would like you to answer some questions about today's political world. Please write your answers in the space provided below each question.

Section C

1. Can you recall who is the Prime Minister of Great Britain?

1=correct answer
0=incorrect answer

2. Do you happen to recall who is the secretary of state?

1=correct answer
0=incorrect answer

3. Is President Bush's current budget proposal smaller or larger than his proposal last year?

1=correct answer
0=incorrect answer

4. Do you recall which political party is the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives?

1=correct answer
0=incorrect answer

5. Do you recall which political party is the majority in the U.S. Senate?

1=correct answer
0=incorrect answer

In the next set of questions, we would like you to answer some basic questions about yourself.

Section D

1. Generally, speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strong Democrat	Democrat	Weak Democrat	Independent	Weak Republican	Republican	Strong Republican

2. What is your year of birth? _____(last 2 digits of year born)

3. What is your race? White Black Asian Hispanic

   Other: _____

   White=1; Non-white=0

4. What is your gender? Female=0 Male=1

5. What is your year in school? First Year=1 Sophomore=2 Junior=3 Senior=4

6. What is your family's annual income?

   $0 to $20,000=1

   $21 - 40,000=2

   $41 - 60,000=3

   $61 - 80,000=4

   $81 - 100,000=5

   $101,000 - 120,000=6

   121,000 and up=7

VITA

VITA

Jonathan S. Morris

Department Address:
Department of Political Science
218 Harrison Hall
Miami University
Oxford, OH 45056
(513) 529-2000
morrisjs@muohio.edu

Home Address:
2255 Fox Sedge Way
Apartment C
West Chester, OH 45069
(513) 942-0839

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Political Science, Purdue University, expected Fall 2002.
M.A., Political Science, Purdue University, 1998.
B.A. (cum laude), Political Science, Sociology, Miami University (OH), 1996.

Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research Summer Program, Maximum Likelihood Estimation for Generalized Linear Models, University of Michigan, Summer 1998.

DISSERTATION

The New Media and the Dramatization of American Politics

In the 1990s, the "new media" emerged as a major political factor in the United States. As the decade wore on, more and more Americans made use of new news sources, such as cable news, political talk programs, and Internet news. While several studies have discussed the ways new media coverage of politics differs from traditional news, very little systematic analysis has been conducted. Furthermore, very little has been done to empirically examine the effect of the new media on public opinion. I argue that new media coverage of politics differs from traditional news by dramatizing the political process. I contend that the new media's coverage of conflict, scandal, sensationalism, and other aspects of political drama is more extensive than today's traditional media. This approach to covering politics, I argue, adversely impacts approval for political leaders, institutions, and the system as a whole.

PUBLICATIONS

Morris, Jonathan S. 2001. "Reexamining the Politics of Talk: Partisan Rhetoric in the 104th House." Legislative Studies Quarterly 26(1):101-121.

Morris, Jonathan S. and Marie Witting. 2001. "Congressional Partisanship, Bipartisanship, and Public Opinion: An Experimental Analysis." Politics and Policy (Formerly The Southeastern Political Review) 29(1):47-67.

ARTICLES UNDER REVIEW

Clawson, Rosalee A, and Jonathan S. Morris. "Challenging Conventional Wisdom: Media Coverage of Congress in the 1990s." Revise and Resubmit at Political Communication.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship. Fall 2001 – Summer 2002.

Dirksen Congressional Center Research Grant (with Rosalee Clawson). 1999.

Harvard University Goldsmith Research Award. From the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. 1998.

Purdue Research Foundation Dissertation Research Grant. 2001-2002.

Purdue Research Foundation Summer Research Grant. 1999, 2000.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

MIAMI UNIVERSITY: VISITING INSTRUCTOR

- Introduction to American Government, Fall 2002.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY: INDEPENDENT INSTRUCTOR

- Introduction to American Government, Fall 1998, Spring 1999, Fall 1999.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY: TEACHING ASSISTANT

- Introduction to Political Analysis, Fall 1997, Spring 1998, Spring 2000, Fall 2001.
- Introduction to American Government, Spring 2001.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"The New Media and the Dramatization of American Politics." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Fall 2002.

"The New Media, the Democratic Process, and Public Opinion in America." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Spring 2001.

"The Media as Public Enemy: The New American Media and the Democratic Process." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Fall 2000.

"People and Process: News Coverage of Congress in the 1990s." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Fall 2000 (with Rosalee Clawson).

"Beyond Negativity: The Press, The Public, and the U.S. Congress." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Fall, 1999 (with Rosalee Clawson).

"Speaking Up in Congress: Partisan Rhetoric in One-Minute Speeches." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Spring, 1999.

"The Determinants of One Minute Speeches on the Floor of the U.S. House: A Comparison of Event Count Models." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Political Science Association, Spring, 1999.

"The Effects of Viewed Rhetoric." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Indiana Political Science Association, Spring, 1998 (with Marie Witting).

Discussant. "Collecting and Coding Political Data." Panel Discussant at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Political Science Association, Spring, 1999.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN). Research Assistant for Professor Robert X Browning (Director of C-SPAN Public Affairs Video Archives, Purdue University). Worked on a program of research examining speaking and debate patterns on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, Fall 1996, Spring 1997.

Media Coverage of Congress Project (Funded by JFK School of Government at Harvard University and the Dirksen Congressional Research Center). Constructed, coordinated, and participated in a massive content analysis of New York Times and CBS Evening News coverage of Congress. Over 2600 stories from 1990 through 1998 were collected and coded (with Rosalee Clawson). 1998-present.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

American Politics
- Political Institutions
- Political Communication
- Public Opinion

Quantitative Methods
- Introduction to Political Analysis
- Linear and Non-linear Models
- Experimental Design and Analysis

PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS

American Political Science Association
Midwest Political Science Association
Southwest Social Science Association
Pi Sigma Alpha
Golden Key National Honor Society
President: Purdue University Political Science Graduate Student Association 1998-1999

REFERENCES

Professor Rosalee A. Clawson (Dissertation Chair)
Department of Political Science
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907
765-494-7599
clawson@polsci.purdue.edu

Professor James A. McCann
Department of Political Science
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907
765-494-4161
mccann@polsci.purdue.edu

Professor Judson L. Jeffries
Department of Political Science
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907
765-494-7604
jeffries@polsci.purdue.edu