

## Chapter 1

# The New Game in Town

A few years after he left office in 1969, President Lyndon Johnson was asked by a TV news producer what had changed in American politics since the 1930s when he came to Washington as a young Texas congressman.

"You guys," [Johnson replied], without even reflecting. "All you guys in the media. All of politics has changed because of you. You've broken all the [party] machines and the ties between us in the Congress and the city machines. You've given us a new kind of people." A certain disdain passed over his face. "Teddy, Tunney.<sup>1</sup> They're your creations, your puppets. No machine could ever create a Teddy Kennedy. Only you guys. They're all yours. Your product." (Halberstam, 1979, pp. 15-16)

In the old days, political disagreements were settled in backroom deals among party big shots. As majority leader of the Senate in the 1950s, Johnson achieved national fame as master of this brand of insider politics. But in the new environment, disagreements are fought in the mass media, refereed by journalists, and settled in the court of public opinion. A new kind of politician, more comfortable in a press conference or a sound studio than a smoke-filled room, dominates the scene. Politicians still make deals, but only after their relative strength has been established in the public game of "media politics."

By media politics, I mean a system of politics in which individual politicians seek to gain office, and to conduct politics while in office, by mobilizing public support through the mass media. Thus defined, media politics stands in contrast to the older system of "party politics," in which, by conventional definition, politicians seek to win elections and to govern as members of party teams. Although party politics is alive and well, it now shares the political stage with media politics, a newer system whose properties are less well understood.

### SKETCH OF A THEORY OF MEDIA POLITICS

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<sup>1</sup> The references were to Ted Kennedy, widely considered at the time to be a likely future president, and to John Tunney, a photogenic, media savvy Senator from California.

This book proposes a theory of media politics. Its aim is to explain the main features of media politics with a small number of theoretical propositions. In my account of media politics, there are three principal actors -- politicians, journalists, and citizen-voters -- each of whom is animated by a distinctive motive. For politicians, the goal of media politics is to use mass communication to mobilize the public support needed to win elections and get their programs enacted while in office. For journalists, the goal of media politics is to produce stories that attract big audiences and that emphasize the "Independent and Significant Voice of Journalists." For citizens, the goal is to hold politicians accountable on the basis of minimal attention and effort.

These diverse goals are a source of constant tension among the three actors. Politicians would like journalists to act as a neutral conveyor belt for their statements and press releases, but journalists do not want to be anybody's handmaiden. Journalists wish instead to make a distinctive journalistic contribution to the news, which they can better accomplish by means of scoops, investigations, and news analyses -- all of which politicians detest. In my account of media politics, journalists value "journalistic voice" at least as much as big audiences,<sup>2</sup> and they care nothing about helping politicians to get their story out to the public. If journalists always reported the news just the way politicians wanted them to, or gave audiences only the political news they really wanted, journalism would be a much less lucrative and satisfying profession for its practitioners than it presently is. In fact, it would scarcely be a profession at all.

The public's wish to hold politicians accountable on the basis of minimal effort implies a demand for condensed and easy-to-digest news that is nonetheless sufficient to assure political accountability. That may seem a self-contradictory demand, but it is nonetheless what, in my theory, the public wants. The public's means of getting what it wants is market competition. Just as competition for votes in elections enables the public to get more of what it wants out of politicians, competition among news programs for audience share enables the public to determine the kind of news its gets. But not completely. The politicians' inherent interest in controlling the content of political news, in combination with journalists'

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<sup>2</sup> Journalists may be compared in this regard to professors at research universities, who typically care about undergraduate ratings of their courses only because, and to the extent that, they have to, but care deeply about expressing voice through research. The difference is that professors are much more insulated from market pressure.

inherent interest in making an independent contribution to the news, create a far-reaching set of tensions and distortions.

The argument of the monograph, simply put, is that the form and content of media politics are largely determined by the disparate interests of politicians, journalists, and citizens as each group jostles to get what it wants out of politics and the political communication that makes politics possible.

I can best convey what my theory seeks to explain and how it goes about explaining it by means of two extended examples. The first is President George W. Bush's announcement of the end of major military operations in the Iraq War from the deck of the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln. The second is the media frenzy that followed President Gerald Ford's statement in the 1976 presidential debates that Eastern Europe was not under domination of the Soviet Union. The first is a case in which a politician held the upper hand in the game of media politics; the second is one in which the media were on top.

#### TWO FAMOUS EPISODES OF MEDIA POLITICS

Declaring Victory in Iraq. Forty-three days after the start of the second Iraq War and about two weeks after major fighting had ended, President Bush flew to the Lincoln as it was returning to its home port in San Diego. He wanted to thank the military personnel who had fought the war and to officially mark the cessation of major hostilities. There was a political agenda as well. Although his standing in public opinion polls was high, the president was coming under political attack because U.S. forces were unable to find the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that Bush had given as the primary reason for going to war. A well-publicized speech could steal the spotlight from critics and buttress public support by playing up Bush's role as command-in-chief of a highly successful military operation.

The president could have declared the cessation of hostilities in Iraq at a formal press conference, a Rose Garden announcement, or a joint session of Congress. But rather than stride to the podium in one of these traditional venues, he arrived for his announcement in a tail-hook landing on an aircraft carrier at sea. The scene, as the *New York Times* wrote, "brought presidential imagery to a whole new level."

Bush emerged from the cockpit in full olive flight suit and combat boots, his helmet tucked jauntily under his left arm. As he exchanged salutes with the sailors, his ejection

harness, hugging him tightly between the legs, gave him the bowlegged swagger of a top gun.

And rather than address politicians in Congress, the president spoke to the returning heroes of war, who cheered him enthusiastically. The movie critic of the *Washington Post*, chosen by the paper to write a sidebar of the event, gave this account:

On the deck of the Abraham Lincoln, the enormous assembled crowd of uniformed men and women cheered and cheered when Bush alighted. They were anything but cheered-out when the president began his speech about three hours later.

[Bush] played to his audience as good performers do, praising the military for its work and telling them, "America is grateful for a job well done," even though the evening newscasts carried more stories of violent outbursts in Baghdad and Fallujah...

About midway, Bush invoked the bitter, painful memory of Sept. 11, 2001, and spent several minutes linking the terrorist attacks of that day to the seemingly successful operation in Iraq. "We removed an ally of al Qaeda and cut off a source of terrorist funding," he said reassuringly...

Then... the tone of the speech turned solemn and Bush remembered those Americans who had fallen in battle. One fatality, Marine Cpl. Jason Mileo, was chosen as a symbol of all those who died and his photograph was supplied to the networks so it could be inserted when the president spoke glowingly of his service to the country.

"There is no homecoming for these families," Bush said. "Yet we pray in God's time their reunion will come." Continuing in a spiritual vein, Bush closed the speech biblically: "In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, 'To the captives, come out, and to those in darkness, be free.'

"May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America."

That was it, and the cheers erupted louder than ever. Everything seemed to go gorgeously right for Bush. Even the pre-sunset lighting was perfect. Some of the military personnel behind him wore not drab uniforms but jackets of vivid red, green, yellow and blue -- standard issue for members of the crew who guide planes in for landing on the deck, each bright color connoting a different task.

The event was as well-publicized as any politician could wish. The carrier landing in the afternoon was covered live on cable news and repeated in many newscasts. Indeed, although I am not certain, I would guess it was carried on every TV news program in the country. The speech, which began shortly after 6 p.m. Pacific Time, was carried live by the news divisions of all of the major networks, which preempted prime time entertainment in order to do so. Because the event coincided with a Nielsen sweeps period, the networks' lead-ins to the speech happened to be the best the networks could muster.

Bush ended his speech at 6:26 p.m., which left TV journalists no time for instant punditry before regular programming resumed. The next day, however, journalists of all stripes had ample time for comment, and their comments often had a critical edge. Journalists emphasized Bush's supposed attempt to turn public attention away from the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. They also questioned the cost of the event, the imposition on service men and women whose return to their loved ones was supposedly delayed by the presidential address, and the use of military equipment for partisan purposes. Democrats in Congress made similar complaints, but they quickly concluded that their criticism was doing them no good.

One Democrat[ic official] moaned yesterday as he watched cable news programs replay hours of footage of Bush on the carrier, with audio about Democratic complaints. "I'm watching him get high-fived and buzz the tower again," the Democrat said. "The White House should have thought of this controversy themselves."

Controversy ceased altogether when a Gallup poll found that a solid majority of Americans saw nothing inappropriate in the president's actions.

This set of events exemplifies my basic definition of media politics – the conduct of politics by mobilizing public support through the mass media. My theory of media politics will call attention to these features of the event:

Constraining Journalistic Choice. President Bush's decision to deliver his speech in a dramatic setting increased the likelihood that the networks would be willing to pre-empt prime time entertainment for it and to rebroadcast segments of it in next several news cycles. Why? Because the stunning images created by the President were attractive to mass audiences, and networks are in the business of giving mass audiences what they want. A great many newspapers carried pictures on their front pages the next day, and for the same reason. If the President had made a more traditional announcement in Washington, the pictures would have been much less widely used.

It has become standard for politicians to make policy announcements in a setting that complements their message – a hospital for a health care policy, a senior citizens home for a policy about social security, and so forth. The event on the Abraham was, however, more appealing than most media events because it was more genuine. Welcoming troops back from war is, to begin with, a presidential duty.

Greeting them as they approached American shores was a genuinely nice way of performing this duty. Arriving by tail-hook landing was, as the media pointed out, unnecessary and perhaps even melodramatic, but it was nonetheless risky and in this sense genuinely dramatic. Viewers turned the event could watch the President of the United States doing something that was actually dangerous.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the audience that cheered wildly for the president was not a collection of pre-screened partisans; it consisted, rather, of genuine heroes of war who were by all appearances genuinely enthusiastic about their commander-in-chief. Those who stage media events constantly strive for these elements of audience appeal – appropriateness of action, drama, natural beauty, and sincere expression of support by symbolically attractive citizens – without often doing nearly so well.

The theoretically important point here is that when politicians (and their assistants) create events as appealing as the one on the Abraham Lincoln, news organizations have no choice but to cover them. In this case, the decision to cover the President's speech must have been somewhat painful to news organizations. This is because the time for the speech did not come from a news program having commercial sponsors; it came, rather, from the displacement of entertainment programming and its commercial sponsors. Thus, the Lincoln event, which ran without commercial interruption, cost private broadcasters hundreds of thousands of advertising dollars.

The question thus arises: Why did all of the networks displace their entertainment programming? Wouldn't one have been enough? As far as the mass audience was concerned, one network would have been sufficient; indeed, it would have been preferable, because it would have allowed the choice of watching entertainment programs on the other networks. But news organizations compete on the basis of their reputations, and a news organization that failed to cover so appealing and apparently important an event would suffer reputation effects more costly than the foregone advertising revenue – or so network executives must have feared.

I emphasize the lost revenues, which are obviously critical to networks struggling to satisfy shareholder demand for profit, because it illustrates the power of politicians, through skillful staging of

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<sup>3</sup> The President was required to practice underwater survival techniques in the White House swimming pool in case of water landing, and the experienced pilot who made the landing managed to catch only the fourth of the four hooks that were available.

media events, to force news organizations to do what they would truly prefer not to do. At many points in this book I will refer to this power.

The power of politicians over journalists is manifest in another aspect of the Lincoln event. Because President Bush began speaking shortly after the top of the hour and continued until 26 minutes after the hour, he managed to monopolize nearly the whole newscast. Journalists introduced the event, showed the tail-hook landing that had occurred earlier, and, upon completion of the speech, said goodnight.

Journalists would probably have been grateful to Bush if he had spoken for only 21 minutes and left five minutes for them to comment – but not so grateful that their comments would have been wholly favorable to the president. Most likely they would have spent a part of the time talking about what Bush did not want to talk about, namely, lack of success in finding weapons of mass destruction and Bush's neglect of that subject in his speech. Journalists might also have had time to discuss the cost to the taxpayers of flying out to the Lincoln. In monopolizing the time available for the broadcast, Bush was able to keep discussion on subjects favorable to him.

Journalist trying to control their turf. In my theory of media politics, journalists are professionals who, like other professionals, want to control their occupational turf. Control in this context means making independent decisions about what information or analysis to include in the news.

In the case of the Lincoln speech, journalists could do almost nothing to affect the content of the live broadcast despite the fact that it was carried in a news program. The pictures of the event were so compelling, and the appropriateness of the president's action so difficult to dispute, that journalists had little choice but to report the event as the Bush communications experts had skillfully designed it to be presented. To ignore or reframe it would be to risk losing audience share to other media outlets that went along with the outstanding Bush framing.

It would be surprising if journalists did not resent Bush's success in using their newscast to his ends. In my theory of media politics, they do resent such occurrences and express their resentment in the form of negative reporting. This negativity may take the form of mere cynicism and carping, raising questions that the politician finds uncomfortable, or a serious investigation. On rare occasions, reporters may go

into “feeding frenzies” over a politician’s supposed misstep or gaff; these are occasions on which the whole press corps will report and discuss nothing except the politician’s misstep.

In my theory, these forms of media-initiated negativity are an attempt by journalists to express voice and to reclaim control over the content of news. A later chapter of this book present a quantitative test of this proposition. Yet, as always in my theory, journalists are constrained in their behavior by the predilections of the mass audience. Hence, they cannot initiate negativity that seems strained or unconvincing or petty. Their criticism must seem plausible, at least mildly important, and fit the public’s mood of the time. The reason, in my theory, that media criticism of the Lincoln event was muted was that journalists sensed, as polls later confirmed, that the public saw nothing wrong with it.

President Bush’s welcome home to the troops on the Lincoln was, from his vantage point, a successful round in the game of media politics: The President managed to entirely dominate a half-hour national news broadcast and much of the follow-up news as well with a message that framed the Iraq War in terms of military success rather than, as critics would have preferred, the absence of evidence that war was justified.

Because no survey organization seems to have done a poll just before and after the Lincoln event, it is impossible to be certain what effect the Lincoln event had on public opinion. Other research, however, has shown that presidential events of this type usually buttress presidential support, and it would be surprising if this event did not help Bush as well (FN). However, it would also be surprising if the effect were more than about one or two percentage points.

Obviously, however, politicians do not always get just the news they want. To show how they can sometimes come up short in the game of media politics, I turn to an episode from the 1976 presidential election campaign.

President Ford’s Big Gaff. In the second presidential debate of the 1976 campaign, President Ford asserted that “there is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.” By all accounts, including eventually Ford’s own account, this was an ill-advised statement. Seizure of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II was a major cause of the Cold War, which was still alive and well in the mid-



1970s. What Ford probably meant was East Europeans did not acquiesce in Soviet dominance or feel spiritually dominated, but this was not what the President said.

The media jumped on the East Europe statement the instant it came out of the president's mouth and kept discussion of it at the top of campaign news for the five frenzied days. Ford's opponent, Jimmy Carter, criticized Ford over the remark, but the press carried the bulk of story in a prime example of what I call media-initiated negativity. During these five days, Ford discussed other issues, but reporters ignored his speeches and kept returning to the Eastern Europe story. They repeatedly pressed Ford for clarification, interviewed leaders of Eastern Europe ethnic groups whom they knew would take a dim view of the president's remark, found that Ford's own campaign workers were privately dismayed by the remark, and discussed over and over how much it was hurting the campaign. Meanwhile, Ford stubbornly refused to back off his comment and, when aides pressed him to do so, he became irritated. In an attempt to clarify his meaning without admitting error, Ford commented that the people of Eastern Europe "don't believe that they are going to be forever dominated, *if they are*, by the Soviet Union." The effect of this awkward statement was to incite reporters to greater frenzy. A Ford operative observing them in the press center after the speech telephoned back to his boss: "This is unbelievable! I can't believe it! The press is going wild! People are yelling and screaming, racing around filing bulletins and laughing."<sup>4</sup> Ford's press secretary afterwards commented:

Once a thing like [this] happens, there is a certain mechanism in the press that has to do with pack journalism partly, that requires a person in public life, whoever it may be, to publicly confess his effort before the matter is dropped. Once a public figure makes a mistake, he must cleanse himself by publicly admitting his error to get off the hook."  
(604)

Finally, on the fifth day, Ford invited the east Europe ethnic leaders to the White House so that he could cleanse himself. "The original mistake was mine. I did not express myself clearly; I admit it." The admission, once reported, ended the episode. But by that time Ford had lost several points in his neck-and-neck race with Carter and a week of campaign time. He wound up losing the election by only two percentage points, a margin small enough that one could plausibly blame defeat on this event. However,

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<sup>4</sup> Witcover, 603.

effects of this size – even though possibly large enough to swing the election – are too small to be reliably detected in most surveys. Perhaps for this reason, there is no clear evidence that this episode, which dominated campaign coverage for a week and was highly unfavorable to Ford, had an effect on the bottom line (See Sears and Chafee, 1978).

Although my theory of media politics cannot explain particular instances of media frenzy, it does hypothesize the general conditions under which media-initiated negativity will occur. The hypothesis is, as suggested earlier, that media-initiated negativity will be more likely in conditions in which politicians aggressively attempt to control news content.

That condition was amply met during the 1976 campaign. Ford, who was the only American president to come to office by appointment rather than election,<sup>5</sup> was a poor campaigner. He had a wooden delivery and was prone to comical mistakes, such as walking into doors, tripping on stairs, and self-inflicted verbal wounds.

Ford's campaign staff recognized their candidate's weakness and formulated a plan that would enable him to get exposure on television without actually going onto the campaign trail. It consisted of holding events in the White House Rose Garden in which Ford would perform an official act, such as vetoing a bill. If, in the midst of an election campaign, Ford's only public appearance was a Rose Garden event, the press would then have no choice but to cover it. As journalist Jules Witcover comments:

Ford's Rose Garden strategy posed a vexing problem for the press corps. It was, after all, an exact replay of the dodge used to such practical, self-serving effect by Nixon four years earlier. Carter, like McGovern, protested bitterly and long that the media was playing directly into the incumbent's hands; permitting themselves to be spoon-fed daily at the White House from a menu of ersatz news events that was passed on undigested to the public on the nightly television news...

The media, at the same time, could not ignore Ford's antics in the White House, no matter how trivial or trumped-up. The trick was to make certain that the staged Rose Garden events were identified as *such*, in print or on television. Most reporters covering the White House came to do just that, usually referring to "the Ford campaign at the White House," or some variation. Still, on television, the important thing for the President, portraying himself as an on-the-job incumbent, was simply to be seen with

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<sup>5</sup> Spiro Agnew was elected vice-president in 1972 but forced to resign over bribery charges stemming from his prior term as Maryland Governor. Nixon then nominated and the Senate approved Ford as vice-president, and when Nixon later resigned over Watergate, Ford became president.

the White House as a backdrop, and there was not much the visually oriented medium could do to minimize the effect.... [One Ford aide] said, "We didn't mind the network correspondents saying he was using the White House. People are not going to remember the voice-over; they're going to remember the visual." (554)

Thus, as in the case of Bush's speech on the Lincoln, the Ford campaign succeeded in forcing journalists to carry the story it wanted. Journalists could, if they wished, make mildly critical comments, but Ford officials didn't care as long as they got the TV images they wanted.

Yet, Ford, in contrast to Bush, was involved in an election, and this meant he had to leave the controlled confines of the Rose Garden some of the time. When he did, and when he then slipped up in the presidential debate, the media pounced. Reporters were especially eager in their criticism because it represented a chance for them to reclaim control of the news and to make their journalistic voices heard – or so, at least, my theory holds. As always, however, reporters could control the campaign agenda only to the extent that the news audience would accept their content as legitimate news. But Ford really had made and publicly persisted in an error – an error, moreover, that seemed consistent with his prior reputation for being a bit slow. As a Ford aide lamented, "It was the 'dumb' issue all over again." This combination of factors gave the frenzied media reaction all the public appeal it needed.

#### PROBLEMS OF EVIDENCE

Bush's Lincoln event and Ford's gaff on Eastern Europe are among the most famous media events of the last half century of American politics. Only Richard Nixon's Checker's speech in 1952 may be more important and memorable. Hence, I make no claim that the two events are typical. I do claim, however, that these events provide good illustrations of the forces generally at play in media politics. Politicians and their communication staffs, eager to boost public support, constantly seek to induce journalists to carry their carefully crafted messages. But politicians' ability to get journalists to carry their messages depends on their skill in creating events the public finds appealing. Journalists resist politicians' effort at control and seek to put their own imprint on the news, but they can do so only insofar as the public finds their version of the news palatable and plausible. Thus, politicians and journalists struggle to control the content of the news, with the news audience acting as referee.

The reader should note that, despite the importance of the two events I have examined, my accounts contain no clear evidence that the struggle to control the news directly affected public opinion. This is because there isn't any. Lack of evidence could be because the events really had no effects. More likely, however, they had effects that were relatively small – perhaps one or two or three percentage points of public support after a week or so had passed. Effects of this magnitude are certainly big enough for politicians to care about. For example, as noted, Ford's margin of defeat in 1976 was only two percentage points. But, even though important, effects may still be too small for researchers to detect in surveys whose margin of error is two or three percentage points.

The problem of clear evidence affects every aspect of the study of media politics. It is much easier to tell vivid stories about brilliantly conceived tail-hook landings and incredibly stupid political gaffs than to provide clear evidence that the vivid stories are right. So, having now set the stage with some vivid stories, my problem becomes one of supplying clear evidence.

The clearest possible evidence would come from an experiment. Thus, we might imagine a study in which we randomly ask half of a sample of Presidents to announce the end of the Iraqi war in a conventional speech to Congress and the other half to announce it from the decks of an aircraft carrier, and then see which venue makes the more favorable impression on public opinion.

Obviously, however, we aren't going to get the opportunity to do that experiment. Now what? A next best strategy might be a non-experimental study. For example, we might examine the manner in which presidents handled each of our wars over the last half century. These would be World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Gulf War I, and Gulf War II. Our question would be whether presidents who announced victory in elaborate ceremonies fared better with public opinion and the media than presidents who made low key announcements.

This study would be more feasible than an experiment, but still not very feasible. Here's why. World War II ended with the atom bomb and a formal Japanese surrender; the Korean war has still not formally ended (as of this writing); the Vietnam War ended with the emergency evacuation of U.S. troops from Saigon and was not followed by any sort of U.S. ceremony; and so forth. The problem, from a research

perspective, is that the U.S. has not fought many wars, and the few we have fought ended so differently that systematic comparison seems pointless.

And yet systematic comparison is essential to the assessment of general claims about how the world works. People who think otherwise are, in my opinion, simply fooling themselves. If, then, we want to make systematic comparison of media events, we must somehow get a large set of genuinely comparable events. This statement brings us to the heart of the method of this book: To focus on the media politics of presidential selection, including both presidential nominations and presidential elections. The reason is methodological. Both presidential nominations and elections have a fixed structure and recur at regular intervals, thereby making it possible to observe patterns and to test generalizations across multiple cases. Even though media politics probably has the same basic properties in non-electoral settings — e.g., Bush's speech on the Lincoln and Ford's gaff in the second debate — it is harder to demonstrate these properties, or sometimes to perceive any sort of regularity at all, in non-electoral settings. Why? Because systematic analysis requires a delicate balance of similarity and difference — a stable common background against which to observe meaningful differences. To a greater degree than almost any other kind of media event, presidential selection has that balance: politicians, reporters, and voters going through the same basic routines over and over, but under somewhat different conditions from one election to the next. And because presidential selection is so important to our democratic life, the differences in conditions are closely studied and painstakingly recorded in the form of polls, news, and books. Little of importance goes unnoticed. Regular structure in combination with thorough documentation makes it easier to demonstrate the dynamics of media politics in presidential selection than in other contexts.

The question still arises: *When are presidential elections sufficiently similar that they may be compared?* This is a tough question. Since the adoption of the Constitution in 1787, the United States has held some 53 presidential elections. But the earliest were hardly elections in the modern sense, because emphasis was on the state legislatures that chose delegates to the Electoral College. Not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century did presidential candidates actively solicit votes by means of personal campaigning, and not until the 1960s did candidates begin using television as their primary means of personal campaigning.

Because of this, and because I shall argue that television has profoundly shaped the modern game of media politics, this book will focus on elections since television has been paramount, 1968. Not by coincidence, 1968 is the first year for which the data necessary to study television coverage is available through the superb Vanderbilt Television News Archive. The book will also examine presidential nominations. Because, as argued elsewhere (Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller, 2001), the current nomination system did not gel until 1980, I shall examine the media politics of nominations from that time to the present. My contention is that presidential elections since 1968 and presidential nominations since 1980 are sufficiently similar in basic structure that systematic comparisons among them are possible and meaningful.

Yet, this book aspires to be more than a study of presidential elections; it aims to be a study of the general features of media politics. As I have suggested by my choice of opening illustrations and shall continue to argue, there are good reasons to believe that the forces that animate media politics are broadly similar in both electoral and non-electoral contexts. Indeed, the forces under examination in this book seem to be at work in Europe as well: Traditional party organization has weakened, media competition has intensified, and politicians increasingly attempt to govern through the media. The development is loosely called the Americanization of politics.

Use of electoral politics as a window for gaining insight into media politics more generally is one of the distinctive features of this book. Not everyone is likely to see this distinctiveness as a plus. In political communication as in many other research domains, researchers tend to develop different theories for different domains. Thus, the media politics of foreign policy are seen as different from the media politics of domestic policy which are in turn different from electoral politics and so forth. Persons inclined toward this view may reject the pretensions to generality that run throughout this book but still potentially accept the book as a narrow-gauge study of electoral politics.

The approach to studying media politics in this book is distinctive in two other respects. The first, as suggested earlier, is that it focuses on the diverse self-interests of the participants and how they shape the nature of media politics. This is a departure from most studies of media politics, which tend to see media politics through different theoretical prisms. One major strand of media research focuses on the

values and conventions of journalists, such as their delight in covering the political "horserace" (Patterson, 1993; Lichter, Rothman and Lichter, 1986 ) or the routines by which reporters organize their work (Cohen, 1962; Sigal, 1973; Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1980). Another major strand of media research emphasizes the symbolic side of media politics, especially its creation of illusions, images, and spectacles that masquerade as a depiction of reality (Edelman, 1988; Bennett, 1996). Without challenging the validity of insights in previous studies, this book offers as a corrective the view that media politics is, like other forms of politics, driven most fundamentally by conflicts in the goals and self-interests of the key participants. And, in an even stronger corrective to existing research, it maintains that media politics is driven by the self-interest of the public at least as much as by the self-interests of other actors.<sup>6</sup>

The final distinctive aspect of this study is that it is organized deductively rather than inductively. In the inductive mode of analysis, one begins by describing a set of facts and then draws (or *induces*) from them a theoretical explanation. In the deductive mode, one begins by positing a handful of theoretical claims and then logically derives (or *deduces*) from them specific hypotheses which are tested against a set of facts. In keeping with the latter mode of analysis, I shall make a point of deriving all of my hypotheses from clearly stated premises and referring ostentatiously to each deductive inference by number, as in D1, D2, and so forth.

For the type of study undertaken here — that is, a heavily empirical study that employs no strictly formal analysis — the difference between the deductive mode of analysis and the more familiar inductive mode is largely stylistic. Yet I believe the stylistic difference has important practical value. First, in beginning with theory rather than data, the deductive mode tends to focus the reader's attention where I think it belongs — on the general processes at work rather than on the particular and sometimes distractingly colorful facts that are at the base of theories. Second, in focusing attention on theory *per se*, the deductive mode makes it easier to see how the various elements of one's theory logically relate to one another. This, in turn, makes errors of analysis on the part of the researcher (me) and failures of

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<sup>6</sup> Among the few studies of media politics to emphasize the importance of mass interests in determining media content is that of Bovitz, Druckman, and Lupia, 1997; another is Hamilton (Princeton, 2004).

comprehension on the part of readers (you) both less likely — though, of course, far from impossible in either case.

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Two other developments since the 1999 draft:

-- The 2000 election was held. I have re-done most of the statistics in the book with 2000 data and the results are unchanged.

-- Doug Arnold collected data on media coverage of congressional politics with the intent of testing my claim in Chapter 3 that news market competition lowers the public affairs content of coverage. His method was to compare newspaper coverage in cities in which there was a monopoly newspaper with coverage in which two papers competed. Results showed that congressional coverage tended to be worse in cities with two newspapers, as expected by my theory. His book, *The Press and Political Accountability*, is due out in 2004 with Princeton University press.