

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. The constitution: winners and losers
 - 1. An alternative system
 - B. How the media affects public
- II. WINNERS AND LOSERS - AN EVALUATION OF THE CONSTITUTION:
 - A. Repeat of yesterday's notes
 - B. * As stressed yesterday, the constitution creates winners and losers.
 - 1. Some groups in society "fare" better than others under our system.
 - C. Advantages
 - 1. Gradual change
 - 2. Protects political rights
 - 3. *Give individuals and especially groups **multiple points of access**.
 - D. Disadvantages
 - 1. Frequently thwarts majority preferences.
 - 2. *A system in which the strongest survive and flourish.
 - a. One reason why I say not everyone fares equally well.
 - 3. Hinders decisive action.
 - 4. *Makes the assignment of responsibility difficult.
 - a. Who do we blame for government's actions and inactions?
 - E. The bottom line: all of these work against capacity and democracy
 - 1. Divided power protects representatives from being held accountable.
 - 2. Divided power suffocates government action
- III. A UNIFIED OR "PARLIAMENTARY" SYSTEM:
 - A. Consider this solution to the problems of improving political capacity and enhancing accountability.
 - 1. We want a form of government that is 1.) accountable to the people and 2.) manages to identify and deal with collective problems.
 - B. A unified or parliamentary system
 - 1. Merge legislative and executive branches and reduce judicial review.
 - 2. Create "strong, disciplined" parties with leaders who have the power to force agreement.
 - 3. Change the function of the legislature by making it a deliberative and oversight body.

4. Eliminate judicial review
5. Modify federalism

IV. THE PROBLEM OF THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC OPINION:

- A. The people in a democratic system: what role do they play; what role could they play.
- B. Views of public opinion
 1. Read the essay “Two Views of Public Opinion” in the “reserve room.”
 2. The “Hamilton school” see the public as misinformed, apathetic, self-centered, irrational, not to be trusted with the reins of power.
 - a. Hence deference is “functional” for the system.
 3. The “Jefferson school” has greater faith in the common person.
 - a. People are capable of self-government
 - b. Whatever faults they have as citizens political institutions and practices are to blame.
 - (1) The mass media
 - (2) The conduct of campaigns and elections
 - (3) The nature of political discourse in America
- C. Main point: when discussing the “quality” of citizenship keep political institutions and practices in mind.

V. THE MASS MEDIA - MAIN ARGUMENTS:

- A. Greatly influence the public’s understanding of the world
 1. Trends in usage
 2. The creation of reality
- B. Information availability: mass versus elite media
 1. Concentrated ownership
- C. The media do **not** have a meaningful liberal bias.
 1. If anything they are conservative, conservative in the older sense of the term.
- D. The media inadvertently discourage enlightened understanding, political participation, and hence democracy through accountability.

VI. CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWS PRESENTATION:

- A. The media do not supply a direct, unadulterated photo of “reality.”
 1. The “mirror” analogy and myth of objectivity
 2. Instead they must **choose what** stories they will tell and **how** they will tell them.
- B. In this sense, the media inevitably “create realities” (note the plural) as well as describe it.
- C. Here are some generalizations. Check them by looking at the “popular” press (network news and local newspapers) to see if they are accurate.
 1. **Government point of view:** official interpretations of events and issues are

the primary source and topic of most news stories. One seldom finds independent accounts or analysis.

2. **Personalization**: news stories are most frequently reported in personal terms. How individuals are affected by an event. Who won, who lost, who was hurt or helped, etc. Compare the number of statements about or by individuals with the number about policy content.
3. **Fragmentation**: stories are usually short, superficial, devoid of contextual explanation. They don't show how events are interconnected and skim on background information.
4. **Drama**: Wherever possible the story's dramatic and emotional elements are emphasized. As the narrator talks what visual images are portrayed. What feelings does the story arouse? Are you angered, saddened, gladdened, etc. or are you "informed." Is coverage dispassionate or does it arouse your feelings?
5. **Politics over substance**: the "political" aspects of news (who did what to whom) frequently overshadow the "why" parts of the matter.
6. **Remoteness**: there is usually little effort to show the individual how a controversy relates to his or her personal life or interests.
7. **Mystification**: reports usually do not explain issues or policies or controversies to the reader or viewer. Because emphasis is on personalities and drama, the substance is often left out.

VII. NEXT TIME:

- A. Test No. 1