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# Media and Information

## Session 13

Professor Devin Caughey

MIT Department of Political Science  
17.263: American Elections

# Roadmap

[Media Coverage of the Barrett Nomination](#)

[Media in a Polarized Age](#)

[Media and Elections](#)

# Media Coverage of the Barrett Nomination

# The Wall Street Journal

## Barrett Faces Final Day of Questioning by Senators



**Nominee has said she would separate personal views from legal rulings**

Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett is facing her second and final day of questions by members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, her confirmation likely assured but its impact on the election still unclear.

- Barrett Parries Questions on Abortion and Health Law
- As Supreme Court Case on ACA Looms, GOP Divided on How—and Whether—to Replace It
- The Senators to Watch

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## Fox News

# Hannity: Democrats 'completely outmatched' by Amy Coney Barrett's knowledge, recall and poise

Supreme Court nominee made Dems 'look stupid, unprepared, desperate,' says Fox News host

By Yael Halon | Fox News



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# Late Night with Seth Meyers



LATE NIGHT WITH SETH MEYERS WEEKNIGHTS 12:35/11:35c

MAIN EPISODES LATE NIGHT PODCAST PHOTOS TICKETS INTERNSHIPS SHOP CREDITS

Getting To Know Amy Coney Barrett

- BELIEVES IN A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE. AND THAT WOMAN IS HER

The screenshot shows a video player interface. On the left, a man (Seth Meyers) is shown in a blue shirt, looking towards the right. On the right, a woman (Amy Coney Barrett) is shown in a dark blue top. The text 'Getting To Know Amy Coney Barrett' is displayed in a yellow-bordered box. Below it, a bullet point highlights the text 'BELIEVES IN A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE. AND THAT WOMAN IS HER'. The background of the video player is a dark blue with a city skyline at night.

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# Media in a Polarized Age



# The Contemporary Media Environment

- ▶ Due to technological, economic, and other changes, the political media environment has become much more **fragmented** over the last few decades.
- ▶ New types of media compete, interact, and mix with holdovers from earlier eras.

# 1. Legacy News Media

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- ▶ 1950s–80s print and TV news oligopolies created “**information commons**” of shared problems, if not solutions.
- ▶ Rise of cable (1980s) and internet (2000s) increased media differentiation and allowed the uninterested to **opt out** of political news.
- ▶ Declining TV audiences and journalists’ increased skepticism and negativity **diminished** officials’ (esp. presidents’) ability to reach and **persuade the American public**.

## 2. Partisan News Media



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- ▶ Unlike legacy media, disregard objective/neutral stance and instead target their ideological niche with slanted content.
- ▶ Talk **radio** (1st gen), then **cable** news (2nd gen)
- ▶ Examples on left (MSNBC) and right, but **Fox News** has “special relationship” with conservatives, for whom Fox is often the *only* news source they trust.

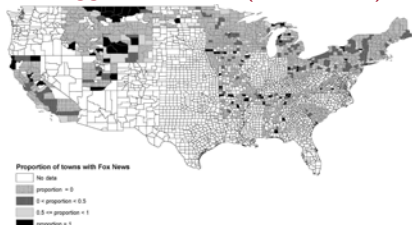


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# The Fox News Effect

Despite ideological self-selection, Fox News, whose conservative slant increased over the 2000s, seems to have convinced a substantial share of its viewers to vote Republican.

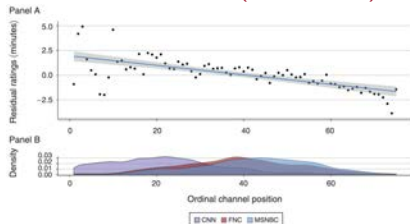
## Staggered Rollout (1996–2000)



News entered the cable market by the year 2000. We find a significant effect of the introduction of Fox News on the vote share in Presidential elections between 1996 and 2000. Republicans gained 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points in the towns that broadcast Fox News. Fox News also affected voter turnout and the Republican vote share in the Senate. Our estimates imply that Fox News convinced 3 to 28 percent of its viewers to vote Republican, depending on the audience measure. The

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## Channel Position (2000–2008)



*shifters of cable news viewership. Channel positions do not correlate with demographics that predict viewership and voting, nor with local satellite viewership. We estimate that Fox News increases Republican vote shares by 0.3 points among viewers induced into watching 2.5 additional minutes per week by variation in position. We then*

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### 3. Online Digital Media



See slide 29 for credits.

- ▶ The internet has fostered a diverse array of online media sources, from **blogs** to **social media** to online versions of **legacy** news media (still very important for driving news).
- ▶ Popular talk of “filter bubbles” notwithstanding, most Americans get news from ideologically **diverse sources**.
- ▶ Lacking gatekeepers, social media is the “wild west” of political **misinformation**.
- ▶ Least political = most influenced by misinformation.

# What's Popular on Facebook (Is Hard to Discern)

Outside Estimates  
(Most Interactions)



Kevin Roose  
@kevinroose

Today's top-performing Facebook link posts by US pages are from:

1. Fox News
2. Fox News
3. Occupy Democrats
4. Fox News
5. Ben Shapiro
6. Ben Shapiro
7. Ben Shapiro
8. AnOmy
9. Blue Lives Matter
10. Dan Bongino

10:59 AM - Jul 20, 2020 - Twitter Web App

834 Retweets 261 Quote Tweets 2.1K Likes

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Right-wing, sensational, and often misleading political posts

Facebook's Response  
(Most Impressions)

Tweeted List	Facebook Top Links By Reach
Fox News	1 abcnews.go.com "Judge Esther Toler, son shot and killed, husband ignored in attack at their NJ home"
Fox News	2 www.dailymail.co.uk "Federal judge's son, 20, is shot dead and her criminal defense attorney husband is [...]"
Occupy Democrats	3 abcnews.go.com "Everybody that has a baby gets a million dollars, Kanye West says at his campaign rally"
Fox News	4 brightside.me "10 everyday things that have a hidden purpose"
Ben Shapiro	5 9gag.com "You can buy wings for your chicken"
Ben Shapiro	6 www.foxnews.com "Black woman bumps paint on more Black Lives Matter murals in NYC. 'We want our justice'"
Ben Shapiro	7 www.boredpanda.com "10 times people surprised everyone with their creativity"
AnOmy	8 www.npr.org "NJ report says epidemic could push up to 132 million people into hunger"
Blue Lives Matter	9 thumbs.gfycat.com "It's not beer breaking into a house"
Dan Bongino	10 www.nbcnews.com "New Jersey federal judge's son killed, husband called after being shot at home"

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Mix of mainstream outlets, gifs, and pop culture

## 4. Political Entertainment Media



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- ▶ Media fragmentation has made it **easier to avoid politics**, and today most Americans do not regularly consume “hard” news.
- ▶ But many people are indirectly exposed to “**soft**” news through entertainment programming.
- ▶ Such programming is thus perhaps the best way for politicians to reach a **wide (persuadable) audience**, especially since it often presents politicians in a **favorable** light.



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# Political Communication via Entertainment Programming

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnW3xkHxIEQ>



# Media and Elections

# Media Effects



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- ▶ They soon found that massive media effects were rare, especially when it came to **persuasion**.

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# Media Effects



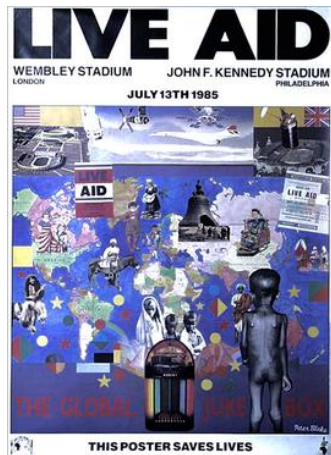
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- ▶ Early media researchers were motivated by the concern that mass media (radio, TV) could be used to **manipulate** citizens at will.
- ▶ They soon found that massive media effects were rare, especially when it came to **persuasion**.
- ▶ However, while the media may not much affect what people *think*, it does affect **what people think about**.

## The “Discovery” of Famine in Ethiopia



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# Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing



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Why does the media's influence over the public agenda matter?

- ▶ **Agenda-setting:** What **problems** does the public think are urgent and important?

Americans Who Cited Race or Racism as the Most Important Problem Facing the U.S.



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# Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing



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Why does the media's influence over the public agenda matter?

- ▶ **Agenda-setting:** What **problems** does the public think are urgent and important?
- ▶ **Framing:** How are political problems or choices **presented**?



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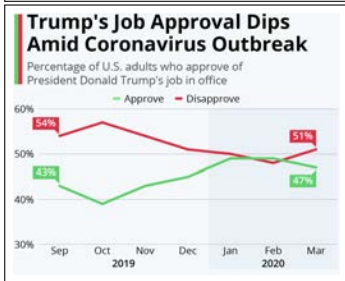
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Why does the media's influence over the public agenda matter?

- ▶ **Agenda-setting:** What **problems** does the public think are urgent and important?
- ▶ **Framing:** How are political problems or choices **presented**?
- ▶ **Priming:** What information is **salient** in citizens' mind as they make choices?



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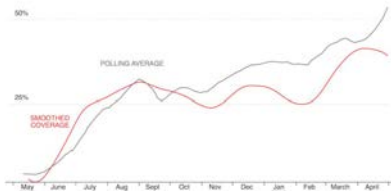


# The Media in the 2016 Election

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Donald Trump's Share of News Coverage and National Polling Numbers



News coverage data was generated using social analytic tools provided by Crimson Hexagon. Polling data from Pollster.

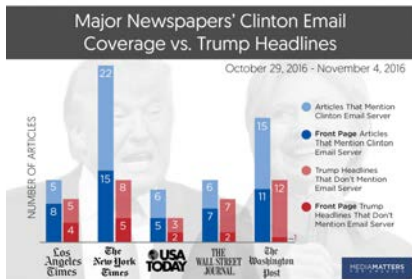
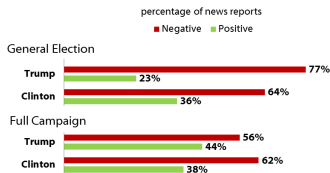
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The media played a critical and controversial role in 2016.

- ▶ **Trump**, already a reality-TV star, **dominated news** coverage during the primary, fueling his rise in the polls.

# The Media in the 2016 Election

Patterson, Thomas E. Figure 1 in "[News Coverage of the 2016 General Election: How the Press Failed the Voters.](#)" Harvard Kennedy School Shorenstein Center. December 7, 2016. License CC BY.

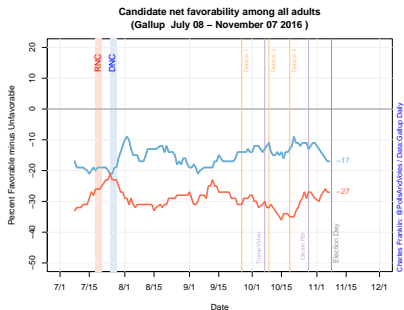


The media played a critical and controversial role in 2016.

- ▶ **Trump**, already a reality-TV star, **dominated news** coverage during the primary, fueling his rise in the polls.
- ▶ The tone of media coverage of both candidates was highly **negative**, and dominated at the end by Clinton's **emails**.

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# The Media in the 2016 Election



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- ▶ The tone of media coverage of both candidates was highly **negative**, and dominated at the end by Clinton's **emails**.
- ▶ Trump, the **most unpopular** presidential candidate in recorded history, won in large part because Clinton was a close second.

## The Informational Role of Campaigns

- ▶ The evidence of the electoral effects of media coverage, and of campaigns generally, raises a **puzzle**: **How can campaigns affect elections if pre-campaign “fundamentals” are so predictive** of the ultimate outcome?
- ▶ One way to resolve this puzzle is to point to the **informational** role of media and campaigns, specifically their role in **informing the public about the fundamentals**. If there were no campaigns, the fundamentals wouldn't be so predictive!
- ▶ Of course, this may be true only in **equilibrium**, when campaign resources and media coverage are (as they usually are in presidential elections) relatively **balanced** and campaigns are acting **optimally** given the fundamentals (cf. Gore in 2000).

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