

Can influence government through civic action:

- ▶ Run for office
- ▶ Petition government office
- ▶ Speak at meetings
- ▶ Be of "good character"
- ▶ Send letters
- ▶ Contribute to campaign



- ▶ Organize to promote their common interests with legislators and public opinion
- ▶ Different types of interest groups: based on economic interests, unions, environmental protection, helping particular ethnic groups, etc.
- ▶ Activities of Interest Groups: monitoring, lobbying litigation, publishing
- ▶ Impact: Lobbyists often bring expert subject-matter knowledge to legislators; lobbyists can influence legislation.

Individuals

Interest Groups

Interest Groups and the Media



The Media

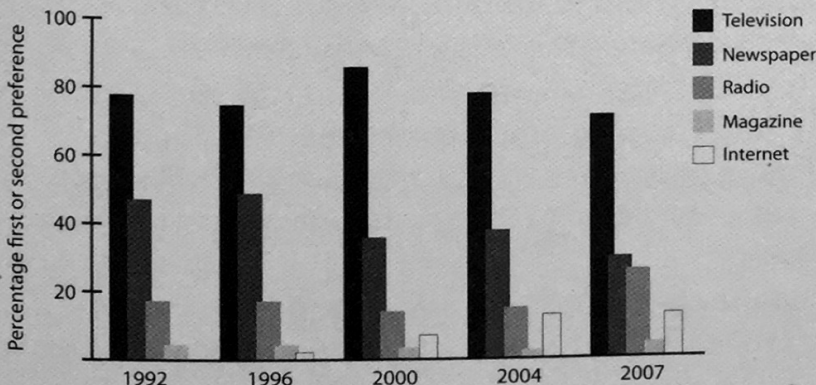
Analyzing Political Communication/Advertising

- ▶ Newspapers, magazines, radio, the Internet
- ▶ People get their knowledge of public affairs from the media
- ▶ The media act as "Watchdog" exposing corruption, wrongdoing or error

- ▶ **Bias** = one sided
- ▶ **Propaganda** = appeals to emotions
- ▶ **Symbolism** = represents something
- ▶ Look for: bias, exaggeration, one-sided, half-truths, glittering generalities

Fact or Opinion?

A **fact** is a statement that can be verified by checking with other sources. It is either true or false. An **opinion** is an expression of belief. There are different kinds of opinions. Some opinions are mere expressions of taste: "I like the taste of a fresh, crisp apple." No one can dispute that the speaker likes apples. Other opinions are statements of belief about the future, or about factual matters where the facts remain unknown: "I think people will watch less television in the future" or "I believe Al Gore actually had more votes in Florida than George W. Bush in the 2000 election."



Review Cards: Interest Groups and the Media

How Individuals Can Affect Government

Individuals can influence government directly by:

- ▶ Running for office
- ▶ Speaking at meetings
- ▶ Petitioning government officials
- ▶ Sending letters
- ▶ Collecting signatures on issues
- ▶ Making campaign contributions

Interest Groups

- ▶ An **interest group** is a group of individuals with common interests who seek to influence public policy. Interest groups attempt to influence public policies directly, rather than by electing their members as government officials. Unlike a political party, an interest group tends to focus on a specific issue or area, rather than on all the problems facing our government leaders.
- ▶ There are many different types of interest groups: environmental interest groups (which protect wildlife and reduce pollution), economic interest groups like the American Bankers Association and American Medical Association (which often focus on their single industry), civil rights interest groups, and interest groups that are formed over particular issues.
- ▶ A **public interest group** attempts to promote the **common good**—the interests of Americans as a whole rather than of any one specific group.

Activities of Interest Groups

- ▶ **Monitoring:** Interest groups often “**monitor**” developments. This means they keep track of everything legislatures and government agencies are doing that might affect their area of focus.
- ▶ **Lobbying:** Interest groups hire **lobbyists**, who speak to state legislators, members of Congress, or other government officials in order to influence new legislation or government regulations. **Lobbying** takes its name from the past when hired representatives of interest groups tried to speak to legislators in the lobbies of their hotels or of legislative buildings.
Lobbyists usually specialize in a particular subject. They therefore bring subject-area expertise to legislators, government officials and the public. Interest groups often help to provide specific details for proposed legislation.
- ▶ **Electioneering:** Interest groups and their lobbyists also help politicians to get elected or re-elected.
In 1974, a law was passed that allowed each interest group to form its own **political action committee**, or **PAC**. PACs can provide larger sums of money to political candidates than individuals are permitted to contribute.
- ▶ **Litigation:** Interest groups—particularly public interest groups and those supporting minority rights—sometimes promote their causes by filing lawsuits. Civil Rights groups in the 1950s, such as the NAACP, used litigation to help overturn racial segregation in the South. Consumer groups and environmental groups also frequently use lawsuits.
- ▶ **Publicity:** Interest groups usually try to sway **public opinion**—the views of the general public—through advertising, press releases, publishing articles, and television and radio appearances. This is sometimes known as “**grass roots**” lobbying.

The Media

- ▶ The word “media” is the plural of “medium.” A medium is something that transfers or carries something, including messages, from one place to another. Here, “**media**” refers to “mass media”—methods of communication to large numbers of people through television programs, newspapers, magazines, radio and internet blogs.
- ▶ The media play an important role in our democratic system of government because they inform citizens what is happening in government.
- ▶ The media act as a **watchdog** over our government, questioning government leaders about their actions and exposing government wrongdoing. “Investigative journalists” investigate issues or suspected wrongdoing through research and by interviewing witnesses and participants. One modern example of investigative journalism was the work of journalists on *The Washington Post*, who helped uncover the Watergate scandal.
- ▶ The media also keep citizens informed about issues and events both overseas and at home.
- ▶ Many **media** outlets show a **bias**—they provide only a partial perspective and may be prejudiced for or against something.
- ▶ **Symbolism** refers to the use of symbols in a communication or article, like a donkey on a poster to represent the Democratic Party.
- ▶ Political communications that are biased and that appeal to fears and emotions to persuade public opinion are known as **propaganda**.
- ▶ **Opinion polls** are used to measure public opinion in order to project voting results and for other purposes.

Analyzing Media and Political Communications

To analyze a political communication, media message or political advertisement, take the following steps:

1. Determine who created the message.
2. Determine the purpose of the article or communication.
 - ▶ What were the authors of this communication trying to do?
 - ▶ Is the communication meant to be informational or persuasive?
3. Determine how the purpose behind the communication may have influenced what it states.
 - ▶ Does the communication show any bias?
4. Read or listen to the text carefully.
 - ▶ What is the main idea?
 - ▶ What arguments does the author use?
5. Consider any symbols in the communication.
 - ▶ A symbol is a visual image that represents another thing, concept or relationship.
6. Identify facts and opinions in the communication.
 - ▶ Decide whether its reported facts are accurate.
 - ▶ Decide if its opinions are reasonable, based on the evidence.
7. Evaluate the reasoning/argument/claims of the communication.
 - ▶ Does each step of the argument follow logically from the one before it?
 - ▶ Does the communication exaggerate? Does it “demonize” opponents or critics?
 - ▶ Does it make false analogies?
 - ▶ Does it contain “glittering generalities”?
 - ▶ Does it contain “half-truths”?
 - ▶ Is it one-sided: does it give only one side of the argument without presenting the other side?