

TEXT SUMMARY

A **medium** is a means of communication; *media* is the word's plural. The American public gets information about public issues through several forms of mass media.

Four major mass media are particularly important in American politics. Television has the most influence, followed by newspapers, radio, and magazines. Other media, such as books and the Internet, also have an impact.

The media play a large part in setting the **public agenda**, or the public issues that people think and talk about. The media also have a central role in elections. For example, television has reduced the importance of political parties. In the past, candidates relied on their party members to reach the voters. Now,

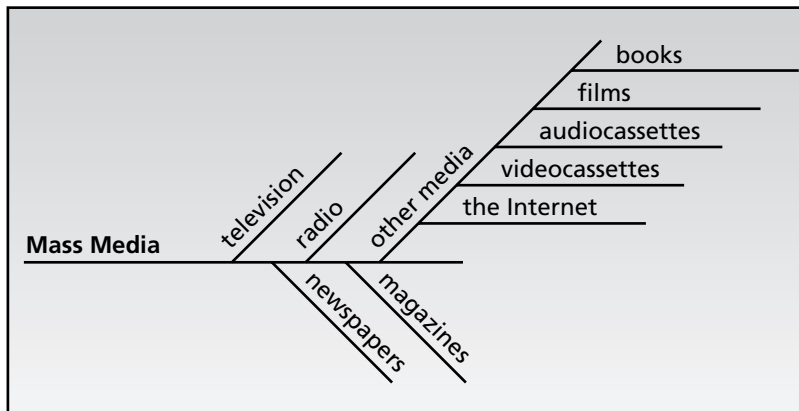
because television allows the candidates to reach the public directly, many candidates operate with only loose ties to a party. They work hard to get good media coverage and to provide the media with good **sound bites**—focused, snappy statements that can be aired in 35 or 45 seconds.

The influence of the media is limited in some ways. Few people actually follow political issues carefully in the media. Also, those who do tend to watch, listen to, or read choose favorite sources rather than sources with contrary opinions to their own. For example, many Democrats do not watch the televised campaign appearances of Republican candidates, and vice versa.

THE BIG IDEA

The media are our most important sources of political information.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *The Mass Media*



The many forms of mass media greatly impact American politics.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do the media affect the public agenda?
2. **Diagram Skills** What are the four forms of the media with the greatest impact on politics?