

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT HISTORY

SS.912.CG.2.13 Analyze the influence and effects of various forms of media and the internet in political communication.

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2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.912.C.2.12
 - Changed from “~~Explain the changing roles of television, radio, press, and Internet in political communication.~~” to “Analyze the influence and effects of various forms of media and the internet in political communication.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from “Explain” to “Analyze”
- Addition of Benchmark Clarifications
 - Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 high school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below.

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. Timeline of Media and Political Communication
2. Media and Political Communication and their Impact on Public Opinion
3. The Role of the Media in Election Campaigns

1. Timeline of Media and Political Communication

Media has evolved over time. When we speak of mass media, it can take many forms, but for our purposes, the focus will be on print, radio, television, and the internet. Information can be quickly accessed now more than ever, so looking at the impact of media in regards to the impact on public opinion and elections will be explored in the next two sections.

Print media, as it relates to political communication, historically begins with colonial newspapers relaying news and opinions of various groups in regard to the actions of Parliament. The most notable was the reactions to the Stamp Act of 1765. Throughout the Revolutionary War, the press was used to promote the idea of independence. After the Revolutionary War, print media became more of a mouthpiece for certain political parties and viewpoints. Some examples include *The Federalist Papers* and the Anti-Federalist Papers. Or newspapers favoring one political party over another: For example, Alexander Hamilton created the *New York Evening Post* as a voice for the Federalists. The *National Gazette* was considered one of the first Democratic-Republican newspapers with support from James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. The party press still exists today, with certain papers deemed as friendly to one party over the other.

In the 1920s and 1930s, radio made headway as a media to relay political communication. Warren G. Harding was the first President to regularly give speeches via the radio. Through the economic troubles of the Great Depression, President Hoover often used the radio to announce programs and plans for financial relief. However, the president most synonymous with the radio would be Franklin D. Roosevelt. His “fireside chats” were meant to reassure the country while gaining ground with his New Deal programs. Radio was still secondary to print media until the 1980s when the advent of Talk Radio stations put politics front and center with broadcasters such as Rush Limbaugh.

In the 1950s, the price of televisions decreased, making this type of media more accessible. Nightly news became a mainstay on all the major networks at the time, such as ABC, NBC, and CBS. For the first time, Americans could see political candidates and politics playing out in real-time. Television became the focus for advertising and elections, but also for politicians to plead their cases. Nixon’s “Checkers Speech” to quiet questions about a scandal was also seen as a way to humanize politicians. Televised debates and political ads were often used as ways to introduce candidates to the people. Much in the same way Roosevelt used radio to reassure the people, television became a source for presidents such as Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to comfort and encourage the nation in times of national emergencies.

The expansion of social media in the 2000s has decreased the role of the press in the traditional sense. More often, political communication is directly posted by elected officials via their social media platforms. President Obama is considered to be the first social media candidate. Most elected officials and other institutions of government have Twitter handles or YouTube channels, expanding upon CSPAN’s coverage of

Congress. The White House and the U.S. Supreme Court also have official social media accounts. Most of the traditional newspapers have adapted to the online world, but with social media, the idea of citizen journalism has taken hold. Anyone with a cell phone can record and post political messages, which in turn can be reposted by partisan accounts. The ability to sift through the message and the spin to “control” the message could be problematic with the advent of AI apps and deep fake posts.

2. Media and Political Communications and their Impact on Public Opinion

The public learns most of its information about government from the media. Scholars suggest that the media acts as a “black box” between the public and government. The image of the “black box” is fitting; individuals cannot see what is between them and what is on the other side. The public must trust the information that they receive through the media as they have no real means to verify it. The “black box” metaphor also works in reverse; government and political entities such as political parties, candidates, and interest groups know that the media is reporting on their activities. Being aware of the media’s presence shapes their behavior. Individuals on both sides of this relationship depend on the media to receive or transmit information. The information transmitted through the media and by government and other political institutions, such as interest groups, candidates, and political parties, is all understood as political communication.

The role of the media in presenting information is often not balanced—the media may present information in a way that favors one perspective (“bias”), advocates a clear point of view or action (“propaganda”), or references or presents images to serve as information shortcuts (“symbolism”).

Media bias may take two forms. One form of bias involves the information shared with the public. It is impossible for the media to report all information about which the public has no direct connection; thus, the media chooses what to report and how much information to share about that news item. Another form of media bias focuses on how information is presented to the public. For example, a media story on poverty may show members of a specific race, gender, age, or ethnic group as being impoverished, which may impact how the public reacts to news stories about poverty because public perceptions about poverty may be shaped by their opinions about the impoverished persons portrayed in the news story. Bias may also be demonstrated in the importance placed on a news item, such as placing a news story on the front page of a newspaper, or leading with that story on a televised news program.

3. The Role of the Media in Election Campaigns

The media also play a key role in transmitting information sponsored by candidates, political parties, interest groups, and individuals during election campaigns. Political advertising focuses on influencing voting behavior, raising money, and motivating other political action. These organizations and individuals pay media outlets to advertise their messages. Campaign advertising gives candidates, interest groups, and political parties the opportunity to control their message.

Campaign commercials serve as useful tools for understanding candidate strategies. Information provided by commercials is shown through the substance of and the approach used to convey messages. For example, some candidates may emphasize their or their opponent’s policy positions, while other candidates will choose to focus on personal characteristics. These strategic decisions are critical because they create one key lens through which voters process campaign-related information. The information generated by campaigns and disseminated through commercials impacts several election-related decisions: whether to register to vote, whether to vote, how to vote, and whether and how much time or money to donate to a campaign organization, political party, or interest group.

Most campaign-related advertising is available where there are the most consumers. There are far more television consumers than there are radio, Internet, newspaper or newsmagazine consumers. Thus, far more campaign-related advertising is found on television than in any other medium. Among non-television media, radio and the Internet are far more often used as campaign advertising outlets than are newspapers or news magazines. Social media, such as Facebook and X(Twitter), have grown in importance as campaign advertising media.

Televised campaign advertising spots were first aired in 1952. The cost and use of television advertising has grown exponentially since then resulting in shorter television spots. Critics argue that shorter advertisements contain less information and a greater emphasis on entertaining viewers, both of which compromise and bias the information found in these advertisements.

Lesson Summary

BENCHMARK	
SS.912.CG.2.13 Analyze the influence and effects of various forms of media and the internet in political communication.	
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students will explain how the methods of political communication has changed over time (e.g., television, radio, press, social media).Students will describe how the methods used by political officials to communicate with the public has changed over time.Students will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different methods of political communication.	
FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION	
Competency 1: Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government	
OVERVIEW	
In this lesson, students will understand and analyze how political communication has changed over time.	
ESSENTIAL QUESTION	
What are the strengths and weaknesses of different methods of political communication? How has political communication changed over time?	
GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">campaign, communication, constituents, media, press	
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	
Primary source analysis	Narrative writing
MATERIALS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Political Communication Over Time slides (contain external links)Political Communication Timeline	
B.E.S.T. STANDARDS	
The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation. Thematically, this lesson aligns to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">ELA.R.2.1 StructureELA.R.2.2 Central IdeaELA.R.2.3 Author's Purpose and PerspectiveELA.C.1.2 Narrative Writing	

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<p>Planning Note: <i>There is significant overlap of content with this benchmark and SS.912.CG.2.11 and you may want to consider combining the lessons into one unit.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by asking students to write out a list responding to the following prompt: What are the main methods you use to receive and communicate information and ideas with others? 2. Ask for responses. Responses may vary, but lead students to the understanding that we use a wide variety of methods to receive and communicate ideas and information with others, such as: television, radio, press, and websites/social media. 3. Continue the discussion by asking students: Are there methods you use more than others? Are the methods you use different from your parents? Your grandparents? 4. Lead students to the understanding that advances in technology have led to changes in how we communicate with one another. This doesn't just impact how we communicate with our friends and family but also how political officials communicate with us. 5. Ask students: Why do political officials need to communicate with us? Why would it be important they 'keep up with the times'? 6. Lead students to the understanding that communication with public officials allows us to be informed voters, allows elected officials to know people's opinions on pressing issues, allows us to stay up to date with current events, and allows elected officials to share information about decisions that impact our community. In order to be elected and then best represent their constituents, political officials will want to communicate using the most popular methods of communication for that time period to reach the widest audience possible. 7. Explain to students that in this lesson, they will learn more about how methods used by political officials to communicate with the public have changed over time. To do this, we are going to examine and analyze the primary means of communication of four presidential administrations from different time periods. 8. Project the "Political Communication Over Time" slides. 9. Pass out the "Political Communication Timeline" to students. 10. For each time period slide, provide students a few minutes to look, listen to, and/or watch the primary source identified. 11. After time for analysis, ask students the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What method of political communication is shown for this time period? ■ Does anyone know the president that is featured? Do you know any other presidents from this time period that were notable for their use of this method of communication? ■ What type(s) of communication would presidents use the method for? ■ What may have been some of the strengths and weaknesses of using this method of communication in this time period? 12. Instruct students to record notes on their timeline as you discuss. Teacher Note: An answer key slide has been provided after each time period source slide. Use this information as well as any additional speaker notes to help guide discussion. 13. Pause after discussing slide 9. 14. Ask students: In addition to press, radio, television, and social media, can you think of any other methods of political communication? (mailers, phone calls, in-person events, public meetings, campaign signs, etc.)

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| | <p>15. Project slide 10 and ask students to identify some of the methods of political communication shown. (event, campaign commercial, television, social media)</p> <p>16. Remind students that today, elected officials use a combination of all of the political communication examined. They may use some more than others but if they want to reach the largest audience possible, they must mix methods.</p> <p>17. End class by having students complete a narrative writing task on the back of their timeline in which they will pretend to be running for an elected office and explain what political communication methods they would choose to use and why.</p> <p>Extension Suggestion: Conduct a socratic seminar with questions regarding the changes in political communication over time. Question examples: Has the addition of new mediums of communication made things better? Is there such a thing as too much information/communication? Has more methods of communication made us a more informed citizenry? Would things have been different if Lincoln had radio or television or Teddy Roosevelt had social media? Will one of these methods of communication eventually become irrelevant?</p> |
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Government Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
campaign	an organized course of action to achieve a goal, for example winning an election
communication	the transmission of information
constituents	the voters who elect a person to represent them
media	means of mass communication in the forms of print, radio, television and social media
press	refers to the news industry in a variety of outlets, such as print (newspapers, newsmagazines) broadcasts (radio and television) and the internet

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Federalist Papers* by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay

ANSWER KEYS

Political Communication Timeline samples answers provided on the “Political Communication Over Time” slides

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

SOURCES

Images, videos, sound clips for the Political Communication Over Time slides are sourced within How U.S. Presidents Have Communicated with the Public—From the Telegraph to Twitter from the History Channel: <https://www.history.com/news/us-presidents-communication-radio-tv-twitter>