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# The Media and Democracy

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## Standard 12.8.1

Discuss the meaning and importance of a free and responsible press.

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# The Mass Media and Democracy

- “The press is the fourth branch of the federal government”
    - Why is the free exchange of ideas important in a free and democratic society?
    - A free press is one characteristic of all countries with a democratic form of government
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# The Mass Media

- How does the mass media fulfill its role to provide the public with political information?
  - How does the mass media influence politics?
  - What are the factors that limit the influence of the media?
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# The Role of Mass Media

A **medium** is a means of communication; it transmits some kind of information. Four major mass media are particularly important in American politics:

## **Television**

Politics and television have gone hand in hand since the technology first appeared. Today television is the principle source of political information for a majority of Americans.

## **Newspapers**

The first newspapers carried mostly political news. Even with the total number of newspapers declining, they are still the second leading source of political information for most Americans.

## **Radio**











On average, Americans hear 20 hours of radio each week. Radio has been a source of news and entertainment since 1920.

## **Magazines**

Some 12,000 magazines are published in the United States today. Several magazines are devoted to American news and politics.

# Media Statistics

Access to media varies from country to country.

Access to Media in Selected Countries				
Country	Population in millions	Television sets per 1,000 persons	Radios per 1,000 persons	Daily newspaper circulation per 1,000 persons
 United States	270.3	776	2,122	238
 Japan	125.9	619	799	578
 Bangladesh	127.6	5	65	0.4
 Nigeria	110.5	38	170	18
 Mexico	98.5	192	227	115
 Italy	56.8	436	790	126
 India	984	21	117	21
 Chile	14.8	280	305	101
 Canada	30.7	647	919	215
 Nicaragua	4.6	48	206	31

SOURCE: *The World Almanac*

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# The Media and Politics

## The Public Agenda

- The media play a very large role in shaping the **public agenda**, the societal problems that political leaders and citizens agree need government attention.
- It is not correct that the media tell the people *what* to think; but it is clear that they tell the people what to think *about*.

## Electoral Politics

- Today, television allows candidates to appeal directly to the people, without the help of a party organization.
  - Candidates regularly try to use media coverage to their advantage.
  - Newscasts featuring candidates are usually short, sharply focused **sound bites**—snappy reports that can be aired in 30 to 45 seconds.
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# Limits on Media Influence

- Only a small part of the public actually takes in and understands much of what the media have to say about public affairs.
  - Many media sources mostly skim the news, reporting only what their news editors judge to be the most important and/or most interesting stories of the day.
  - In-depth coverage of public affairs is available to those who want it and will seek it out.
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# The Media

## The Relationship between the Freedom of Speech and Press Amendments and the Media:

- **Confidentiality:** Since the Supreme Court found that the Constitution does not allow members of the news media to keep their sources confidential in a court of law, 30 states have passed **shield laws** to give reporters some protection against having to reveal their sources.
- **Motion Pictures:** In *Mutual Film Corporation v. Ohio*, 1915, the Supreme Court held that motion pictures were a business, not a form of expression, and so were not protected under the freedom of expression guarantees. The Court reversed this decision in *Burstyn v. Wilson*, 1952.
- **Both Radio and Television Media** are subject to more government regulation than other forms of expression because they are transmitted by “public airwaves.”



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# The Media

## The Relationship between the Freedom of Speech and Press Amendments and the Media:

- **Near v. Minnesota (1931)** was a United States Supreme Court decision that recognized the freedom of the press to be free from prior restraints on publication.
  - **Prior Restraint-** is a legal term referring to a government's actions that prevent materials from being published.
  - **What does it mean????** Government cannot restrict material for print. NO CENSORSHIP!
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