

**Module 8: Politics**  
**Topic 3 Content: Influence of the Media**

**Introduction**



**Glover Mint:** On today's episode of WUSG News, we asked Pilar de la Casa to join us for a discussion about different factors that may influence an election. Live, via satellite, here is Pilar de la Casa.

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**Influence of the Media**

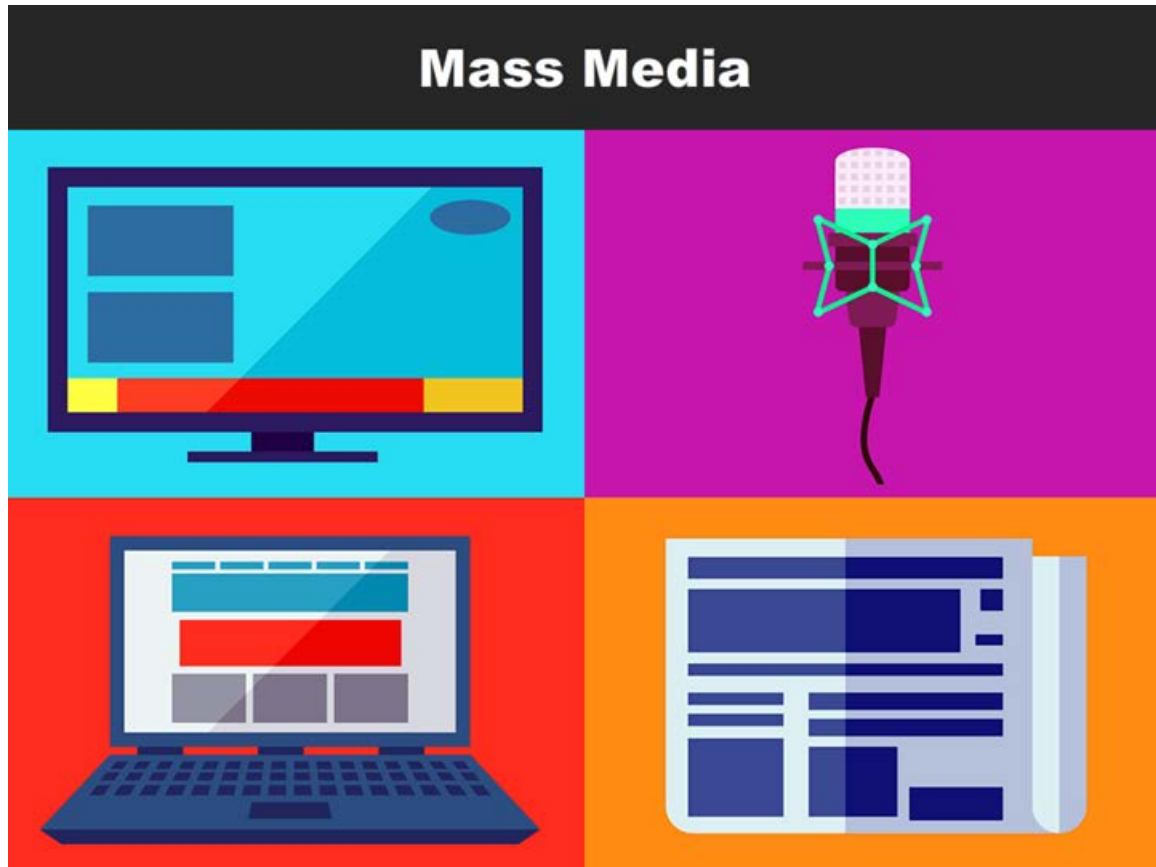


**Pilar de la Casa:** Thank you, Glover. I would like to start this episode by asking our audience a question: do you think you are influenced by the media? Your initial answer is probably no. You are an intelligent individual capable of thinking critically and making your own decisions. As you are an informed viewer of WUSG News, I have no doubts about this. On the other hand, the media is able to draw attention to certain issues, which helps set the topic of conversation. This means that even our viewers will be pulled into a discussion about an issue, simply because of how popular the issue is. Because of this power to influence public opinion, media coverage plays a critical role in elections. This is all the more reason for news media to attempt to remain fair, balanced, and unbiased in its reporting. Let's take a look at the way the media and other factors are able to influence elections.

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#### Mass Media



**Pilar de la Casa:** As we have already mentioned, the mass media, which includes television, radio, print, and the Internet, has a significant impact on public opinion. The media provides information that the American public can use to support or oppose different points of view. It is also the primary way Americans learn about different candidates. For example, think about a well-known politician. Is your opinion of this person based on a personal relationship or a private conversation? Most likely, your opinion is based on a televised debate you watched, an article you read in the newspaper, or even a video clip you watched online.

The influence of mass media can be a powerful tool for savvy politicians and clever campaign managers; however, a poor television interview or an awkward sound bite might destroy a candidate's political aspirations.

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**Campaign Ads**

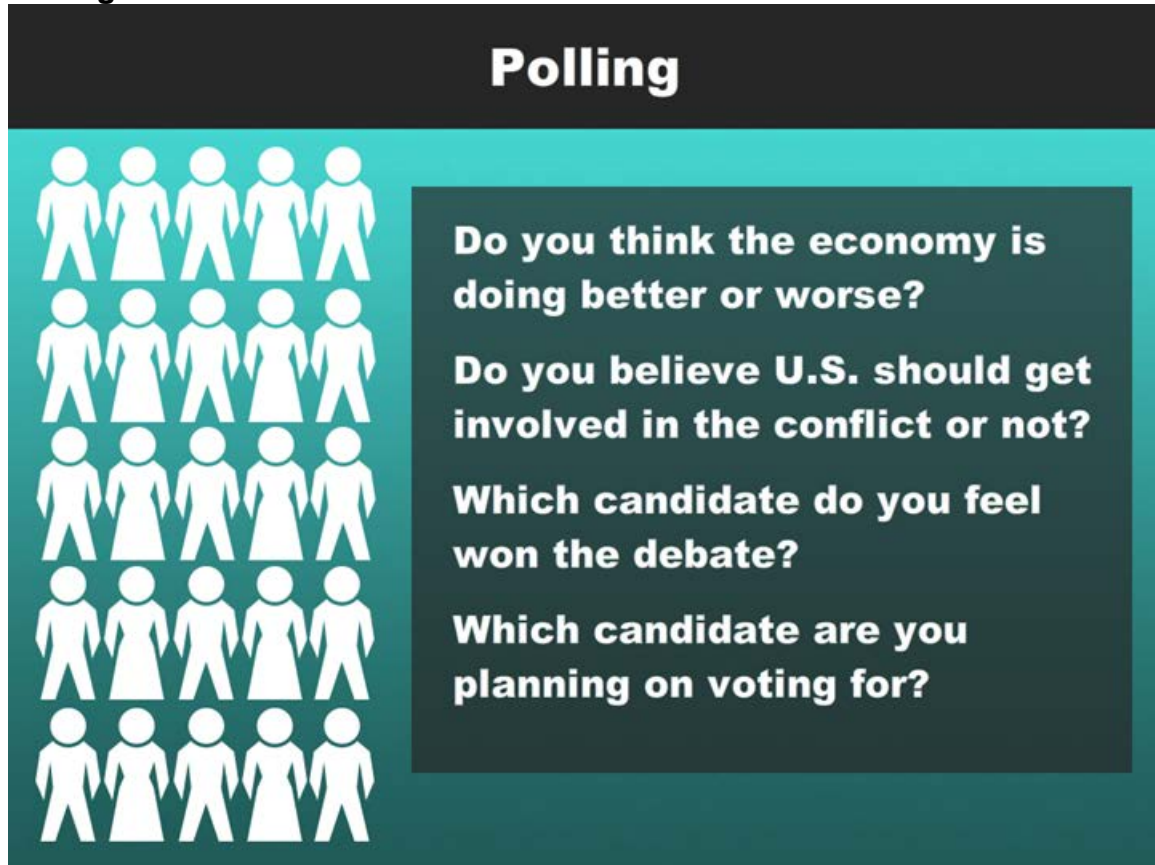


**Pilar de la Casa:** Obviously a large part of any political campaign is the campaign's advertisements. These ads can be found in various types of mass media, and are typically targeted toward their intended demographic. For example, older voters are more likely to read their news in a newspaper than on a website, whereas younger voters are the exact opposite. Age is less a factor for a medium like television. This is why you will see countless campaign ads on television during election season.

These ads use different tactics to win the election. Some ads attempt to persuade voters to cast their ballots for a particular candidate. Other ads attempt to mobilize voters and convince them to participate in the election. This is especially true of ads targeted toward a younger audience. Finally, there are the infamous negative campaign ads. These ads focus less on the positive attributes of a candidate and more on the weaknesses of his or her opponent. Although most Americans claim to be against negative campaigning, it has been a common part of American politics from the beginning.

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**Polling**



**Polling**

**Do you think the economy is doing better or worse?**

**Do you believe U.S. should get involved in the conflict or not?**

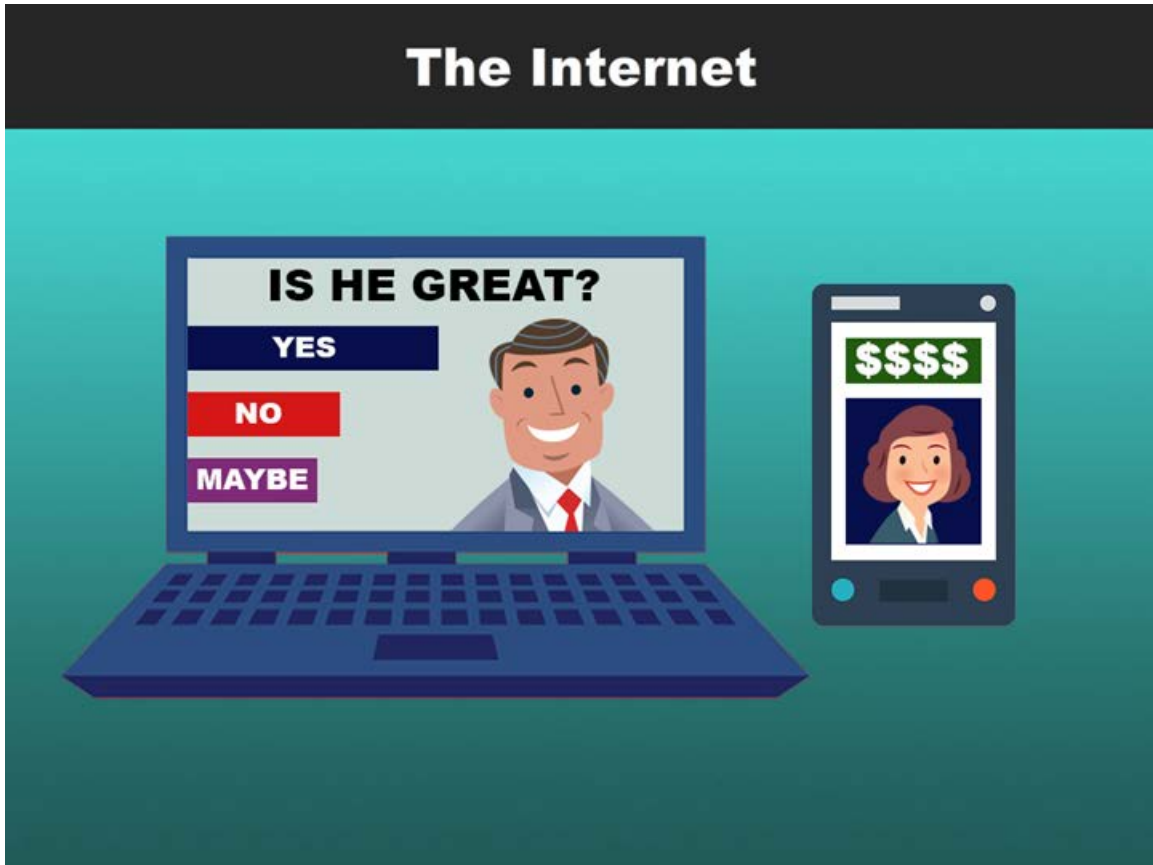
**Which candidate do you feel won the debate?**

**Which candidate are you planning on voting for?**

**Pilar de la Casa:** Scientific polls take a sample of the population and ask them to answer a question or a series of questions. These polls can be used to measure public opinion on different topics, including candidates for office. Polls are not perfect, but they are an excellent way for a campaign to gauge current public opinion. If, according to a poll, a candidate is considered weak on foreign policy, the candidate can focus on highlighting foreign policy in his or her next speech. If a poll shows that a candidate is less popular with women voters, the campaign can begin producing ads targeted at female voters. In this way, a campaign is able to refine its strategies to be more effective.

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**The Internet**



**Pilar de la Casa:** The Internet has revolutionized many aspects of our lives, including the way we participate in civic life. The best campaign managers have understood the importance of the Internet and used it to their advantage. For example, campaigns use websites and email to easily share information about a candidate with countless voters. Social networking sites and blogging have allowed average Americans to share their political opinions with larger and larger audiences, helping shape public opinion. Polls and fundraising efforts are easily conducted online. Grassroots movements, which begin at a local level, are able to expand to the national level with relative ease, thanks to the Internet. My personal opinion is that the Internet has only just begun to revolutionize political campaigns and elections.



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**Ending of Episode**



**Glover Mint:** Thank you, Pilar. I agree with you that the impact of the Internet on political campaigns and elections has yet to be seen. It will be exciting to see some of these major changes to the political process occur in our lifetime.