RESOLVED, The new media have brought the president closer to the people

PRO: Matthew R. Kerbel

CON: Jeffrey E. Cohen

William McKinley was a media pioneer. Who knew? As historian David Greenberg records in Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency, McKinley was a presidential candidate in 1896 when “motion pictures were just escaping the vaudeville booths and amusement arcades and arriving in urban theaters.” A few weeks before the election, moviegoers began seeing a newsreel called “Major McKinley at Home.” “It was as if the governor had literally ambled into the theater,” Greenberg records. “The crowd cheered; some called for the apparition to speak.”

McKinley was far from a natural on the silver screen, but his successor as president, Theodore Roosevelt, was right at home. Movie audiences grew accustomed to seeing newsreels not just of the athletic, hyperactive TR but also of his young children (the first to be raised in the White House since Abraham Lincoln’s sons). Concerns arose among critics who saw the new medium as trivializing politics and government. In 1920, for example, Democratic vice presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “Carefully rehearsed moving picture films do not necessarily convey the truth.” But he and other ambitious politicians soon got with the program, realizing that to reach voters, you must meet them where they are.

Newsreels exemplify a recurring pattern in the history of the presidency: the periodic rise of a new entertainment-centered mass medium, its grudging and awkward adoption by the president who is in office at the time, and then its mastery by subsequent presidents.
Take radio. In 1920 hardly anyone had one. By 1930 almost everyone did: big, ornate pieces of furniture that became the new centerpiece of American living rooms. Early in the decade, President Warren G. Harding broadcast a few speeches to crowds, but he always focused on the live audience. His successor, Calvin Coolidge, seized on the new medium. Confessing that “I can't make an engaging, arousing, or oratorical speech to a crowd,” Coolidge discovered that “I have a good radio voice and now I can get my messages across.”

A few years later FDR famously mastered radio with his relaxed, seemingly informal (but actually well-rehearsed) fireside chats. “The president likes to think of his audience as being a few people around his fireside,” said press aide Stephen Early—which is exactly what his audience was, only times tens of millions in number and in their own homes, not FDR’s. Many people today think Roosevelt delivered about a chat per week. Instead, he did just two or three per year. Roosevelt realized that when people turned on the radio to hear him they were in effect allowing him into their homes. He knew better than to wear out his welcome.

TV saturated the country as thoroughly during the 1950s as radio had during the 1920s. Repeating the cycle, Dwight D. Eisenhower, the first president elected in the television age, was okay, even smearing on makeup to cut the glare from his bald head. But it took John F. Kennedy to make the pictures as pleasing as the words were persuasive. JFK was the first president to broadcast his press conferences live, which seemed brave and daring even though there was seldom a question he and his staff hadn’t anticipated or an answer he hadn’t rehearsed.

As with radio and television, the online world moved from the margins of American life to its center in about a decade, from roughly 1995 to 2005. Barack Obama was the first national politician to make masterful use of the new medium through his Obama for America (OFA) campaign website in 2008. OFA became Organizing for America when he assumed office, but it never really took off in its postelection incarnation. Some future president undoubtedly will turn the Internet from a useful tool for campaigning into one that works just as well for governing. But in doing so, that president will have to take full account of the fact that social media are interactive, not unidirectional, from leader to led as in the past.

Even in the current phase of transition from novelty to familiarity to mastery, a serious question arises about the new media: Have they brought presidents and the people closer to each other or farther apart? Matthew R. Kerbel argues the case for increasing closeness. Jeffrey E. Cohen contends that the new media actually have made the president a more remote figure to most Americans.
President Obama celebrated his fifty-fourth birthday in August 2015 and
Americans across the country celebrated with him—on Twitter. They
tweeted pictures of the president with balloons, confetti, and party hats, and
sent heartfelt wishes like they would to relatives or friends. The hashtag
#44turns54 is filled with so many personal comments and expressions of well-
being that it’s easy to forget there once was a time when the president was a
distant and unapproachable figure. That was before the Internet and social
media revolutions broke down barriers and afforded ordinary individuals the
opportunity to engage in virtual relationships with virtually anyone.

President Obama—the first president of the social media age—maintained
a strong and carefully cultivated Internet presence, and as social media increas-
ingly defined our interpersonal relationships, the president used them to draw
closer to the people. Television may have brought presidents into our living
rooms and made them accessible figures by saturating us with their likeness
and words, but television is an “old” medium that communicates messages
from single individuals to massive numbers of people. At best, television cre-
ated the illusion of proximity to the president, an image of familiarity crafted
on the president’s terms. In contrast, the “new media,” with their decentralized
platform, permit a wide range of interactions that can easily start with ordi-
nary people. And when we initiate the engagement we develop a deeper and
more enduring bond.

Television is built on a parallel architecture to radio and newspapers in
that an elite group of gatekeepers crafts and disseminates a message to a mass
audience. Skillful practitioners of the art of broadcasting, including successful
past presidents, managed how they were presented on television in order to
shape a positive image of themselves for the mass public. Long before Bill
Clinton played the saxophone on late-night TV, before Ronald Reagan pack-
aged his likeness with the Statue of Liberty and the American flag, John F.
Kennedy honed a young, vigorous television image and Dwight D. Eisenhower
marketed himself through television advertising as a heroic figure with
homespun roots by carefully combining thematic messaging with iconic
images. Presidents during this period would “go public” to market their
major legislative plans over the heads of Congress, using television as a key
resource in a strategy designed to shape the public agenda. When successful,
these efforts at media outreach could move public opinion. But television-age
presidents did not have the tools to reach out to and connect with individual
constituents.
Far from being an ideal medium for building relationships, television is implicated in facilitating a range of attitudes and behaviors associated with disconnection from the political process. Political scientist Robert Putnam documented a decline in social capital, or the collective benefits derived from interpersonal connections, during the period of television’s peak influence from the 1960s through the rise of the Internet at the turn of the century, which he suggests was aggravated by the central role of television in people’s lives. Social capital is key to a virtuous cycle where strong relationships engender trust and cooperation, leading to greater public engagement and support for political institutions and individuals like the president.

The elements of this cycle were notably absent in the television age, a time of decreased political participation and diminished support for government. Regardless of how favorably presidents may have presented themselves in their scripted appearances, television news coverage dwelled on the negative, portraying presidential actions as self-serving, scheming, and informed by the base motivation of holding onto power and position. The result was widespread cynicism about presidents and the political process.

Evidence abounds of the weakening of political bonds during this period. By 1992, at the height of television’s influence and just before the Internet revolution, the American National Election Study found rampant cynicism and political disengagement. Supermajorities expressed the sentiment that public officials do not care about the concerns of individual citizens and that government is not run for the benefit of society. Fully half felt their elected officials were corrupt.

Even if television is not to be blamed for these attitudes—and it is certainly too convenient to blame television for every social ill—there is little evidence of the sort of engagement between the president and the public that we would expect to find if television-age presidents had successfully built bonds with the public. Television programming, with its frenetic pace and innate preference for trouble and turmoil, is a poor vehicle for promoting positive partnerships between presidents and the public. Skilled presidents may have figured out how to use television to move aggregate opinion in their direction for fixed periods of time, but by no means did this reflect greater closeness or proximity to individuals. Perhaps it’s not coincidental that of the presidents who served between 1964 and 2000, only Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton left office with their approval on the upswing. The electorate discarded the other five.

But the Internet is different. It is built on an architecture designed to facilitate relationships. Its “many-to-many” design permits what television-age presidents could only dream about: the chance to microtarget messages to small or specific groups and inspire people to initiate their own, personalized
contacts with the White House. While the Internet supports top-down communication like television, it also permits bottom-up and many-to-many contacts that shift the locus of communication to the general public. This is particularly true with social media, where anyone can initiate political outreach in 140 characters, and it has transformed how presidents interact with the public.

You can trace this transformation to the 2008 campaign, where candidate Obama and a nexus of young, Internet-savvy advisers understood the defining nature of personalized communication in the Internet age and were able to develop tools to empower supporters to create their own campaign experience. The hub was the candidate’s official social network, my.barackobama.com (or, to campaign officials, simply MyBO). The site was a gateway that permitted voters to take the campaign into their own hands by building their own networks with other supporters. Its decentralized nature and easy, intuitive functionality personalized the Obama experience on a mass scale in a manner only possible on the Internet. Users responded by reaching out to others in their social networks to convince them to become Obama supporters, exchange information about the candidate, raise money, and even plan campaign events.

The top-down complement to MyBO, perfected to a high art in 2012, was a deep investment in microtargeting supporters, reaching them through social media, e-mail, and even text messages to cultivate relationships, initiate conversations, and call to action on behalf of the candidate. This enabled the candidate to invert the traditional campaign model, in which a small group of paid staffers performed the vast majority of campaign functions, in favor of a community involvement model in which massive numbers of unpaid volunteers each contributed small amounts of their time to the cause of electing the candidate. The campaign benefited from a motivated nationwide army of supporters, while supporters became personally invested in the campaign.

Obama nurtured these virtual connections after he took office, bringing the campaign’s social media skills to the White House. “I am Barack Obama, President of the United States—AMA,” read the message on the social media website Reddit one day in August 2012. “AMA” is an acronym for “ask me anything.” People did, with the president dutifully responding to a cascade of questions for half an hour and triggering a discussion that continued for days. Obama is the first president to have a YouTube channel. He has a presence on Google Plus, Instagram, BuzzFeed, Tumbler, and Pinterest. With over 3,600,000 Facebook followers and 6,260,000 Twitter followers, his social media outreach is objectively generating an enormous public response.

The Obama administration used these connections to engage citizens in the political process on behalf of his policy agenda. Social media outreach helped
The New Media Have Brought the President Closer to the People

to mobilize support for the 2009 stimulus package, the Supreme Court nomination of Sonya Sotomayor, and the Affordable Care Act. Over 200,000 people pledged to prevent sexual assault on college campuses in response to a White House social media campaign. In 2015 the fourteen-person White House Office of Digital Strategy was larger than the Office of the Press Secretary in the George W. Bush administration.

Presidential contacts are effective because of the power the Internet gives individuals to engage one another and initiate social action, even if it is on behalf of the administration’s agenda. Social media are about cultivating relationships, something the Obama campaign understood well. “The relationship that Obama built with individual supporters and between them was the unique part,” said Joe Rospars, the campaign’s primary digital strategist. “Our [social media] tools were sort of the glue for the relationships.” Added Thomas Gensemer, managing partner at Rospars’s media technology firm Blue State Digital, people “expect a conversation, a two-way relationship that is a give and take.” The open nature of the Internet strengthens these relationships by breaking down barriers between politicians and citizens.

Social networks also serve as “trust filters” where people can rely on interpersonal connections to evaluate information and decide whether it should be believed or set aside. Having personal networks to verify information enables people to navigate a hypersaturated media environment, ultimately permitting ordinary individuals to act as gatekeepers for others in their networks—a role once limited to television producers and newspaper editors. As in any relationship, trust is the prerequisite for successful engagement. Once trust is established, presidents are in a position to influence the behaviors of those who open their networks to them, and through their gatekeeping role the recipients of presidential contacts can amplify that influence.

The collective result of the trust developed through social networks is the creation of social capital, deepening and tightening community connections through the power to link directly to others in a manner unseen during the television age, evident through increased political and civic participation. Once believed to be the exclusive product of face-to-face encounters, social capital is now understood to be associated with virtual networks as people spend more time connected to one another online. This beneficial effect can extend to personalized communication between political figures like the president and individuals who are predisposed to social engagement.

It is hardly automatic that all future presidents will have the understanding and skill to use social media to form bonds with the public. President Obama and his advisers had a keen understanding of how social media work and were able to employ them impressively, recognizing the value of reaching people
through emotional appeals that communicated enthusiasm and even humor.\textsuperscript{26} It would not be difficult to imagine other presidents with a less intuitive feel for online communication having difficulty using social media in a way that feels as natural. Likewise, not all presidents will have the impulse to allow others to play an important role in their communication strategy. Effective social media connections require ordinary citizens to feel empowered to act on their own, and that could spell difficulty for a president not secure enough to relinquish top-down control of the media.

Additionally, not everyone will be interested in engaging with the president through social networks. In an era marked by intense partisanship, it would not be surprising if the White House disproportionately reaches those who are predisposed to support the president. But there should also be no question that the Internet and social media give the president a multitude of options for connecting with the public that were not available only a few years ago, and that the nature of those connections is profoundly richer than what was possible in the television age.

The new media have undoubtedly brought the president closer to the people. They can strengthen relationships around political engagement. They can generate social capital. And they can create a bond with the president strong enough to inspire voting, involvement in a policy campaign, and countless tweeted birthday cards.

\textbf{CON: Jeffrey E. Cohen}

A\textsuperscript{m}ericans now enjoy easier and more varied access to information and news about politics, government, and the presidency than ever before. Three cable television networks, MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News, offer round-the-clock news; interested viewers can tune into news whenever they want. People can also receive information about politics from television programs that blend political satire with commentary and news, such as \textit{Saturday Night Live}, the \textit{Daily Show} and the \textit{Colbert Report}.\textsuperscript{27} The Internet offers an even greater diversity of news sources. All the major newspapers publish online editions, available to anyone, anywhere, at any time. There are also Internet-only news sites like Politico, the Daily Beast, and the Huffington Post, as well as less formal news and information sources such as blogs. The rise of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, allows greater flexibility in accessing and sharing information, two-way interaction, and collaboration in the production of content, including news.
Presidents, too, increasingly employ a variety of means to communicate with citizens. The combination of jet-airplane technology and broadcasting allows presidents easy travel around the nation and the globe. They can speak to targeted groups or the entire nation from almost anywhere. More recently, the Internet has become an important communication tool for political campaigns and the presidency. Campaigns use the Internet to generate interest in and provide information on the candidate, to solicit donations, and to locate and mobilize potential campaign workers and voters. The presidency has established a formal governmental Internet page, WhiteHouse.gov, which offers information about the president and the administration, including positions on issues, texts and videos of speeches, a portal to other government agencies, and even a way to submit questions and comments to the White House. President Barack Obama built his own nongovernmental webpage, https://www.barackobama.com/, where people could learn about the administration, volunteer to actively support the president on specific issues, and buy T-shirts and other products proclaiming support for Obama and his policy initiatives.

With myriad ways for communication between the president and voters, one would think that the president and the public are closer now than they have ever been. But this is not the case. Citizens are more distant now from the president, and presidents have a harder time reaching voters than was the case in the 1960s and 1970s, before the creation of cable television—the first of the new media. Why, if there are so many ways for voters and presidents to communicate and learn about each other, are voters and the president more distant now than they were forty years ago, before the advent of the new media?

Two Eras of Communication: Broadcasting and the New Media

To address the question of the closeness between the president and the public, it is useful to divide the years since 1960 years into two broad eras, the Broadcast Era (1960–1980) and the New Media Era (1980–present). During the Broadcast Era, the most important news sources for most voters were the evening news broadcasts from three major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC). Each broadcasted their major news program during the dinner hour, they competed with one another for viewers, and their programs covered essentially the same news stories. If someone wanted to watch television during the dinner hour, which many appeared to want to do, practically the only viewing choice one had was a news program. Consequently, voters, no matter their interest in news and politics, were exposed to a lot of news about politics and government.
Moreover, there was a similarity in news across most of the major news organizations, whether television or newspapers. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and a few other sources set the news agenda, especially with regard to national and international events, for most news organizations. To keep from offending viewers and readers of different political orientations and to generate as large an audience as possible, news reporting in this era primarily described the president's activities, with much less commentary and analysis than is now so common for news reporting.

The era of new media began with two major developments—VHS (and, later, DVDs) and cable television. A defining characteristic of the era of new media is that people have much more choice about what to watch than they did during the Broadcast Era. For example, technologies, like VHS and DVDs, allow people to record a television show or rent a movie to be watched whenever they desire. Cable television offered viewing choices, from sports, to music videos, to reruns of television programs, to movies that competed with the dinner hour news broadcasts of the three networks. The audience for network news broadcasts declined as many viewers flocked to these entertainment programs that cable offered. Most people, it appears, prefer entertainment to news. Cable television also offered around-the-clock dedicated news networks (CNN, Fox, MSNBC), but they have quite small viewshippers. In 2014 their combined prime-time audience was only 2.8 million, and they might be best described as niche networks catering to an audience hungry for news. To try to stem the loss of viewers, who preferred entertainment to news, the big three television networks decreased the amount of hard news—that is, news on politics, government, and economics—and increased the amount of soft news—that is, human interest stories, often concerning entertainment, popular arts, and lifestyle.

Since the advent of cable television, there have been other major new media developments, primarily the Internet, and more recently, social media. But like cable, these newer new media resemble cable in being primarily human interest media. Despite the possibility of accessing news-on-demand from a variety of sources, news acquisition is not the top or even a highly ranked activity among those using the Internet or social media. For instance, in 2013 the *New York Times*, the most trafficked dedicated news site on the Internet, ranked thirty-first overall, but received only 7 percent as many visits as Facebook. Still, Internet access is nearly ubiquitous in the United States. In 2014 approximately 87 percent of the population had Internet access, and nearly two-thirds owned a smartphone. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, in 2015 approximately 63 percent of both Facebook and Twitter users said they got some news from those social media platforms. This means that
about 40 percent and 13 percent of the population receive some news from Facebook and Twitter, respectively—quite large numbers. How has the spread of these technologies affected the relationship between voters and the president?

**Trends in the Closeness of the President and the Public**

There are several ways to think about the closeness between the president and the public. One is to look at policy agreement, but there will always be some policy disagreement between the president and a significant number of voters.35 Instead, let us think of the presidency as the primary political institution for most voters. For a large number of voters, the only political leader they can name is the president, and many lack basic knowledge or understanding of our admittedly complex system of separation of powers and checks and balances.36 Large numbers of voters look to the president for leadership, especially in troubling times. To fulfill this leadership expectation, presidents must be able to get their message to the public—that is, voters must pay some attention to presidential communications, and they must be able to make sense of them.

**Declining News Coverage of the President**

Presidents communicate with the public through two means—either directly, by giving prime-time national addresses, or indirectly, through the coverage they receive from the news media. Through both of these means, presidents convey information to the public, educating them on the important issues of the day. Since presidents cannot give national addresses frequently, the news is especially important for continual day-in–day-out communication from the president to the voters. If the president does not receive sufficient news coverage, it becomes more difficult for the public to learn about the many issues and policies being debated. Moreover, if presidents do not receive much news coverage, the public will not look upon them as being particularly strong or important.

But how much news coverage does the president receive? It is difficult to compare the amount of news coverage that the president has received over time because of the evolution of communication—from broadcasting, to cable television, to the Internet, to social media. Still, we can look at news coverage for one news source that has remained important in both the Broadcast and New Media Eras, the *New York Times*.

As noted above, the *Times* is the most prestigious news organization, irrespective of medium, and it still sets much of the news agenda for most news
organizations—that is, other news organizations tend to follow the lead of the *Times* in deciding what is newsworthy, especially for national and international news. Figure 6-1 plots the average number of stories per day that appeared on the front page, which is usually reserved for what news editors consider the most important news. There is an unmistakable decline in the amount of presidential news. In the 1950s through the 1960s, presidents received about 3.0 front-page news stories per day, compared to about 1.5 in the 2000s. This decline partially reflects the decrease in the number of front-page stories. But there is a similar trend if we look at the entire newspaper. In the early 1970s, there were about 15 articles per day on the president in the entire paper, compared to about 8–9 in the 2000s. There is much less news coverage on the president today than there was forty years ago. If there is so much less news coverage of the president now than in the past, it is hard to argue that the relationship between the president and the public is closer.

**Figure 6-1**

Average Daily Number of Front-Page News Stories on the President in the *New York Times*, 1953–2010

![Graph showing the average daily number of front-page news stories on the president from 1953 to 2010. The graph shows a noticeable decline in the number of stories, particularly in the 2000s.](source: ProQuest Historical Newspapers Archive.)
Declining Audience for Presidential Speeches

Instead of trying to track the overall volume of news, which may be impossible to do, we can ask how much attention people pay to the president. The State of the Union Address (SOTU) is the most important speech presidents give. They do it once a year, and in the address presidents outline their policy agenda for the upcoming year. How many people watch the SOTU?

The A. C. Nielsen company has been tracking the ratings of television broadcasts since the 1950s, and it has done the same for the State of the Union Address since 1969. Figure 6-2 plots the rating for the SOTU since 1969. Each rating point can be thought of as the percentage of households with televisions that watch a program. As nearly every household in the United States has a television, a ratings point is approximately the percentage of households.37

There is an unmistakable and dramatic decline in the ratings for the president’s State of the Union Address. In the early 1970s, nearly one-half of households watched the speech. By the 2000s, barely 20 to 25 percent did so. The audience for

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Figure 6-2

Trend in Ratings for the President’s State of the Union Address, 1969–2015

Source: A. C. Nielsen.
the president’s speech *on broadcast television* has declined by one-half. But people do not have to watch the speech when it is being broadcast. They can stream it on platforms like YouTube, when it is most convenient for them. In 2015 the Obama administration was aware of the falloff in the number of people who watch the SOTU. For a month prior to the address, the administration publicized the outlines and initiatives the president would discuss, and it heavily used new media like YouTube, Facebook, Medium, Vine, LinkedIn, and Twitter to get the message out, especially to those who traditionally do not pay much attention to news about politics and government.38 Table 6-1 lists the number of views of the president’s SOTU on the official White House YouTube channel from 2010 through 2015. The 2015 YouTube audience rose greatly over that of the previous two years, at nearly 1.9 million, but this is a small number given the vast size of the United States. As each ratings point is equivalent to approximately 1,156,000 households currently, the YouTube audience would add about 1.5 ratings points, perhaps bringing the rating to about 21–22; this is still well shy of the levels reached decades ago.39 Even with a determined campaign by the White House to boost attention to the SOTU through social media, the effort still produced an audience woefully small compared to that during the Broadcast Era.

Moreover, in the New Media Era, the audience for the president’s address is composed primarily of those who agree with the president and are of the same

**Table 6-1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Views of the State of the Union Address on the Official White House YouTube Channel (whitehouse.gov)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>470,014 (on C-SPAN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>500,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>926,077</td>
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<td>2,772,567</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>525,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,860,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>613,432</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: YouTube, as of September 9, 2016.*
party. Opposition party identifiers and those generally uninterested in news and politics pay little attention to the address. This differs from the Broadcast Era, when the audience for the address represented a broader cross section of American society.\textsuperscript{40}

**Declining Levels of Political Knowledge**

A knowledgeable citizenry is crucial for the functioning of a democracy, as the founders, in particular Thomas Jefferson, acknowledged and advocated.\textsuperscript{41} The news media—in fact, all forms of communication among people—were considered central in the role of informing the citizenry about what its leaders were doing, such as their policies. One promise of the new media is to increase and ease access to relevant information about politics, government, and the presidency. A more knowledgeable citizenry will be closer to the president, if only because a citizenry that lacks the requisite knowledge of politics and government cannot hold the White House accountable or communicate its needs and aspirations to the president.

For each election cycle since the early 1950s, the American National Election Studies has polled nationally representative samples of Americans, asking a variety of questions, including some that tap into their basic knowledge and understanding of politics and government. One question that has been repeated numerous times asks voters whether they know which party holds the majority in the House of Representatives. This is a useful question for measuring basic political knowledge, as it is a fundamental fact about our political system’s constitutional structure.

Since only the Democrats or Republicans could hold the House majority, we would expect that if everyone merely guessed, one-half would get the answer right. Fifty percent, thus, should serve as a baseline for making comparisons over time and assessing the knowledge level of voters. Moreover, as educational levels have risen over the last fifty years, we should expect larger percentages of voters correctly answering this question over time. Figure 6-3 plots the percentage correct from 1960 through 2012.

Although there is some volatility from election to election, the figure shows a steady decrease in knowledge over time. Whereas about 65 percent correctly identified the House majority party in the 1960s, only 50 percent could do so in the 2000s—not much better than guessing. Moreover, this decline has been occurring while educational levels have risen. This trend, like the ones discussed above, suggest a distancing between the president and the public.
Conclusion

At a minimum, a close relationship requires a sufficient degree of interaction and knowledge by the two parties about each other. One would think that the new media, with their ease and convenience of use, would have helped bring the president and the public closer together. But that does not seem to be the case. There is less news about the president than during the Broadcast Era, which means that voters will learn less about what the president does. In addition, voters seem to pay less attention to news and major presidential events, like the State of the Union Address, now than during the Broadcast Era. Perhaps most important, despite rising educational levels, voters in the New Media Era are in general less knowledgeable about politics and government than during the Broadcast Era.

This distancing between the president and voters is not merely a function of the arrival of the new media. Polarization and decreasing civility in modern
politics probably also play a role. But the choices the new media offer citizens have led many to spend their time in nonpolitical activities. Thus, there is considerable political disengagement in the New Media Era. It is hard to call the relationship between presidents and citizens close if they are disengaged from each other.

NOTES

PRO

9. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
22. Ibid.

**CON**

27. As of this writing, Jon Stewart has left *The Daily Show*, now hosted by Trevor Noah, and Stephen Colbert moved on to become host of *The Late Show* on CBS. Research indicates that viewers learn from programs like these. See Josy Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, “The *Daily Show* Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy, and American Youth,” *American Politics Research* 34, no. 3 (2006): 341–67.
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34. Pew Research Center, “The Evolving Role of News on Twitter and Facebook,” http://www.journalism.org/2015/07/14/the-evolving-role-of-news-on-twitter-and-facebook/. In 2015 about 73 percent and 23 percent of Internet users had a Facebook or Twitter account. With 87 percent of the population having Internet access, this means that 63 percent and 20 percent of the population had Facebook and Twitter accounts. Multiplying these percentages by the 63 percent who say they get some news from Facebook or Twitter produces the 40 percent and 13 percent for the population.


37. See Baum and Kernell, “Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television?”


39. In fact, slightly less than 600,000 people subscribe to the WhiteHouse.gov YouTube channel.
