

# Prikaz američkih predsjednika u medijima

---

Viteškić, Sarah

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2022

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Fakultet hrvatskih studija**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:111:963655>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-11-01**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of University of Zagreb, Centre for Croatian Studies](#)





University of Zagreb  
University Department of Croatian Studies

Sarah Viteškić

**PORTRAYAL OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTS  
IN THE MEDIA**

BACHELOR THESIS

Zagreb, June 202



University of Zagreb  
University Department of Croatian Studies  
Communication Studies

Sarah Viteškić

**PORTRAYAL OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTS  
IN THE MEDIA**

BACHELOR THESIS

Mentor: Spomenka Bogdanić, Lecturer

Zagreb, June 2022

Content:

SUMMARY .....	1
1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM .....	3
3. THE PRESIDENT’S NEED FOR MEDIA COVERAGE.....	4
4. THEODORE ROOSEVELT .....	5
4.1. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA .....	5
4.2. PRESIDENCY AND MEDIA COVERAGE.....	6
5. JOHN F. KENNEDY .....	8
5.1. THE MEDIA’S INFLUENCE: KENNEDY VS. NIXON.....	8
5.2. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA .....	9
5.3. MEDIA CRITICISM.....	10
6. BARACK OBAMA .....	11
6.1. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.....	11
6.2. SOCIAL MEDIA PRESIDENT .....	12
6.3. MEDIA CRITICISM.....	13
7. DONALD TRUMP .....	15
7.1. MEDIA WAR.....	15
7.2. PRESIDENT AS A TWEETER.....	16
8. CONCLUSION .....	18
REFERENCES .....	19

## **SUMMARY**

The President of the United States' future has always rested on their relationship with the media and the impression they make on the public. Presidential campaigns were analyzed in the press or televised live to the audience's homes, which had a crucial role in influencing public opinion development. Some presidents took advantage of media attention and kept a good attitude, while others were met with criticism. Positive media coverage could help the president gain support, while negative media coverage has the potential to redirect resources away from the president's priorities and lose potential voters. In this thesis, four American presidents are used to illustrate the relationship between presidents and the media in the United States of America. Theodore Roosevelt was the first President to recognize the importance of public opinion and to use newspapers and magazines to spread his message. Similarly, John F. Kennedy used the medium of television to address the public directly. Moreover, by creating a tradition of live, televised news conferences, Kennedy allowed the public to learn about his policies and personality. Later, President Barack Obama effectively used the rise of social media. Obama was the first President to use Facebook and Twitter effectively, considering he saw the Internet and social media as a way to engage people and promote policy ideas. His ideas were furthered by his successor, President Donald Trump, who used Twitter as "his printing press" and often quarreled with the media. The thesis examines how these four American presidents were portrayed and reported on in the media, and what was the audience's ultimate reaction.

**Keywords:** presidents, presidency, The United States, media, social media, politics, public, elections

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of the media era, presidents of the United States of America have used the media and felt used by it as well. However, as new media technologies entered the picture, the public became more involved, and presidents had to adapt. As head of both the government and the state, presidents' future depends on their connection with the media and the impression they make on the public. When presidents could get their narrative on the news, they knew they were communicating with the broad public in the most effective way possible. Presidential campaigns were either published in the papers or televised live, which had a crucial role in creating public opinion.

The main aim of this thesis is to examine how former US Presidents were portrayed in the media, as well as their interactions with the media. Furthermore, the way the media reports about the presidents and how it all influences the public's opinion will be addressed as well.

Throughout American history, there have been forty-six presidents, including the current president, Joe Biden. This thesis will focus primarily on four former American presidents and their interactions with the media. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump all left their imprints on media coverage and public opinion.

In the first part of the thesis, the American presidential system will be explained, as well as the importance of media coverage and the President's desire to obtain it. In the second part of the thesis, four presidents' relationships with the media will be discussed. Firstly, Theodore Roosevelt, the 26<sup>th</sup> President, was the first to effectively use the media to his advantage, to raise awareness and engage the public. After that, the thesis will move to President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was the first to directly address the audience through the media, notably television. On the other hand, presidents Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, both had turbulent relationships with the media, which will be addressed later. The media supported and criticized Barack Obama, calling him out for unfulfilled promises. The thesis will conclude with a short portrait of Donald Trump, the most controversial president, who publicly clashed with the press and declared a "war on the press".

## 2. AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

Since 1776, the colonies of the New World have been referred to as the "United States." Arnold (2004) explains how the US Constitution, which was adopted in 1788, establishes three different parts of the government: judicial, legislative, and executive. Supreme Court is the judiciary section, and its justices are appointed by the President, who is the executive branch. Arnold clarifies all of that happens only with the approval of the United States Senate, which oversees the legislative branch (2004).

The President of the United States oversees the government and the state. They are chosen independently of the legislature and may or may not be members of the largest political party. (Arnold, 2004) The President's power and responsibilities, according to Arnold, include assigning Supreme Court justices, appointing a cabinet of secretaries of state and department heads, serving as the military's Commander-in-Chief, negotiating international allegiances, etc. (2004)

In 1789, George Washington became the first President of the United States of America, a newly formed Nation of four million people. (Freidel, 1964) Every four years, the President of the United States is elected by the electorate that requires a candidate to receive "at least 270 electoral votes from the states to win".<sup>1</sup> Until today, the United States of America has had 46 presidents, including the current and ongoing President, Joe Biden.

Schiesingler in Freidel (1964) states how through the years, the presidency has not been viewed in the same light by all presidents. Those who understood democracy in the 1790s argued that the President's role should be limited to that of Congress. Schiesingler mentions how historians, based on examinations, believe that the President's authority has grown steadily over years. (Freidel, 1964). This is something Berube (1991) agrees with, claiming the nation became increasingly complicated in the twentieth century, therefore presidential decision-making became more complex as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (n.d.). *A history of U.S. presidential elections in maps*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved May 6, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/list/a-history-of-us-presidential-elections-in-maps>

### **3. THE PRESIDENT'S NEED FOR MEDIA COVERAGE**

With the rise of the media era, presidential candidates understood that the press, including print and electronic media, may be crucial in American electoral politics. Therefore, they spend most of their time attempting to sway it in their favor. (Rubin, 1983)

Frantzich (2019) explains the difference and influence of positive and negative media coverage on the President. Positive media coverage could strengthen the president's position with other political figures and, as a result, contribute to the approval of his desired policy outcomes. On the contrary, negative media coverage threatens to divert resources away from the president's and his administration's priorities. Therefore, a president's ability to use the media to set the agenda could help him win more votes in Congress.

Researchers found that a resident's general reputation and capacities, both depend on the presentation of network news programs. (Frantzich, 2019) Rubin explains that the president's representation in the media increases the general public's familiarity with political content and increases the chances of political topics being discussed among the public. Consequently, the media, especially television, broaden the public's knowledge and generate opinions about elected officials. (1983) In recent years, presidents have started to rely less on their political parties and more on public support. According to Frantzich, some presidents use nationally televised remarks to alter public opinion and such national appeals are usually moderated due to the heterogeneity of the audience. On the contrary, other presidents "go local", delivering messages to specific groups of people. (2019, p. 7-8)

Frantzich (2019) concludes it is certain that the Presidents and the media have a mutually beneficial relationship where they rely on each other. To gain public support for his policies and influence others, the president must get his word out. On the other hand, the media covers the President to meet the expectations of the public. Therefore, presidents and the media struggle for control of the public message.

However, Frantzich (2019) argues that in recent years, the usefulness of going public to widen one's policy support has diminished. Presidents have lost their monopoly on news coverage due to the expansion of media sources. Furthermore, companies and political parties have studied how previous presidents used the media and have copied their public relations strategies.



The relationship between the media and four former presidents of the United States of America will be discussed further in this thesis. Moreover, the media presentation and electoral campaigns of Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump will be analyzed as well.

#### **4. THEODORE ROOSEVELT**

The 26<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt led the country from 1901 to 1909. Even though he was born into a wealthy family in New York City in 1858, throughout his political career, he fought economic disparities. (Freidel, 1964) The late nineteenth century was a period of the public's questioning of American aristocracy. Saveth (1991) claims that Roosevelt stated his dissatisfaction with patricians and assembled his image with elements of activism and fighting for public rights. Roosevelt remains remembered as the first President who effectively used the media and steered Congress and the American people toward progressive changes and programs. (Freidel, 1964)

##### **4.1.RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA**

Greenberg (2017) explains how during the nineteenth century, presidents of the United States did not spend much of their time worrying about public opinion. Theodore Roosevelt was the first one who made it his job to gather the public behind his political aims, transforming the presidency into a force for social progress. Unless prohibited by law or the Constitution, Roosevelt believed that the President should take whatever action is required for the public interest and considered the President to be the "steward of the people". (Freidel, 1964, p. 57)

Roosevelt's relationship with the media began even before he was elected President. In the spring of 1898, President William McKinley led the United States into war with Spain, later known as the Spanish-American War. Greenberg explains how during that time, Roosevelt was already a well know New York state representative and police commissioner. After the war started, he got a position as a lieutenant colonel and established a training base in Texas. Photographers and reporters gathered at the Texas camp, which had a sign on the gate that said, "All Civilians, Except Reporters, Prohibited from Camp." The media called such camps "Teddy's Terrors" indicating Roosevelt's ability to seize headlines even before he was elected president. (2017, p. 27-28)

Roosevelt collaborated with the media and allowed his preferred journalists to accompany him to get a complete insight into the story. Greenberg claims Roosevelt was equally concerned with how the war was presented as with how it was fought. (2017) As his war glory grew, newsreels strengthened the public's perception of Roosevelt's heroics. After the war was over in December 1898, Roosevelt was elected as New York's Governor. In 1901, he was elected vice president and after McKinley was assassinated, Roosevelt took his place as the President of the United States. (Greenberg, 2017)

Due to recognizing the importance of public opinion in politics, Roosevelt was able to construct his public presidency. Journalist William Smith wrote how no president has ever taken the people into his confidence or appealed as Roosevelt did. The public recognized this, Smith added, and it increased Roosevelt's popularity. (Greenberg, 2017)

#### **4.2.PRESIDENCY AND MEDIA COVERAGE**

As the President, Roosevelt continued to receive a lot of attention. He knew how he wanted the public to perceive him and how to deal with the media. Correspondent Isaac Marcossion described him as the "master press agent of all time" (Greenberg, 2017, p. 32). Similarly, Juergens portrays Roosevelt as the "master of image-making". (1982, p. 131)

To address big national issues, the President had to establish the political agenda through speeches, the media, and other forms of mass communication. This entailed mastering the skills of persuasion and image creation that would eventually be known as spin to command public attention. (Greenberg, 2017) He thought the news in a daily newspaper, and how they are presented, have a significant influence on public opinion. It would not matter what the press had to say about him on the inside pages if he could take the headlines and control the way reporters wrote about him. (Juergens, 1982)

Roosevelt had come to believe that newspapers and magazines with a large circulation were essential for spreading his message. He claimed that no other group holds as much power as those who write for the daily newspaper and other magazines. Greenberg (2017) states that during his two mandates, Roosevelt's interactions with reporters were a mix of charm and leadership. Furthermore, he realized their crucial role in shaping public opinion. He understood that journalists' impact on the public came from the information they provided and the way their news columns framed matters.

Roosevelt remains remembered as the first President who valued relationships with the media. He allowed journalists to accompany him on his tours across the country, giving interviews and being photographed. (Frantzich, 2019) During an interview, Roosevelt said he preferred simplicity to avoid being misquoted and tries to put the whole truth in every sentence. Therefore, he was extremely careful with his words and stated that one sentence quoted out of context might be exploited to stab his back. (Greenberg, 2017)

Frantzich (2019) furthers that Roosevelt gave journalists direct access and information with only one rule. He kept the privilege to make off-the-record statements and punished reporters who disobeyed it. According to Juergens (1982), Roosevelt warned the journalists that if they revealed where they got their information, he would accuse them of lying. Roosevelt told the service representatives that a reporter who betrayed his trust would be prevented from receiving further news. Furthermore, he would even withhold valid news from the newspaper or agency that hired the offending reporter. Covering Roosevelt became a reporter's dream for those who collaborated, which meant writing in favor of Roosevelt's programs.

To reach all the possible audiences, Roosevelt took presidential trips known as “swings around the circle” which were extremely exciting for the public. (Greenberg, 2017) The White House did not always provide the press with an equal amount of information and transparency. The news was broadcast in different methods to fulfill different goals, but all to receive public support. (Juergens, 1982) Greenberg explains how Roosevelt’s ability to manipulate news went even further. He learned that bad and degrading news on Friday evenings may be buried in the Saturday papers while breaking positive news on Sundays could make Monday's front pages. He leaked information to journalists and checked whether cameras and special reporters were present on occasions. (2017)

He was known for publicity stunts, once going on a dive in a submarine near Long Island to show his support for the warships. Roosevelt created the first full-time White House pressroom and assigned government press officers. Frantzich (2019) explains that the White House pressroom allowed journalists even more access and Roosevelt was known for his informal press conferences, for instance, conferences held during his “afternoon shave” (p.114). Since the information he gave the reporters represented the truth as he saw it, his meetings with the press shaped the version of the truth that was communicated to the public. Roosevelt received the publicity and media coverage he desired, while the media improved the quality of its reporting and were the first to publish. (Juergens, 1982)

Greenberg (2017) states that Roosevelt was the first President who had recognized and grabbed the potential to captivate the audience with morally charged speeches. While his predecessors had mostly given speeches on ceremonial occasions, he used policy and legislation speeches to lead and rally public opinion.

## **5. JOHN F. KENNEDY**

The youngest man elected, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America who carried the office from 1960 to 1963. (Freidel, 1964) Frantzich (2019) states Kennedy understood the thin line between the performer and the audience member. Kennedy began preparing live news briefings even before his inauguration, to master the television medium.

### **5.1. THE MEDIA'S INFLUENCE: KENNEDY VS. NIXON**

Kennedy nearly won the Democratic nomination for Vice President in 1956 and was the first presidential nominee four years later, in 1960. He was the first president to successfully communicate with the American people through the new medium of television. (Freidel, 1964) Rubin (1983) explains that television has produced a massive national audience of almost 50 million nightly watchers. Television played and still has a huge role in delivering elected officials' messages to the public, which ultimately shapes public opinion.

According to Hoover, Kennedy recognized that television was a matter of style and that it involved "drama as much as reality." (1988) His debates with Republican nominee Richard Nixon on television were watched by more than 70 million Americans.

The first televised debate was a significant shift from traditional presidential campaigning. Before 1960, there had been political debates, but none had been broadcast nationally. Self states that by agreeing to go on live television together, without scripts, two presidential candidates went into unexplored political territory. (2005, p.362) Before the presidential debates, Kennedy took a wide range of preparations. He assigned and practiced with the media gurus, researched Nixon, and compiled a stack of fact cards with data and talking points on topics ranging from unemployment to steel output. (Greenberg, 2017) The first of the four debates took place on September 26<sup>th</sup> 1960, and focused on domestic problems.

When Nixon arrived that night, he was unwell and responded that he had a fever and was on antibiotics. Even though he was hospitalized a couple of days before due to his knee injury, and reinjured his knee upon arrival, he refused to postpone or cancel the debate. (Self, 2005) Kennedy came fifteen minutes later, full-tanned and in good mood. He greeted Nixon upon arrival but later told his press assistant that Nixon looked extremely unwell. (Greenberg, 2017) Greenberg (2017) states that during the debate, Kennedy replied clearly, and repeated his campaign theme that the United States had stalled under President Eisenhower and vice-president Nixon in economics, defense, and civil rights. On the other hand, Nixon spoke rationally but failed to build a theme or separate his own from Kennedy's. He constantly stated that he agreed with what Kennedy had just said, making Kennedy appear to be the one with good ideas. Greenberg (2017) discussed their appearances as well. Kennedy appeared calm and tanned in his dark suit. He controlled both his words and actions, followed by gestures. On the contrary, Nixon appeared pale and sick. His gray outfit matched the studio's surroundings, he was smeared with sweat and was mopping his brows constantly. After the debate, Kennedy leaped the polls and was considered a clear victor.

Based on their presidential debate, Druckman (2003) conducted research on the effect television has on political behavior. The suggestion is that, when compared to audio listeners, television viewers are more likely to form conclusions about personality traits based on what they saw. Due to the differences in appearance, many people who watched the debate on television assumed that Kennedy won. On the contrary, radio listeners who did not see the candidates thought Nixon had won. Therefore, it is discussable Kennedy won because of his greater image on television, not because he was necessarily better on the issues.

## **5.2. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA**

The new President, John F. Kennedy, brought in the age of television's influence in shaping political trends, attitudes, and images to Americans. Kennedy established a tradition of live, televised news conferences, giving the public access to his policies, his battle of wits with reporters, and his personality. (Hoover, 1988)

Besides being the first President who mastered the art of television, Kennedy was famous for his press conferences. In the beginning, print journalists, who used to be the gatekeepers of information, saw John Kennedy's intentions to open conferences to live radio and television as a threat. According to print journalists, television reporters would "cheapen the press conference." (Frantzich, 2019, p. 114) Since television had been very important in

campaigning, Kennedy's media assistant thought Kennedy should take a bold move and allow live broadcast of his presidential press conferences. (Greenberg, 2017)

Kennedy accepted it and used his press conferences to reach out to the public, listen to the country's problems, and build his personality. Hoover explains the reasons for focusing on televised press conferences included the wide availability of television to the people, no equivalent time restrictions for the opposition, direct access to the people, and the medium's compatibility with Kennedy's personality. (1988) President Kennedy treated the press conferences as if they were a television special, and news coverage compared him to a Hollywood leading actor. (Greenberg, 2017)

Like Roosevelt, Kennedy was also known for befriending journalists. Kennedy gave numerous interviews, joked with reporters, and planned his press statements to meet deadlines. (Greenberg, 2017) By interacting with the media on policy matters, Kennedy aimed to obtain relevant information from the media. President could even give rewards to encourage positive behavior and discourage criticism, like invitations to formal dinners and special interviews. On the other hand, those who wrote negatively were restricted from attending Kennedy's news briefings. (Frantzich, 2019, p. 31, 140)

### **5.3. MEDIA CRITICISM**

Greenberg states that if there was a romance between Kennedy and reporters, it was a turbulent one. Journalists were still exhausted by the secrets of the Cold War, which Kennedy tried to maintain. Even though he answered questions through press conferences, dissatisfaction among journalists remained. They did not enjoy the lack of closeness, the limited material revealed, and the president's increased influence. (2017, p. 335-336)

Despite mostly favorable press coverage, Kennedy was still sometimes frustrated with the press. For example, Frantzich states that Kennedy believed the New York Herald Tribune was biased, thus he canceled his subscription. (2019, p. 30) Regardless of his friendly relationship with the media, Kennedy recognized that their interests and his department's interests would eventually clash. Therefore, in a press conference, he expressed himself carefully and diplomatically. (Greenberg, 2017)

According to Greenberg, Kennedy and his staff punished the authors of articles they did not like, threatening lawsuits or freezing offending publications. Kennedy became furious when journalists revealed material that he believed should remain hidden. Greenberg claims he

ordered FBI surveillance of reporters who revealed and published critical material, for example, USA plans in case the Soviets advanced on West Berlin or the amount of the USA and Soviet missile arsenals, both classified. (2017, p. 342-343)

The excitement of Kennedy's conferences faded over time. The president, tired of them, took a step back. Despite his claims, he ended up giving them information less frequently than Eisenhower. However, Greenberg (2017) states Kennedy used the media frequently enough to stay in the public spotlight, and they allowed him to show off his humor and attitude.

## **6. BARACK OBAMA**

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Barack Obama became the 44th president of the United States and became the first African American President. Obama won by approximately 200 electoral votes and 8.5 million public votes and took the office from 2008 to 2017. (Aaker & Chang, 2009) Obama saw the Internet and social media as a means to engage people and advocate policy ideas, therefore, he was the first President to use Facebook and Twitter effectively. (Frantzich, 2019)

### **6.1. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN**

As the senator running for President, Barack Obama's supporters predicted that he would be the first non-white President of the United States and the first with African ancestors. He was the promise of a new beginning in American history and a different sort of administration. (Walker, 2008) Press (2016) claims the 2008 election campaign was one of the most clever and well-planned political campaigns in history. Its promise of a bright young man and the first African American President inspired millions of Americans.

Pew Research Center<sup>2</sup> from Washington conducted research in 2008 where they investigated how the press covered the 2008 General Election. According to the findings, the media coverage has presented Barack Obama in a considerably positive light while portraying his opponent, John McCain in a significantly bad light. Obama's press coverage has been slightly more positive than negative, but not significantly so. On the other hand, McCain has received a lot of negative press, which has only gotten worse over time. During this time, 36 percent of

---

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center. (2008) „Winning the Media Campaign: How the Press Reported the 2008 General Election“. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2008/10/22/winning-media-campaign/> (Accessed: March 22nd, 2022)

the reports on Obama were positive, while a similar amount of 35 percent was neutral or mixed. While Obama had 29 percent of negative stories on him, for McCain more than half stories, approximately 58 percent were negative. (Pew Research Center, 2008)

Obama's and McCain's political programs varied markedly on numerous issues. Obama made a pledge to protect the institutional right to abortion, expressed hesitation regarding free trade, and proposed a national health insurance system. McCain wanted completely the opposite. Furthermore, Obama talked about cutting taxes for everyone except those making more than \$600,000 per year, while McCain wanted to cut taxes for everyone, benefiting the wealthy. (Walker, 2008) The economy's worsening in September 2007, according to Walker (2008), appeared to favor Obama, who started rising in the polls and eventually won the elections. Frantzich (2019) mentions that the Center for Media and Public Affairs found that, during the first fifty days of each president's administration, unfavorable coverage almost always outnumbered good coverage on evening news programs. He claims that at the beginning Obama was an exception, however, it is proven that his coverage deteriorated with time. After three months of Obama's presidency, only 43 percent of stories about him were positive.

## **6.2. SOCIAL MEDIA PRESIDENT**

One of the most important factors that contributed to Obama's victory was using social media and technology as a crucial component of their campaign strategy. His campaign's premise was to go where the people are, social media. (Aaker & Chang, 2009) Social media provides the President with a means for directly communicating messages without the intervention of traditional media. Barack Obama has tried to encourage his listeners with the slogan "yes we can", and the media has responded by emphasizing these words. (Frantzich, 2019, p. 131)

Obama was available on more than fifteen social networks and had a whole team of experts dedicated to leading his profiles. Obama's administration used social media not only to raise funds but rather to build a progressive movement of inspired volunteers who believed they could make a difference. (Aaker & Chang, 2009) Besides reaching the public, social media allowed Obama to be closer to them and appear friendly. According to Aaker and Chang (2009), many were impressed with the authenticity of Obama's Facebook page. He would talk about his favorite music, movies, and interests, as well as share his family photos like ordinary Sunday time with his children. They were continually updating their social media profiles, and people felt like they were interacting with him and his campaign. One of the examples Aaker and Chang provide is Obama's media team preparing an unusual event called



"Dinner with Barack." They chose four donors who had expressed their motivations for donating money to the campaign. Those chosen met with Obama over dinner and had the opportunity to discuss their major concerns with him. The events were streamed live on YouTube and through the campaign's websites. (2009, p. 12)

According to Frantzich (2019), the Obama administration was concerned about humiliating questions from common people, therefore it kept the authority to choose which questions would be addressed. Furthermore, Obama held conferences but not as many as interviews with specially selected media. Frantzich (2019) appoints three key reasons why President Obama had so many interviews. First was that they enabled him to target specific audiences even more. Second, the president could establish rules for the discussion topics, and third, the White House had the final say over who led the interview. (Frantzich, 2019) Therefore, by controlling social media and interviews they strongly regulated all the information regarding Obama and his activities.

### **6.3. MEDIA CRITICISM**

As president, Obama discovered that the admiring coverage he received on the campaign trail soon went back to the old adversarial relationship between the press and the presidency. (Greenberg, 2017) Frantzich states that President Obama used to say that the media tends to believe the elected President's job description is to get reelected. Therefore, the media evaluates and discusses every action or word and its possible impact. (2019, p. 38)

A couple of months into Obama's presidency, the public was irritated by rising unemployment and poor economic prognosis. Obama's administration was frequently called out for not delivering electioneering promises. As Obama's poll numbers plummeted in 2009 and 2010, many people opined that the President had lost control of the narrative. (Greenberg, 2017)

Press (2016), who calls himself an avid Obama supporter, started his book with a strong statement claiming once Obama arrived at the White House, he broke too many campaign pledges and disappointed the people who elected him. Moreover, Press lists rising issues in American society, for instance, unemployment, economic disparity, and middle-class struggles. Press furthers on topics ranging from the economic to the environment, from immigration legislation to gun regulation and health care issues claiming Obama abandoned values he had sworn to preserve. (2016, p. 6-7)

Similarly, Frantzich (2019) claims President Barack Obama and his team were criticized for being arrogant, bossy, vindictive, and the least transparent administration. In a letter issued in 2014, thirty-eight news organizations protested the Obama administration's restriction on journalists. Among their objections were blacklisting of reporters, delaying interviews till deadlines had passed, and forbidding personnel from speaking with journalists.

Only 35 days after Obama's inauguration, he was portrayed in the media as a cold, detached, unapproachable statue, who ignored direct answers about what he would do now that he was in office. (Press, 2016) During Obama's presidency, according to Frantzich (2019), journalists were irritated by the office's demand that reporters submit their stories to the White House before distribution. Obama's administration claimed it was done to increase accuracy, however, journalists perceived it as a form of control and censorship. As a result, the media began sending reports and stories directly to their members.

Chief editor of USA Today, Susan Page, during the editorials meeting said that the Obama's White House was not only more repressive but also more threatening to the press than any other administration in history. (Press, 2016) Despite promising to be one of the most transparent governments in history, the Obama administration started a war on leakers who revealed information about its actions. While Presidents despise leaks, government leakers are considered heroes by the press. (Frantzich, 2019)

The Obama administration has undertaken an aggressive campaign against investigative journalists as part of its attempt to prevent government leaks. Reporters would often discover that their phones had been bugged, their emails had been spied on, and their travel records had been confiscated. The Associated Press was the first news organization to be targeted after it was revealed that in 2012 the Justice Department had illegally gathered phone records of several journalists. Furthermore, individual reporters who spoke with accused leakers were also pursued, including Fox News and New York Times reporters. (Press, 2016) Frantzich mentions a situation in 2010 when the reporter yelled "you liar" at President Obama while talking about welfare not covering illegal immigrants. President Obama's response was rapid and calm "not true." In the end, the reporter had to take responsibility for his overreaction. (2019, p. 136-138)

Obama's promise of available healthcare to everyone also fell apart. When asked about it, he would often provide contradictory answers. Before elections he promised equal healthcare opportunities, as President he claimed that if people enjoy their healthcare plan, they should

stick with it. Furthermore, Obama claimed nobody will compel them to drop their healthcare plan. All his statements collapsed when in 2013, health-insurance firms began delivering cancellation notifications to nearly 4 million subscribers. Instead of apologizing, Obama further complicated matters by claiming he never made a "you like it, you keep it" guarantee and that the news is to blame for incorrect reporting. (Press, 2016, p. 98-99)

Press declares the Obama administration's war on journalists raises major doubts about unprecedented media freedom. He concludes that such treatment certainly was not expected from the President who promised "the most open" administration ever. (2016, p. 140)

## **7. DONALD TRUMP**

The 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Donald Trump, lead the country from 2017 to 2021 and remains remembered as one of the most controversial presidents of all time. His statements of racism, sexism, banishing all not-Americans, building a wall with Mexico, and calling other nationalities rapists or terrorists sparked enormous public controversy. (Kellner, 2019) Trump won the elections in 2016 under the parole "All press is good press". Klauški explains that Trump effectively used the public's loss of trust in the media and his main goal was to get the press to write and broadcast about him. (2017, p. 10) Rutledge and Rackaway (2021) agree Trump's presidency is different from other presidencies. They claim Trump appeared more confrontational and adversarial toward the press, as well as more engaged with reporters.

### **7.1. MEDIA WAR**

Rutledge and Rackaway (2021) claim the phenomenon of presidents assaulting the media is as old as the country, but Trump brought it to a whole new level. Since the beginning of his presidential campaign, Donald Trump has launched a battle with the media. When the media criticized Trump's remarks or behavior, he lashed out. When presented with contradictory data, Trump and his department rejected all accusations as fake news and alternative facts. (Kellner 2019) Trump triumphed when, based on the polls, people's trust in the media to report truthfully and objectively was at its lowest. He refused to collaborate with the media, avoiding them for months and even declaring open war on them. (Klauški, 2017)

During his election campaign, Donald Trump managed to exploit all the traditional media's weaknesses. Klauški (2017) explains that the more the traditional media criticized Trump, the more his popularity grew, eventually leading to his election to the White House.

Whenever Trump attended a campaign event, the media hyped it with commentators saying "Waiting for Trump" speculating about what he might say. Trump's speeches were almost always nationally televised, and after it was over, the commentators would discuss every word he said. (Kellner, 2019, p. 52) For a long time after he became the Republican Party's presidential candidate, Trump has not held a single press conference. Journalists waited 168 days for the chance to question the presidential candidate. However, he talked solely with one journalist during the campaign, Sean Hannity, his friend from Fox News. (Begley 2017, from Klauški, 2017, p. 12)

After the election, Trump did not hesitate from questioning the credibility of the media, particularly those who have attacked him. He openly accused CNN of producing fake news. (Slack 2017, from Klauški, 2017, p. 12) He has repeatedly described the media as not only his adversaries but also the adversaries of all American people. Trump created a blacklist of media groups that were prohibited from getting White House information. On multiple occasions, he verbally attacked the media correspondents, called them out on fake news, and pushed his fans to disrespect journalists as well. (Frantzich, 2019)

According to Frantzich (2019), the polls portrayed White House correspondents are less pleased with Trump's administration than with Obama's. Much of the dissatisfaction with Trump's administration stemmed from his lack of candor, therefore, sixty-three percent of the reporters felt that, at some point, Trump or his team lied to them. According to Trump's associates, the media were so critical of him because he was one of only seven percent of Republicans representing themselves in the mainstream media, which was, allegedly mostly Democratic. (Klauški, 2017) Donald Trump launched an online war with the media, casting doubt on their intentions, loyalties, and abilities. The media, on the other hand, has responded by calling out the president's exaggeration of facts. (Frantzich)

## **7.2. PRESIDENT AS A TWEETER**

Frantzich states that even though Barack Obama was the first president to use Twitter, it was Donald Trump who turned it into a special weapon for administration. According to Frantzich, President Donald Trump's fondness for Twitter originates from his successful use

of the platform during the 2016 campaign to avoid the traditional media. It has been compared to having "a president with his printing press". (2019, p. 170-171)

Through daily tweets, Trump provided twenty-four-hour media coverage on all platforms. His tweets were recycled and commented on, problematized, and analyzed, as if those were serious topics the public should address more. The media and Trump's opponents used those announcements to condemn his candidacy and warn of the dangers that his election would bring, while supporters used his publications to spread his ideas and claims even further. (Klauški, 2017) In 2015, when asked why he used Twitter so much, Trump said it was simple and he could fight his media opponents when he "was not treated correctly". (Kellner 2019, p. 51) Rutledge and Rackaway (2021) pointed out that President Trump used Twitter to promote himself and humiliate people who criticize his actions or talk negatively of him. They claim Trump's use of Twitter revealed some conflicts and the need to label his rivals as deserving of hatred.

President Donald Trump used Twitter accounts: the White House's @POTUS45 and his @realDonaldTrump. Twitter allowed millions of users to monitor what Trump is thinking and when he is thinking it. The content of his tweets represented him without filters, honest and defiant, lashing out when he believes he is being attacked. (Frantzich, 2019) Twitter allowed President Trump to communicate directly with supporters and other followers, avoiding the media entirely. (Rutledge and Rackaway, 2021) The public's poor perception of the mainstream media was fueled by Trump's speeches and tweets. His tweets often blamed the "very dishonest press" for producing what he called fake news. Furthermore, he presented the media as part of the system he has to bring down to save common people. (Klauški, 2017, p. 13)

For journalists, President Trump's continual tweeting was a jackpot. Everyone picked his words, broadcast them, and wrote about them. However, Frantzich (2019) mentions the dangers behind presidential tweets. Millions of Twitter users followed him and for some of them, his word was law. His degrading statements about other races, nationalities, groups, social statuses, etc. pushed his fans toward hate speech and in some cases even violence.

Klauški (2017) concludes that the situation of Donald Trump demonstrates how there is an increasing need for honest and credible media whom the public would have trust. Not just in the United States, but the whole world as well.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to demonstrate the development of the relationship between the American presidents and the media. Presidents' actions and the way the media portrays them influence the public's opinion and perception of the elected officials. As a result, presidents and the media are mutually dependent. Presidents rely on the media to communicate their ideas and goals, while the media rely on the president to remain up to date with current events and report on matters of public interest.

The media's coverage and popular support determine the president's destiny and "expiration date." The media, however, should strive for truthful and transparent reporting in the public interest. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, former President Theodore Roosevelt marked the visible beginning of the media's development and rising importance to the public. Following him, President John F. Kennedy used the advancement of television to effectively reach out to the public and spread his ideas even further.

As the media developed, so did the way presidents approached it and used it. Even though the reporters were initially cautious and even fearful of the risks of reporting against the President, they eventually began challenging their ideas and calling them out for lying and violating promises. The latter is especially visible in the examples of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Before the election, Obama was seen as the safer option, a man who promised a better future for all Americans. However, after the elections, many promises remained unfulfilled, and the way the media depicted them brought those problems to the public's attention, causing them to worry about them as well. President Trump had the most hostile relationship with the media, calling them out for fake news, suing and insulting them. It is important to note that the rise of social media has opened entirely new options for both the media and the President. The Presidents were able to promote their ideas without interference from the media, and the media had, even more, to cover, debate and broadcast.

To conclude, the President's relationship with the media was and continues to be mutually beneficial. Both sides are interacting more frequently and given how far their relationship has progressed since the beginning of the 20th century, it is safe to assume that it will develop even more in the future.

## REFERENCES

- Arnold, A. (2004). *About America: How the United States is governed*. The United States, Department of State: Braddock Communications
- Druckman, J. N. (2003). The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(2), 559–571. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.t01-1-00015> (Accessed: March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022)
- Greenberg, D. (2017). *Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency*. The United States: W. W. Norton & Company
- Frantzich, S.E. (2019). *Presidents and the Media: The Communicator in Chief (Media and Power)* 1st Edition. United States: Routledge
- Freidel, F. (1999). *The Presidents of the United States of America* (15<sup>th</sup> edition). The United States: White House Historical Assn
- Hoover, J. (1988). An Early Use of Television as a Political Tool: The 1961 News Conferences of President John F. Kennedy and the Republican Opposition, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 16:1, 41-48: Routledge. DOI: 10.1080/01956051.1988.9943308 (Accessed: April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022)
- Kellner, D. (2019). Trump's War Against the Media, Fake News, and (A) Social Media. In: Happer, C., Hoskins, A., Merrin, W. (eds) *Trump's Media War*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94069-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94069-4_4) (Accessed: May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022)
- Klauški, T. (2017). Fake news and how Donald Trump took advantage of the weaknesses of traditional media in the presidential campaign. *Political analysis* 8 (30), 10-14. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/184732> (Accessed: May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022)
- Juergens, G. (1982). Theodore Roosevelt and the Press. *Daedalus*, 111(4), 113–133. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024820> (Accessed: May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022)
- Press, B. (2016). *Buyer's Remorse: How Obama Let Progressives Down*. United States: Threshold Editions
- Rubin, R. L. (1983). Mass Media and Presidential Selection. *PS*, 16(4), 683–688. <https://doi.org/10.2307/418742> (Accessed: April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Rutledge, P. E., & Rackaway, C. (Eds.). (2021). *The Unorthodox Presidency of Donald J. Trump*. University Press of Kansas.

SAVETH, E. N. (1991). Theodore Roosevelt: Image and Ideology. *New York History*, 72(1), 45–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23175177> (Accessed: April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Self, J. W. (2005). The First Debate over the Debates: How Kennedy and Nixon Negotiated the 1960 Presidential Debates. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 35(2), 361–375. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552687> (Accessed: May 15<sup>th</sup>)

Walker, M. (2008). The Year of the Insurgents: The 2008 US Presidential Campaign. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 84(6), 1095–1107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25144983> (Accessed: May 16<sup>th</sup>)

#### Internet sources:

Aaker, J. & Chang, V. (2009). Obama and the Power of Social Media and Technology. Case No. M321: Graduate School of Stanford Business. (Accessed: May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022) Available at: <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/case-studies/obama-power-social-media-technology>

Pew Research Center. (2008). „Winning the Media Campaign: How the Press Reported the 2008 General Election“. (Accessed: March 22nd, 2022) Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2008/10/22/winning-media-campaign/>

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (n.d.). *A history of U.S. presidential elections in maps*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed: May 6th, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/list/a-history-of-us-presidential-elections-in-maps>