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## TV IS THE FUTURE—AND THE 2014 MIDTERMS WILL PROVE IT

<sup>0</sup> Article Views551



GroundReport | **Author:** [Toby Miller](#)

**Filed Under:** [News](#), [Politics](#) | **Posted:** 08/28/2014 at 12:55AM

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Netflix proudly proclaims that ‘[i]nternet TV is replacing linear TV. Apps are replacing channels, remote controls are disappearing, and screens are proliferating’<http://ir.netflix.com/long-term-view.cfm>. IBM disparages ‘Massive Passives ... in the living room ... a “lean back” mode in which consumers do little more than flip on the remote and scan programming.’ By contrast, it valorizes and desires ‘Gadgetiers and Kool Kids’ who ‘force radical change’ because they demand ‘anywhere, anytime content’ <https://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/imc/pdf/ge510-6248-end-of-tv-full.pdf>.

Without denying the substantial change brought about by the spread of digital technologies and deregulation, I challenge the universalizing [claim](#) that broadcast, cable, and satellite television are over.

The evidence of television's demise is as sparse and thin as the rhetoric for it is copious and thick. Historically, most new media have supplanted earlier ones as central organs of authority or pleasure: books versus speeches, films versus plays, singles versus [sheet](#) music. TV blended all of them. A warehouse of contemporary culture, it merged what had come before, and now it is merging with personal computers (which were modeled on it) to do the same <http://www.economist.com/node/7995312>. The [New York Times](#) presciently announced this tendency over thirty years ago with the headline "Television Marries Computer" <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/03/27/books/when-television-marries-computer-by-howard-gardner.html>.

Television's robust resilience is especially true when it comes to current affairs: 94% of the US population watches TV news, which for years has remained their principal resource for understanding both global events and local politics <http://www.gallup.com/poll/163412/americans-main-source-news.aspx>.

During the 2004 US Presidential election, 78% of the population followed the campaign on television, up from 70% in 2000 <http://stateofthemedias.org/2005/>; <http://www.pewresearch.org/2005/01/20/trends-2005/>.

Political operatives pay heed to the reality. Between the 2002 and 2006 mid-term elections, and across that 2004 campaign, TV expenditure on political advertising grew from US\$995.5 million to US\$1.7 billion—at a time of minimal inflation. That amounted to 80% of the growth in broadcasters' revenue in 2003-04 <http://www.thenation.com/article/america-needs-electoral-reform>. The 2002 election saw US\$947 million spent on TV election advertising; 2004, US\$1.55 billion; and 2006, US\$1.72 billion. The correlative numbers for the [internet](#) were US\$5 million in 2002; US\$29 million in 2004; and US\$40 million in 2006 <http://ssc.sagepub.com/content/26/3/288.full.pdf+html>. The vast majority of electronic electoral campaigning takes place on local TV—95% in 2007 <http://bransonagentnewsline.blogspot.co.uk/2007/10/analysis-of-2007-and-2008-political.html>; [http://www.adweek.com/?vnu\\_content\\_id=1003658398&utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=F+TV%252C+Radio+Stations+and+Outdoor%2529](http://www.adweek.com/?vnu_content_id=1003658398&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=F+TV%252C+Radio+Stations+and+Outdoor%2529).

Consider the famous [Barack Obama](#) campaign of 2008 and its much-vaunted use of the [internet](#). Here's the scoop: Obama's organization spent the vast majority of its energy and money on television. The internet was there to raise funds and communicate with supporters.

The US Presidency cycles with the summer Olympics, broadcast by NBC, but few candidates commit funds to commercials in prime time during this epic of capitalist excess, where the classic homologues of competition vie for screen time—athletic contests versus corporate hype. Obama, however, took a multi-million dollar package across the stations then owned by General Electric: NBC (Anglo broadcast), CNBC (business-leech cable), MSNBC (news cable), USA (entertainment cable), Oxygen (women's cable), and [Telemundo](#) (Spanish

broadcast). TV was on the march, not in retreat: on election night 2008, CNN gained 109% more viewers than the equivalent evening four years earlier

<http://adage.com/article/news/olympic-deal-sealed-obama-makes-5-million-buy/129853/>;  
<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/08-big-headlines-everybody-124988>.

The 2012 US Presidential election was again a televisual one. [How many US residents who watched the debates between Mitt Romney and Obama preferred the internet to TV as their source? 3%. How many watched on both TV and the internet? 11%. How many people shared their reactions online? 8%](http://www.people-press.org/2012/10/11/one-in-ten-dual-screened-the-presidential-debate/) <http://www.people-press.org/2012/10/11/one-in-ten-dual-screened-the-presidential-debate/>.

In Europe as well as the US, TV rules the roost by a long way when viewers seek news <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/washington/survey-tv-remains-top-news-access-device/129847>;  
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Reuters%20Institute%20Digital%20N>  
Worldwide, owners of tablets such as iPads are the keenest consumers of television news worldwide. These tablets are adjuncts, gadget partners, to the main source. If anything, they stimulate people to [watch](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/worldnews/news-consumption.html) more television <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/worldnews/news-consumption.html>.

Of course, change is afoot, as Lynn Spigel explained a decade ago:

‘[I]ncreasing commercialization of public-service/state-run systems, the rise of multichannel cable and global satellite delivery, multinational conglomerates, [Internet](#) convergence, changes in regulatory policies and ownership rules, the advent of high-definition TV, technological changes in screen design, digital video recorders, and new forms of media competition—as well as new forms of programming ... and scheduling practices ... have all transformed the practice we call watching TV. This does not mean all of television is suddenly unrecognizable—indeed, familiarity and habit continue to be central to the TV experience—but it does mean that television’s past is recognizably distinct from its present’ <http://static.squarespace.com/static/5101f04fe4b0527bec6f8a55/t/51a77046e4b061864>

As intimated earlier, the signs are that the internet will merge with television, and the two technologies will transform one another. In the words of Steve Ballmer, Microsoft’s former chief [executive](#), ‘we will see TVs become more sophisticated and more connected. The boundary between the PC and the TV will dissolve’  
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/biztech/tv-or-not-tv/2009/01/09/1231004268540.html>.

Television ‘seems designed, no matter what its platform of delivery, to generate new ways of being-together-while-apart’ <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415509794/>. In Horace Newcomb’s view, ‘the future of television will be essentially the same as its past’ via ‘strategies of adjustment’ to change <http://flowtv.org/2014/01/the-more-things-change/>.

TV remains the dominant source of our truth and object of our consumption, in dual senses—the sets cost more, and we spend more time with them than other devices. All in all, there simply isn’t evidence that newer technologies have displaced or are displacing the traditional cultural *bodega* of the last half-century. Media influence on and coverage of the coming midterms will be all about TV. Sorry, Netflix. Apologies, IBM. Maybe [next](#) time.



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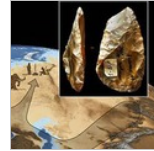
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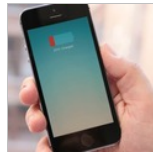
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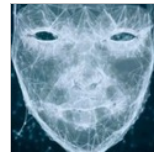
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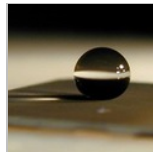
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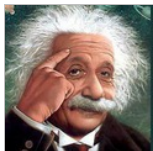
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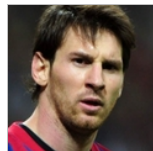
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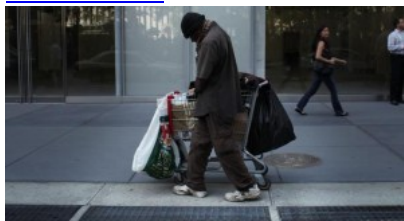


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