



# The Control Room: How Television Calls the Shots in Presidential Elections

*Martin Plissner*

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"Thirty-five years ago, sad to say, CBS, NBC, and ABC created the modern New Hampshire primary." So says *The Control Room*, a gritty look at how network news has come to dominate every stage of presidential selection from the earliest announcements to the final swearing in. As we embark on another of the quadrennial circuses that determine how the world's most powerful country passes its crown, *The Control Room* shows us who really cracks the whip.

Martin Plissner, former political director of CBS News, has played a central role in the network coverage of every presidential campaign since 1964. Now, drawing on his intimate knowledge of life inside the control room, he provides a lively and authoritative account of the ways television has come to dominate presidential politics in the final third of the twentieth century. Blending personal anecdotes with fascinating mini-histories, Plissner shows how all the elements of the contest for national power in America -- the primaries, the conventions, and the final counting of the ballots -- are shaped by the struggle among the networks for supremacy in viewership and breaking news on ever-dwindling budgets.

How did Ross Perot trounce both George Bush and Bill Clinton in primaries he never entered? And how did Pat Buchanan's far-right call to arms become the main event at the 1992 Republican National Convention? Why did the country expect a Carter-Reagan photo finish in 1980 and a Clinton landslide in 1996 -- neither of which happened? The answers to all of these questions begin in the network control rooms.

As the race for the White House heads toward a new century, Plissner reveals how television news coverage will decide who gets attention and when, who is on the rise and who is down the chute, when the race begins and when it ends, and what you care about when you vote for president. "The men and women who call the shots at the network news divisions do have an agenda," writes Plissner. Find out what it is in this fascinating insider's report.

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