

voter participation, on the theory that the more we see of politicians, the less we like them. And he attributes the diminishing power of elected officials to "the glare of television's attention," which has weakened "the ability of Presidents and congressmen to govern."

In Mr. Ranney's opinion, public officials must also endure a world in which "Most of the people who produce and broadcast television news fully share the traditional American distaste for politicians as a class. Certainly television characteristically portrays politicians being motivated . . . by their eagerness to win votes, and seldom . . . by any desire to promote the public interest."

Television's own desire to promote the public interest is what Mr. Ranney is gently calling into question here. If good journalism "is to report what is really happening with all the powerful elements of society," he writes, why shouldn't television feel obliged to cover its own activities?

CHANNELS OF POWER

The Impact of Television on American Politics.

By Austin Ranney.

207 pp. New York:

An American Enterprise

Institute Book / Basic Books.

\$14.95.

By RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

"Channels of Power," an examination of television news, shares some of its subject's familiar peculiarities. Gloomy messages are cheerfully dispatched; the presentation seems fastidiously balanced yet oddly weightless. Many of the conclusions, moreover, emerge independent of the evidence. Nonetheless, Austin Ranney makes some interesting claims — that, for example, most television news correspondents are remarkably free of political bias. "Indeed," he writes, "over two-thirds claim never to have registered to vote as a member of a political party" — a neutrality that resembles indifference.

Mr. Ranney holds network news at least partly responsible for the nationwide decline in



Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather.