



# Public Opinion & Media

**Wilson Chapter 6**

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# Political Culture

## Political Culture:

- *Widely shared (throughout the whole community) beliefs, values, and norms concerning the relationship of citizens to the government and to one another*
    - Answers: “What is?”
    - Proposes: “What ought to be.”
    - Provides: Emotional connections, symbols, etc.
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# Political Culture

## Political Ideology:

- Beliefs, values and norms concerning the relationship of citizens to the government and to one another
    - shared by members of a political movement or sub-group, but not by the whole society
  
  - Examples: Republican Party, Democratic Party, Arian Nations, Green Peace, etc.
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# Political Culture

## Political Socialization

- The process of developing political attitudes, values and beliefs

## Institutions of Socialization

- The groups, practices, and systems that convey and inculcate the values of political culture to rising generations and new members
  - Examples: FAMILY, friends, school, churches, media, Boy Scouts, Job's Daughters, soccer leagues, service clubs, etc.
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# Public Opinion

- Public Opinion: attitudes of the population towards public institutions, public figures, and current events
  - Formation of Individual Opinions
    - Drawn from life experiences
      - Education, wealth, race, geography, gender, etc.
    - Built through socialization
      - Family, school, friends, media, political parties, churches, service clubs, etc.
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# Public Opinion

## Cleavages

- We can generally predict how most individuals in broad categories will view issues
  - Influenced by:
    - Race
    - Age
    - Geography
    - Education
    - Religion
    - Occupation
    - Etc.
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# Public Opinion

## Cleavages

- Cross-Cutting Cleavage
    - When a person's background puts them in different camps depending on the issue
  - Mutually Reinforcing Cleavage
    - When a person's background puts them in the same camp with the same friends and enemies over all or most issues
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# Public Opinion

## Cleavages

- Cross-Cutting Cleavage
    - Tempers conflict
    - Engenders compromise
    - Enables stable democratic decision-making
  
  - Common in US and most advanced industrial societies
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# Public Opinion

## Cleavages

- Mutually Reinforcing Cleavage
    - Strengthens political differences
    - Reduces the incentive to compromise
    - Leaves people seeing all-or-none outcomes
    - May lead to political violence
    - Makes democracy difficult
  
  - Race in America, esp.
    - Black, urban, poor
    - Hispanic, rural farm-working poor?
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# Media

## American Media:

- Make-up
    - TV
    - Radio
    - Newsprint / mainstream web-based news
    - Blogs, fringe media, etc.
  
  - Is Print Preferable?
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# Media

Is Print Preferable?

Less Bias??

More accurate??

Who decides what to read and how much??

Time to analyze and question?

Who is in the driver's seat?

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# Media

- Historical press role
    - 1790s Party Papers
    - Technological/economic reasons
  - Development of professional media
    - Penny Press
    - Advertising
    - Unbiased media
    - Professional reporters / editors
    - Professional standards
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# Media

## Media Bias v Professional, Unbiased Media

- Media self-perception
    - Unbiased watchdog
    - Fair
    - Reporting just facts
  
    - Is this realistic?
    - What about their intentions?
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# Media

## Media Incentive: the *Profit Motive*

- What drives reporting choices?
  - What drives style?
  - Results:
    - Horse Race
    - Scandal
    - Sound bites
    - Exit polls
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# Media

## Media Bias?

### □ Liberal Press?

- “Content analysis shows liberal bias”
- “Liberal media and academic conspiracy”
- Reporters are “all liberals”

### □ Corporate Press?

- “Content analysis shows conservative (pro-business) bias”
  - All major media owned by large corporations
  - Never offend advertisers
  - “Vast right-wing conspiracy”
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# Media

## Media Bias?

- ❑ From the Right: Liberal Press!!
  - ❑ From the Left: Corporate, Conservative Press!!
  
  - ❑ Reality?
    - Both exist, some liberal, some conservative, some centrist...
    - You chose where you get your info...
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# Media's Impact on Public Opinion

- Does media determine how you think?
    - How others think?
  
  - Partly:
    - Media as Gatekeeper
    - Media as Watchdog
    - Media as Institution of Socialization
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# Media and Public Opinion

Does media determine how you think?

- No
  - Selection Bias
    - We only read or watch sources that reinforce our own views
  - Perception Bias
    - Even when we read or watch messages that contradict our view, we tend to miss or ignore the contradictions
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