

Public Opinion & Media

Wilson Chapter 6



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.



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.



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



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?



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?



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



Media

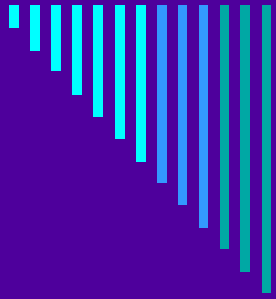
Media Bias?

□ 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...



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
