chapter 13

- **Politics: Power and Authority**
  - Class, Status, and Power
  - Traditional Authority
  - Charismatic Authority
  - Legal-Rational Authority
  - Power/Knowledge
- **Political Systems**
  - Authoritarian Systems
  - Democracy
  - Problems of Political Systems
  - Citizenship
- **The Political System of the United States**
  - American Political Parties
  - Party Affiliation: The Politics of Race, Class, and Gender
  - Interest Groups
- **Political Change**
  - Social Movements
  - Revolutions
  - War and the Military
  - Terrorism
- **Everyday Politics**
  - Being Political: Social Change
  - Civil Society: Declining, Increasing, or Dynamic?
  - Politics and Media: Interdependence
- **What Are the Mass Media?**
  - Types of Mass Media
  - Saturation and Convergence: The Sociology of Media
- **Media Production and Consumption**
  - Culture Industries
  - Multicultural Voices
  - Media Consolidation
  - The Importance of Advertising
  - Celebrities
- **Consuming Media, Creating Identity**
- **Globalization of the Media**
  - What Is Media Globalization?
  - Cultural Imperialism
  - New Media, New Voices
- **Politics and Media in the 21st Century**

Politics and Media

THERE ARE TWO OLD SAYINGS about politics:

"Everybody wants to change the world."
"You can't fight city hall."

Which is true? In some ways, we have more political power than ever before. The media give us constant access to political discussion and protest. Local groups constantly organize to change things. Yet we also have less power than ever. Every week, it seems, a new scandal reveals how the big money behind big corporations seems to dictate public policy. Labor strikes no longer work. Worldwide protests against wars and invasions have little impact on policymakers.

We're more politically aware than ever. Round-the-clock news stations broadcast every detail of major and minor political disputes. C-Span lets us glimpse every moment of every session of Congress. Telephone and Internet polls chart changes in public opinion minute by minute. Yet we're also less politically engaged than ever. Party membership is down. Voting rates are low compared to other industrialized nations—even in elections full of hot-button issues.

We're more politically polarized than ever before. The divisions between Democrat and Republican have never been greater. No journalist half a century ago would have thought to divide the country into red and blue states. Yet we're also less politically coherent than ever before. Legislation that passes one year is rescinded the next. Few voters pull the lever for a straight party line any longer. Liberals vote for conservative candidates, conservatives vote for liberal candidates, and

We are both more informed and more apathetic, more empowered and more disenfranchised, and the world is both more and less democratic than ever. Understanding these dynamics is sociology's unique contribution to the study of the media and of politics.

many people just give up on labels and vote for a mixed bag of Republicans, Democrats, independents, and Greens.

Finally, in some ways, the world is more democratic than ever before. People everywhere celebrate democracy as an ideal, and virtually every nation claims, in its constitution or in its official name, to be a democracy—including the People's Republic of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Yet many of these countries are authoritarian regimes, ruled by political or theocratic elites rather than the "consent of the governed." And many democracies are also corrupt or run like individual fiefdoms, so the world sometimes seems less democratic than ever before.

Which is it? More or less power? More or less informed? More or less politically aligned? More or less democratic?

To the sociologist, the answer to these questions isn't one or the other. It's both. The processes and dynamics of how we can be both more *and* less informed, powerful, or democratic is sociology's unique contribution to the study of media and of politics.

Politics: Power and Authority

Politics is the art and science of government. Politics is about **power,** the ability to make people do what you want them to do—whether they want to do it or not. And it is about **government**—the organization and administration of the actions of the inhabitants of communities, societies, and states. And politics is about **authority**—power that is perceived as legitimate by both power holders and those who are subjected to it. If politics is working well, it is through government that power is transformed into authority.

Sociologists have always wondered about power: how we get it, how we use it, why some of us have so much of it and some of us have so little (Faulks, 2000; Lukes, 1986; Orum, 2000). Back in the nineteenth century, Marx saw power as purely a characteristic of social class. The owners of the means of production had a tremendous amount of power. They had complete control over the workers' tasks, schedules, and salaries; they could pay their workers enough to live comfortably, or just enough to keep them alive, or even less and let them starve to death. Meanwhile the workers had no power at all. They had no control over their wages or working conditions and could vote only for candidates who were handpicked by the factory owners. Their only means of getting more were trickery and theft.

Class, Status, and Power

No society has ever been built around pure coercion. A few have come close—the slave society of the antebellum South, for example, or Romania under Nicolai

Ceausescu—but they are always vastly inefficient because they must expend almost all of their resources on keeping people in line and punishing dissidents. And even there, the leaders must supplement coercion with other techniques, like persuasion and indoctrination.

That's why Max Weber (1978 ed.) argued that power is not a simple matter of absolutes: Few of us have total power over others, so force won't work. And few of us have no power at all, so we rarely have to resort to trickery. Most often, people do what we want them to do willingly, not because they are being coerced or tricked. Drivers who obey the speed limits are probably not worried about being fined—after all, hundreds of cars are zooming past them at 90 mph without punishment. Instead, they have decided that they want to obey the speed limit, because they're good citizens and that's what good citizens do.

In most societies, cultures, subcultures, families, and other groups, coercion remains a last resort, while by far the most common means of exercising power is authority. Authority is power that is perceived as legitimate, by both the holder of power and those subject to it. People must believe that the leader is entitled to make commands and that they should obey.

Weber argued that leaders exercise three types of authority: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and legal-rational authority.

Traditional Authority

Traditional authority is a type of power that draws its legitimacy from tradition. We do things this way because we have always done them this way. In many premodern societies, people obeyed social norms for hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years. Their leaders spoke with the voice of ancient traditions, issuing commands that had been issued a thousand times before. They derived their authority from who they were: the descendants of kings and queens, or perhaps the descendants of the gods, not from their educational background, work experience, or personality traits.

Traditional authority is very stable, and people can expect to obey the same commands that their ancestors did. Its remnants still exist today in many social institutions, including religion, government, and the family, where we obey some rules because we have always done so. But even in ancient times, large-scale political, economic, and social changes sometimes occurred, such as invasion, war, or natural disaster, and new generations faced situations and challenges unknown to their ancestors, thus putting a great strain on traditional authority. That's when a second form, charismatic authority, would emerge.

Charismatic Authority

Charismatic authority is a type of power in which people obey because of the personal characteristics of the leader. Charismatic leaders are so personally compelling that people follow them even when they have no traditional claims to authority. Indeed, they often ask their followers to break with tradition. We read in the New Testament that Jesus frequently said "it is written, but I say unto you . . . ," contrasting traditional authority (Jewish law) with charismatic authority (his teachings).

Charismatic leaders are often religious prophets, but even when they are not, their followers can be as passionate and devout as religious believers. Some presidents, like Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, developed a popularity that cannot be explained by their performance in office alone. Many other political leaders of the past and present depend, to some degree, on charisma in addition to other types of authority.

Did *you* know?

Today the term *politically correct* is used mostly by political conservatives to condemn what they perceive as liberal hypocrisy. Originally the term was positive, referring to honest attempts to avoid offending different groups. The efforts to change the word "mankind" to "humankind" or to eliminate the use of "Miss" or "Mrs." for women (which referred to them only in their relationship to men) were some examples.

Actually, the term is much older. It first appeared in 1793 in a Supreme Court decision (*Chisholm v. Georgia*) to distinguish between "the United States" and "the people of the United States" (the latter was politically correct).

Charisma is morally neutral—as a personal quality, it can be found at all points in an ethical spectrum: Hitler, Gandhi, Osama bin Laden, and Nelson Mandela all possessed personal qualities that elicited obedience from their followers.

But pure charisma is also unstable because it is located in the personality of an individual, not a set of traditions or laws. And because they defy other forms of authority, charismatic leaders rarely live long—they are exiled (like the Dalai Lama in 1959), assassinated (Gandhi, Kennedy), or imprisoned (Mandela). When they are gone, their followers are faced with a crisis. How do you maintain the emotional high that you felt when the leader was with you?

Weber argued that after the leader's departure, a small group of disciples will create a set of rules and regulations by which one can continue being a follower. Thus, charismatic authority is replaced by the rules, regulations, and rituals of legal-rational authority.

Legal-Rational Authority

In the third form of authority, **legal-rational authority,** leaders are to be obeyed, not primarily as representatives of tradition or because of their personal qualities, but because they are voicing a set of rationally derived laws. They must act impartially, even sacrificing their own opinions and attitudes in obedience to the laws of the land.

Legal-rational authority has become the most common form of authority in contemporary societies. In fact, many argue that modern government would be impossible without it. Governments operate under a set of regulations flexible enough to withstand changing social situations. Traditional authority is unable to handle much change without breaking down. And no leader, however charismatic, would today be able to sway tens of millions of people of diverse socioeconomic classes, races, religions, and life situations, on the basis of his or her personality alone.

Power/Knowledge

Weber argued that we obey authority because we perceive it to be legitimate. But how do we get the idea that it is a good thing to obey a leader, instead of rebelling or striking out on our own? The late twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault had a different idea: We obey because we cannot conceive of anything else. Power is always explicitly connected with knowledge. In fact, he wrote, they should be the same word: *power/knowledge* (Foucault, 1980).

Power/knowledge does not force us to do things, but it shapes and limits our thoughts and desires until they correspond to the dominant ideologies of our society. If you cannot think of doing something, then it is pretty hard to entertain actually doing it. For example, if you have no idea that there are forms of contraception, it would be difficult to imagine "planning" your family. If the rules of a game are firmly established, it's hard to imagine that they might be otherwise.

Political Systems

Political systems determine how group leaders exercise their authority. Virtually all political systems fall into one of two categories, authoritarian or democratic.

Authoritarian Systems

In an **authoritarian political system,** power is vested in a single person or small group. Sometimes that person holds power through heredity, sometimes through force or terror.

Monarchy. One of the first political systems was the rule by a single individual, or **monarchy** (*mono* means "one," and *archy* means "rule"). In many early societies, the best hunter or the best warrior would seize control and rule until a better hunter or warrior arrived on the scene. Then leaders began to rule throughout their lives, and on their deathbed they would name one of their children as the new leader. Thus individuals from a single family began to rule from generation to generation. Denmark has had 52 kings and queens, in a family lineage extending from Margrethe II (1940–) all the way back to Gorm the Old (840–936). Japan has had 125 emperors, from Akihito (1933–) extending back to the legendary Jimmu (711–585 BCE).

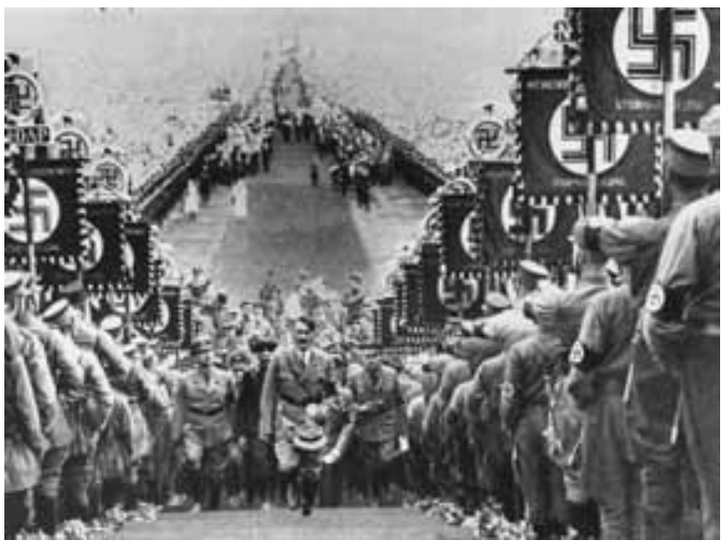
The rule of a family was legitimized by traditional authority. The rulers of ancient Egypt, China, Japan, and Peru all claimed that their families descended from the gods. Medieval monarchs derived their power from divine right: They were not literally descended from God, but their power was based on God's will. By the time of the Renaissance, most of the kings and queens of Europe were "absolute monarchs": their word was law, even when their word contradicted the law of the land. It might be illegal for the average person to commit murder, but the king or queen could call for the execution of anyone, for any reason or for no reason (so it made sense to stay on their good side).

Gradually a more egalitarian climate began to prevail. We can find traces of "rule of the people" as early as the English Magna Carta (1215), which established government as a relationship between monarchy and the people. But it wasn't until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke began to suggest that kings and queens, however noble, may be as human as everybody else (Marshall, 1994). If they were evil or incompetent, they should be removed from office. During a relatively short period, the English Civil War and revolutions in France, America, and Haiti either deposed hereditary rulers or made them answerable to parliaments of elected officials (Birn, 1992; Wedgwood, 1990; Winks and Kaiser, 2003). Other kingdoms became "constitutional monarchies" peacefully, adopting constitutions and electing parliaments with the full support of the kings or queens. A constitutional monarchy may still have a hereditary ruler, but he or she functions as a symbol of the country and a goodwill ambassador, while elected officials make the everyday political decisions based on the principles embedded in a constitution.

Today only a few absolute monarchies remain, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Swaziland, but even they often legislate a system of checks to keep the rulers from overstating their power.

Oligarchy. **Oligarchy** is the rule of a small group of people, an elite social class or often a single family. For instance, in Renaissance Italy, the city-state of Venice had a population of about 200,000. It was originally a republic, ruled by an elected official, the Doge. But gradually the Maggior Consiglio, the equivalent of the parliament, took more and more power. Members of the Maggior Consiglio were required by law to belong to one of a few aristocratic families (Norwich, 1989). As a simple guide, if monarchy is like the rule of the father in a household, oligarchy is more like the rule of the father and all his brothers. (Oligarchies tend to be patriarchal, and thus the use of the male family members.)

Dictatorship. A **dictatorship** is rule by one person who has no hereditary claim to rule. Dictators may acquire power through a military takeover, or they may be elected or



▲ **Although dictators rule by violence, they often have significant popular support. Adolf Hitler arriving at a rally in Nuremberg in 1936.**

appointed. Many people are surprised to find out that three of the most ruthless dictators of the twentieth century acquired their power legitimately. King Victor Emmanuel of Italy appointed Mussolini prime minister in 1922. That same year, in the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin was elected president of the Communist Party. German president Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolph Hitler as chancellor in 1933. Afterwards, however, they took over the press, dismantled parliament, outlawed political opposition, exiled or executed their enemies, and generally ignored the democratic ideals that gave them their power in the first place.

Totalitarianism. In **totalitarianism,** political authority is extended over all other aspects of social life—including culture, the arts, and social relations. Any political system may become totalitarian when no organized opposition is permitted and political information is censored. Secret police and paid informers closely monitor the people to ensure that they remain loyal to a rigidly defined ideology. Propaganda, misinformation, and terror are used to ensure obedience (Arendt, [1958] 1973).

In North Korea, for instance, pictures of "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-il are everywhere, and political messages are broadcast over loudspeakers, constantly reminding citizens that they owe allegiance to the state. Government-controlled schools and mass media present only official versions of events, and very little knowledge of the outside world is permitted. No labor unions or other political groups are permitted, and even social groups are closely monitored. Friends and family members are encouraged to spy on each other, reporting momentary lapses into disloyalty. Some 200,000 people are held in concentration camps as "political dissidents" (Martin, 2004).

Other than the brutal attempts to control the thoughts and behaviors of their citizens, modern totalitarian governments have little in common. They can start out as democracies (Nazi Germany), constitutional monarchies (Italy under Mussolini), or socialist states (the Soviet Union under Stalin). They span economic systems, although free-enterprise capitalism is uncommon because it is difficult to control. They tend to be more common in rich nations than in poor nations because they are expensive to maintain (North Korea expends 25 percent of its resources on the military).

Democracy

The great British statesman Winston Churchill once commented that democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others. Democracy is messy and noisy, and order is difficult because in its basic idea, democracy gives a political voice to everyone.

Democracy (from *demos,* or people) puts legislative decision making into the hands of the people rather than a single individual or a noble class. The concept originated in ancient Greek city-states like Athens and Sparta, in which all questions were put to a vote in an assembly, and every adult male citizen had voting rights. City officials were selected by lottery (Hansen, 1999).

Pure democracy, or **participatory democracy,** with every person getting one vote and the majority ruling, can work only in very small, homogeneous units, like classrooms, families, communes, clubs, churches, and small towns. If many people participate, it becomes impossible to gather them all together for decision making. If the population becomes heterogeneous, simple majority rule obliterates the needs of minorities.

The idea of democracy vanished when ancient Greece became part of the Roman Empire (510–23 BCE). It reappeared during the Enlightenment (1650–1800), when philosophers began to argue that all human beings have natural rights, including the right to select their own political leaders. Because nation-states were too big for participatory democracy, they developed the theory of **representative democracy,** in which citizens elect representatives to make the decisions for them. Representative democracy requires an educated citizenry and a free press. High-speed communication and transportation are also helpful; during the nineteenth century, it took weeks to calculate the popular votes in presidential elections and months before everyone in the country was informed of the results. However, there are often several steps between the people and the decisions, such as an electoral college, to minimize chaos while things get counted.

Did *you* know?

On *The Simpsons*, whenever the town of Springfield has a problem, the mayor calls a town meeting. Everyone in town shows up, and everyone, even Bart Simpson, gets a vote. Springfield is too big for everyone to assemble in a small auditorium, but the practice of town meetings, with every citizen present and voting, has a long history in New England, where small towns still meet to plan budgets and educational curricula, issue licenses, and pass local laws.

In 1900, there were only a few democracies in the world, and none with **universal suffrage** (voting for all adults, both men and women). Today 70 percent of the world's nations are democracies, more than twice the percentage just 20 years ago, and another 14 percent are constitutional monarchies, all with universal suffrage. The remaining 16 percent of the world's nations are a mixture of colonies, territories, absolute monarchies, communist states, Islamic republics or other forms of theocracy (rule by a religious group), military juntas, and dictatorships, plus one ecclesiastical state (Vatican City) and two states with no central government (Somalia, which is in chaos after 20 years of civil war; and Iraq, which is under American occupation as of this writing).

But even these countries are experiencing strong pressure toward democratization from both home and abroad. Globalized mass media constantly put rich people on display as examples of "ordinary" citizens of the United States, Japan, or Western Europe, thereby associating democracy with wealth, privilege, and power. International humanitarian agencies often associate democracy with freedom and condemn autocracies as necessarily oppressive. The only way to resist the pressure is to strictly censor outside media, thereby transforming the state into a totalitarian regime.

The appeal of democracy as a political ideal has become nearly universal. The first national election in Iraq in 2005. ▼

Problems of Political Systems

Democracies are messier than authoritarian systems; populations in open societies are more difficult to control. But both authoritarian and democratic systems are prone to the same types of problems.

Corruption. An international agency called Transparency International (www.transparency

.org) ranks nations on a scale of 0 (not corrupt) to 10 (highly corrupt) on the basis of three variables:

1. Outside interests donate large sums of money to elected officials.
2. New members of parliament or Congress obey special interest groups rather than the views of the people they are supposed to represent.
3. Officials misuse government funds or the power of their office for personal gain.

Corruption seems to have little to do with whether the country is democratic or authoritarian. For instance, Papua New Guinea, which rated a 10 on democratic institutions, ranked a 7.9 in corruption; and Kuwait, which rated a –7 on democratic institutions, ranked 4.7 in corruption. Instead, corruption seems to be characteristic of poor nations, where there are few economic opportunities, so people use their political influence to make money or exercise illicit power.

Bureaucracy. As nations become larger and more complex, more and more levels between the people and the decision making are formed, creating **bureaucracy.** In the United States, most people who operate the government are never elected by anyone and not directly accountable to the people, and there are many possibilities of mismanagement, inefficiency, and conflict of interest (Etzioni-Halevy, 1983). The administrative staffs of organizations often wield enormous influence over policies, as do lobbyists and other interested groups.

Bureaucracies, Weber argued, were inherently antagonistic to democracy. In a democracy, after all, one is elected to a fixed term (and with contemporary "term limits," these are increasingly short terms). This means that elected officials do not become "entrenched" but are constantly subordinate to the will of the people. By contrast, bureaucracies are staffed by people who are appointed, often for a "life tenure," which means that they are accountable to no one but the bureaucracy itself. Bureaucracies therefore almost always suffer from "bureaucratic entrenchment" (1978).

Political campaigns have become so costly that often only the wealthiest can mount one. Billionaire Michael Bloomberg spent tens of millions of his own money to run for mayor of New York City in 2002. ▼

Class, Race, Gender, and Power. The rich have far more political clout than the poor. Every U.S. president elected in the past 100 years has been wealthy when elected, and most were born into wealth. Today millions of dollars are necessary to successfully finance the campaigns of presidents, governors, senators, and even local officials like mayors: Grassroots door knocking and envelope stuffing can never compete with high-tech prime-time TV commercials and glossy full-page magazine ads. Members of the middle class rarely rise higher than the local school board or local civil service, and the working class are virtually excluded from elected office altogether.

In recent years, several enormously wealthy men have spent hundreds of millions of their own dollars to run for public office—and win. Billionaire Michael Bloomberg, the current mayor of New York City, and Jon Corzine, a U.S. senator who became governor of New Jersey, had no political experience before running for elected office but used their business acumen as an asset, promising to run the government like a successful business. This idea of applying a business model to government is always attractive because government bureaucracies tend to make people feel the government is entrenched and unresponsive, and hence, undemocratic.

Corporations and special interest groups spend millions, sometimes billions, of dollars on lobbying and political action committees (PACs), often leaving the average citizen's concerns far behind. As a result, the average citizen often feels that neither party is doing what is needed, that no one is listening to "people like me." Minorities feel particularly slighted by their parties and by the party system (Kittilson and Tate, 2004).

The representation of minorities in elected offices is tiny. Of 535 seats in Congress, 15 percent are occupied by women, 8 percent by African Americans, 5 percent by Hispanics, and less than 1 percent each by Asians and openly gay people. Most minorities occupy seats in the lower House of Representatives, not the Senate; in fact, African American men are overrepresented in the House (Kittilson and Tate, 2004). On the state and local level, the situation is similarly unequal. For instance, men outnumber women in local legislatures by a margin of about 4.8 to 1 (Rule and Hill, 1996).

Similar processes occur in democracies around the world. Although the representation of women in national legislatures has been increasing steadily during the past 50 years, it approaches equality in only a few wealthy European countries (43 percent in Sweden, 37 percent in Finland, 31 percent in Germany). The world average is 14 percent. Several nations (Britain, India, Israel, Pakistan) have had female presidents or prime ministers—twice in India. Non-Whites (Black, Indian, Pakistani, and others) comprise 8 percent of the population of Britain but only 2 percent of the members of Parliament, and only about 1 percent of MPs are gay or lesbian (Kittilson and Tate, 2004).

The commonsense explanation for the underrepresentation of minorities in high government positions is simple: discrimination. Either minorities lack the financial resources to successfully run for office or else voter prejudice keeps them from being elected. Prejudices about the "qualifications" of various minorities to adequately represent the majority often induce people to vote for "majority" candidates.

This, though, raises another question: If the minorities cannot adequately represent the majority, how can the majority claim to adequately represent the minorities? If democracy is defined as the rule of the majority, what happens to those who are not in the majority? Will there be, as some sociologists predicted, a "tyranny of the majority," in which power becomes a zero-sum game and the winners get it and the losers don't, or will there be protections of the minorities to ensure they are not trampled politically? (Of course, middle-aged wealthy White men, who dominate all elective office, are the statistical *minority* of all voters. By a landslide.)

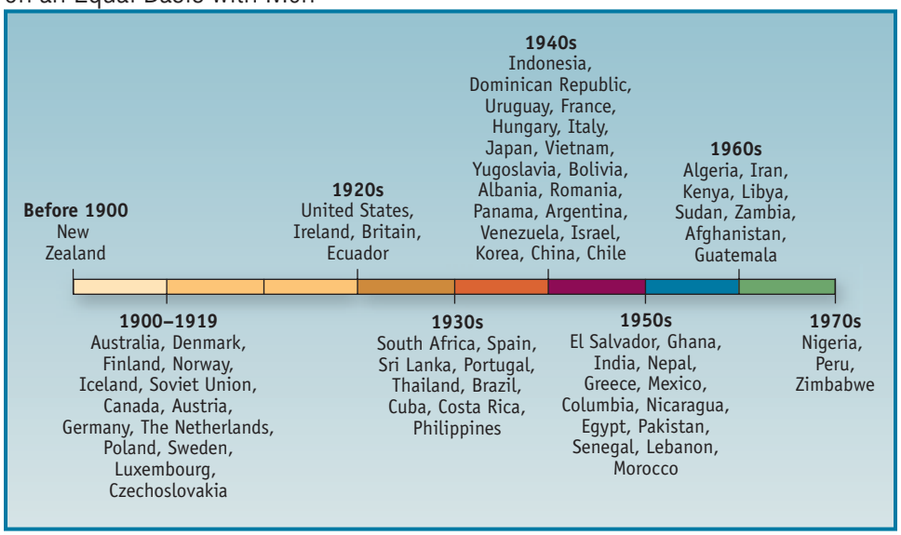
Discrimination does not, however, explain what happens in countries with multiple electoral systems, combining "winner take all" (the U.S. practice) with proportional representation (or PR). In a **proportional representation** system each party would receive a proportion of the legislative seats and thus would be more likely to govern "from the center" and build coalitions. This would tend to increase minority representation because coalitions of minority groups can form a majority. Countries that use proportional representation elect many times more women to their legislatures than winner-take-all systems (Rule and Hill, 1996).

Citizenship is the foundation of political participation. In the United States, the number of naturalized citizens has been steadily climbing, to 702,589 in 2006. A naturalization ceremony in Miami, 2007.

Citizenship

One question that characterizes all systems is: Who gets to participate? Who decides? To participate in the political process, you must be a citizen. Throughout most of human history,

FIGURE 13.1 The Year in Which Women Achieved the Right to Vote on an Equal Basis with Men



Source: Adapted from Lisa Tuttle, *Encyclopedia of Feminism,* 1986.

people were born into a tribe or cultural group, and they belonged to it forever, no matter where they happened to live. In ancient Rome, only people of Roman ancestry could become citizens. It didn't matter that your ancestors had lived in Rome for five generations, or that your first language was Latin; citizenship, and with it the opportunity for political participation, was forever beyond your grasp. Well into the twentieth century, Jews were excluded from citizenship in most European countries, even if their ancestors had lived there for 500 years.

The idea of universal citizenship didn't take hold until the nineteenth century (Holston, 1999; Jacobsohn, 1996; Steenbergen, 1994). When the United States was founded, a Black person counted as three-fifths of a White person for statistical purposes, but Black men were denied **suffrage** (the right to voting and representation) until 1865. Women (Black and White) didn't acquire suffrage until 1920 (Figure 13.1).

By the twentieth century, most nations recognized two rights to citizenship: the right of blood, whereby you become a citizen automatically if your father or mother is a citizen, regardless of where they happen to be living; and the right of territory, whereby you become a citizen automatically if you are born in a country, regardless of where your parents live. Most countries allow foreigners with no right of blood or right of the territory to become naturalized citizens, but there are restrictions: Usually you must speak the language and have a job or vital skills that will make you attractive to employers. Sometimes you must meet nationality and racial quotas (the United States barred non-Whites from becoming citizens well into the 1930s), educational restrictions (a high school diploma or the equivalent), and age limits (no one over 40) (Aileinikoff and Klusmeyer, 2001; Castles and Davidson, 2000). A number of countries do not permit naturalization (though you can become a permanent resident), and a few "holdout" countries like Japan do not even recognize the right of citizenship by virtue of being born there. Citizens must be of Japanese ancestry (Tarumoto, 2003).

The Political System of the United States

In the American political system, citizens are protected as individuals from the exercise of arbitrary control by the government, but individual citizens have little impact on changing the system. Individuals must band together at every level—local, state, and national—to hope to sway policies. And even then, it is only through one's elected representatives that change can be accomplished. The system is so large and complex that organized bureaucratic political parties dominate the political landscape.

Political parties are groups that band together to petition for political changes and to support candidates to elected office. Most of the world's democracies have many parties: Germany has 6, Japan 7, France 19, Italy 30, and Argentina 49. Usually, however, only two or at most three dominate in parliament or congress. British elected officials traditionally belong to either the Labour Party or the Conservative Party; there are many other parties, but the most successful, the Liberal Democrats, occupy only 9.6 percent of the seats in Parliament.

American Political Parties

The United States was founded on a **two-party system:** The Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, distrusted the newly enfranchised populace and argued for a strong, centralized government; the Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, held a more agrarian small-town ideal and argued for a decentralized government with limited power. These morphed in the first decades of the nineteenth century based on their positions on central government, immigration, and slavery. In the years after the Civil War, the modern two-party system of Democrat and Republican was consolidated. By the 1880s, Republicans and Democrats received 100 percent of electoral votes and very nearly 100 percent of popular votes.

With only two major political parties, the United States is something of an anomaly among democratic nations. Sociologists generally attribute the fact that most other countries have many more political parties to America's winner-take-all electoral system. With legislative representation based on proportional voting, as in Europe, for example, smaller parties can gain seats, have influence, and even be included in coalition governments. In the United States, it doesn't make sense to spend money and launch major campaigns if you are a third (or fourth, and so on) party because if you don't win, you get nothing, no matter how many votes you received. However, that fact hasn't stopped some Americans from starting smaller political parties.

Republicans and Democrats tend to have different platforms (opinions about social and economic concerns) and different ideas about the role of government in the first place. According to conventional thinking, the Republicans run "against" government, claiming that government's job should be to get out of the way of individuals and off the back of the average taxpayer. Democrats, by contrast, believe that only with active government intervention can social problems like poverty or discrimination be solved. It is the proper role of government to provide roads, bridges, and other infrastructure, as well as services such as welfare, health insurance, and minimum wages to those who cannot fend for themselves.

Did *you* know?

Twenty-seven of the world's democracies make voting compulsory. Usually nonvoters face no penalty, or they can get off with just an explanation and a fine (the equivalent of $2.50 in Switzerland, $25 to $250 in Austria, $400 in Cyprus). In some countries, they face a fine plus "disenfranchisement": loss of voting privileges in Belgium and Singapore, loss of some government services in Peru. In Chile, Egypt, and Fiji, they can go to prison (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance).

Both sides point to the other side's failures as evidence that their strategy is better. Republicans argue that overspending on welfare has made poor people lazy and dependent, unable and unwilling to help themselves, victims, as President Bush said, of the "tyranny of low expectations." Democrats point to the devastating human toll of Hurricane Katrina, for a recent example, which was made infinitely worse because of Republican policies of cutting funding to reinforce the levees surrounding New Orleans, while they offered massive tax cuts to the wealthy.

To a sociologist, however, this question—whether the government should intervene in personal life or not—is a good example of how framing the issue as "either/ or" misses the most important issues. It's always both—and both parties believe that the government should both intervene in private life and stay out of it. It is rather *where* they want to stay out of your life and *where* they want to intervene that is the question.

Party Affiliation: The Politics of Race, Class, and Gender

What makes people affiliate with—that is, join, support, or vote for—Republicans, Democrats, or a third party? Surprisingly, it's not often the issues, and rarely the "great divide" of government intervention versus hands off. The answer is that people are socialized into party affiliation. They vote to express their group identity. If you were to tell me your educational background, class, race, and gender, I would probably be able to predict who you are going to vote for with considerable accuracy (Burdick and Broadbeck, 1977; Popkin, 1994). Party affiliation tends to follow from:

1. *Class.* Poor, working-class, lower-middle-class, and blue-collar trade unionists tend to be Democrats, while wealthy, upper-middle-class, white-collar individuals tend to be Republicans. In 2004, the Republican Bush beat the Democrat Kerry among households earning over $50,000 per year, but Kerry beat Bush among low-income and blue-collar households.
2. *Education.* Generally, the higher educational levels go Democratic, and the lower Republican. However, in 2004, Kerry beat Bush among *both* the least-educated and the most-educated voters.
3. *Race.* Since the 1930s, most racial and ethnic minorities have been Democratic. However, the percentages are declining as more minorities become wealthy, upper middle class, and white collar. In 2000, 90 percent of Blacks and 67 percent of Latinos voted Democratic. In 2004, it was 88 percent of Blacks and 67 percent of Latinos.
4. *Gender.* Women are more likely than men to vote Democratic, but again the percentages are declining (54 percent in 2000, 51 percent in 2004). The decrease occurs primarily among White women: 44 percent voted for Kerry in 2004 as compared to 75 percent of women of color.

Interest groups organize to lobby around specific issues. These Greenpeace polar bears are protesting against global warming. ▼

Interest Groups

Parties are not the only organized groups that influence political decisions. Individuals, organizations, and industries often form **interest groups** (also known as *special interest groups, pressure groups,* and *lobbies*) to promote their interests among state and national

How do we know what we know?

The Case of Polling

"Dewey Defeats Truman" was the headline of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on the day after the 1948 presidential election. Preelection polls had predicted that Dewey would win by a 5 to 15 percent margin. In fact, Truman defeated Dewey by 4.4 percent of the vote. In the 2000 election, preelection polls showed Al Gore beating George W. Bush in Florida. Exit polls in 2004 found John Kerry beating Bush in Ohio. How did the media get it so wrong?

Every election is preceded by a series of polls. Private polling agencies, newspapers, TV networks, and individual candidates all sponsor polls to track the way that the election is shaping up.

Polling is nearly as old as the United States. In the 1820s, newspapers began to do straw polls to test the mood of the electorate. (The term comes from an old trick used by farmers, who would throw a few sticks of straw into the air to see which way the wind was blowing. The "straw poll" was designed to tell which way the political wind was blowing.)

Polls are surveys of likely voters, culled from county or state lists of registered voters. Pollsters like Gallup, Harris, Roper, and Zogby rely on preelection polls to discern the general sentiments of the electorate, and predict its outcome. These are watched daily, even hourly, to show trends among likely voters. They also use exit polls in which voters are asked for whom they voted as they leave the polling place. Again, exit polls are carefully stratified to ensure that age, race, class, gender, and other factors are accurately represented. And, of course, the elections themselves are polls in which people indicate a preference for a candidate. But this time, the answers actually count! Why are polls sometimes wrong?

Typically polls are conducted by sampling from the telephone book, and these are cross-checked against registered voters. But this may bias the sample because wealthier people often have several telephone numbers (increasing the likelihood they will be called) but the extremely wealthy have unlisted phone numbers (so they will never be called). The sampling frame is flawed because what ought to be a random sample is actually not random.

In election polls, pollsters use stratified sampling to construct a sample of likely eligible voters who well represent the different factions and groups that make up the electorate. A stratified sample divides the electorate up into discrete groups by age, gender, race, class, education, and a host of other factors.

But young people are more likely to have only cell phones, which are often not listed in the phone book. And some people have answering machines while others don't. This may result in a nonresponse bias.

Finally, most polls have a margin of error of about 3 to 4 percent—which, in the case of tight elections, is enough to be terribly misleading.

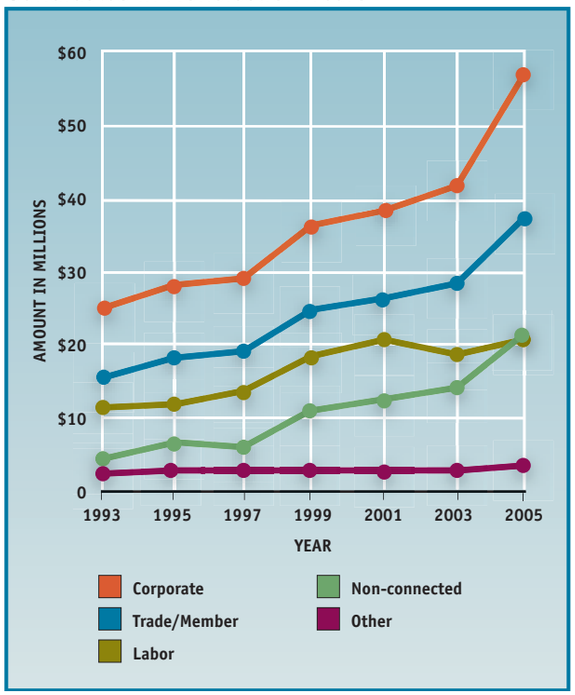
In the case of the 1948 presidential election, several things may have caused the polls' error. The preelection polls were so overwhelming predicting that Dewey would win that one pollster, Elmo Roper, announced he wouldn't even do any more polls. This may have left Republicans feeling overly confident, so they were less aggressive in the final weeks, while Truman's supporters marshaled every possible vote they could. In the six weeks before the election, Truman traveled 32,000 miles and gave 355 speeches. Experts still weren't convinced. In October, 1948, *Newsweek* asked 50 key political journalists who they believed would win. All 50 predicted Dewey would win.

Political skill, Winston Churchill once said, "is the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, and to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen."

legislators and often to influence public opinion. *Protective groups* represent only one trade, industry, minority, or subculture: Labor unions are represented by the AFL-CIO, African Americans by the NAACP, women by NOW, and conservative Christians by Focus on the Family. *Promotional groups*, however, claim to represent the interests of the entire society: Greenpeace tries to preserve the planet's ecology, and Common Cause promotes accountability in elected officials (Grossman and Helpman, 2001; Miller, 1983).

Increasingly, interest groups do not try to represent an entire political agenda. Instead, they fight for or against a single issue, like gun control. As the number of "hot-button" issues has become more visible in the media, the number of interest groups has increased, especially now that the Internet provides an easy, risk-free place for mobilization: Potential members need only push a button indicating that they support the cause and key in their credit card number to make a donation.

FIGURE 13.2 PAC Contributions to Candidates in Nonelection Years



Source: Federal Election Commission.

Interest groups are very visible in Washington. They often have a staff of full-time professional lobbyists who influence politicians for a living. In fact, many people believe that interest groups have too much power and can buy votes in any election by pumping money into their campaign—or the campaigns of their opponents. As a result of widespread public suspicion, interest groups are also subject to restriction. They must be registered, and they must submit detailed reports of their activities.

One of the more controversial contemporary versions of an interest group is the **political action committee (PAC).** These are lobbying groups that work to elect or defeat candidates based on their stance on specific issues. Most PACs represent interests of large corporations—business and industry; there are no poor people's PACs. However, you can find many smaller special interest PACs on the Internet.

PACs work by soliciting contributions, which they then contribute to the campaigns of their chosen candidates. Prior to the 2004 presidential election, for instance, PACs raised $376 million (an increase of 19 percent over 2001) and contributed $106 million of it to federal candidates. Because the total campaign contributions received by George Bush and John Kerry combined amounted to $665 million, this was a sizeable sum. And it was all "soft money," outside the limits imposed by federal election law (Federal Election Commission, 2006). Even in nonelection years, PAC contributions to candidates have been growing steadily, with sharper increases over the past decade (Federal Election Commission, 2006; Figure 13.2). In 2006, the top three PACs—the National Association of Realtors, National Beer Wholesalers Association, and Trial Lawyers of America—each contributed more than $2 million to selected candidates and committees (Federal Election Commission, 2006).

Political Change

Political life is not merely a matter of orthodox social institutions: political parties, voting, and elections. History shows us that some groups find their objectives or ideals cannot be achieved with this framework—or are actively blocked by it. They need to develop "unorthodox" political action. Some types of efforts for political change, social movements and revolutions, are internal; others, like war and terrorism, are attempted from outside the society.

Social Movements

When people seek to effect change, they may engage in political revolutions, but more commonly they start **social movements**—collective attempts to further a common interest or secure a common goal through action outside the sphere of established institutions. They may try to influence public opinion with advertising campaigns or by convincing a celebrity to act as their spokesperson. They may try to get legislators' attention through marches, sit-ins, media "zaps" (invasions of televised media events), Internet protests, boycotts, or work stoppages. Or they may try more colorful

(and illegal) methods of getting their points across, like animal-rights activists who splash blood on actors wearing fur coats (McAdam, 1996; Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett, 2002; Morris and Mueller, 1992; Tarrow, 1998).

Today there are thousands of social movements, dedicated to supporting every imaginable political agenda. Many social movements are international and rely heavily on use of information technology to link local campaigners to global issues. They are as evident a feature of the contemporary world as the formal, bureaucratic political system they often oppose.

Social movements vary by the types of issues around which they mobilize, their level of organization, and their persistence over time. Some social movements also change over the course of their lives. Some become more limited in focus, others more expansive. Some morph into political parties to sustain themselves. Movements such as the labor movement or the Civil Rights movement began as more limited in focus, trying to better working conditions, raise the minimum wage, or ensure the right to vote, but both became broad-based movements that have been sustained over time by large organizations and a wide variety of issues. As they were successful, they expanded their scope and their horizons and began to press for more sweeping changes.

▲ **Social movements often innovate new tactics to get attention for their positions. Members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals protest against killing animals to make fur coats.**

Revolutions

Revolution, the attempt to overthrow the existing political order and replace it with a completely new one, is the most dramatic and unorthodox form of political change. Many social movements have a revolutionary agenda, hoping or planning for the end of the current political regime. Some condone violence as a revolutionary tactic; many terrorists are hoping to start a revolution. Successful revolutions lead to the creation of new political systems (in France, Russia, Cuba, and China), or brand new countries (Haiti, Mexico, and the United States). Unsuccessful revolutions often go down in the history books as terrorist attacks (Defronzo, 1996; Foran, 1997).

Earlier sociologists believed that revolutions had either economic or psychological causes. Marx believed that revolutions were the inevitable outcome of the clash between two social classes. As capitalism proceeded, the rich would get richer and the poor would get poorer, and eventually the poor would become so poor that they had nothing else to lose, and they would revolt. This is called the **immiseration thesis**—you get more and more miserable until you lash out.

Talcott Parsons (1966) and other functionalists maintained that revolutions were not political at all and had little to do with economic deprivation. They were irrational responses by large numbers of people who were not sufficiently connected to social life to see the benefits of existing conditions and thus could be worked into a frenzy by outside agitators.

This theory is clearly wrong. Revolutions are almost never caused by mass delirium but by people who want a change in leadership. A number of sociologists after Parsons, especially Charles Tilly (1978, 2006), William Gamson (1975), Jeffrey Paige (1975), and Mayer Zald (Zald and McCarthy, 1987), showed that revolutions were just a type of social movement, rationally planned, with mobilization strategies, grievances, and specific goals in mind.

But Marx was also wrong—especially about which groups will revolt. It is not people with nothing left to lose, but people who are invested in the social system and

have something at stake. Don't expect a revolt from the homeless and unemployed but from the lower middle classes in the cities and the middle-rung peasants in the countryside. Political scientist Ted Robert Gurr (1971) coined the term **relative deprivation** to describe how misery is socially experienced by constantly comparing yourself to others. You are not down and out: You are worse off than you used to be (downward mobility), or not as well off as you think you should be (rising expectations), or, perhaps, not as well off as those you see around you.

Revolutions do not take place in advanced societies where capitalism has had time to create huge gaps between rich and poor. The major revolutions of the twentieth century occurred in Mexico, Russia, China, Cuba, and Vietnam—that is, in peasant societies where capitalism was vestigial or nonexistent (Paige, 1975; Skocpol, 1979; Wolf, 1979).

Sociologists typically distinguish among different types of revolutionary events, along a continuum from the least dramatic change to the most. A **coup d'état** simply replaces one political leader with another but often doesn't bring with it any change in the daily life of the citizens. (Some coups do bring about change, especially when the new leader is especially charismatic, as in Argentina under Perón.)

A **political revolution** changes the political groups that run the society, but they still draw their strength from the same social groups that supported the old regime. For example, the English Revolution between 1640 and 1688 reversed the relationship between the king and aristocracy on the one hand and the elected Parliament on the other, but it didn't change the fact that only property owners were allowed to vote.

Finally, a **social revolution** changes, as Barrington Moore (1966) put it, the "social basis of political power"—that is, it changes the social groups or classes that political power rests on. Thus, for example, the French Revolution of 1789 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949 swept away the entire social foundations of the old regime—hereditary nobility, kings and emperors, and a clergy that supported them—and replaced them with a completely new group, the middle and working classes in the French case and the peasantry in the Chinese case.

War and the Military

In Hebrew and Arabic, the standard word for *hello* and *goodbye* is *shalom* or *salaam*, meaning "peace." War was so common in the ancient world that the wish for peace became a clichéd phrase, like the English *goodbye* (an abbreviated version of the more formal "God be with you"). By some estimates, there were nearly 200 wars in the twentieth century, but they are increasingly hard to pin down. The old image of war, in which two relatively evenly matched groups of soldiers from opposing states try to capture each other's territory, has become increasingly meaningless in the days of long-range missiles, smart bombs, and ecoterrorism. However, war still occurs as a standard, perhaps inevitable characteristic of political life: In his classic *On War* ([1832] 1984), Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "War is not an independent phenomenon, but the continuation of politics by different means."

Worldwide, there are approximately 100 million soldiers. Almost every country has an army, navy, or air force, plus reserve forces, and many have paramilitary forces as well. The total percentage of military personnel is often very high, often as much as 1 percent of the population. In the United States it's 4.6 per 1,000 people, but in Russia it's 10.6, in Greece 15.0, and in Israel 27.4. Military service excludes children, most middle-aged and elderly people, and many other categories, so this is a substantial percentage of the eligible young adult population.

The United States spends more money on its military than any country in the world; in 2004, it spent $370 billion. China spent "only" $67 billion, France $45 billion,

Saudi Arabia $18 billion. If we look at expenditures per capita, we find that Israel leads with $1,451 per person, but the United States is number two at $1,253.

The frequency of war suggests that it is an inevitable problem of human societies, but extensive research has found no natural cause and no circumstances under which human beings will inevitably wage war. In fact, governments worldwide expend considerable time and energy to mobilize their people for warfare (Brown, 1998; Stoessinger, 2004). They offer special privileges to those who enlist in military service, glorify warfare as "freedom fighting," schedule parades and exhibitions of military power, and portray enemies or potential enemies as monsters out to destroy us.

Sociologist Quincy Wright (1967) identified five factors that serve as root causes of most wars:

1. *Perceived threats*. Societies mobilize in response to threats to their people, territory, or culture. If the threats are not real, they can always be manufactured. The possibility that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, aimed at the United States, was the justification for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2002.
2. *Political objectives*. War is often a political strategy. Societies go to war to end foreign domination, enhance their political stature in the global arena, and increase their wealth and power. For example, the United States entered the Spanish American War in 1898 to ensure American influence and dominance in Latin America.
3. *"Wag the dog" rationale*. When internal problems create widespread unrest at home, a government may wage war to divert public attention and unify the country behind a common, external enemy. During World War I, many countries entered because they were on the brink of collapse and revolution.
4. *Moral objectives*. Leaders often infuse military campaigns with moral urgency, rallying people around visions of, say, "freedom" rather than admitting they fight to increase their wealth or power. They claim that wars are not acts of invasion but heroic efforts to "protect our way of life." The enemy—whether Germany in World War I (the "Hun") or Iraq in the early twenty-first century—is declared "immoral," and morality and religion are mobilized for the cause.
5. *Absence of alternatives*. Sometimes, indeed, there is no choice. When your country is invaded by another, it is hard to see how to avoid war. The United States adopted a strictly isolationist policy during World War II, until Pearl Harbor.

A perceived threat is often a justification for war—whether it turns out to be true or not. In February 2003, at the United Nations, the U.S. government presented its case for the invasion of Iraq by showing maps of chemical and biological weapons storehouses. After the invasion, no such weapons were ever found. ▼

Terrorism

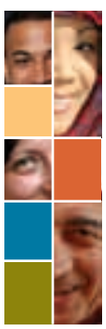
Terrorism means using acts of violence and destruction against military or civilian targets (or threatening to use them) as a political strategy. For instance, an individual or group interested in acquiring independence for the Basque people of northern Spain might engage in terrorism in the hope that the Spanish government will acquiesce to their demands for autonomy. Frequently, however, terrorism has no specific political goal. Instead, it is used to publicize the terrorist's political agenda or simply to cause as much damage to the enemy as possible. Interviews with terrorists who bomb abortion clinics reveal that they do not believe that their actions will cause the Supreme Court to reverse the *Roe v. Wade*

decision; they simply want to kill abortion doctors. Similarly, when al-Qaeda orchestrated the 9/11 attacks, they did not expect Americans to embrace their extremist form of Islam en masse; they simply wanted to hurt Americans (Hoffman, 1998; Juergensmeyer, 2003).

Terrorism can be used *by* the regime in power to ensure continued obedience and to blot out all dissent. For example, Stalin in the Soviet Union, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the apartheid regimes in South Africa all used terrorist violence to maintain control. Because totalitarian states can survive only through fear and intimidation, many make terrorism lawful, a legitimate tool of government.

But usually we think of terrorism as the actions *against* the existing regime. Usually terrorists have little or no political authority, so they use terror to promote or publicize their viewpoints, just as nonviolent groups might use marches and protests.

While terrorism is not new, recent technological advances have made weapons easier to acquire or produce and communication among terrorist groups easier, so that terrorism is increasingly common. According to the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, in 2006 there were 14,000 terrorist attacks worldwide, resulting in 20,000 deaths. Afghanistan accounted for the majority of attacks and deaths, but that year saw more



Sociology and our World

A Tale of Two Terrorists

In 1992, an American GI returning from the Gulf War wrote a letter to the editor of a small, upstate New York newspaper complaining that the legacy of the American middle class had been stolen by an indifferent government. Instead of the American dream, he wrote, most people are struggling just to buy next week's groceries. That letter writer was Timothy McVeigh from Lockport, New York. Three years later, he blew up the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in what is now the second-worst act of terrorism ever committed on American soil.

McVeigh's background and list of complaints were echoed, ironically, by Mohammed Atta, the mastermind of the September 11 attack and the pilot of the first plane to hit the World Trade Center. Looking at these two men through a sociological lens sheds light on both the method and the madness of the tragedies they wrought.

McVeigh emerged from a small legion of White supremacists, mostly younger, lower-middle-class men, educated through high school. They are the sons of skilled industrial workers, of shopkeepers and farmers. But global economic shifts have left them little of their fathers' legacies. They face a spiral of downward mobility and economic uncertainty. They complain they are squeezed between the omnivorous jaws of global capitalism and a federal bureaucracy that is, at best, indifferent to their plight.

Most of the terrorists of September 11 came from the same class and recited the same complaints. Virtually all were under 25, educated, lower middle class, and downwardly mobile. Many were engineering students for whom job opportunities had dwindled dramatically. And central to their political ideology was the recovery of manhood from the emasculating politics of globalization.

Both Atta and McVeigh failed at their chosen professions. McVeigh, a business college dropout, found his calling in the military during the Gulf War, where his exemplary service earned him commendations; but he washed out of Green Beret training—his dream job. Atta studied engineering to please his authoritarian father, but his degree meant nothing in a country where thousands of college graduates were unemployed. After he failed to find a job in Egypt, he moved to Hamburg, Germany, where he found work as a draftsman—humiliating for someone with engineering and architectural credentials—at a German firm involved with eliminating low-income Cairo neighborhoods to provide more scenic vistas for luxury tourist hotels. Defeated, humiliated, emasculated, a disappointment to his family, Atta retreated into increasingly militant Islamic theology.

The terrors of emasculation experienced by lower-middle-class men all over the world will no doubt continue, as they struggle to make a place for themselves in shrinking economies and inevitably shifting cultures. Globalization feels to them like a game of musical chairs, in which, when the music stops, all the seats are handed to others by nursemaid governments. Someone has to take the blame, to be held responsible for their failures. As terrorists, they didn't just get mad. They got even.

than 700 killed by terrorists in Sudan, 520 in Thailand, 115 in Russia, and 97 in Nigeria (National Counterterrorism Center, 2007).

Democratic societies reject terrorism in principle, but they are especially vulnerable to terrorists because they afford extensive civil liberties to their people and have less extensive police networks (as compared with totalitarian regimes). This allows far more freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom to purchase terrorist weaponry. The London subway attacks of July 2005 and airport attacks in Glasgow, Scotland, of 2007 were possible only because people are free to move about the city at will; in a totalitarian state they would be subject to frequent searches and identification checks, and they would not be allowed in many areas unless they could prove that they had legitimate business. And the absence of checking and monitoring duty means that democratic countries have smaller police forces to respond to emergencies.

Terrorism is always a matter of definition. It depends on who is doing the defining: One person's terrorist might be another's "freedom fighter." Had the colonies lost the Revolutionary War, the patriots would have gone down in history books as a group of terrorists. The same group can be labeled terrorist or not, depending on who their foes are: In the 1980s, when they were resisting the Soviet Union, the Taliban groups in Afghanistan were portrayed in the media as "freedom fighters," but in 2001, when they were resisting the United States, they were portrayed as terrorists.

Everyday Politics

Most political activity does not occur in political caucuses and voting booths, through large-scale social movements, or even through the violence of war, terrorism, and revolution. Politics happens in everyday situations that have nothing to do with candidates.

Being Political: Social Change

In 1969, Carol Hanish wrote an article for the book *Feminist Revolution* (1969/1979) titled "The Personal Is Political," arguing that even the most intimate, personal actions make a political statement: "Personal problems are political problems," she concluded. Or, to put it another way, every problem is a political problem. For example, you are making a political statement when:

- Someone makes a racist, sexist, or homophobic comment, and you agree, disagree, or stay silent.
- You make a friend who belongs to a different race, gender, or sexual orientation, or who doesn't.
- A company exploits the workers in its foreign factories, but you buy its products anyway, or refuse to buy its products, or don't know about it.
- You seek out a "green" product, or don't, or don't notice whether it is environmentally friendly.

In short, you are "being political" all the time.

Everyday politics is not a replacement for organized political groups. In fact, the two complement each other. Small, seemingly inconsequential everyday acts have a cumulative impact, creating grassroots support for the legislative changes for which political groups lobby. These acts also express political identity, enhance solidarity, and promote social change (Scott, 1987).

Frequently, groups with little formal power still attempt to resist what they perceive as illegitimate or dictatorial authority, using symbolic and cultural expressions.

▲ **In earlier generations, most middle-class women did not work outside the home, so they had enough free time to take leadership roles in community and civic volunteerism. Today many more middle-class women have full-time jobs, so they have less time to volunteer.**

For example, when Estonia was under Soviet occupation in the 1980s, citizens would pretend they spoke only Estonian or put signs on hotels in Russian that said "No Vacancy" (Suny, 1985). In France and Spain, schools in Brittany, Catalonia, or the Basque country often teach subjects in the local language rather than French or Spanish, to preserve local traditions.

Civil Society: Declining, Increasing, or Dynamic?

In the best-selling book *Bowling Alone* (2000), political scientist Robert Putnam looked at **civil society**—that is, the clubs, churches, fraternal organizations, civic organizations, and other groups that once formed a third "zone" between home and work.

In 1950, most middle-class men belonged to the Elks, Masons, Odd Fellows, Kiwanis, Toastmasters, or Chambers of Commerce, while middle-class women belonged to garden clubs, literary clubs, civic improvement societies, and the PTA. These groups provided places for friendships to be forged, opinions expressed, and political changes pursued. They were the primary schools of democracy—but no longer.

In the mid-1970s, two-thirds of the adult American population regularly attended club meetings. In the mid-1990s, it was one-third. The number who had attended a public meeting on local or school affairs fell by a third.

The raw numbers of civic groups has actually increased, from around 8,000 in 1950 to just over 20,000 in 2000. But the new groups are not grassroots "third places," but advocacy groups involving far fewer people and little real contact.

Civility may change because of long commutes and two-career families, but it hasn't been eliminated. Mobility means that we are unlikely to forge significant social contacts with relatives (too far away), co-workers (they live on the other side of town), or neighbors (rather, the strangers who live next door). We are likely to seek out friends in clubs and organizations, just as our parents and grandparents did 50 years ago. Only now we go about it differently (Norris, 2002).

In the twenty-first century, civic engagement by young adults (15- to 25-year-olds) increased. They are less likely to participate in traditional avenues of political engagement: 85 percent have never participated in a protest march or demonstration, 82 percent have never written a letter to a newspaper or magazine, and 81 percent have never contacted a public official. However, over half have helped raise money for a charitable cause, and 41 percent have walked or bicycled for a charitable cause. They are making their political viewpoints known through grassroots, day-to-day involvement rather than through attempting to influence political leaders. Political activism is taking on some new forms—stretching the concept of civic engagement (Rimmerman, 2001):

- *Shift to the marketplace.* Young people use their power as consumers. Over half have refused to buy something because of "the conditions under which it was made" or made the decision to buy something because they liked the values of the company that made it (Grimm, 2003; Neuborne, 1999).
- *Preference for hands-on activity.* Young people prefer helping to raise money for a cause—especially through mass activities like "AIDS Walk" or "Race for the Cure." These events allow them to participate in a group, and they can actually "see" themselves making a difference (Grimm, 2003; "Inside the Mind," 2001).

- *Preference for supportive activity.* They don't protest against something; they prefer to rally for something. Instead of protesting the deficiency in funds for AIDS research, they march to raise money for AIDS research (Grimm, 2003).

Politics and Media: Interdependence

"Everyday politics" often relies on the media to make its points. Hands-on events depend on media coverage to enhance their impact on policy and public opinion; consumer actions need media coverage to spread the word about tactics, reasons, and goals. Sociologist Todd Gitlin (1980) coined the term "staged politics" to describe the conscious use of the mass media to create political events out of everyday actions.

Politics and the media have a long history of interdependence stretching back to the dawn of America itself, when colonial newspapers were used to publicize revolutionary ideas and drum up public support for military action. Today, political actors and media organizations engage in increasingly sophisticated relationships. Officeholders, organizations, and political candidates time and tailor their statements to news broadcasts, while media organizations sponsor polls and hire countless commentators, developing streams of content out of political sentiment and events. Today, many question the impact of the media in politics. Do the media shape or reflect the political scene? Do they create or reflect the public opinion on which political decision making is based?

This debate about the power of the media echoes across many social questions of the day. Think how many times we have heard variations of it: Does pornography lead men to commit rape? Does gangsta rap, or video games, or violent movies, or violent heavy metal music lead to increased violence in our society? Do the media incite social problems like violence or racism or sexism, or do they merely reflect how prevalent they already are in our society?

The sociologist does not choose between these two positions. It's both: The media both reflect the society in which they were created and also affect our behaviors and attitudes. If they didn't reflect our society, then they wouldn't make any sense. And if they didn't have some effect on our attitudes or behavior, then they wouldn't "work"—which means that the entire advertising industry would be out of business. Instead of asking whether media shape or reflect our society, the sociologist asks: How and in what ways do the media shape and reflect our lives?

What Are the Mass Media?

Media (the plural of *medium*) are the ways that we communicate with each other. If I am talking, I am using the medium of speech. I could also sing, gesture, and make smoke signals. In the Canary Islands, people used to communicate through the medium of whistling. Right now I am writing, or more precisely typing, using alphabetic symbols instead of sounds.

Technological innovations like the printing press, the radio, the television, and the personal computer have created **mass media**, ways to communicate with vast numbers of people at the same time, usually over a great distance. Mass media have developed in countless directions: There

Through media segmentation, some groups are connected to global cultural trends while others remain wedded to more local forms. These Argentine fans greeting Ricky Martin in 2006 may have more in common with American fans than they do with the rural poor in Argentina. ▼

are books, newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, records and tapes, CDs and DVDs, radio and television programs, comic strips and comic books, and a whole range of new digital media. New forms of mass media are constantly being developed, and old forms are constantly falling into disuse.

Sometimes the new forms of mass media can revive or regenerate the old. Teenagers used to keep their diaries hidden in their rooms, with little locks to deter nosy siblings. Today they are likely to publish them on the Internet as blogs.

Sociologists are interested in the access to media by different groups with different resources and also in the effects of media—how they affect our behaviors and attitudes, how they bring us together or drive us apart, how they shape the very rhythm of our days.

Types of Mass Media

There are many types of mass media. All have experienced enormous growth since the nineteenth century, and today media animate—and some would say dominate—our everyday lives.

Print Media. People have been keeping written records for 5,000 years, on clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, the wooden tablets of Easter Island, and eventually books. But everything had to be copied by hand, so anything written was extremely rare and expensive. In *The Canterbury Tales* (1386), the Clerk is so obsessed with books that he owns 20 of them!

The printing press, which appeared in China in the eighth century and Europe in the fifteenth, changed the way we record and transmit information (Eisenstein, 1993). The new technology allowed media to be produced more quickly, more cheaply, and in larger numbers. Reading shifted from a privilege of upper-class males to a much wider population, and the literacy rate in Europe jumped from less than 1 percent to between 10 and 15 percent.

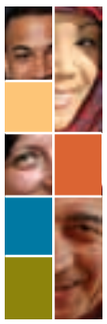
But even during the 1800s, most people owned only two or three books—the family Bible, an almanac, and maybe a book of poetry. In the first decades of the twentieth century, reading became a mass middle-class activity (Radway, 1999). People read cheap paperbacks, newspapers, and magazines.

While mass general-interest magazines have declined, there are thousands of special-interest magazines—for every imaginable hobby. These magazines unite small communities, but "buttonhole" them into separate and definable niches. ▼

The newspaper and the magazine were originally vehicles for general interest readers (the word *magazine* originally meant a storehouse where you would keep your excess flour or corn). In the nineteenth century, both flourished. Newspapers became a staple of middle-class life in the developed world (in the United States, over 11,000 were being published in 1880), and mass-market magazines similarly reached an increasing range of readers, bringing novels, political and cultural information, artwork, and soon photography, plus tips, advice, and contemporary musings to millions of literate people in various countries of the world.

Today, the 13,000 magazines published in the United States are largely specialized publications, of interest to only a selected audience (Tebbel and Zuckerman, 2005). The number of daily newspapers in the United States has shrunk over the past century, as newspapers seem to have been hit harder by the development of new media than books or magazines. However, most newspapers are now available online (worldwide, more than 5,000), and 45 percent of U.S. adults who went online indicated that they had visited a newspaper site during the last week (*Harris Poll,* 2004).

New technologies and new literate audiences have actually spurred sales of magazines and books. Today, despite widespread worries that the Internet



Sociology and our World

Do Women's Magazines Oppress Women or Liberate Them?

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a blockbuster bestseller that many say launched the modern women's movement. Friedan argued that women's magazines are the main way that culture brainwashes women into believing that their highest value is in fulfilling their femininity, that true happiness can only come from catching a man, marrying him, and becoming a homemaker and mother.

Some 40 years later, the discussion continues, but now some best-selling authors are blaming women's magazines for leading women astray—in the opposite direction. These critics now say women's magazines brainwash women into wanting careers and independence, leading them away from the homes and families that represent their true pursuit of happiness (Crittenden, 1999; Shalit, 1999).

Which is it? Are women's magazines instruments of women's oppression by keeping women in the home—or by forcing them to seek fulfillment outside of the home? Are they guidebooks to fulfillment by encouraging women to marry and be mothers—or to build careers, businesses, and individual success in the world?

To the sociologist, the answer is not one or the other—it's both. From the very beginning, American women's magazines have presented readers with competing messages and have asked them to select which ideas to accept and which to resist and to resolve conflicting messages in their own ways (Aronson, 2002).

That diversity of perspectives remains true today. Women's magazines remain highly profitable and popular; four women's titles—*Good Housekeeping, Family Circle, Women's Day*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*—rank among the top ten best-selling magazines in the nation. The major magazines also have international editions published in dozens of countries around the world. And modern versions still carry at least some of the competing messages that readers have long expected and enjoyed. See for yourself: Look at any popular women's magazine—*Glamour, O, Jane, Latina, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan*—or check out even the great-grandmothers like *Good Housekeeping* or *Ladies' Home Journal*. See if you notice competing perspectives among the articles, the ads, and the editorials.

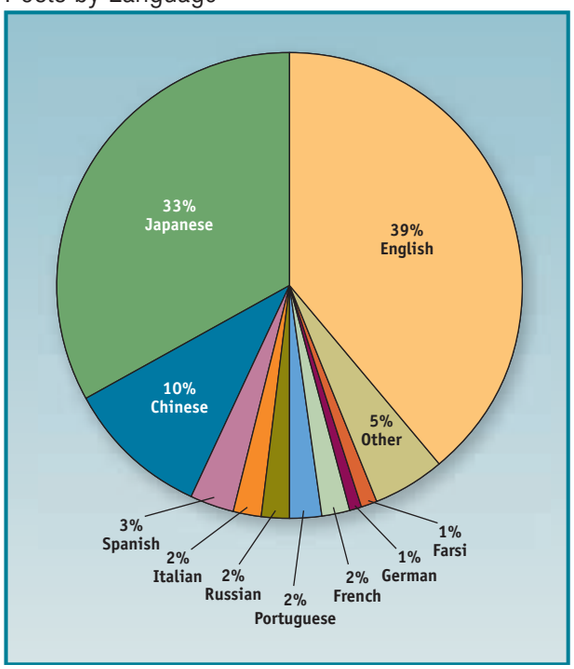
has made the book obsolete, book publishing is a $23 billion a year industry in the United States alone, with sales increasing every year ("Bound for Success," 2006). And magazine publishing is a $35 billion business, with hundreds of new titles launched every year. In the first four months of 2006 alone, 101 new magazines were launched.

Globally, one can discern the difference between rich and poor nations by their newspaper circulation. Norwegians are the most avid newspaper readers in the world, with 554 issues sold per 1,000 people, more than one per household. It's 257 in Australia, 218 in the United States, and 122 in Russia. But look at the poor countries: 24 subscriptions per 1,000 people in Algeria, 6 in Bangladesh, 4 in Benin. Ethiopia is the lowest, at 0.3 (UNESCO, 2000). Obviously the newspapers in these countries are not suffering greatly from Internet competition: Most people are too poor to afford newspapers and unable to read them anyway (Ethiopia has a 36 percent literacy rate).

Blogs: Online Print Journalism. A **blog**, short for "Weblog," is essentially an online personal journal or diary where an author can air his or her opinions directly to audiences. Some call it "personal journalism." Others call it "citizen journalism." Some say it doesn't qualify as journalism at all. Blogs, you might say, put the "me" back in "media."

Blogs have become amazingly popular: There are about 12 million of them (Lee, 2006; Nussbaum, 2004; Rich, 2006), with a new blog getting started every 5.8 seconds (Belo, 2004; Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005). About 57 million

FIGURE 13.3 Blog Globalization: Blog Posts by Language



Source: Technorati, 2007. Reprinted by permission of Technorati, Inc., www.technorati.com

Americans—39 percent of all U.S. Internet users—read blogs (Lee, 2006). A majority of bloggers are young people under 29 (Nussbaum, 2004), but many are also written by professors, journalists, scientists, and other adults of various professions. The "blogosphere" is a continually globalizing space; bloggers speak an array of languages (but English and Japanese are dominant; Figure 13.3). Some blogs resemble the editorial page of a newspaper, and others offer gossip, photography, or video content.

There is controversy about both the definition and the growing power of blogs. Are blogs the first form of journalism to truly harness the democratic potential of the World Wide Web? Are they the way ordinary citizens can speak up, voicing their views without having to get past media company gatekeepers, editors, or advertisers? Blogs became so influential in both fund raising and opinion making in the hotly contested 2004 U.S. presidential campaign that today it is considered a strategic essential for political candidates to have a "blogmeister" on staff. In 2006, Farsi, the language of Iran, also widely spoken in Afghanistan, moved into the top ten languages of the blogosphere, suggesting the potential importance of blogs and bloggers in world affairs (Technorati, 2006).

On the other hand, traditional news journalism, whether print, broadcast, or online, must meet established standards of fairness and accuracy. Bloggers are under no obligation to be scrupulous and diligent in their research, news gathering, and reporting. They never need admit when their reports are fraudulent, unfair, or wrong. In fact, quite the contrary—and to some that's the whole point. The writer Andrew Sullivan, a former national magazine editor turned popular blogger, told the *Washington Post* that he sees his blog as "a way you can throw ideas around without having to fully back them up, just to see what response you get" (Rich, 2006). Given their growing influence, blogs are of significant interest to sociologists—and not just to those who write them.

Radio, Movies, and Television. Before 1880, if you wanted music, you had to make it yourself or hire someone. That all changed when Thomas Edison recorded his voice. Within a few decades, the gramophone (a machine that enabled you to listen to recorded music) was a staple of American life. And, at the same time, entrepreneurs sought to harness the power of transmitting sound via invisible "radio waves" and make them profitable. Movies were born with a 12-minute clip of *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903—and the media world changed forever.

The problem was, after the initial purchase, listening to the radio would be free; how could producers make any money? Eventually someone came up with the idea of sponsors: A company would pay for the production in exchange for regular advertising "plugs." The first commercial radio station, KDKA, opened in Pittsburgh in 1920. By 1923, 7 percent of American households had radio receivers; by 1935, 65 percent.

Movies offered no such commercial resistance. By the mid-1930s, over half of the U.S. population went to the movies—every week. And this would include, typically, two full-length features, newsreels, serial dramas, cartoon shorts—and commercials. And television, introduced in the late 1940s, was geared to commercial

What do *you* think?

MyLab

Confidence in the Press

Conservatives claim the press has a liberal bias, but liberals claim the press has a right-wing bias. Most people probably don't think they are getting the entire truth from the media regardless of their political persuasion. In an age of globalization and media conglomerates, many sources of news are controlled by a small number of large corporations and powerful individuals. However, the rise of the Internet as a means of conveying information has changed the media landscape. So, what do you think?

As far as the people running the press are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?

- ❍ A great deal
- ❍ Only some
- ❍ Hardly any

See the back of the chapter to compare your answers to national survey data.

Source: General Social Survey, 2004.

sponsorship of shows. With variety shows and commercial spots every few minutes, the connection between selling products and consuming media was indelibly tightened. (European television and radio are state sponsored and, until the 1980s, had no commercials at all.)

The irony of American television is that, between 1955 and 1985, television was arguably the most popular form of mass media in the United States. Virtually everyone was watching—and everyone was watching the same channels. There were only three national networks, NBC, ABC, and CBS. Whole generations were defined by their preferred television programs: *I Love Lucy* in 1955, *Bonanza* in 1965, *All in the Family* in 1975.

Today, the average American home has more television sets than people (Associated Press, 2006). But television is so fragmented that even the top-rated shows draw only a small percentage of viewers. Only 15 percent of all households with TVs tune in to *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, the top-rated show, compared to 74 percent who watched *I Love Lucy*, the top-rated show in the 1950s (Hof, 2006). Today's viewers can choose from among hundreds of channels, and the traditional networks lose numbers every year in favor of specialized niche channels.

Each new form of media brings the world closer together—satellite TV and radio broadcast shows around the world. And yet media also can fragment us into niches and exacerbate the gap between rich and poor (those who have media access and those who do not). Globally, television is similar to the newspaper, saturating rich countries, rare in poor countries. In the United States, there are 740 television sets per 1,000 people; there are less than half that in South Korea, but that's more than enough to immerse the population in the latest game shows and reality

Did *you* know?

The world's largest movie industry is not Hollywood. It's "Nollywood." The Nigerian film industry produces more than 2,000 movies a year, most of them low-budget affairs (between $15,000 and $100,000) and two-thirds of them in English. The Nigerian film industry employs over a million people, making it the nation's second largest employer (after agriculture). India's "Bollywood" is second ("Nollywood Dreams," 2006).

▲ **Many new media forms are marketed to, and enjoyed by, different groups. There are "his" and "her" video and computer games, but, as a genre, it's mostly "his."**

series. Among poorer countries though—with 58 TVs per 1,000 people in India and 3.5 in Mozambique, for example—there is no unifying national television culture (*CIA World Factbook*, 2005).

Video Games, Gambling, and Porn: Guy Media. Worldwide, more than 300 million people play video games. The global video game market totaled more than $40 billion in 2006, outselling box office receipts for movies, books, CDs, and DVDs by a landslide. (Movies, in second place, made $14 billion globally.) Over 225 million computer games—nearly two games *per household*—are sold every year. Three-fifths of Americans age 6 and older play video games regularly—and three-fifths of those players are men.

Young males are also the primary players of online poker. According to PokerPulse.com, which tracks online poker games, some 88,000 players were betting almost $16 million in online poker every day when the first World Poker Tournament was held in 1997. Today, those figures have increased by a factor of ten—1.8 million players bet $300 million online every single day. The single largest group of online poker players is young men, 14 to 22 years old, according to the National Annenberg Risk Survey (NARSY) in

How do we know what we know?

Does Watching Pornography Cause Rape?

What effect does viewing pornography have on men's attitudes and behaviors? Does watching porn cause rape? Social scientists (both social psychologists and sociologists) have tried to address this question from several different perspectives.

Early researchers showed men some porn clips and then asked them to either serve as jurors in a mock rape trial or to take a survey measuring rape myths (cultural beliefs about rape such as "women say no when they mean yes" and "women like it when you force them to have sex"). This research found that watching pornography increased the likelihood that male jurors would acquit a defendant in a rape trial and that they would support rape myths. But these effects were not very long lasting and vanished within a day or two.

Research by psychologist Dolf Zillman (1993) tried to measure if watching pornography actually increased men's aggression toward women. But his methodology reflected flawed assumptions. He measured aggression by how sexually aroused the men were—they wore a rubber band fitted with electrodes around the penis that measured arousal. Yet surely sexual arousal is not the same thing as sexual aggression.

Ed Donnerstein (1985) showed college age men three sets of images: (1) violence alone (no sex), like slasher movies; (2) sex alone (no violence, soft-core porn); (3) sexually violent material from hard-core porn. Men who watched the second set of images, sex alone, showed no changes in attitudes or behaviors. But the images of both violence and sexual violence together changed both attitudes and behaviors—and in virtually identical ways. Donnerstein concluded that it was the violence in the pornography, not the sex, that caused the changes.

Finally, sociologists Murray Straus and Larry Baron (1993) noticed a correlation between rape and pornography consumption. In the 1980s, they found that the states that had the highest subscription rates per capita of *Playboy, Penthouse*, and *Hustler* magazines also had the highest per capita rape rates.

But, Straus and Baron cautioned, correlation does not mean causation. Subscribing to a magazine may not cause rape. In fact, they found, those states (Wyoming, Montana, Alaska) also had the highest ratio of single men to single women—that is, the largest number of unattached males. And they also had the highest per capita subscription rates to *Field and Stream*—and no one was suggesting that reading *Field and Stream* might contribute to rape.

2003 and 2004. One in eight college guys is betting on poker games online at least once a week (see Conley, 2005).

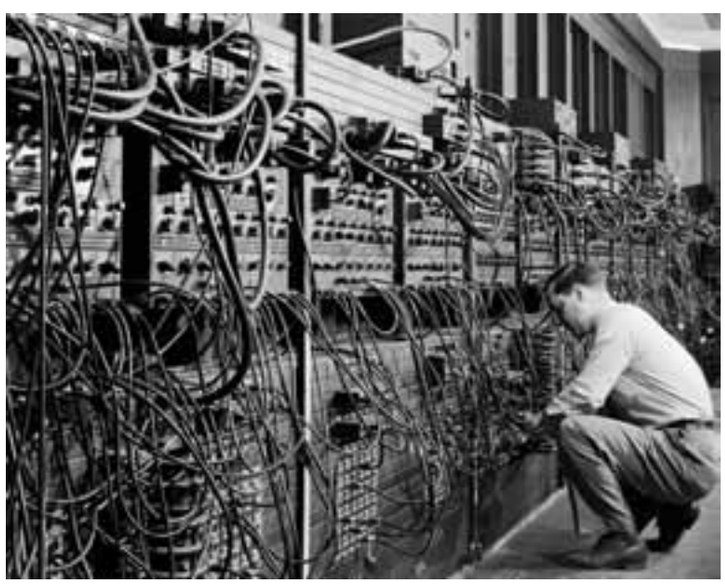
Pornography is a massive media category worldwide. In the United States, gross sales of all pornographic media range between $10 and $14 billion a year for the whole industry—more than the NFL, the NBA, and Major League Baseball combined, or, in media terms, with revenues greater than ABC, NBC, and CBS combined. Sales and rentals of videos and DVDs alone gross about $4 billion a year. More than 200 new pornographic videos are produced every week. On the Internet, pornography has increased 1,800 percent, from 14 million web pages in 1998 to 260 million in 2003 (Williams, 2004). One study found that adult entertainment is the number one thing people do online, outpacing even e-mail and search engine use (Grover, 2006).

What often concerns parents is the time boys spend using these media. They claim that these media have replaced social interaction with these solitary activities. What is of interest to sociologists, though, is that the use of these new media is so heavily gendered, and that young males seem to use them not in place of social interaction but as a form of interaction itself. Young males play video games together, play poker online together, and even watch pornography together. How does this new medium change the patterns of friendships and interaction?

The Internet. There was a home computer on the market as far back as 1975: the Altair 8800, which came unassembled, with a price of $5,000 (in today's dollars, that would be $18,000). Personal computers were a business tool, not a mass medium. But with the development of the World Wide Web in the 1980s, the computer had transformed the world yet again. Later called the Internet, online usage grew 300,000 percent per year: There were 10,000 network hosts in 1987, and 1,000,000 in 1992. By 2007, every country in the world, with a very few exceptions (Monserrat, the Isle of Man, Palau), was online (Abbate, 2000; Campbell-Kelly, 2004; *World Internet Statistics,* 2008).

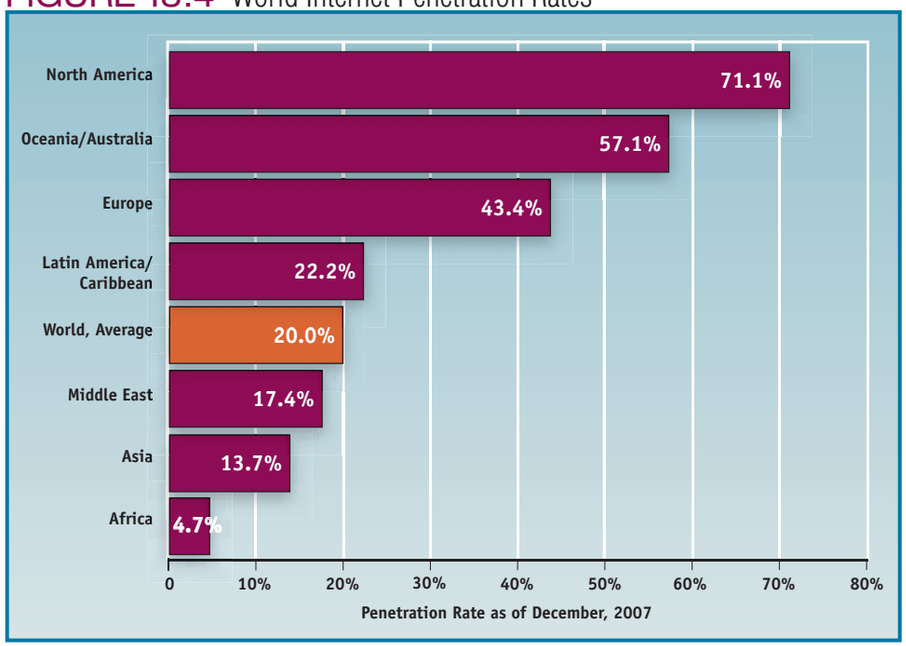
As of 2007, the Internet was accessed by 88 percent of the population of Norway, 72 percent of the United States, 69 percent of Japan. Beyond core countries, penetration is considerably smaller: 16 percent in Colombia, 13 percent in Venezuela, 11 percent in Saudi Arabia, 10 percent in South Africa, 7 percent in Pakistan. The mean Internet penetration rate worldwide is 20 percent, which means one in five people, on average, has both basic knowledge of and available access to the Net (Figure 13.4). In poor countries, Internet access remains an overwhelmingly elite activity, available to well under 1 percent of the population. But even there, change is coming. In 2000, Somalia had 200 users; today it has 90,000, an increase of more than 45,000 percent (World Internet Statistics, 2008).

The Internet has not only transformed mass media but is a new form of mass media in its own right. A website is its own medium, like nothing that has ever come before, with text, graphics, and sounds combined in a way that no previous medium could do. Information is scattered across hundreds of sites in dozens of countries; and because there is little



Personal computers, now nearly universal in the industrialized world, are the centerpiece of our interface with media—they store information, give access to the Web, and store music, video, movies, TV, and old love letters. The first general-purpose computer, called the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC), was built by the U.S. Army in the 1940s. It weighed 30 tons, was eight feet high, three feet deep, and 100 feet long, and contained over 18,000 vacuum tubes that were cooled by 80 air blowers. And it mainly stored information. ▼

FIGURE 13.4 World Internet Penetration Rates



Source: www.internetworldstats.com Copyright©2008, Miniwatts Marketing Group.

or no regulation of its content, it often becomes difficult to distinguish fact from opinion and opinion from diatribe.

The Internet has been accused of facilitating increased isolation—all those millions of teenagers who spend the time they should be doing their homework in chat rooms, playing online poker, blowing up the galaxy on online games, or downloading songs and pornography. But at the same time, it's also a new form of community, a virtual town square, where you offer intimate details about yourself and your romantic (and sexual) desires, meet your friends on Friendster or Facebook, and interact with like-minded members of your virtual network. As President George W. Bush noted, "With the Internet, you can communicate instantly with someone halfway across the world and isolate yourself from your family and neighbors." It's not either/or—it's both (Bumiller, 2006).

Saturation and Convergence: The Sociology of Media

We live in an age saturated by the media. The average American home today has 3 television sets, 1.8 VCRs, 3.1 radios, 2.6 tape players, 2.1 CD players, 1.4 video game players, and at least one computer. American kids between 8 and 18 spend seven hours a day interacting with some form of electronic media—which may explain why 40 percent of 8- to 13-year-olds said they did not read any part of a book on the previous day, a figure that shoots up to 70 percent of kids 14 to 18.

TV is omnipresent: During the years 2005–2006, the average American household tuned in to TV for 8 hours and 14 minutes per day (Consoli, 2006). Fifty-eight percent of families with children have the TV on during dinner, and 42 percent are "constant television households"—that is, they have a TV on virtually all day, whether or not anyone is actually watching it.

Not long ago, the various types of mass media used to be vastly different, using distinct forms of technology. Now they are all digital. Even if a real book appears at the end of the production process, it is still written, edited, and produced in the form of word processing documents, spreadsheets, jpegs, mpgs, and wav files, and stored as computer files. The gap between forms of mass media is shrinking constantly. We can already access the Internet from our television sets, watch TV on our computers, and play video games on either. The difference is just a matter of social context: We tend to watch TV in a group, and the computer is a solitary device.

Scholars have only just begun to speculate on the sociological implications of media convergence, but one effect is certain. Older people have always complained that the preferred mass media of their youth were far superior to the mass media today. Reading books was far superior to listening to the radio: You were active, engaged, and you had to use your imagination. Then: Listening to the radio was far superior to watching television, for the same reasons: active, engaged, used imagination. Then: Watching television was far superior to playing video games: active, engaged, used imagination. When every mass medium appears on flickering computer screens, there will be no nostalgic "active, engaged, imaginative" medium to look back on.

Both the cognitive demands that new media require from their viewers, and their effects, seem actually to be *more* engaging than those of previous generations. Surely, computer games require more manual dexterity and eye–hand coordination, as well as the ability to hold several different plotlines in your head simultaneously, while a TV show or radio show—not to mention sitting quietly and reading a book—required less physical connection. The "good old days" of media may not have demanded any more from the consumer and did not leave you as dizzy from so many choices.

Media Production and Consumption

For years, there seemed to be a strict division between media production and media consumption. A group of writers, editors, directors, actors, artists, and supporting personnel, all working for corporate executives in high-rise offices, produces and distributes the books, magazines, and television programs. The books, magazines, and television programs appear in their respective mass media, and we consume them. We have little input; a million irate letters failed to save *Star Trek* from cancellation in 1967.

This boundary is being increasingly blurred. Audiences increasingly run the show. Viewers of *American Idol,* for example, determine through their voting how the show turns out.

These days, media producers are all consumers themselves. The people who write, act in, and direct television programs go home every night and watch television themselves. Consumers are not just sitting idly by, consuming media as if they were popcorn; they create their own fan fiction, blogs, chat rooms, message boards. Consumers are also producers, using the same technologies to write books and magazines and produce movies.

However, the distinction between mass media production and consumption is still useful, particularly as we try to figure out exactly what happens as a message goes from my brain into words, sounds, and pictures (is encoded), is transmitted over a long distance through a mass medium, and then gets into your brain (is decoded). It's not at all like talking to you or showing you pictures face-to-face. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, the medium changes the message. Actually, the medium changes everything.

▲ **In today's interactive media environment, the line between consumer and producer is becoming blurred—at least for those consumers with access to the technology. Network television stations add additional content as well as provide opportunities for interactions among fans of their most popular TV shows.**

Source: Screen capture "Heroes" from the NBC website, www.nbc.com/Heroes, accessed October 24, 2007. Reprinted by permission.

Culture Industries

Like any other industry, mass media are characterized by industrial patterns such as hierarchy and bureaucracy. But the goal of most industries is to provide a product that you can use. The goal of the media is either to convince you that you need someone else's product or to entertain you sufficiently that you will be positively motivated to purchase someone else's product.

Much of the arts—classical music, visual arts, dance—remain shrouded in an aesthetic sensibility that makes it difficult to see their more sociological elements. Many of us subscribe to a notion of "art for art's sake"—the work of art is produced by an individual artist as an expression of his or her unique vision.

Sociologists often challenge such romantic views, generally by focusing on the more mundane elements of artistic production. In *Art Worlds,* for example, Howard Becker (1984) showed that much of the life of a painter or a musician is bureaucratic and routine; he or she goes to work, practices routine material, deals with money and sales receipts, talks on the phone, in a way that is quite similar to that of an office worker. In *Making News* (1978) Gaye Tuchman found that what gets covered as "the news" has less to do with individual judgments or social importance than with the organizational structures within which reporters and editors do their jobs (see also Becker et al., 2000; Berkowitz, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978).

In addition, sociologists examine the **culture industries**—the mass production of cultural products that are offered for consumption. Instead of crafting an individual work of creative genius, movie studios and radio stations are like assembly lines, producing cultural products as if they were loaves of bread. They may recycle the same tired images and themes over and over again because they are cheap and have been successful in the past. If you've seen one cowboy movie (or one episode of *CSI: Miami*), you've seen them all. Every sitcom covers the same territory, with the same jokes. As a result of taking in such material over time, some sociologists have argued, consumers become passive and uncritical. They absorb the simplistic, repetitive images with no questions asked, never having their preconceptions, stereotypes, and ideologies challenged (Horkheimer and Adorno, [1944] 1972; Steinert, 2003).

The concept of culture industries is helpful in explaining why so many mass media promote old-fashioned, even oppressive, ideologies. In a free-market economy, the producers must make the product appealing to as many potential consumers as possible. Therefore they select the themes and situations that are familiar to people, never challenging a preconception, a stereotype, or an ideology. Sociologist Todd Gitlin coined the phrase "the logic of safety" to describe the continuing tendency of media producers to repackage time-tested themes and formulas to minimize programming risks and maximize profits (Gitlin, 2000). In so doing, the mass media also reinforce and may actually promote acceptance of inequalities.

But media production and media consumption are more complex than the culture industries idea proposes. Producers cannot churn out exactly the same old images audiences have seen before; some originality, some tweak, something novel is needed to attract an audience. Some mass media producers do have artistic visions

in their own right, and sometimes they do challenge preconceptions, stereotypes, and ideologies.

What's more, media consumers are not the passive zombies culture industries fear. Rather, audiences are active; we participate in the process of making meaning out of media.

▲ **Mass media can allow access to more and more people and enable previously voiceless minorities access to connection and visibility. Univision, the leading Spanish-language media conglomerate in the United States, creates its audience as it caters to it.**

Multicultural Voices

The Mohawk, one of the "Five Civilized Tribes," once occupied a huge area of Quebec, Ontario, and New York. Today there are only about 3,000 speakers of Mohawk left, mostly older people. Children are rapidly losing sight of their ethnic identity because Native Americans are invisible in the mass media of the United States and Canada. So what did the tribal elders do? They started a website where you can learn some common Mohawk words and phrases, listen to traditional songs, learn about tribal traditions, and order many different CDs not available on amazon.com: *Music from Turtle Island, Yazzie Girl.*

Gay adolescents used to be stuck in limbo. They rarely knew any other gay people, teenagers or adults. Their teachers and parents assumed that everyone in the world was straight. No organizations existed in their small towns, or they were afraid to contact them. So while their friends were happily planning dates and proms, they were doomed to years of loneliness and silence. Not anymore. An Internet search for "LGBT youth" yields hundreds of websites: Gay Youth UK, OutProud, the Gay Youth Corner, Toronto Coalition for LGBT Youth. Then there is *XY,* a glossy magazine with articles on sports, fashion, music, and celebrities.

Thus, mass media can be more democratic, spreading ownership and consumption of media to more and more people and enabling previously voiceless minorities access to connection and visibility. For another example, Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Black-owned record companies, digital media companies, and magazines have identified and sustained a new media market and also, in the process, helped to create that market. Ethnic media markets have grown robustly in the United States in the twenty-first century. About 51 million Americans, 24 percent of the adult population, are either primary or secondary consumers of ethnic media today (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

Media Consolidation

But media can also, simultaneously, be less democratic, as those at the top can concentrate increasing amounts of media power. **Media consolidation** refers to the increased control of an increasing variety of media by a smaller and smaller number of companies. A small number of companies control virtually all the media in the United States today, and huge conglomerates own or hold large stakes in a variety of media.

This consolidation raises fears about what gets produced and also about the quality and reliability of media products, particularly news. When a small group of people controls how information circulates, the spectrum of available ideas, opinions, and images seems likely to narrow. Moreover, big media companies will prefer programming and voices that conform to their own financial interests, and they are in a position to block most smaller, independent companies from rising to offer alternatives.

Any major music store in America is filled with thousands of selections from dozens of different labels in dozens of different musical categories: country, rap, house, bluegrass, Latin, rock, reggae, folk, R&B, and on and on and on. But do you think the producers of the $37 billion worldwide music business are as various as their products appear? The truth is just five gigantic corporate conglomerates own all the different record labels, and so they distribute 95 percent of all music carried in record stores in the United States. They are called "the big five," and only one of them is a U.S. company. Warner is an American firm, but the others are Bertelsmann (Germany), EMI (U.K.), Universal Music Group (Canada), and Sony (Japan). They show us that the distribution of media products may have spread around the globe, but ownership has become more centralized with media globalization.

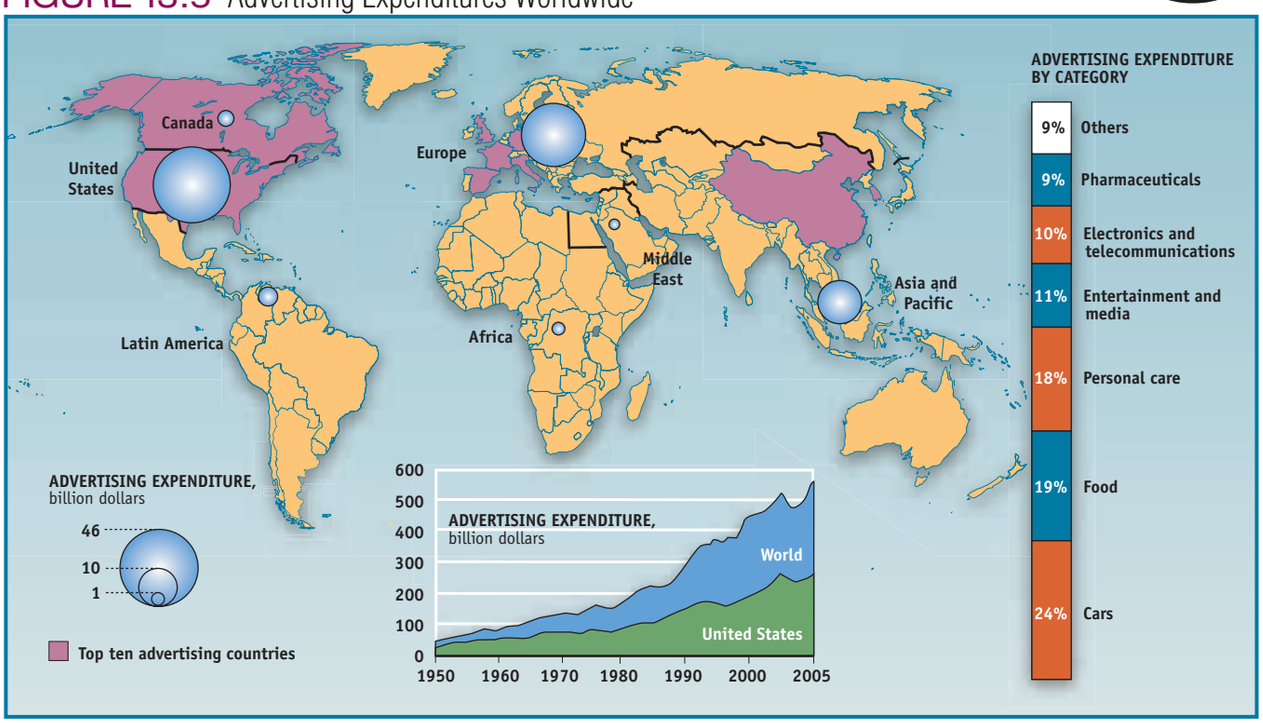
But as this example may suggest, the links between consolidation and diverse content are far from clear. Gamson and Latteir (2004) found that sometimes media giants homogenize content, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes these corporations stifle dissent, and sometimes they open up extra space for new people to be visible and vocal. It depends on numerous factors, not the least of which are the financial rewards owners can reap for doing one or the other at particular times in particular markets worldwide.

The Importance of Advertising

Advertising is a form of mass media and also a kind of media text (Figure 13.5). Advertising can appear as phrases, pictures, songs, cartoons, or short films ("commercials"), but its purpose is always the same: to convincing prospective consumers that

MyLab

FIGURE 13.5 Advertising Expenditures Worldwide



Source: "Consumption Appeal" by Emmanuelle Bournay from *Vital Waste Graphics* 2, 2006, which appears on the UNEP/GRID-Arenda, http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/consumption_appeal. Reprinted by permission.

they want or need a product—soap, soda, sports cars—but also services (like monster.com for job seekers) and other media ("Must See TV"). Occasionally advertisements merely discuss the qualities of the product. But usually ads try to associate the product with a desirable quality or activity (Fox, 1997; Marchand, 1986; Samuel, 2002). The flavor of a soda is not nearly as important as the surge in popularity you experience with just one sip. Who cares about the nutritional content or taste of the cereal purveyed by the wizened old general store proprietor?

Advertising is an engine of media production; most media depend on advertising to survive and profit. Since most of these mass media forms themselves are free (like TV) or cheap (like newspapers or magazines), ads pay for most of the cost of production as well as the profits. As a rule, the more the medium depends on advertising for its revenue, the more it will shy away from challenging preconceptions and stereotypes (Pipher, 2000; Williamson, 1994). I have never seen an interracial couple on any television commercial, though they are increasingly common in real life (see Chapter 12, Family).

Sociologists bring the same sorts of questions to advertising that they bring to other forms of mass media: What is the relationship between producers and consumers? Why do so many media texts promote stereotypes and oppressive ideologies? If consumers aren't passive zombies, under what conditions do media messages influence our attitudes, ideas, even behavior? The questions become more important for two reasons. First, we consume many more ads than anything else, dozens every day, hundreds every week. They are everywhere. And second, ads present by far the most pervasive stereotypes of any form of mass media: Almost every commercial shows affluent nuclear families in huge suburban houses, with Dad reading the newspaper and Mom in the kitchen. Dad does not mop the floor, and whenever he cooks dinner, he botches the job and takes the kids out to a fast-food restaurant.

How does a steady diet of such images affect our ideas about how life works or how it should work?

Celebrities

Actors and singers are among the most common mass media products today. Many Americans cannot name their own senators and representatives, but nearly all of them know who Tom Cruise is and even about how in 2005 he jumped on the couch and howled on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Celebrity news often makes the front page of newspapers in the United States and Europe, particularly in Britain. Why? Celebrity stories sell papers—and magazines and products.

Mass media created celebrity. There were professional performers before, of course. But even the most diligent theatergoer might see the same actor only twice in a given year. With the advent of radio, listeners could hear their favorite comedians or singers every week. With movies, you could *see* your favorite performers almost as often. Celebrity magazines grew up around the American film industry, developing the thirst for details on the smallest doings of stars.

Television, however, is even more intimate than movies: You can see your favorite performers every week, in your own living room. These people are not simply performers; they are *celebrities,* famous not necessarily because of their talent or accomplishments but because they appear so often in mass media texts that audiences feel that they know them personally (Dyer, 1987; Gamson, 1994). And, in some ways, you do: In talk shows, magazine interviews, and fan articles, you learned every detail of their everyday lives, sometimes more intimately than your real friends. Of course, celebrities are not your friends; the intimacy is one-sided. They are neither friends nor strangers; Richard Schickel (1985) calls them "intimate strangers."

▲ **The mass media crave celebrities—they sell papers and magazines, and we watch them on TV. The media also create a cult of celebrity, drawing us to certain people sometimes for no other reason than the fact that they are featured and photographed.**

A Hungarian-born socialite named Zsa Zsa Gabor (1917–) was probably the first celebrity created purely by media exposure. She was technically an actress, with a string of bad movies to her credit. But she didn't become one of the most recognizable people in the world because of her movies. She appeared on talk shows to talk about her marriages, her diamonds, her appearances at posh functions, her jet-set lifestyle. She became "famous for being famous."

Today, that's increasingly common. Celebrity itself has become the product—rather than a device for marketing films or music. Now there are "faux celebrities" everywhere—from the winners (and runners-up) of reality shows like *Survivor, The Bachelor, American Idol,* and others, to Anna Nicole Smith, to Jack and Kelly Osbourne, to Paris Hilton. Celebrities and their agents have now begun to collaborate with photographers and publications, staging shots that then appear to be intrusions in their private lives in exchange for more control over their image and a share of the profits.

Consuming Media, Creating Identity

Whatever the producers may intend, consumers use media texts for their own ends. Through our consumption of media, we actively create our identities. In fact, it is largely *through* our media consumption that we know who we are and where we fit in society. Consumers have five broad goals in consumption:

1. *Surveillance, to find out what the world is like.* This is the main reason that we consume news and information programs, nonfiction books, magazines, and newspapers. However, we also acquire information from fiction. The best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code* is both a mystery and a guided tour of modern Paris and the art of its famous museum, the Louvre.
2. *Decision making.* I may watch a YouTube clip before deciding to download a song or read a review of a club or restaurant before deciding to go there. The success of most advertising depends on my getting information at the right moment: That Pizza Hut commercial may be all the information I need to decide what to have for dinner tonight.
3. *Aesthetics.* Media objects are works of art because they create a particular vision of reality. I can appreciate the theme, style, and technique of *SpongeBob SquarePants* as easily as (maybe even more easily than) *Macbeth*.
4. *Diversion.* If we're being entertained, the reasoning goes, we are not engaged in big, important, useful work. We are diverted from improving ourselves, thinking about our problems, saving the world. However, diversion performs an important function. It's like a short vacation. By stepping outside of everyday reality for a moment, we are refreshed and may be better prepared to think about that big, important, useful work.

5. *Identity.* Consuming mass media texts allows us to create and maintain a group identity. If you belong to the upper class, chances are you will not listen to country-western music (or will keep the CDs hidden when company comes around), because your class identity requires that you like classical music instead. Men are "supposed" to like movies with lots of car chases, and women are "supposed" to like movies with lots of crying and hugging, so they will attend these sorts of movies to signify their gender identity.

There is no single, definitive meaning in media texts. Media texts may emphasize or "prefer" certain hegemonic meanings over others, but ultimately meaning is in the mind of the beholder. Readers and viewers interpret what they see in different ways; they notice, follow, value, and understand things in different ways and so "create" the meaning of a media text for themselves. No single meaning is "correct": There are always multiple possibilities.

One reason is that we never consume media texts in a vacuum: We discuss them with family, friends, and co-workers. We join clubs and chat rooms. We take classes and get degrees. We understand media content within social groups, with whom we share certain strategies for interpreting and using media content. We consume the media text within an **interpretive community** (Fish, 1980; Lewis, 1992).

Interpretive communities are groups that guide interpretation and convey the preferred meanings of mass media texts. In subtle ways, they offer rewards for "correct" meanings and punishments for "incorrect" meanings. Sometimes the rewards and punishments are formal, like a grade in school. Usually, however, they are informal, approval or ridicule—just try to defend a "chick flick" if you are a guy, enjoy folk music if you are Black, or say the typical summer blockbuster is a mess of mindless explosions among teen or twenty-something friends!

Your friends represent an interpretive community; so does your school, your region, your age group, and your country. Back in the 1960s, Van Williams starred in a superhero adventure series, *The Green Hornet*. Martial arts expert Bruce Lee played his chauffeur and valet, certainly a subsidiary role—except in Hong Kong, where it ran as *The Bruce Lee Show*. The interpretive community of Hong Kong preferred a resistant reading that made Bruce Lee the star.

Interpretive communities also produce fans. A **fan** is someone who finds significant personal meaning through allegiance to a larger social group: a sports team, for example. In the media, fandom refers to a heightened awareness of and allegiance toward a specific text—a story, a series, a performer—so that the fan gains satisfaction by belonging to an interpretive community.

Fandom is a public affiliation, not just a private love. It is a public proclamation of identity, a choice that your allegiance to some media product reveals a core element of yourself. It was important for fans of Harry Potter to buy the latest installment in the series the second it went on sale—in part to display publicly to other fans (or themselves) the strength of their allegiance. Rap and hip-hop fans may express their affiliation through clothing, jewelry, verbal affectations, social interactions. "Deadheads" will bedeck themselves in tie-dyed shirts (preferably with skulls on them) and, if they are male, wear their hair long. The hard-core *Star Trek* fan might write fan fiction (sometimes complete novels), start websites,

Media also create interpretive communities, groups that cohere around similar media tastes and create a subculture. At Comic-Con International in 2005, a group of Bat-people pose as some Ghostbusters look on. ▼

organize conventions, use the hand gesture and expression "live long, and prosper," even walk around with Mr. Spock's pointed ears.

Fandom is a good example of the ways the media both create and reflect audience desires. Movie studios, television producers, and record producers offer websites and merchandise schemes to entice and sustain existing fans. These and other devices reflect the fandom of those who already like a particular star or show. But they also set the standard for "true" fandom: Suddenly you can't be a "real" fan unless you subscribe to these magazines, wear these clothes, and purchase these products. The media both meet "demand" (offering services) and create the very demand they then service.

Globalization of the Media

A few years ago, I was visiting Morocco, and I stayed in a fourteenth-century Moorish castle converted into a hotel. My room was furnished with ornate tile work, panels inlaid with lapis lazuli, fringed pillows. It was like moving into another world. I opened an ornately appointed armoire, and found that it hid a large television set—evidently they didn't want modern conveniences to interfere with the lush fantasy of the room. I turned on the TV. What were they watching in this ancient, mysterious country? *Beavis & Butthead*.

American movies were being shown around the world as early as the 1920s, but the immersion has increased dramatically during the last 20 years. *The Simpsons* is broadcast in Central and South America, Europe, South Africa, Israel, Turkey, Japan, South Asia, and Australia. On any given night, *The Bold and the Beautiful* is playing in Romania, *CSI* in Germany, *Sex and the City* in Spain, *Fairly Oddparents* in the Philippines. In China, the most popular programs are *Friends* and *Seinfeld*.

The mass media have become truly global in nature. CNN broadcasts via 23 satellites to more than 212 countries and territories in all corners of the globe. Major sporting events are seen by hundreds of millions of people worldwide. The 2006 World Cup, for example, was watched by a cumulative television audience of more than 26 billion viewers across the globe (FIFA, 2007). The Internet is growing more global every day, allowing millions of users from all over the world to come online to seek and share information, post opinions and creative work, and shop for items previously available only to those who physically traveled to other countries.

In the 1960s, the path-breaking media scholar Marshall McLuhan predicted that the rise of global electronic media would bring the world closer together. He coined the term **global village** to describe an environment in which people everywhere could make their voices heard to one another, thus compelling "commitment and participation" and making human beings "irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other" (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, p. 24). Four decades later, is that what globalization means?

What Is Media Globalization?

Media globalization has two main concerns. First, there is the technological innovation that allows us to communicate instantaneously over vast distances. In many countries today, there is no need to be physically close by to work together; images, sounds, the thoughts of almost anyone, from anywhere, can potentially be available to billions of people. Technology is giving increasing numbers of people the power to produce culture. And technology is making it as easy to communicate with someone on another continent as it is with someone down the hall.

But media globalization also concerns the cultural products that are available around the world. In that area, sociologists are finding that McLuhan's vision of a global village is far from today's reality. Commercial interests, rather than humanitarian ideals of education, understanding, or equality, are driving media globalization. Large media conglomerates from a few wealthy industrialized nations are dominating global markets. In fact, both media production and consumption are strongly oriented toward the wealthier members of the world's population. As a result, the global media often function to highlight and help reproduce global inequality (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003).

Cultural Imperialism

The media products of the West, especially of the United States, are so dominant in global markets that some sociologists call it **cultural imperialism.** Imperialism is economic control of one country by another. Cultural imperialism, then, is cultural control of one country by another. One culture's art, music, television, and film are defined and controlled by another. And from Latin America to Asia to the Middle East, the West, but particularly the United States, is decried for its pervasive cultural dominance around the world.

Cultural imperialism is not simply the cultural domination of poor countries by rich ones, however. Western and American media products certainly do have a very strong presence in poorer nations, but Europeans and Canadians complain of American media dominance too—and quite loudly. In Europe, for example, American movies make up anywhere from 54 to 92 percent of movies shown in theaters, while European films make up only 3 percent (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003). Of all movies shown on European television, over 50 percent are made in America (De Bens, Kelly, and Bakke, 1992). In Canada, 95 percent of films in theaters are American movies. U.S. firms control music distribution. Eighty percent of magazines sold are from the United States, as are two-thirds of all books (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003; Escobar and Swardson, 1995).

The overwhelming majority of music in the global marketplace is sung in English—usually by Americans. In Japan, songs sung in English make up 50 percent of radio playlists. In Germany, it's 80 percent. In Brazil, where the people speak Portuguese, nearly three-quarters of songs on the radio are sung in the English language (Barnet and Cavanaugh, 1994; Croteau and Hoynes, 2003).

Of the top-grossing films of all time at the international box office, all of the top ten were American films (Figure 13.6).

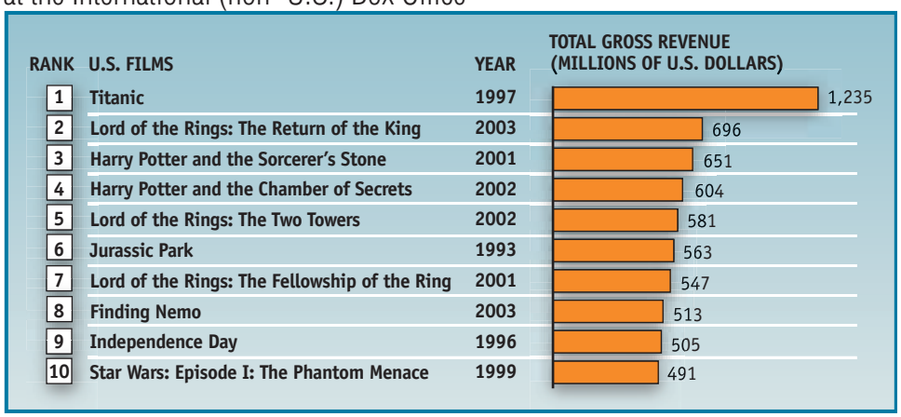
The issue is not jealousy of American lifestyles or dislike of global media products like MTV, Hollywood films, English-language pop music, and American soap operas. The cultural imperialism thesis holds that this kind of Western media dominance, driven by the relentless desire for profits, will shape all the cultures of the world and ensure their Westernization. Playing everywhere and blocking out opportunities for local productions, this media dominance will substitute American values like individualism and consumerism for the local values of countries where media products are sold. Eventually, cultural distinctiveness will be eroded, threatening national and cultural identity. Other nations will be so thoroughly indoctrinated with U.S. cultural, political, and economic images and ideals that they will forget who they are.

U.S. cultural products are having an immense impact around the world, but sociologists are finding that for a number of reasons the cultural imperialism thesis offers only a partial picture. For now anyway, U.S. products are dominating some media and markets, while other media continue

Did *you* know?

The Middle Eastern Broadcasting Company in Dubai currently broadcasts a dubbed version of *The Simpsons* called *Al Shamsoon* to most of the countries in the Persian Gulf. In the Arabic version, Homer becomes Omar, and Bart is Badr. Some scenes have to be cut to avoid offending conservative Muslim censors: no girls in bikinis, no bacon for breakfast, and no alcohol. Homer cannot be shown drinking or talking about beer, and his after-work hangout, Moe's Tavern, no longer exists.

FIGURE 13.6 Top Ten Grossing Films of All Time at the International (non–U.S.) Box Office



Source: From *The Human Development Report*, 2004.

to be locally produced. Plus, different audiences still interpret foreign fare differently, and there are apparent limits to the appeal of Western—particularly U.S.—culture in other countries. Finally, different countries have created local variations of American or Western programs, giving imported formats a local resonance. Media globalization has induced successful "fusions" in film, television, and, perhaps especially, music, which circulate and sell well in originating countries and beyond. Many locally produced fusions have been so popular that they have allowed local producers to successfully compete with much larger media conglomerates.

Overall, then, it's not a question of domination or resistance, global or local, but both.

New Media, New Voices

For example, developments such as satellite TV and the Internet have allowed local groups to develop a voice that they never had before, no matter how strictly local governments may control media access. Before around 1990, the West heard a single, monolithic Arab "opinion" on everything from Israel to Islam, even though there were 18 predominantly Arab countries stretching from Morocco to Iraq, with people from all ethnic groups, social classes, religions, and political persuasions. Minority opinions were censored. Now they are talking, and through approved channels. And their voices are diverse. Among Morocco's 15 online newspapers and news websites are the progressive feminist *Femmes du Maroc* (published in French) and the socialist *Libération*. Saudi Arabia forbids its citizens from publishing or accessing any information that disagrees with official policy, but there are hundreds of clandestine groups, including over 500 on Yahoo.com.

Al Jazeera, an independent television network based in Qatar (on the Persian Gulf), is one of the most popular media sites in the world, with several specialized channels devoted to sports, music, and children's programs and over 50 million regular viewers (it is available in the United States via satellite). Its main claim to infamy is its dedication to presenting alternatives to official policies of the Arab world. Several Arab countries have claimed that the network is too pro-Israel or pro-U.S. On the other hand, after the 9/11 attacks, when Al Jazeera broadcast statements from Osama bin Laden, many Westerners claimed that it was merely a front for terrorists. Journalists from the

network have had their credentials revoked in both Arab and Western countries, and when an English-language version of its website premiered in 2003, hackers immediately rerouted visitors to a picture of an American flag (Lynch, 2005; Rugh, 2004).

Today's media are helping other cultures to preserve and help "alternative" voices to be heard. In the United Kingdom, for example, Sianel Pedwar Cymru, the Welsh fourth channel, is helping to support Welsh language and culture. In Mexico, the Zapatista movement was able to bypass established media to communicate with the world via the Internet. Broadcasting among the Bedouin tribes of the Sahara has helped revive a sense of collective identity (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Williams, 2001).

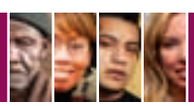
Politics and Media in the 21st Century

The Greek philosopher Aristotle once wrote that "man is by nature a political animal." We are also political animals "by nurture"—because social life requires it. Politics remains a contentious arena, in which people organize together, formally and informally, to fight for their positions and influence the policies that, in turn, influence their lives. It is an arena in which the divisions among people—by class, race, gender, and age—are most evident, and the arena in which the power of some groups over other groups is declared to be legitimate because "the governed" have consented to it.

Both the lines of division and the terms of consensus among "the governed" are increasingly shaped by the mass media. In today's complex political environment, in which few of us have direct access to leaders and policymakers, the media provide most of our political information and also serve as a site of political mobilization. The mass media shape our political experience as well as reflect our political will.

Politics remains the arena in which we believe we can develop and maintain democracy, in which we all feel somewhat connected to each other because we are able to participate in the political process. It is rarely a question of whether politics unites us or divides us—indeed, politics both unites and divides. The questions remain, as always—united toward what goals, inspired by what vision, and divided by what factors?

And do the media shape or reflect these persistent questions? Yes. They do both. And they will do so increasingly as the new century unfolds.



Chapter Review

1. ***How do power and authority manifest in politics?*** Politics is about power. Usually power is exercised through authority, which is power that is perceived as legitimate. Weber described three types of authority. Traditional authority is based on tradition and is stable over time. Charismatic authority is based on the personal characteristics of the leader, and legal-rational authority is based on laws and is the most common form of authority in contemporary societies. Power is connected to knowledge, and authorities use three strategies to maintain control, including hierarchical observation (Big Brother is watching), normalizing judgment, and examination.

2. ***What are the different political systems?*** Political systems are either authoritarian (an individual or small groups have power) or democratic (the people have power). Authoritarian systems include monarchy, which is the inherited rule of one person; oligarchy, which is the rule of a small group; dictatorship, the rule of one person with no hereditary claim; and totalitarianism, where political authority is extended over all aspects of social life. Democracy is the rule of the people. It is either participatory or representative.

3. ***What is the United States' political system?*** The United States was formed on a democratic two-party system and, to a great extent, still relies on that system. The current two parties, Democrats and Republicans, have different platforms. Americans are socialized into a particular political affiliation, and it becomes a marker of group identity. Party affiliation is correlated strongly with class, education, and gender. Voters are also swayed by interest groups, who influence political decisions and are visible and powerful in Washington.

4. ***How does political change happen?*** Social movements are collective attempts to change society by furthering a common interest or securing a common goal outside established institutions. Other ways to enact political change include revolution, an attempt to overthrow the existing political order and replace it with an entirely new one. Political revolution changes political groups that run the society; social revolution changes the social groups that have power. War is caused by perceived threats, political objectives, diversion of public attention, moral objectives, or if there is no other choice.

5. ***How does politics manifest in everyday life?*** Politics plays out in our everyday personal lives; we make political statements with our personal actions. Civil society is the zone between home and work, including things like clubs, churches, and the like. Sociologists see participation in civil society as declining. Political activism is taking on new forms. Younger people are using the marketplace to wield their power as consumers, and civic groups tend to be more hands-on and more in support of an issue rather than against it. Everyday politics often relies on and even manipulates the media for publicity.

6. ***What are the mass media?*** Mass media are ways we communicate with large numbers of people; they are spurred by technological innovation and both reflect and create culture. Sociologists are interested in access to and the effects of media. Mass media include print media, radio, TV, movies, and the Internet.

7. ***How are media production and consumption related?*** The production and consumption of media used to be divided but are now more interactive as producers consume and consumers produce. The media is considered a culture industry—a hierarchical and bureaucratic industry—which explains why so many media promote old or oppressive ideologies. Sociologists call this "the logic of safety." However, consumers have an active role in both interpreting and creating meaning.

8. ***How are advertising and celebrity related to the media?*** The purpose of advertising is to convince consumers they want or need a product or service by associating the product with a desirable quality or activity. Sociologists are interested in advertising because we consume more ads than anything else, and ads are full of stereotypes and lead to questions about consumer desire. The more a medium relies on advertising for revenue, the less it will challenge traditional views. Mass media created celebrity; celebrities are famous because they appear so much in the media. Now celebrity itself is a product we consume.

9. ***What role does the consumption of media play in the creation of identity?*** We often figure out who we are and where we fit into society through our consumption of media. Consumers are doing five things: surveillance to find out what the world is like, decision making through information gathering, appreciating aesthetics, being diverted for fun, and maintaining a group identity. Readers interpret the media in different ways, thereby creating their own meaning. Media are not consumed in a vacuum; rather they are consumed within an interpretive community.

10. ***How is globalization related to the media?*** The mass media are truly global. Media globalization involves technological innovations that allow production and consumption and also develop media as a global product. Global media work to perpetuate the dominance of the powerful and both highlight and increase global inequality. Some call the dominance of Western media cultural imperialism or cultural control. But there is resistance to the possible homogenization of cultures, and the media reflect that by adapting to local audiences.

Key Terms

Authoritarian political system (p. 401)
Authority (p. 398)
Blog (p. 419)
Bureaucracy (p. 404)
Charismatic authority (p. 399)
Civil society (p. 416)
Coup d'état (p. 412)
Cultural imperialism (p. 433)
Culture industries (p. 426)
Democracy (p. 402)
Dictatorship (p. 401)
Fan (p. 431)
Global village (p. 432)
Government (p. 398)
Immiseration thesis (p. 411)
Interest group (p. 408)
Interpretive community (p. 431)
Legal-rational authority (p. 399)

Mass media (p. 417)
Media (p. 417)
Media consolidation (p. 427)
Monarchy (p. 401)
Oligarchy (p. 401)
Participatory democracy (p. 403)
Political action committee (PAC) (p. 410)
Political party (p. 407)
Political revolution (p. 412)
Politics (p. 398)
Power (p. 398)
Proportional representation (p. 405)
Relative deprivation (p. 412)
Representative democracy (p. 403)
Revolution (p. 411)
Social movement (p. 410)
Social revolution (p. 412)
Suffrage (p. 406)
Terrorism (p. 413)
Totalitarianism (p. 402)
Traditional authority (p. 399)
Two-party system (p. 407)
Universal suffrage (p. 403)

What does America think?

Confidence in Press

These are actual survey data from the General Social Survey, 2004.

As far as the people running the press are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? The GSS survey results for 2004 indicate that almost 44 percent of the population has hardly any confidence in the press. Almost half of respondents had only some confidence in the press. Those in the upper class were most likely to reporting having a great deal of confidence in the press and at the same time were also the group most likely to report having very little confidence in the press. The percentage of respondents reporting confidence in the press has steadily declined since 1972 for all social class categories.

CRITICAL THINKING | DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Take a good look at the social class differences in responses. They are complex. How do you explain them?

▶ Go to this website to look further at the data. You can run your own statistics and crosstabs here: **http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss04**

REFERENCES: Davis, James A., Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden. General Social Surveys 1972–2004: [Cumulative file] [Computer file]. 2nd ICPSR version. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center [producer], 2005; Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut; Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; Berkeley, CA: Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California [distributors], 2005.