CHAPTER

3

Politics, Culture, and Social Processes

T.S. Eliot once observed that culture is made up of those things that make life worth living (1948). *Culture* in this sense refers to things we call "high taste," or artifacts such as classical music, expensive art, or gourmet food. As sociologists, we understand that culture has both material and nonmaterial dimensions. For example, *material forms of culture* are displayed in museums and archives. The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence on display in the National Archives in Washington, DC, are examples of highly symbolic forms of material culture, including the architecture of the temple-like National Archives building. *Nonmaterial forms of culture* include music played or speeches given on the Fourth of July to celebrate the principles in those documents. As the study of culture has grown in sociology, it has confirmed the fact that culture is essential to the functioning of society and its component social structures and groups.

Over the past three decades, sociologists have made great strides in refining their understanding of the role of culture in guiding social and personal interactions. Much of this work represents the return to key concepts originally outlined by Weber, Durkheim, and to some extent, Marx. Political sociology has built on much of this work in the study of culture, and more recently returned to the study of the various nuances of the relationship between culture, power, and the nature of political arrangements in society. In this chapter, we explore just a few ways in which culture and politics intertwine. The goal here is to briefly describe how political beliefs, values, ideologies, and other symbolic systems in society are related to the exercise of political power in its many different forms, such as formations of political groups and associations, or participation in political action.

CULTURE AND POLITICS

What is culture? C. Wright Mills (1959) observed that "the concept of 'culture' is one of the spongiest words in social science" (160). While there are many approaches typically connected to various disciplines, we conceptualize culture as comprised of values, knowledge, beliefs, symbols, language, and artifacts found in all societies. Culture is essential to the facilitation of social interaction. Weber described the concept in a fascinating observation about the nature of religion and culture in guiding social action:

> Not ideas, but material and ideal interests directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interests. (Weber 1946: 280)

Weber's insight is that images and ideas shape interests and guide social interactions.

In his treatment of culture, Talcott Parsons (1951) identified three elements of culture, all of which are transmitted, learned, and shared—knowledge, values, and symbolic expressions. Knowledge is the store of experiences, findings, facts, and ways of comprehending the world. For instance, since the Enlightenment, science has evolved into a tradition of knowledge. Schools obviously play an important role in preserving this knowledge and sharing it with successive generations. Values are made up of beliefs or mental benchmarks for assessing the world. In a classic study of values in the United States, Williams (1970) concluded that freedom, equality, democracy, individual success, progress, work, material comfort, efficiency, morality, science, patriotism, and the superiority of some groups over others have consistently served as guides to social interactions in the United States. Parsons also suggested that norms, including folkways and mores, were part of this element of culture. In addition, Parsons brought to our attention the significance of symbolic expression as an element of culture. This includes art, music, poetry, rituals, and religions as manifestations of emotions and tastes. Language too is an essential symbolic expression especially for facilitating interaction. It gives human beings a mechanism for expression through utterances, words, verbalizations, and signs.

Ann Swidler (1986) defined culture as a "tool kit" of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action. The tools we are given in the socialization process help us navigate social interactions as we move through social groups and social institutions. Understanding culture as a tool kit for interaction in society, and as made up of elements that help forge the tools, provides an important analytic tool for considering the role of culture in politics. As revealed in the study by Williams (1970), values play a significant role in deciding power relations in society. As Weber argued so persuasively in his early work, culture governs social actions, including social conflicts, be it conflicts among social classes, status groups, or other structures in society. The mechanisms for transmitting information about political candidates, or how individuals learn about citizenship, are examples of forms of political knowledge linked to socialization processes of many kinds. Certainly we can think of politics as having symbolic expressions too. The more obvious are associations with nationalism or patriotism, such as flying a flag. Language can also play a role in legitimizing power relationships, or quite literally, creating a criterion for citizenship. In this case, the tools in the kit are labeled in such a way that we access them when considering aspects of power and politics.

The work on culture has advanced considerably within the last twenty years. Granted, culture at one level is about a complex of values and attitudes that in turn influence social interactions. But the sociological understanding of culture goes beyond that. Hall, Neitz, and Battani

(2003) build on the classical sociological, anthropological, and historical treatments of culture and define culture to

> encompass: (1) *ideas, knowledge* (correct, wrong, or unverifiable belief), and *recipes* for doing things; (2) humanly fabricated *tools* (such as shovels, sewing machines, cameras, and computers); and (3) the *products* of social action that may be drawn upon in the further conduct of social life (a dish of curry, a television set, a photograph, or a high-speed train for example). (7)

Contemporary approaches to the study of culture focus on these concepts. Moreover, as this definition suggests, culture is more than just values and belief systems. The study of values and beliefs, however, constitute an important part of research in political sociology. The study of political culture offers a different view of politics, asking questions such as:

1. How do citizens develop ideas about power?
2. Where does political knowledge come from and what effect does it have on politics?
3. What role do the media play in the creation of political ideas or knowledge?
4. Is symbolism embedded in political structures used to manipulated citizen beliefs about power?

As we shall see in this chapter, these and many other questions about the connections between culture and politics make a "terrain" of a relatively new focus for political sociology (Berezin 1997).

Coronation of Elizabeth II, Westminster Abbey, London, June 1953

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POLITICS, CULTURE, AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Early works in political sociology made references to culture and especially the significance of cultural contexts to the social psychology of politics. For example, Bendix and Lipset (1966) suggested that "interaction among individuals occupying the same economic position is also conditioned by cultural, social-psychological and situational determinants" (27). In building the research agenda of the growing field of political sociology in the 1960s, Coser (1966) advanced the argument that power had a number of cultural dimensions worthy of greater research:

> While political science had concentrated mainly on the specifically political sphere, political sociology claimed that to understand the political process fully one had to relate politics to the entire social structure. These sociologists emphasized the ways in which a particular political order as well as specific instances of political behavior—for example voting—must be studied with reference to ostensibly non-political factors such as the socialization of the young, the formal and informal patterns of association in which men are variously enmeshed, or the complicated ways in which systems of beliefs and ideologies color the perspective of political actors. (2)

This description of the nature of power in society reinforced the claim that socialization, values, beliefs, and ideologies should be studied in order to understand better the distribution of power and conflict. The major theoretical frameworks over time would address each of these "nonpolitical factors" in unique ways. The various conceptual perspectives in political sociology highlight different aspects of the nature of values, beliefs, and orientations and how these are connected to politics in society.

Pluralist

Culture has always played an important role in pluralist thinking about politics and power. Pluralists view culture as the seedbed for the beliefs, values, symbols, and orientations necessary to support the political process. For example, children learn in school that being a good citizen involves obeying the law as well as active participation in the governing processes, especially voting. These values, as Parsons would say, are important to the maintenance of the political system.

Tocqueville (1945[1835]) conducted one of the earliest studies of the new political system in the United States, highlighting the pluralist nature of the new American republic. He viewed nineteenth-century America as one of the most democratic countries in the world. Intrigued by the notion that democracy in America brought to its citizens (i.e., White adult males) social, economic, and political equality, Tocqueville's focus was especially on the participatory nature of the new democracy and how individuals would be engaged not only in voting, but also be active in civic groups and associations. Tocqueville predicted great success for the new nation. He offered five conclusions about American democracy that would assure its success:

1. a division of authority throughout society which would enhance individualism and diversity of viewpoints
2. a federal system that divided power among three branches of government as well as a division of power between state and federal governments
3. a sense of local control which would check outsiders as a threat
4. the right to a free press and
5. the right to freely associate, preventing the centralization of economic or social functions beyond government.

In many ways, these five observations from Tocqueville reflect pluralist assumptions about politics and power. Power is viewed as dispersed among groups and associations of citizens, not concentrated, but rather balanced as a result of fair elections and exchanges of opportunities to govern. Values and beliefs are supported by the cultural structures, and in some cases, these values are reflected in the language of the Constitution itself.

One of Tocqueville's most important observations dealt with the frequency with which Americans tended to organize into voluntary associations for social, economic, and political purposes. He believed that this tendency grew out of the value given to equality and the social contract—that is, the set of expectations that come from living in a community where the individual also gains from the collective life of the community. Tocqueville brought attention to the fact that political participation grows out of association and group formation oriented around political goals. Tocqueville recognized that conflict was an important source of social evolution, however, he was optimistic about American society's ability to handle this conflict. Conflict, he believed, would be balanced by giving emphasis to local governance and solving communal problems, and strengthened by voluntary association. As American democracy emerged, collective action through association was equated with power.

In *Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1963, 1989) made one of the earliest arguments for emphasizing the role culture played in shaping politics. From their study of citizens from the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy, they concluded that political culture is the cement that holds together democratic societies in a number of ways. First, culture is "the political system internalized in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations" (1963: 27) of the citizenry that fosters a healthy tension of sorts between full participation on every policy decision (pure democracy) and no participation at all. In other words, political culture creates a social context in which the business of governance occurs as a result of consensus. This allows a cadre of political leaders to act in the best interests of the society based on consensus about essential social values, such as equality, individualism, or achievement. Second, citizens learn that trust is crucial to the business of governing. A plurality of groups or coalitions of interest are created to address the concerns of society. Consider for example, the significance of a peaceful transition of power in the United States. The president's term of office is limited, and when a term ends, the power of the presidency is peacefully handed over from one individual to the next. Despite the contentious election of 2000, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff in *Bush v. Gore*, George W. Bush was peacefully sworn in as the forty-third president of the United States. Almond and Verba (1989) would argue that political culture creates trust in these processes of governance. Consensus is maintained around the value of peaceful transitions of power and recognition by citizens that the party or majority elected in a fair electoral process has a legitimate claim to rule.

Consensus about the nature of political rule is another feature of the role of culture in politics. Equality is clearly a key theme in democratic systems. Individuals are considered to have certain rights that provide them access in the competition for power. Pluralists treat culture as an essential component to the understanding of how the masses offer support for the political system, or how changes in values and beliefs result in corresponding changes in configurations of political coalitions that result in changes in who rules. As we shall see in this chapter, a great deal of work has been done to highlight the connections between governance and mass belief systems.

Elite/Managerial

In contrast to the pluralist framework, the elite/managerial approach shifts the emphasis from conceptualizing politics to conceptualizing power as held in the hands of a few, because the competition among interest groups is guided by the rules of a fair process. The elite framework

treats political culture as a source for values resulting in acquiescence to elite rule. The simple argument for this perspective is that the elites construct the political culture to reinforce elite rule.

Weber played a significant role in identifying what role culture would play in sustaining patterns of institutional rule, namely through bureaucracies. Two contributions are worth noting here in our study of politics and culture: the role of religion in fostering capitalism and associated patterns of government, and the impact of rationalization on values about interactions between citizens and larger organizations.

Weber argued that religion and systems of power were associated in ways that created a value system in a society which supported institutional arrangements. Weber's analysis of how capitalism emerges in societies alongside Protestant beliefs in particular was a critical contribution to a cultural understanding of social inequality and stratification. He suggested that Protestant attitudes contributed to the rise of capitalism in several ways. These aspects of Protestant doctrine included the idea of predestination or being God's chosen people, the notion that wasting time was a sin, or that work and occupational choice were a calling divinely inspired (Collins 1985). The strength of these attitudes, according to Weber, created a cultural system that would foster adherence to a managerial system of work and politics. Those with higher status conclude that their position in society is "providence": "This internal situation gives rise, in their relations with other strata, to a number of further characteristic contrasts in the functions which different strata of society expect religion to perform for them" (Runciman 1978: 183). For those with lower status, the hopes for salvation in the afterlife maintain a sense of complacency and acceptance of their social situation.

By understanding culture as a way of life, Weber also shed light on the structural ways in which the Industrial Revolution was changing the power of elites and their everyday existence. Weber's description of large organizations and bureaucracy contributed to understanding how what he called the *forces of rationalization* changed social patterns and social arrangements, especially power and politics. Weber found that rules, procedures, laws, and the formality of social interactions were becoming institutionalized. As a result of the forces of rationalization, value is placed on efficiency, predictability, and adherence to procedure. Culture shaped by these forces would foster the expansion of bureaucracies and the impersonal nature of law and procedures. Lawyers, bureaucrats, scientists, and experts would hold positions in the elite and assure adherence to this way of life.

The works of Mosca also extended the elite framework's argument that those who rule craft a ruling ideology. Mosca wrote of a "political formula" which the elite used to "justify its power on the ground of an abstraction" (Meisel 1962: 55). Mythological references to providence, divine right, or perhaps vision for leadership are formulas that justify political actions. Mosca wrote of this symbolic system of beliefs that resulted in elites electing elites to positions of authority, or using intellectual justification to assure elite appointment to positions in governing bodies. Mosca saw the formula as a cultural element as a distraction from the reality that power was not "of the people" (political formula) but rather in the hands of a few.

Fifty years later, in his analysis of politics and social change, Daniel Bell (1960, 1973, 1976) came to the conclusion that elites dominated the political culture of the 1970s by creating distinct belief patterns. He argued that elites would preserve power through the creation of what he called more "inclusive identities." These psychological attachments would trump social-class divisions in many ways, for example, shifting individual orientations to perhaps focus on geography, nationalism, or gender identity. Related to this shift, he argued that elites would play a role in redefining what equality meant in the modern state. Moreover, identities linked to work would

change with the onset of postindustrial life, as knowledge and education would become more important. Thus elites would command the right skills or credentials required for rule. As a result of these and other global forces, Bell was one of the first to argue that political ideological struggles would be reduced to whether or not capitalism or socialism was the best model for social political economic systems. Bell argued that the "end of ideology" meant that social life was being transformed into managed life, where values would be redefined by an elite made up of diffuse centers of power.

Class Perspective

Marx originally treated the notion of culture as a superstructure, that is, culture emerged out of the economic relationships of society as well as preserved social-class divisions. In this regard, political culture would include those values, beliefs, and ideologies that preserved capitalism, the concentration of wealth in the capitalist class, the obedience of the laboring class, and the psychological power of money. For conflict theorists, culture has an important role to play in the preservation of unequal distributions of power in society.

Marx and eventually Engels concluded that each class had its own worldview in the history of class struggle, and its resulting tradition. This outlook was described as "class consciousness," which for Marxists is the source of political ideology. Class consciousness reflects economic interest. For political sociologists grounded in the class or Marxist perspective, political culture is understood as a function of ruling interests weaved into ideology and worldviews. The symbolic aspects of culture are controlled to promote economic gain for capitalist leaders. The capitalist ideology (or consciousness) is reproduced and distributed in books, letters, church pulpits, and media of all forms. The extent of this control assumes that the upper class, often with the assistance of the intelligentsia, can produce ideas to maintain or legitimize inequalities.

The essence of Marxist notions of culture, especially ideology as we shall consider it later in this chapter, is best summarized by a key statement made in Marx's 1859 work, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. (Bottomore 1961: 51)

Because property is the basis for economies, which creates classes, Marx believed that the role of the state was to protect the property interests of the owners of production. Property is owned because the state creates "rights" to ownership. The state and associated structures would create the requisite ideologies to support these outcomes.

In his efforts to describe *Who Rules America* (2006), Domhoff identifies what he calls "Americanism" as a unique mix of values which support the capitalist system and its associated governing structures. Based on decades of refining a class-based model of power in the United States, Domhoff argues that the unique ideological make-up of the United States has fostered the

creation of the corporate ruling class through history. Specifically, he argues that individualism and a corresponding support for free enterprise yields at the least acquiescence to political outcomes favorable to the ruling class. As a result, few individuals challenge what are considered to be taken-for-granted assumptions in a capitalist society. This ideological characteristic of U.S. culture is one of the elements of American social history that Domhoff identifies as a component of the foundation for ruling-class dominance of politics in the United States.

A second cultural dimension found in Domhoff's (2006, 2010) research focuses on the creation of cohesion among individuals in the ruling class. Early in his research, he identified the role of the Bohemian Club and its camp north of San Francisco in creating literally a retreat for America's wealthy and elite. Interestingly, this retreat has become a place for corporate, political, and social elites to gather for fun and relaxation. Cohesion is fostered in this environment. Interestingly, Domhoff describes a number of rituals which contribute to the cohesion. One of the most intriguing of these rituals takes place near the beginning of the annual retreat when the responsibilities of corporate, political, and social leadership are symbolically burned in the "cremation of care." In this elaborate ritual, responsibility and care are personified in a muslin-wrapped wood skeleton placed in a coffin; later the coffin is burned on an altar before a large carved owl, the symbol of the Bohemian Club and Bohemian Grove camp. This symbolic letting go of the affairs of banking, corporate finance, the affairs of state, or cares that go with being a celebrity, creates cohesion among the membership much like rituals found in other groups. According to Domhoff, this ritual and the various activities found at the retreat foster interaction, loyalty, and cohesion among the ruling-class members attending.

Derber (2006) recently proposed that the history of political rule in the United States has been what he calls a series of regimes. One of the "pillars" of regime rule is the role of ideology, or political culture, manipulated to create "hidden power." Derber poses an interesting challenge to the pluralist thinking about fair and open governance in the United States:

> Do you believe in black magic? You should, because the regime survives through its own amazing form of it. All regimes weave hegemonic myths and stories that help to win the allegiance of the people and keep the regime in power. These can be called regime ideology or, more bluntly, propaganda. In democratic societies, the role of propaganda is to partly cloak what Teddy Roosevelt called the "invisible government" of the regime itself. (121)

In his historical analysis of regimes in the United States, especially since the Industrial Revolution, Derber argues that intellectual centers, corporate leaders, and the media have all played a significant role in weaving what the people come to believe is true about the state of political affairs. The goal of this belief system is to preserve wealth and power in the hands of a few. Regimes create a ruling-class hegemony, that is, a belief system that diverts people from acting in their own economic self-interest and instead becoming loyal to nationalistic or moral beliefs that ultimately do nothing to advance the causes of those who suffer or are excluded from the societal systems of power.

Rational Choice

Ideology, political values, hegemony, or symbolic systems of power that foster adherence to political rule are themes in the pluralist, elite, and class frameworks. In many ways, political culture has been an important topic for political sociologists and has never been removed from the agenda of research in political sociology, especially as sociologists have recently brought new

life to the study of culture in general. Rational choice theory has come to occupy a prominent position in current explanations of power and political outcomes. It emphasizes treating politics as outcomes of interest based on rational actors operating within the bounds of a system, shaped by the social allocation of resources or the distribution of power in the community, which ultimately results in political action understood as a matter of choice. In other words, political institutions as well as political individuals act in their best interests based on the resources they have or come to earn. Following the assumptions of rational choice theory in the study of politics, we could make the case that values and orientations, no matter what the source, guide the choices of individual citizens (e.g., voting choices, action to address a community problem).

Kiser and Bauldry (2005) identify six ways in which current research in the rational choice tradition is making use of concepts in political culture. First, they note work on a concept called "focal points" which researchers argue constitutes information, values, and beliefs in an organization that become a point for agreement. This creates a basis for coordinating action within the organization and marshalling resources directed at certain goals. Second, they note that information and knowledge play a role in rational choices in organizational or institutional dynamics. As an element of culture, knowledge can guide choices. In this sense, political sociologists are now studying what role information sources play in directing actions of bureaucracies as well as political activists. The role of norms in political groups and the creation of ways to maintain membership in the groups is the third cultural dimension to the rational choice approach to the study of politics. Fourth, legitimacy to authority is an important dynamic in emerging rational choice models of politics. Related to the role of norms is the idea that some power centers in the game of politics command greater credibility to rule than others. This line of research would examine how legitimacy is created by political groups acting in the political arena. This connects to a fifth theme identified by Kiser and Bauldry, the role of ritual in pulling together collectives for political action. Political rituals can reinforce membership and loyalty to a group, thus affecting the ability of organizations to again marshal the resources necessary for achieving political goals. Sixth, more recent rational choice approaches have started to examine the role of nationalism as a cultural component to coordinating political action. As we will see later in this chapter, the rational choice approach raises interesting questions for political sociologists who consider cultural dimensions in their research as some find nationalistic tendencies to be powerful motivators for political action. As we will see in other chapters, the impact of culture continues to appear in the work of political sociologists reinforcing the role cultural elements play in politics.

Institutionalist

As mentioned in Chapter 1, we believe that the new institutionalist theories in the social sciences are in many ways a hybrid of theories of politics that have focused on structures such as organizations, bureaucracy, and the state, and have incorporated aspects of culture that emphasize culture as habits, symbolic guides to political processes, or traditions in politics. Because the institutionalist approach emphasizes the effects of culture, it's important to consider what role culture plays in politics when contrasting the various frameworks in political sociology. There are many concepts associated with this approach: the role of social ideas that affect political outcomes, the role of experts in influencing political processes, and the reliance on scripts or narratives as norms that also guide political action.

An important question in political sociology is "How is public policy made?" A cultural turn in answer to this question suggests that there are ideas, or what Burstein (1991) calls "policy domains"—"a component of the political system that is organized around substantive issues" such as education, crime, or welfare (328). These domains make up arenas of action where citizens, politicians, interest groups, parts of the bureaucracy, courts, and

legislators come together with a particular policy focus. In this sense, a variety of structures are moved to address policies in these domains or areas of interest. These domains are focused on determining how issues become part of the public agenda, or how policy options are chosen. Burstein's notion of policy domains gives a focal point for analyzing what political institutions are at work, such as political actors, rules, and eventual policy outcomes. The policy domain as a clustering of structural activity around an idea explains the influence that interest groups, protest organizations, or even judicial actors have when they come together in a pattern of social action around issues like public education, defense, or health care.

Similar to the notion of the policy domain is another cultural concept referred to as a normative context for politics. Norms play a role in guiding the work of policymakers, lobbyists, or civil servants. One way of thinking of these contexts, or fields as suggested by Campbell (2002), is as "taken-for-granted world views of policy makers" that "constrain the range of policy choices they are likely to consider when formulating economic, welfare, national security, and other public policies" (22). These are typically important normative assumptions about the nature of work or family or education. For example, there may be normative boundaries in policymaking that follow the "get tough on crime" norm typical of campaigns which emphasize to legislators the taken-for-granted cultural expectations regarding punishment of crimes that are considered particularly harmful to society.

Policymakers as well as candidates seeking office often turn to experts for advice on political processes. The role of experts as retainers of knowledge and experiences in political action is another field of research in the institutionalist framework. Manza (2000) studied, for example, a constellation of experts that played a critical role in the creation of the New Deal reforms initiated by President Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s. He finds that "At the center of the efforts of these reformers were advocacy organizations such as the American Association for Labor Legislation and the American Association for Old Age Security. These organizations provided intellectual and political leadership for early pension reform campaigns, and eventually at the national level during the New Deal" (312). As an element of culture, knowledge in this regard is seen as an important variable in explaining actions of the state. A cadre of intellectuals or experts typically plays an important role in bringing areas of specialty to bear on political processes, including policy processes and electoral activities of campaigns (e.g., pollsters or campaign strategists).

Another stream of inquiry associated with institutionalist political sociology has explored "narratives" in politics. Jacobs and Sobieraj (2007) describe narratives as "templates for orienting and acting in the world: by differentiating between good and evil, by providing understandings of agency and selfhood, and by defining the nature of social bonds and relationships" (5). In this sense, political culture is a source for ways in which stories about public problems or concerns are told, with situations, actors, even scripts for telling the story. In their research, they study how members of Congress weaved what the researchers called "a masquerade narrative" to shed light on fake or illegitimate nonprofit groups. The power of these stories is revealed by how public perceptions were molded by members of Congress who wanted to maintain their image as champions protecting legitimate nonprofit groups that help people, and at the same time criticizing the nonprofit sector for taking advantage of the taxpayer through tax exemptions or high salaries paid to CEOs of nonprofit groups. Narratives in this regard originate in the power of storytelling as a way to persuade voters or describe groups in context of a political debate or conflict. We will revisit the importance of narrative and the story creation to motivate political participation.

Postmodern

The postmodern analyses of politics, political structures, and political processes in society are perhaps in essence cultural in their approach. This body of work focuses on inherently cultural themes, such as the power of language and social discourse in creating exclusion of segments of society, the emergence of social identities related to values and beliefs unique to postmodern life, the understanding of history as culture, as well as the evolution of political configurations of symbols, meanings, and structures across time. Torfing (2005) summarizes this approach, concluding that "Poststructuralist discourse theory is a tool for analyzing the more or less sedimented rules and meanings that condition the political construction of social, political and cultural identity" (153). The postmodern framework as we describe in this text is a collection of works perhaps not as unified as the previous traditions but nonetheless significant to studies of political culture.

A key feature of the postmodernist notions of power is that language structures reality. Thus, power distributions in society are understood as what is commonly referred to in this framework as narratives. These narratives are (to oversimplify perhaps) patterns of social actions created as/by systems of power. They reflect the "sedimented rules and meanings" in language and interaction that Torfing describes. Two key works by Foucault shaped this approach. In his study of mental illness, *Madness and Civilization* (1973), he proposed the idea that some groups of people can be separated because they are not adherents to reason. Separation was created not only physically, but also through narratives. For example, society created a named category of persons with mental problems—the mad. Eventually, the narrative of mental illness was commanded by doctors and scientists, who described these conditions as medical conditions. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault traces the narratives of punishment. Prior to the 1800s, societies created spectacles of pain and torture often in the name of the monarch or church. Science changed this narrative with the invention of a science of punishment. The modern prison, invented in the early 1800s, was structured to allow the "gaze" of the watchful state, maintaining control and surveillance of those convicted with large prisons designed to control every move of the body as well as watch every aspect of daily prisoner routines. The science of punishment would also invent narratives related to reform and rehabilitation, again with the idea that criminality was sickness, or bad choices, which could be changed. The language of these forms of control in society was changed by science, experts, and the state. Narratives mark these shifts in thinking about control of deviant populations.

Another example of the postmodern approach to politics and culture is found in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985; Mouffe 1991) who offer a framework where citizenship is redefined in terms of the creation of discourse to describe a cultural guide of sorts to steer individuals to come together to tackle common problems. Mouffe suggests that individuals create a common bond when they share a concern or problem. They draw upon cultural rules and manners of talking relevant to conceptualizing problems in order to get things done. Mouffe refers to the cultural sources that guide manners, talk, and conceptualizations of social issues as citizenship emerging from the res publica:

> Those rules prescribe norms of conduct to be subscribed to in seeking self-chosen satisfactions and in performing self-chosen actions. The identification with those rules of civil intercourse creates a common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises. This modern form of political community is held together not by a substantive idea of a common good but by a common bond, a public concern. It is therefore a community without definite shape, a definite identity, and in a continuous reenactment. (1991: 77)

In this sense, the exercise of political power can appear and disappear depending on the public concern addressed, as well as on the makeup of any given community that expresses its concerns and at the same time is motivated to act against the political authority. Politics is not thought of as interest group against interest group (pluralism), elites against the masses (elitism), or upper class against working class (class), but rather politics is constructed by citizens working together using cultural resources (e.g., discourse, symbolism, cohesion of a community) to create civic bonds that once forged, are useful in addressing public concerns.

This approach to understanding politics requires the political sociologist to see the exercise of power by collectives in its civic context, or consistent with the terminology of this approach, politics occurs in certain social spaces. For example, in his study of AIDS activism in Canada, Brown (1997) found that individuals in urban areas came together to address the public concern of how to care for AIDS patients. Political action was not just about lobbying the state for resources to help AIDS patients, but it was also about creating groups of volunteers in neighborhoods to care for patients or to educate the community about AIDS. In addition, Brown discovered that activism also involved families in a way to create care networks of sorts for individual patients. What Brown discovered was that the "radical democracy" that Mouffe and Laclau talked about was revealed in the way of life associated with the particular city studied. The res publica was a cultural basis for the norms and rules of action involving the state (national and urban), community (neighborhoods), and families (the private sphere). Politics emerged to address the concern of AIDS. Urban life fostered this new space of political action.

According to this approach, culture and structure foster the emergence of political action. Political action at any given moment can appear as individuals define political concerns through discourse, and find a configuration of collective action that works for the problem. Culture is the sources of rules about forming action, beliefs about what is valuable action or what issue is in need of concern, and ideas for solving problems. This action may then disappear once it's felt it has been addressed. Thus, because of the heavy influence of culture in this approach outlined by Laclau and Mouffe, political action is always changing. Although complex, this conceptualization of politics and culture is a good example of the postmodern orientation to politics and power.

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

How does an individual learn about the practices of politics in society or tools for citizenship? How is knowledge transferred or language practiced? We call the social process by which members of the social group acquire the tools, skills, and beliefs for political action and the exercise of power, *political socialization.* The acquisition of political knowledge, comprehension of political symbols, or manipulation of values for political ends is better understood if we consider how society transmits culture to future generations. This is referred to as the *process of political socialization.*

The early studies of political socialization focused on the nature of political learning, especially in childhood and adolescence. Greenstein (1965) defined political socialization as "the deliberate inculcation of political information, values and practices by instructional agents who have been formally charged with this responsibility" (5). Reflecting a systems orientation, political socialization was understood as a process for schools, as organizations of the state are assigned the responsibility of fostering political learning. Easton and Dennis (1969) concluded that a child's attachment to political systems revolves around three "attitude objects." All children first understand the political community, that is, the localized social group brought together through political influences. For example, children in early elementary grades learn about their

city or community and the actors in it, namely police officers, fire safety officials, or the postmaster. The second set of objects is political authorities. Occupants of key political roles, such as George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, who occupied the political role of president, are studied. The third object is the regime, which although a bit more abstract for children, is the focus of law, rules, duty, and obligation connected to the notion of citizenship. Good citizens follow the rules, and participate in political institutions by voting in elections. Mock elections, where children are encouraged to vote, are examples of learning processes where political roles such as voter are learned.

Much of what we know about political socialization is that it is developmental, meaning that the acquisition of attitudes, values, and orientations about politics and power takes place throughout the course of life (Braungart and Braungart 1990). This model of political socialization is a process not limited to childhood or adolescence (see Textbox 3.1). It explains the dynamics of values and understandings as occurring throughout life. Generally, the transmission of knowledge, values, and symbolic expressions from one generation to another has been suspected of having significance to a society's political systems. The patterns of socialization culturally create a basis for generalized support of democratic structures in society. As Easton and Dennis (1969) noted, these patterns develop "diffuse support" for the political system as the individual critically analyzes the political world. This diffuse support contributes to the forces necessary for acceptance of the political order and its institutions. The "benevolent leader hypothesis" confirms this by showing how the positive image of the president developed during childhood influences subsequent beliefs about political institutions and leaders (Greenstein 1960). This may take the form of looking to the president as a problem solver or person responsible for addressing social ills or as a source of protection in times of threat. According to Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson (1977), the significance of the stages of development in political knowledge and values was that "adult political behavior is the logical expression of values, knowledge, and identification formed during childhood and youth" (73). This assertion, however, was never fully supported as much of the research on political socialization died out since few links between childhood attitudes correlated with adult political behavior.

The socialization process is constructed by what are called *agents of socialization*. These social structures play an important role in learning about politics and culture. The impact agents of socialization have on political values, beliefs, and symbols of politics is an important part of the research efforts in the study of political socialization. Research on political socialization has thus focused in particular on family, school, and social groups, with some attention to the role of workplace in the formation of attitudes, values, and knowledge about politics (Jennings and Niemi 1981).

Families play an important role in the early inculcation and development of political beliefs, values, and attitudes. The primary function of the social institution of family is to transmit norms, roles, and statuses to children. Roles related to power and authority are some of the first learned in the family environment. For example, working-class parents tend to display more authoritarian patterns of discipline with children (Kohn and Schooler 1969). These patterns are learned and then associated with persons in positions of leadership or authority. Families are where children also learn about identification with political parties, which in most cases lasts into adulthood. Republican parents tend to raise Republican-identifying children. The more visible parents are in voting or participating in politics, the more their children seem to learn that participation is important.

Schools play an important role in the process of political socialization. There is clearly an explicit role for the social institution of education in that it claims a social mandate to instruct and

TEXTBOX 3.1

Political Socialization through the Life Course

In the 1960s and 1970s, studies of political socialization applied advancing psychological and educational models about learning. Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson (1977) identified a number of dynamics that occur at different stages in what Braungart and Braungart (1990) would later call the "life-course understanding" of political socialization. Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin (1988) identified the following stages in political socialization:

- ***Preschool (ages three to five)*** Children become aware of a political world in very simple terms. They are aware of the authority of the state, namely through role models, and they are aware of a political community fostered by saying the Pledge of Allegiance or becoming familiar with the flag.
- ***Early Childhood (ages six to nine)*** Children begin to understand in very basic terms that government and the president have power which is similar to the hierarchy found in many families. Interestingly, children start to develop a party identification mostly as a result of familial identification. Hess and Torney (1969) reported that 55 percent of the children in a 1963 sample of grade school children were able to identify themselves as being a Democrat or Republican. The child is capable of labeling himself or herself but is unable to articulate the meaning of a political party.
- ***Late Childhood (ages ten to twelve)*** The child begins to learn about voting for the person not the party as a political value in democracy. Interests in public affairs, voting, and getting others to vote are viewed by the child as definitions of good citizenship (Hess and Torney 1969). Children develop the capability to distinguish between persons and institutions. The president is now known as an individual who holds an institutionalized position of authority.
- ***Adolescence (ages thirteen to eighteen)*** This stage is characterized by a great deal of change and for all practical purposes, the crystallization of political views. Adelson and O'Neil (1966) note that the child is now able to distinguish self-interest from community interest. Policy conceptions at this stage are more coherent and the child is able to think in terms of ideology. Adolescents in their early teens hold a positive view of government and the Constitutional structure in general.
- ***Political Adulthood*** The effects of life-course experiences after high school are notable in the political socialization process. Understanding and commitment to the regime, authority, and politics can be influenced by life experiences, group membership, and aging. Partisan attachment is generally stronger during middle to late adult years. Abramson (1983) found that the electorate tends to "Republicanize" as it becomes older. Taking stands on political issues could be affected by some events such as a war, a corrupt administration, or others. During one's life, events such as these could change basic political views. Social forces are capable of changing the party orientations acquired during childhood as one ages. Early patterns of socialization may be influenced by experiences later in the life cycle, and so early patterns have little subsequent effect on political behavior.

teach children about the nature and characteristics of government, and the more generalized role of citizenship. In early grades, the benevolence of public servants is reinforced with visits from law enforcement officers or trips to the state capitol to meet legislators or the governor. Children view authority as looking out for the interests of the community. In adolescence, the focus of the socialization process shifts to preparation for citizenship. Most direct is enrollment in civics courses designed to provide instruction in the characteristics and operations of the state apparatus. Students may be engaged in community service projects that emphasize the role of the citizen or seek out volunteer roles in campaigns or community organizations. These connections between the school and the political apparatus are designed to reinforce aspects of citizenship that are assumed to carry through to adulthood. Education beyond the K-12 experience increases the likelihood that an individual will become more active in politics (Dalton 2008). Whether this is a function of "greater knowledge" or other factors is unclear. Nonetheless, years of schooling correlate strongly with civic activism and growth of democratic forms of governance.

Social groups also play an important role in shaping political values and orientations. Drawing on findings from other fields of study that conclude that peers matter, this body of knowledge confirms that peers play an important role in shaping political ideas among citizens. For adolescents in particular, peer groups can serve as a reference point for political information by communicating about political events such as elections, as well as a place to explore defining role behaviors related to citizenship. These patterns carry into adulthood.

The media have also played an increasingly important role in political socialization processes, but Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson (1977) noted early on that this role is secondary in contrast to the power of the three socializing agents described previously. Since the 1960s, the role of television, especially in politics and campaigning, has grown remarkably. Since the 1990s the Internet has also launched important changes in the nature of media-oriented politics. Obama's campaign for president made very effective use of the Internet, including the solicitation of significant campaign contributions. For children, the media are an important source of imagery and information. Children and adolescents are more likely than adults to

Barack Obama gives election victory speech on BBC News TV screens on audio floor of John Lewis department store

Credit: © RichardBaker/Alamy

report getting their understanding of political events or issues from TV sources. This may be changing as the Internet and other media forms take on a significant role in the lives of adolescents especially. What impact this has on socialization processes related to information sharing or the construction of political orientations or images is unclear. Clearly, we cannot ignore the role of TV in the last forty years, especially in conveying a political understanding to the youngest citizens. For example, presidential and vice-presidential debates continue to generate considerable interest among the TV-viewing public. Thanks to technology and changes in the media industry, this all may be changing.

Research from the disciplines of psychology, political science, education, and sociology have fine-tuned our understanding of what factors seem to influence the development of political values, attitudes, and beliefs. For example, research in the field of psychology now suggests that schemas or "cognitive mailboxes," are constructed to retain and analyze information about political occurrences (Torney-Purta 1990, 1995). Renshon (2004) identified three questions of interest that build on more than forty years of research. He argues that contemporary social changes are behind three new orienting questions in political socialization research:

1. What impact does globalization have on nationalist identities? For example, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States appear to have significant impact on nationalist identities in the United States. What aspects of the socialization process are crucial in shaping these types of identities?
2. How will immigration and changing demographic patterns in the United States influence socialization processes? As the population of the United States becomes even more diverse, interactions among individuals of differing ethnic and racial backgrounds will become more frequent, much like those during the Industrial Revolution. The ways in which citizens adapt to these changes will no doubt be found in the socialization processes associated with schooling in particular.
3. How have changes in civic education in the last decade influenced socialization outcomes? For example, some research notes declining levels of civic literacy, suggesting that schools have not lived up to the expected role of socializing future citizens into informed roles (Niemi 1999).

Much of the focus has shifted to exploring what impact social structures, like schools or group memberships, have on shaping attitudes and values about politics. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 on political participation, some argue that culture shifts have had important effects on youth civic involvement, community activism, and ultimately, voting.

POLITICAL VALUES

Political socialization entails many mechanisms by which members of a society or social group understand the formalized operations of power in society, namely the ways in which the state works. Knowledge is conveyed regarding the nature of government, the duties and obligations associated with the role of citizen, as well as the skills necessary for participating in the political process. At another level, political socialization affects the values and political orientations of individuals. These values shape the ways in which individuals make judgments about the distribution of power in society, or the acceptability of certain policies advocated by the state (Halman 2007, Weakliem 2005). Political values are shaped not only by the agents of socialization described earlier but also by what political sociologists describe as period effects or influences associated with societal events at a particular period in history.

Almond and Verba (1963, 1989) and Huntington (1968, 1991) argued that certain cultural patterns that emphasize well-being and education give rise to democratic forms of government. The groundbreaking work *The Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba 1963) concluded that democratic societies would evolve out of changing societal milieu, namely one characterized by higher levels of industrialization and education. Politics would be changed as citizens in societies characterized by modernization would embrace forms of participation, self-governance, and government led by principles of civil service rather than elite dominance. The exploration of social change and its effects on politics has yielded insights into the connections between cultural elements (knowledge, values, symbolic systems) and political outcomes. In 1997, Inglehart concluded that:

> The political culture approach today constitutes the leading alternative to rational choice theory as a general explanatory framework for political behavior. The political culture approach is distinctive in arguing that (1) people's responses to their situations are shaped by subjective orientations, which vary cross-culturally and within subcultures, and (2) these variations in subjective orientations reflect differences in one's socialization experience, with early learning conditioning later learning, making the former more difficult to undo. Consequently, action can not be interpreted as simply the result of external situations: Enduring differences in cultural learning also play an essential part in shaping what people think and do. (Inglehart 1997: 19)

What Inglehart does here is advance the sociological agenda in connecting politics and culture. This argument suggests that it is not economic or political outcomes that dictate choices (the assumption of rational choice theories), but rather, politics, economics, and social structures in general change and adapt as a result of culture. This chapter now takes a detailed look at the work of Inglehart, and examines how processes of socialization, generational experiences, and economic conditions shape values and political beliefs.

The Shift from Materialist to Post-Materialist Values

One of the most comprehensive projects dedicated to studying how social change affects political culture and thus, political dynamics in society, is the project led by Ronald Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997). His studies of political culture in the United States and more recently worldwide (Inglehart and Welzel 2005) focus on explaining how historical, socioeconomic changes in the last one hundred years have fostered changes in the values of citizens. Inglehart defines culture as "a people's strategy for adaptation." That is, the toolkit that includes ways of understanding political events, cognitive skills for making political decisions, and values that would influence political choices, is altered by structural and historical forces. These strategies are altered in response to economic, technological, and political shifts, and ultimately affect politics. This study of political culture has highlighted how economic effects experienced by different generations change political values and attitudes.

Inglehart's initial studies in the United States hypothesized that economic changes since World War II (WWII) have resulted in changes in values and personal skills. Specifically, he observed that cultural change in Western society is "deemphasizing economic growth as a dominant goal" with a corresponding decline of economic criteria as the standard for rational behavior. By studying two cohorts (individuals born before and after WWII), Inglehart found differences in value orientations and what he described as "skills" related to work and political

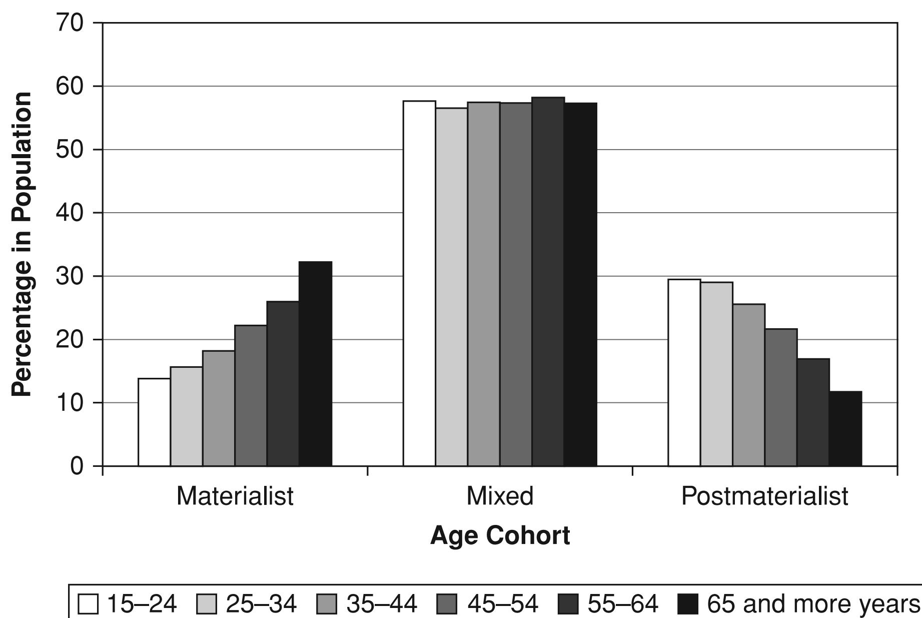

FIGURE 3.1 Materialist, Mixed, and Postmaterialist Population in Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands, and the United States by Age Group

Source: World Values Survey 1981–2008 Official Aggregate v.20090901, 2009. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid. This graph was created using the World Values Online Data Analysis, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/.

involvement. He referred to these cohorts as *materialists* (those born before WWII) and *post-materialists* (those born after WWII). As seen in Figure 3.1, a greater percentage of older persons reported holding materialist values, while a greater percentage of younger persons reported post-materialist values. Those with mixed value patterns did not vary by cohort.

Industrialization and socioeconomic change since WWII has resulted in a change in what Inglehart refers to as the *political community*. He suggests that individuals require different skills for social and political interaction, which reflects how people conceptualize political community. The postmaterialist political community is national, complex, and driven by technology. Postmaterialists (those in the post-WWII cohort) acquired skills that facilitate participation in a national political community. Inglehart suggested that generational differences existed in what he called, "cognitive mobilization" or essentially, the skills needed for political action in modern political communities. These skills include education, information, and participation in organizations or networks. These are elements we associate with modern mass societies. Inglehart argues that these mechanisms of social transition may raise the potential for political participation.

Postmaterialists as social idealists are redirecting their energies toward social activities that go beyond mere physical or economic security. Pursuit of lofty social goals leads to opportunities for greater participation, according to Inglehart, as postmaterialists are driven by idealism. Cognitive skills create opportunities for value reflection and critical examination of personal priorities. As a result of postmaterialist political culture, Inglehart concludes that inequality between elites and masses has generally diminished, and education has become the basis of power for the masses, who in turn could become elites. He points to data showing that for the postmaterialist generation, education and unconventional participation are strongly associated. He also points to general declines in gender-based inequalities in Western societies. This model argues that education is washing out the effects of gender discrimination in voting or political participation in general.

According to Inglehart, the value sets common to the post-WWII generation focus on lifestyle issues (e.g., aspects of sexuality, religious and spiritual pursuits, environmentalism). The appeal to social class is no longer significant as economic development has equalized much of the individual's need to feel economically secure. Change in orientations toward state authority and legitimacy of national institutions have also been significant. As a result of relative prosperity, individuals shift their emphasis, from economic and physical security to belonging, self-expression, and quality-of-life issues. This shift follows the expansion of the welfare state and economic growth after WWII, which by the 1970s had turned into post-materialist support for exploration of differing lifestyles especially in contrast to the values of the pre-WWII generation.

The changes in political values and behavior were also significant. Shifts were noted in the prevailing types of participation. Specifically, Inglehart finds changes in loyalties to political parties. No longer does party identification represent class or socioeconomic status (SES) cleavages. Postmaterialists transcend traditional labels, and tend to support change parties in general. Postmaterialists are far more likely to engage in protest politics such as petition drives, demonstrations, strikes, or boycotts. And according to Inglehart, postmaterialists gained access to elite groups in the United States. Those with postmaterialist values are now achieving positions of authority in society. Members of this cohort now serve in parliaments or congress, and hold occupations in the elite occupational groups (e.g., educators, lawyers, labor leaders, media reps).

In their most recent project, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have identified similar shifts in other countries, again connected to global economic modernization. Based on surveys of values from 120 societies, Inglehart and Welzel have created a model of political culture that emphasizes a connection between economic growth, human choice, and strength of democratic processes. Specifically, they conclude that

> Each of the three components of human development is a distinct manifestation of a common underlying theme: autonomous human choice. Socioeconomic development increases people's resources, giving people the objective means that enable them to make autonomous choices. With self-expression values, people give high priority to acting according to their autonomous choices. And democracy provides civil and political liberties, granting people the rights to act according to their autonomous choices. (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 287)

Inglehart's studies have tested this claim and provided evidence that the relationship between cultural shifts and political attitudes and behavior is strong.

Inkeles and the Modern Personality

Much like the model of cultural change and politics outlined by Inglehart, Alex Inkeles has conceptualized political culture emerging from social change resulting in what he calls "modern values" (Inkeles 1983; Inkeles and Smith 1974). Societies that become economically complex in the modern era would modernize further as a result of individuals retaining values including:

- openness to new experience
- independence from traditional authority
- belief in science and medicine for solving human problems
- educational and occupational ambition
- punctuality and orderliness and
- interest in civic affairs. (Schooler 1996)

One key factor in modernizing these values in contrast to traditional value systems held by older generations in society was the advancement of education. He too concluded that each generation experiences a number of historical and structural changes reflected in the socialization processes of society. The result is a shift in individual value patterns among citizens.

Religion and Political Values

Interest in the connections between religion and politics is not new. In fact, one can easily argue that prior to the Enlightenment, religion, as Weber suggested, was the social base for the legitimization of power. Think for example about the concept of divine right of kings. Rule of the monarch was justified by appeals to the intentions of God. Enlightenment thinking and the age of revolution changed this basic philosophy of rule. Political power would move from a religious base to a focus on the ability of free persons to think and choose rulers and policies. The role of religion in politics since then has changed. In the last two centuries, appeals to religious thinking have been used to justify political acts such as wars, declarations of independence, the abolition of slavery, and the intervention of the state in human reproduction and death.

In very recent history, American politics in particular entered an era where religion played an important role in shaping political outlooks thus organizing citizens into various forms of political action. The 1980s and 1990s were described by some political sociologists as polarized, suggesting significant divisions between a variety of citizen groups. Hunter (1991) coined the term *culture wars* to describe the intensity of what emerged as a debate about the perceived morality of American society and the role of the state and religious organizations in defining social values. Why is religion important to our understanding of politics? It serves as a basis for structuring moral imperatives about the nature of life, and thus, social conflicts that may become political questions.

In the United States, the social institution of religion has undergone three significant changes in the past century:

1. decline in size of mainline denominations with growth in conservative denominations;
2. decline in denominationalism (ecumenical, cross church); and
3. emergence of "direct action, special purpose" groups.

As a result of these changes, the role of religion in politics has taken on new forms. Hunter describes this as a key influence in the culture wars, because the purpose of many of the emergent religious groups is "about power—a struggle to achieve or maintain the power to define reality" (1991: 52). It is within this environment that groups like the Moral Majority marshaled political resources including money and churchgoers, and the presidential candidacies of Pat Robertson, a tele-evangelist who placed a surprising second in the 1988 Iowa Caucuses, and Mike Huckabee, a former Arkansas governor and minister in the Southern Baptist Church who won the Iowa Caucuses in 2008.

Some scholars have argued that the current religious critique of culture and morality is a direct attack on modernity and everyday life as the twentieth century came to a close (Marty and Appleby 1995). The growth of fundamentalist religious beliefs is worldwide, involving especially two of the largest global religious traditions: Islam and Christianity. The shift to fundamentalist thinking at the end of the twentieth century was important to national and global politics. The key point is that religion serves as a significant source of values that in turn construct political orientations and dispositions that foster variations in individual and group values, attitudes, and resulting political actions. Manza and Wright (2003) find that these values create "religious cleavages" in voting patterns in the United States. For example, they conclude

TEXTBOX 3.2

Religion, Ideology, and Political Extremism

Religion has historically been a powerful force in shaping the motivations and eventual acts of kings, crusaders, revolutionaries, and activists. The role of religion in serving as a catalyst for political actions such as terrorism or war has been studied. Even today we find examples of religious frameworks transformed into what some believe are justifiable acts of political violence. Because values and religious beliefs are involved, there is controversy in defining the exact relationship between religion and politics. Some bristle at the label "political extremism" based on religious ideology.

In May 2009, abortion provider Dr. George Tiller was murdered while attending services at his home church in Wichita, Kansas. Scott Roeder, a self-proclaimed anti-abortion activist in Kansas who had created an anti-abortion Web site and had participated in protests at Planned Parenthood clinics in the Kansas City area, was convicted of the murder. Law enforcement officers also linked Roeder with a right-wing movement known as the "Freemen," which was an antigovernment movement in the Midwest claiming to operate under its own system of common law. Roeder has claimed that his use of deadly force was "justifiable" to defend unborn children. There are clues in this case that religion and beliefs in conspiracy shaped Roeder's beliefs about abortion.

In an effort to examine the role of religion in contemporary politics, some groups monitor the acts of religious groups organized around political agendas. Abortion has become a highly politicized topic in the last fifty years. In one recent study, entitled *Toxic to Democracy: Conspiracy Theories, Demonization, and Scapegoating* Chip Berlet (2009) claims that religion helps form outgroups in politics and establishes social divisions that rationalize the use of political violence. He observes:

> Right-wing pundits demonize scapegoated groups and individuals in our society, implying that it is urgent to stop them from wrecking the nation. Some angry people in the audience already believe conspiracy theories in which the same scapegoats are portrayed as subversive, destructive, or evil. Add in aggressive apocalyptic ideas that suggest time is running out and quick action mandatory and you have a perfect storm of mobilized resentment threatening to rain bigotry and violence across the United States.

According to the study, there are four "tools of fear" commonly used by groups and individuals associated with what we know as right-wing political movements. These tools include: (1) dualism, (2) scapegoating, (3) demonization, and (4) apocalyptic aggression. The report also details how each of these goals are commonly pursued by various groups that make up far-right followings. Many of these groups are part of a larger social and political ideological movement in the United States.

Go to the link listed in the source to download your copy of this study. Then using these four goals and news reports on the Roeder case, identify how religion and conspiracy are used to construct a justification for political violence. Find specific examples of statements or law enforcement testimony or reports that demonstrate dualist thinking about abortion, blaming and demonization of abortion doctors, and the use of violence and aggression.

Source: Chip Berlet. "Toxic to Democracy: Conspiracy Theories, Demonization, & Scapegoating." Public Eye.Org, the Web site of Political Research Associates, retrieved July 29, 2009 from http://www.publiceye.org/conspire/toxic2democracy/media.html.

that denominational membership and a commitment to dogma or religious teaching influence how people vote for president. Others have identified the role of religious values in structuring more radical forms of political protest and extremism as we will see in Chapters 8 and 9. Sociologists studying radical forms of political protest, rallies, and the emergence of extremist Web sites have found that religion plays an important role in the construction of attitudes and beliefs that are used to justify racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia. Textbox 3.2 provides an example of this research.

IDEOLOGY, BELIEFS, AND PUBLIC OPINION

The concept of ideology is used to conceptualize the arrangement of values and belief systems that citizens, policymakers, leaders, and even nonparticipants create about power and power structures. The study of ideology has held a prominent position in social and philosophical inquiry since the concept was described by Destutt de Tracy in the late eighteenth century. Influenced by Enlightenment philosophers, this French citizen charged with rebuilding French intellectualism after the revolution used the term *ideology* in a plea for a science, or logic, of ideas. In the fields of philosophy and social psychology, ideology has emerged as a concept related to the individual's interpretation of various events or aspects of the environment. The writings of Karl Marx focused on ideology as a superstructure, its expression in various forms of the division of labor, in the forces of economic history, and its use by the ruling class. Marx suggests that ideology emerges from the superstructures creating false consciousness among the working class. Mannheim (1936) argued as did Marx that ideology was a historically captured notion, representing the thinking of the times. Specifically, he suggested that ideology was expressed by individuals as particularistic, or ideology was totally emanating from the forces of culture and social history. Oakeshott (1962), a philosopher aligned with the British idealists, treated ideology in yet another vein. He as well as his students, argued that ideology be conceptualized as a connection with the practical, day-to-day actions of the human being. For example, citizens would find interest as rational actors in how political parties would treat minimum-wage policies or tax credits as incentives to buy an energy-efficient car. Politics, in this sense, is an appeal to social action, bringing about change in the routine existence rather than some unattainable ideal. Goran Therborn (1980) cast ideology as a set of attitudes, values, and beliefs about the distribution of power in society and the resulting social actions that flow from this set of views. It is useful to construct arenas of research that treat ideology as mental pictures as well as social actions. Larrain (1979) concludes that:

> Ideology is perhaps one of the most equivocal and elusive concepts one can find in social sciences; not only because of the variety of theoretical approaches which assign different meanings and functions to it, but also because it is a concept heavily charged with political connotations and widely used in everyday life with the most diverse significations. (13)

The Faces of Ideology

Because defining ideology has been problematic, the ways by which political sociologists have conceptualized ideology have varied. One useful way of thinking about the many approaches to the concept of ideology is by categorizing the vast research on ideology in four ways that highlight the interplay between culture, power, and social action: (1) ideology understood as an ability to comprehend the political environment, (2) political attitudes and beliefs that make up a constellation

or collection of orientations about power, (3) beliefs about issues and politics changed by deliberation or talking about politics, and (4) ideology as a function of historical and social-class influences that conceal or distort to assure power. Each of these research traditions has to date generated a great deal of understanding about the interactions between individual citizens, their political thinking, and structural influences that have effects on the nature of power in society.

IDEOLOGY AS POLITICAL "SOPHISTICATION" Early studies of ideology were designed to test the basic assumptions of democracy that voters are informed, keen decision makers. In other words, social scientists were interested in the assertion that democracy required citizens to be informed using what they understood about issues and candidates to come to logical conclusions to make decisions. Much of the early work on ideology in American politics began as a result of two studies. In 1964, Converse asserted that most American voters had little ideological sophistication. Rather, understanding politics was a function of "constraints" that had little to do with comprehension of issues, or thinking in a critical way about the pros and cons of policy positions held by political candidates. In the classic study of American voting, this lack of sophistication was confirmed. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) found that indeed, a larger portion of American voters did not vote based on what was then described as *a sophisticated* view of political positions. These studies, combined with the arguments of sociologists at the "Columbia School" of voting, indicated that other influences were important to vote choices, and launched decades of study around the nature of ideology and what were called "mass belief systems." Converse defined a mass belief system as "a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence" (Converse 1964: 478). Ideology was understood as a system of ideas among the citizenry that was shaped, or "constrained" by idea elements.

Political sociologists have examined this argument about ideological thinking and sophistication in very interesting ways. The research has continuously focused on determining whether the American electorate could be characterized as sophisticated in its reasoning about politics. In 1990, Luskin concluded:

> . . . a person is politically sophisticated to the extent to which his or her political cognitions are numerous, cut a wide substantive swath, and are highly organized or "constrained." Some psychologists write in this vein of cognitive complexity, meaning the extent to which a person's cognition of some domains are highly differentiated (roughly, numerous and wide-ranging) and highly integrated (organized or constrained). Others refer equivalently to expertise, meaning the extent to which the person's knowledge of the domain is both extensive and highly "chunked." Political sophistication is political cognitive complexity, political expertise. (115)

Dalton (2008) more recently concluded that although citizens may not be rational and logical experts on politics, they are "reasonable thinkers" using what information they have to make relatively stable decisions. Dalton proposes that mass belief systems be understood as a "hierarchy" of policy opinions based on (1) general orientations to politics shaped by group memberships, religious views, or economic conditions; and (2) principles or values connected closely to fundamental notions about how politics should look. For example, ideological thinking about health care may emerge from principles related to the role of government in helping people or furthering the free market. These give rise to orientations focused on government-sponsored insurance in certain circumstances or for certain populations. These general orientations may in turn shape specific opinions on a particular proposal, such as universal health care insurance, support for

caps on Medicare payments to doctors, or other specific policy outcomes. What Dalton suggests is a model of ideology in an electorate that comes to "reasonable" conclusions about political things rather than highly sophisticated conclusions based on idealized forms of civic thinking.

IDEOLOGY AS A SET OF POLITICAL BELIEFS After the 1960s and 1970s, research on political ideology tended to measure this orientation of value sets and attitudes as a spatial concept, with ideology understood as a place on a continuum between liberal and conservative (Gerring 1997; Knight 2006). Not only were individuals found to have fairly consistent political orientations on this continuum but the measure of conservative–liberal was applied to understanding office-holders as well as political groups. This "spatial" notion of ideology finds that individuals and groups can hold a number of positions on selected beliefs about the nature and role of government, power, civil liberties, foreign policy, and the relationship between state and citizen in a pattern consistent with liberal or conservative philosophies. About a third of the participants in the General Social Survey have consistently identified themselves as "moderates" over the past four decades (see Figure 3.2).

However, how individuals see themselves ideologically can differ from their actual cognitions to how they respond to political questions. The so-called objective measures of ideology, in contrast to those that measure self–placement, have been developed to give ideology a "spatial" (Knight 2006) characteristic along the liberal–conservative continuum. When individuals are asked to assess specific policy outcomes, such as support for foreign interventions in global markets, or agreement with the statement that prayer in schools should be banned, the American polity tends to look a bit

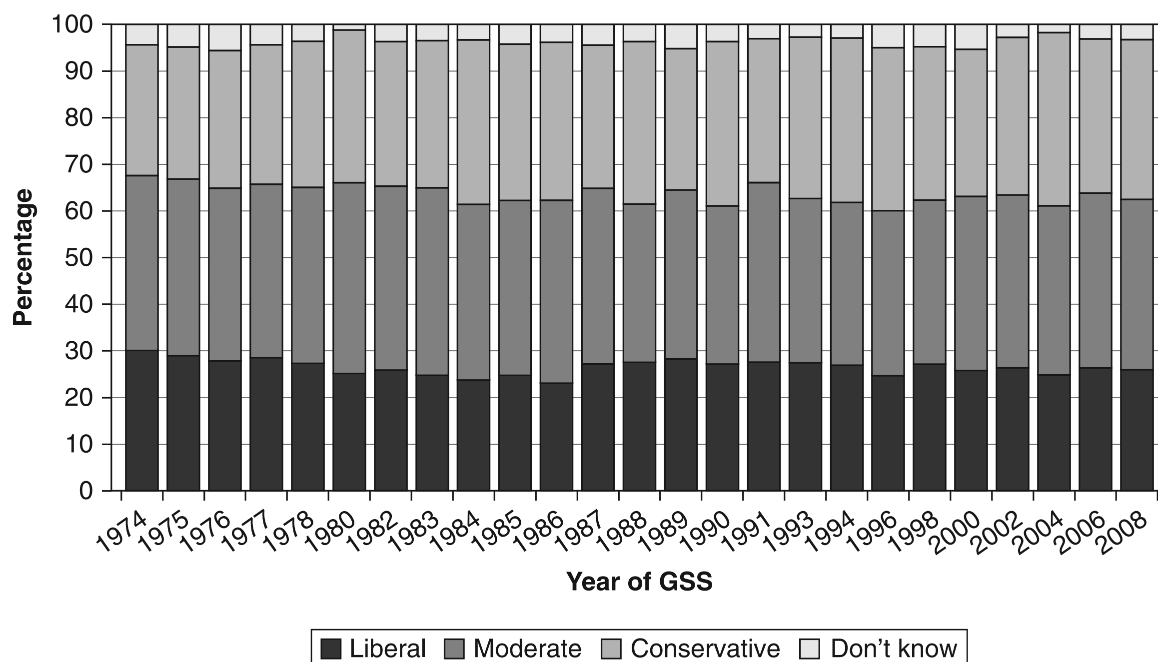

FIGURE 3.2 Respondents Who Identify Themselves as Liberal, Moderate, or Conservative in the GSS, 1974 to 2008

Source: Davis, James A., Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden. GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEYS, 1972–2008: [CUMULATIVE FILE] [Computer file]. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center [producer], 2009. 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 (http://sda.berkeley.edu), University of California [distributors], 2009.

different when asked to rate themselves as conservative, moderate, or liberal. For example, in a study of twenty years of survey data measuring respondents' positions on key ideological issues, the Pew Research Center (2009) found slight shifts to liberal ideology on certain issues. Respondents in 2009, in contrast to respondents studied in 1987, were more supportive of programs for the "needy" and those "who can't care for themselves." In addition, support for "old fashioned values about marriage and family" and homosexuality were less of a concern to respondents in the 2009 survey than to those surveyed in 1987. These signs of shifts away from right-ideological positions may be early signs of changes in the political culture associated with the election of President Obama in 2008.

IDEOLOGY AS DELIBERATION AND DISCOURSE Another approach to ideology draws upon the idea that citizens are engaged in conversation or dialogue about the nature and distribution of power found in society (Eliasoph 1996). Marx and Hegel observed that this dialogue was constructed by the ruling classes to assure that the outcome of the dialogue would favor preservation of wealth in the capitalist class. The concept of dialectic was used here to describe societal understandings created by each human being gaining some experience, then observing and comparing this to other experiences, and then making a judgment. There is a mental dialectic characterizing all such interactions between the person and the object in the environment.

Billig et al. (1988) suggested that ideology be viewed as a mindset about politics constructed for contrasting sometimes conflicting themes encountered in daily life, placing an emphasis on thesis and antithesis, or ideology created through dialectic processes. These authors argue that dilemmas emerge out of shared beliefs and social values. The response of the person to the dilemma, however, according to this framework is a function of the preconditions of the decision if one is involved. Out of the contrary themes that emerge from daily interactions is the need for argumentation and discourse. Billig et al. propose that dilemmas around common sense result in thinking processes. Social beliefs are the foundation for these debates. The shared beliefs lead to new forms of thought or beliefs, as patterns of discourse dissuade the utility of older value sets, or reinforce the stance of the common sense that the individual has grown with. Discourse and argument are at the foundation of the theory of ideology described by Billig. The individual's expressions in discourse or debate may reflect the challenge between a lived and intellectual ideology. Ideology based on this model is a dynamic, fluid concept that is a function of historical influences on the contextual interactions of the human existence.

Billig et al. (1988) have developed a typology of ideology based on these frameworks of thought. The *lived ideology* refers to a "society's way of life." Billig et al. admittedly treat ideology in many ways as synonymous with culture. This type of thinking about power in everyday social patterns is contrasted with *intellectual ideology*. This refers to specifically articulated frames of reference. Often, as the name implies, intellectual ideology is associated with great thinkers or philosophical advocates who have formalized their interpretations or demands. The lived and intellectual ideologies are often the source of the dilemmas that Billig et al. argue make up the dialectic of social action.

IDEOLOGY AS HEGEMONY AND HISTORY The traditional class perspective has analyzed ideology more in terms of historically relevant views of politics, economics, and daily human interactions. Marx saw ideology as that giving rise to the legitimation of the relations of production and continued exploitation of labor. Others conceptualize ideology as a function of historical forces and experiences related to economic determinism and resulting positions in the class structure.

In his study of the emergence of Protestantism and socialism through the Enlightenment, Wuthnow (1989) found that how societies constructed views of power could be connected to

a culture and social structure. His historical analysis demonstrated how Protestantism, the Enlightenment, and Socialism emerged from cultural movements as a result of periods of "exceptional economic growth" (9). Periods in history were also characterized by a unique process of cultural development. Ideology grows out of the social processes of cultural production. He suggested that ideology be thought of as "an identifiable constellation of discourse" connected to social groups, patterns of social interaction, and institutions. He is suggesting here that ideology comes from three forces in society bound up in their historical era—environmental, institutional, and action sequences. Ideology is created, torn down, and then recreated through cycles in history. As Mannheim (1936) concluded, every epoch or age has an ideology unique to that frame in time.

Wuthnow concludes that socialism comes from an ideology made by its environmental conditions, institutional contexts, and actions connected to each. The environmental conditions include the social, political, or economic conditions of a particular period in history. For example, wars or famine can create shifts in how resources in society are distributed. Institutional contexts shape this distribution process. By institutional contexts, Wuthnow is describing the work of organizations or bureaucracies. The masses connect to these contexts in schools or universities, governmental agencies, reading or scientific societies, newspapers, or political parties. Action sequences flow from environmental conditions and institutional contexts. That is, ideas associated with ideological movements (e.g., socialism) are produced in these settings and at the same time seek changes in the institutional contexts and eventually environmental conditions. Imagine for example how wars in nineteenth-century Europe were a focal point of conversations in coffee shops or cafés in France or Germany. Ideas about the effects of the war, such as what to do with those who fought in these wars and lost their livelihood, might eventually become the ideological basis for creation of social insurance programs such as pensions for the aged or medical care. This cyclical nature of historical conditions giving rise to ideas about power and the distribution of resources in society, according to Wuthnow, characterizes how ideology changes historically.

Another approach to political culture developed by proponents of the class perspective addresses the more subtle influences of culture on ideas and values. Antonio Gramsci (1971) used the term *hegemony* to describe that general cultural milieu created by the ruling classes, where ideas and values are shaped in compliance with ruling-class objectives. The intent with this cultural dimension of ruling-class dominance is to preserve through the power of ideas, emotions, loyalties, and beliefs the stability of class differences. Thus power is exercised through the manipulation of ideas. Gramsci used the concept to explain why the upper economic classes maintained power even when compliance with upper-class demands was against the best interests of the working class.

One example of how hegemony works is found in the work of political sociologists who study power differences between and among men and women. Masculine hegemony is described as made up of a set of ideas such as aggression, competition, winning in a game, or deceit in order to attain interests. In their global analysis of women's representation and participation in political systems, Paxton and Hughes (2007) find that hegemonic influences in countries described as patriarchal create cultural barriers to women attaining positions in the political system. They conclude that cultural forces such as attitudes in society about roles of men and women, especially those shaped by religion, "matter for women's acquisition of political power" and can "influence women's decision to run for political office" (120).

Contemporary work exploring the emergence of hegemonic power in other ways has grown significantly with the study of globalization. As an oversimplification perhaps, globalization

argues that the beliefs and ideas associated with U.S. capitalist culture have been extended to all parts of the globe. As a result, ideas influence consumer choices in nations characterized as newcomers to capitalist life. For example, as China has embraced some forms of capitalist market activity in the past several years, consumer choices for things like McDonald's products or Western music have become hallmarks of change in a traditionally anticapitalist society. In his recent study of the impact of the Internet and digital technologies on societies throughout the world, Drori (2006) suggests that Internet communications represent "a totalizing and individualizing form of power, allowing each person a voice while also imposing on individuals a hegemonic structure" (121). Although people are led to believe that the World Wide Web offers a forum for free speech or communication, the truth is that the communication is virtual and typically becomes a place for the distortion of identities (e.g., gender-bending in a chat room, faking a profile). We believe we can anonymously communicate using these digital communications, but the rules of online interaction are structured by the creators of the device being used. If this replaces face-to-face communication, intent or genuineness is more difficult to test. Drori concludes, "In the age of globalization, where the global is regarded as the homogenizing force and the local as a unique scene, technology—like other forms of knowledge—is an instrument of power" (121). Hegemonic influences are practiced through the structure of the World Wide Web, which is made real in the small space of the computer screen throughout the world.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND MEDIA

The mass media have assumed a unique role in the dynamics of modern political culture. On one hand, the media have been treated as a source of information and knowledge about political candidates, political events, and global political changes. The media have also been studied as a significant actor in the processes of political socialization described earlier in this chapter. For social constructionists, the media have been understood as key players in the manipulation of political symbols and expressions related to deliberation, ritual, and outright political mythologies. Textbox 3.3 explores another direction of research which tests the claim that the media has a liberal bias in its treatment of candidates and issues. The holy grail of sorts in the study of media effects on political attitudes and behavior is being able to identify the direct impact of TV ads, or exposure to images, or time spent reading on specific political outcomes. After decades of research, few studies have been able to make such direct links (Preiss et al. 2006). What we understand now about the role of media in shaping elements of political culture is that sociological variables are important—education of the viewer, economic status of target audiences, predispositions created by other societal influences or reference groups, and group membership more generally. Needless to say, the connections between media and political outcomes are complex.

Political sociologists typically focus on the role of the media as a social institution; that is a type of social organization created for reasons of profit, or to claim a voice in political discourse. For example, Domhoff's study (2006) of the ruling class in the United States finds that:

> The media can say what people think is important, but the news they stress reflects the biases of those who access them—corporate leaders, government officials, and policy experts. Even here, there is ample evidence that the views of liberal critics make frequent appearances in newspapers and magazines, and that corporations and establishment politicians are regularly criticized. (117)

TEXTBOX 3.3

Is There a Liberal Media Bias?

The perception that the media is biased is widespread. A Google Internet search found 2.2 million hits for "liberal media bias" compared to 1.5 million for "conservative media bias." This perception is backed with opinion poll data revealing that 45 percent of Americans believe that the media are too liberal compared to 35 percent who say the media are about right and 15 percent who believe the media are too conservative (Gallup Organization 2009). Partisanship influences perception. In other words, Republicans perceive liberal bias while Democrats perceive a conservative slant (Morris 2007). Sixty-three percent of Americans believe that news stories are inaccurate and 74 percent believe that news organizations are influenced by powerful people and organizations (Pew Research Center 2009). Not surprisingly, the majority of Americans (55 percent) report having little to no trust and confidence in the mass media (Gallup 2009). How accurate are these perceptions?

Those advocating that a liberal media bias exists cite studies showing that journalists have more left-of-center views on social issues (e.g., Dye 2002) and that when researchers ask reporters to make hypothetical journalistic decisions, the reporters choose responses consistent with their partisan views (e.g., Patterson and Donsbach 1996). However, responses to hypotheticals do not prove actual bias in reporting (Niven 1999). Gans (1980) points out that reporters do not have control over headlines or story placement and editors are careful to weed out any trace of political bias.

In their review of media bias research, Covert and Wasburn argue that past studies fail to ask "More or less conservative (or liberal) than what other specific news sources" and assume that bias does not vary over time or by the issue (2007: 690). In a comparison of twenty-five years (1975–2000) of news magazine coverage, mainstream sources such as *Time* and *Newsweek* are centrist in their coverage of crime, environment, gender, and poverty compared to the markedly more conservative *National Review* or liberal *Progressive* (Covert and Wasburn 2007). Niven (1999) also found, using an objective baseline, no liberal bias in his analysis of newspapers.

In contrast, other studies have found that Fox News, self-promoted as an alternative to the "liberal media," has become friendlier to Republican views since its inception (Morris 2005), with news coverage more supportive of the Bush invasion of Iraq (Aday, Livingston, and Hebert 2005). Fox News viewers were also more likely than others to believe incorrectly that there was a link between Al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein and that weapons of mass destruction were found after the 2003 invasion (Kull 2003). Fox viewers also underestimated the number of U.S.–Iraq war casualties compared to other viewers (Morris 2005).

G. William Domhoff (2010) argues that media bias is not influential because consumers gravitate toward media sources that fit their ideological views. For example, Republicans tend to choose Fox News as their primary source (Morris 2007), so any relationship between news viewing and behavior is probably more a function of previously established political attitudes. However, a more fragmented media market may result in a more polarized public, making consensus building more difficult. Morris contends that previously, a more homogenized news environment exposed viewers to different points of view. In today's more fragmented media, viewers choosing news consistent with own point of view reduce their exposure to alternative ideas.

Morris (2007) contends that Fox News benefits from the persistent perception of liberal bias, having become one of the most popular news sources in the United States, as those who believe that the media have a liberal slant are also more likely to report Fox News as their primary news source. A larger audience share means increased advertising revenue. This raises an important question: Is there really a liberal media bias or is this only a gimmick to attract viewers and advertising dollars?

Political sociologists approach the study of mass media in many different ways. We organize this vast body of research around the basic notions of political culture in that, culture, given our use of a fairly simple definition, includes values, knowledge, and symbolic systems in society. In this sense, we have learned that the mass media play a powerful role in influencing political values, political knowledge, and the symbolic dimensions of American politics in particular. The mass media, which we define to include here the news gathering and reporting organizations, the entertainment industry, and most recently, the Internet, are a collection of organizations that are outside the formal apparatus of the state (although in countries other than the United States, the mass media can be an arm of the state). The media are part of the civil sphere in that they may target not only citizens or popular audiences (mass), but typically the work of the mass media can influence the behavior of state actors.

Media and Political Knowledge

We begin with the work on the relationship between exposure to mass media and citizen behavior. This is where much of the research has focused. We can connect this long-standing research agenda to the early voting studies in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, which basically painted a picture of a fairly unsophisticated American electorate, as described earlier. As the media emerged to hold a greater presence in society by the 1960s—only fifty years ago—studies of what impacts the mass media had on changing the relative sophistication of the American electorate became more common.

One critical assumption in American democracy follows the dictum of Thomas Jefferson, who argued that educated citizens would be active participants in the processes of governance. At first glance, we do find a connection between the use of various forms of media and news and forms of political participation. As Figures 3.3 and 3.4 show, individuals who participated in the National Election Studies reported a greater use of television as a source of political information than newspapers but both television viewership and newspaper readership have increased between 1974 and 2004. The impact of media on citizen's knowledge about politics is at best described in the research as a complex pattern (Bishop 2004; Glynn et al. 1999; Markus 2007; Norris 2000). The link between information from media sources and political participation or interest in politics is trumped by other influences. For example, the relationship between watching C-SPAN and CNN or reading the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine tends to be a function of interest in politics to begin with. In other words, the effects of this vast potential for gathering political information at the mass level has not resulted in increased mass participation or mass interest in politics. Reading newspapers or news magazines has over time become less prominent a source of news for many, and the rise of the Internet as a source of political information is only now being studied.

In a recent review of this body of research, Goldstein and Ridout (2004) suggested that TV advertising in political campaigns actually creates knowledge as a "by-product" (211). In other words, the intent of political ads is to persuade voters to choose one candidate over another, or to convince citizens to support a particular proposition. Brians and Wattenberg (1996) found that even for individuals watching TV news and reading newspapers, TV political ads contributed more to political learning. Others who tested a similar hypothesis did not find support for the notion that political ads contribute to the knowledge of voters. Rather, the effect is present only under certain conditions, such as if the ad is sponsored by a political candidate, or the audience has low interest or low information to begin with (Just et al. 1996; Pfau et al.

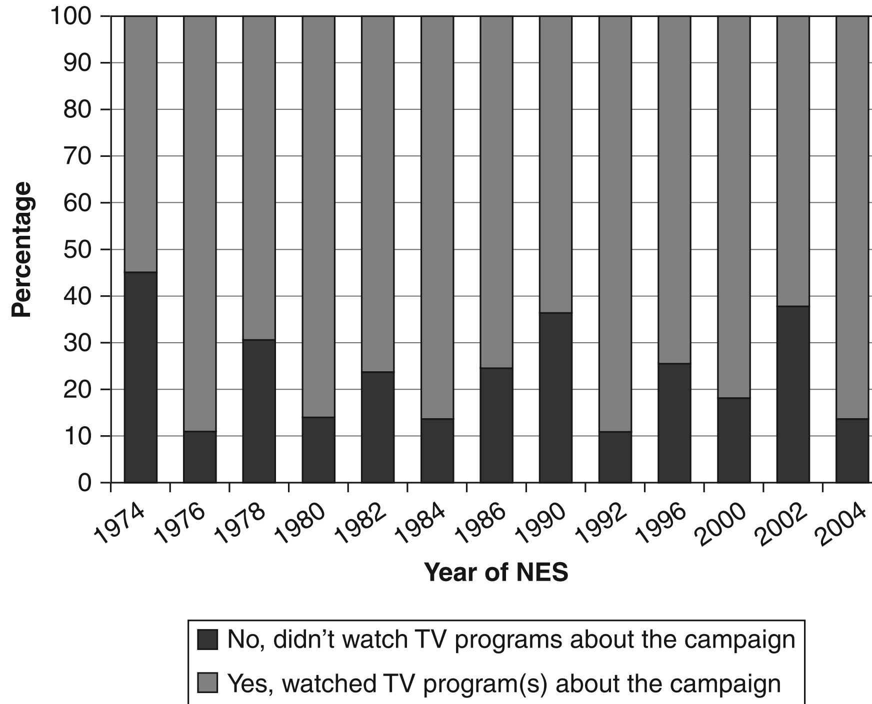

FIGURE 3.3 TV as a Source of Political Information, 1974–2004, American National Election Studies

Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor]. This graph was created at the Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program (http://sda.berkeley.edu), University of California [distributors], 2009. (These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation and a number of other sponsors.)

2002). Therefore, there is not a clear picture of the extent of the overall effect of media on knowledge about politics and under what conditions this effect consistently appears. More research needs to be conducted.

As we discussed earlier, the Internet and World Wide Web are a new form of mass media communication. Only recently have researchers started to examine what role the Internet plays in political sophistication and knowledge (Margolis 2007). Given the relative youth of this form of mass media (only twenty years), researchers have yet to untangle the many influences hypothesized to have effects, especially on younger citizens who have grown up with this new form of political communication. Bimber (2003) finds that much like other media sources, the Internet has relatively little impact on political knowledge or information for the general population. Rather, cyberspace has become a place for activists to post information about political events (e.g., posting comments on a blog after a president's speech). These sites tend to be visited by activists rather than the mass public seeking information by which to evaluate political outcomes. Yet, data collected by the National Election Studies (Figure 3.5) from voters in the last four national elections does show that more voters reported accessing the Internet for information. More research will be done for sure as sociologists continue to sort out what the Internet means to activists, voters, and the public at large.

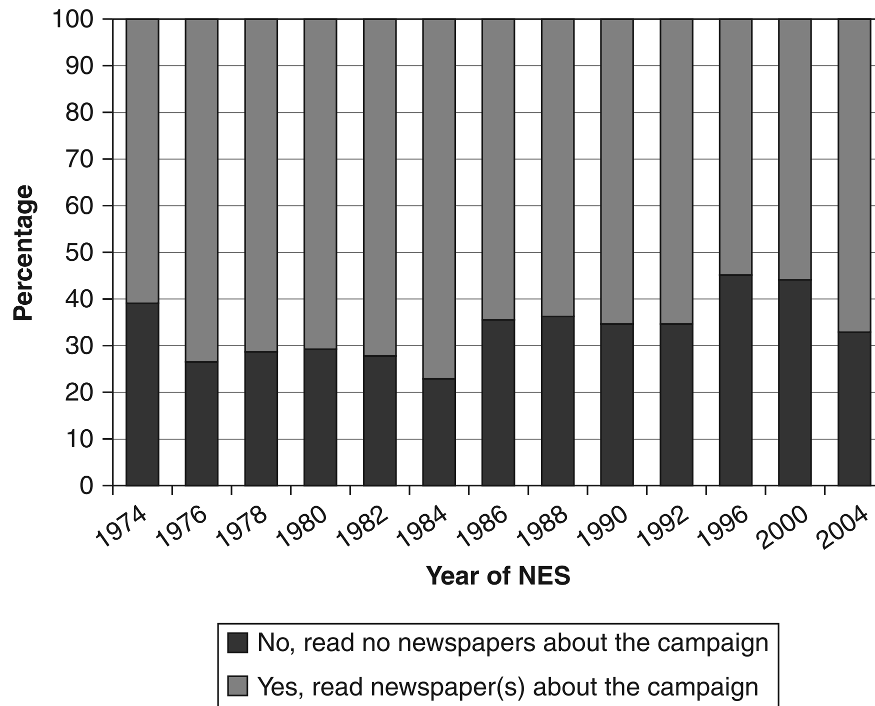

FIGURE 3.4 Newspapers as a Source of Political Information, 1974–2004, American National Election Studies

Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor]. This graph was created at the Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program (http://sda.berkeley.edu), University of California [distributors], 2009. (These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation and a number of other sponsors.)

Media and Political Values

One popular notion is that the media shapes values about politics as well as moral concerns, and as a result, the media are typically a source of scrutiny by interest groups seeking regulation of media images or even vocabulary. Research on attitudes and values suggests that for the most part, these are relatively stable in adulthood, and the media have only minor effects on major shifts in these attitudes and values. Political values are not likely to change for the greatest portion of individuals in society. As we saw earlier from the research on postmaterialism and the personality of modernity, values tend to be altered as a result of cohort or generational effects, including crises such as war, or economic depressions. The media do not significantly change political values per se. If anything, values tend to dictate what kinds of media are sought out or accessed by politically aware individuals.

In her review of the vast literature in this field, Graber (2006) finds that individuals tend to pay attention to news media sources such as TV or print media as a result of existing dispositions. For example, individuals predisposed to liberal or conservative values seek out sources that confirm these positions (Ansolebehere and Iyengar 1995; Becker and Kosicki 1995; Erikson and Tedin 2005; Glynn et al. 1999).

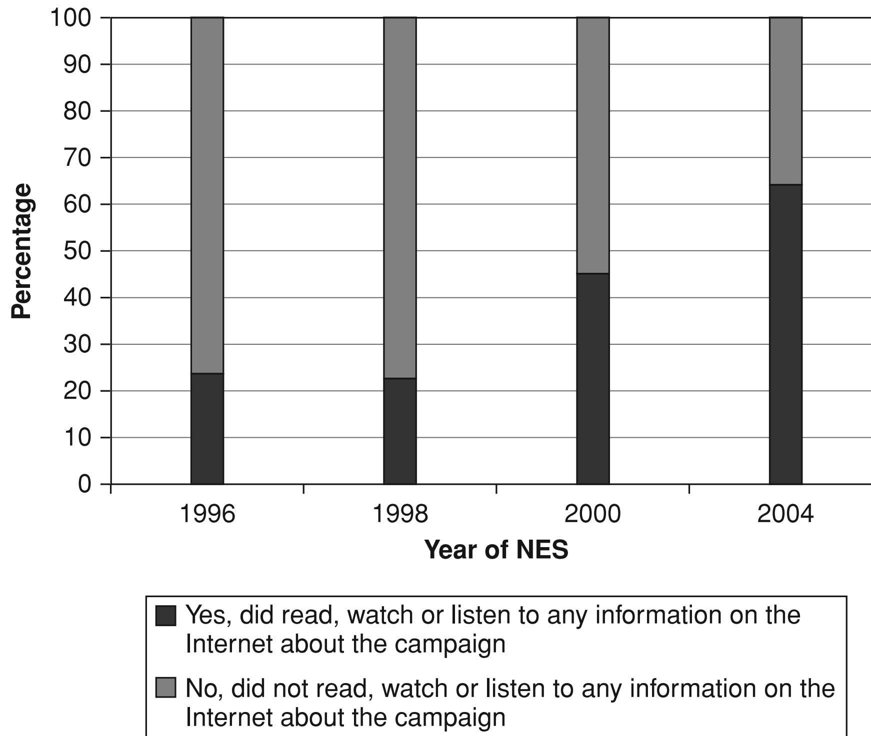

FIGURE 3.5 Internet as a Source of Political Information, 1996–2004, American National Election Studies

Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor]. This graph was created at the Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program (http://sda.berkeley.edu), University of California [distributors], 2009. (These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation and a number of other sponsors.)

Graber (2006) arranges this mixed picture on media effects into three frameworks of research. These three camps in media research have evolved in an attempt to explain and describe patterns of media use based on values, lifestyles, and personal dispositions:

> *Uses and Gratification*—This research suggests that individuals seek out media stories that fit personal uses or interests. "Put simply, proponents of this approach contend that individuals ignore personally irrelevant and unattractively presented messages. They pay attention to the kinds of things that they find useful and intellectually or emotionally gratifying if time and effort constraints permit it" (Graber 2006: 190). As some point out, these uses of information or media sources can vary across time and across experiences in life. What may be attractive for a college student participating in a political campaign for the first time may change as the student leaves the campaign and joins other causes.
>
> *Selective Exposure*—Individuals tend to avoid unpleasant things, and if one ever watches the evening network news, it tends to be filled with stories of death, destruction, war, disease, corruption, murder, and other negative topics! Moreover,

people tend to listen to those who hold similar attitudes. "Selectivity reduces the already slim changes that exposure to different views will alter an individual's established beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. Selective exposure therefore helps to explain the considerable stability that exists in orientations, such as party allegiance or foreign policy preferences" (Graber 2006: 192).

Agenda Setting—This body of research challenges the other two frameworks and suggests that the media does change values and attitudes through a process of agenda setting. "When people are asked which issues are most important to them personally or to their communities, their lists tend to correspond to cues in the news sources that they use in their communities" (Graber 2006: 194). Thus media sources can, in some ways, alter what groups of people value as political priorities or issue concerns. But, Graber warns that this influence "varies in potency." New concerns, for example, are more likely to be influenced by the media polls or reports as well as information required for understanding new issues.

These three perspectives are examples of competing findings in the current research on the impact of the media on citizens. The results are complex and tend to vary from social group, social context, and historical environment.

Media and Political Symbols

As we know from sociological work in the field of symbolic interaction, symbols are powerful mechanisms for building interpersonal understanding, the formation of social connections, the formation of group cohesion, and using symbolic cues to identify belonging to a group as well as individual differences. The symbolic system studied most extensively is language. Think about how words, phrases, tones, or inflections are used to connect to others. Early in the study of power, Deutsch (1955) identified at least five symbolic systems significant to the ways in which power is understood by individuals, and in some cases, manipulated in political processes:

1. abstractions (e.g., ideas, sayings, chants)
2. pictures (e.g., flags, animals, buildings, relics)
3. people (e.g., heroes, presidents from the past, saints)
4. places (e.g., national shrines, parks, tombs) and
5. organizations and institutions (e.g., courts, synagogues, military).

These symbolic systems are sources for influencing political values, knowledge, or more abstractions about power. The media use imagery to invoke emotions that can construct important political belief systems through the depiction of symbols. Television, print media, and more recently, the Internet, all use technology to convey images about elections, world politics, war, political candidates, political groups, and political power generally. What these images mean to the viewer is of interest to political sociologists.

In a series of works beginning in 1964, Edelman (1964, 1971, 1988) suggested that for the most part, American politics was about spectators watching the symbolic manipulation of governance by the elites. He suggested that the spectators, for the most part, played little role in actual decision making in the rule of the country. Rather, they were placated as spectators of sorts, reassured by the symbolic expression of the ruling elite. For example, Edelman described what symbolic expressions are used in the modern political convention. American politics in particular was about the manipulation of nationalist symbols. If you watch the Democratic or Republican National conventions on TV, you witness a highly choreographed event. You will see

symbols used to invoke party loyalty and bring attention to the candidate nominated for president that are organized around patriotic themes (e.g., red, white, and blue balloons or flags and banners), or you will hear speeches filled with symbolic phrases that may end up as sound bites on the evening news or become campaign slogans (e.g., in 2008 Barack Obama, the Democratic nominee for president, invoked change). These "spectacles" as Edelman describes them, were common dramas in the modern media age created to portray the American political process as open and inviting the participation of the masses.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND PLACE

The study of political culture has also revisited Durkheim's classical argument that values and social orientations are a function of social context. Researchers are exploring the connections among values, attitudes, ideologies, political action, social context, and place. More specifically, one path in this line of work explores the distribution of various political communities throughout society. As we will see in this section, place and social context have also been connected to nations and the development of nationalism.

Political Subcultures

One of the first major projects dedicated to understanding the link between place and political institutions as well as values was that of Daniel Elazar (1984, 1994). He proposed a model of state–federal institutional relationships based on a configuration of political value patterns found in the United States. He described political culture as "the particular pattern of orientation to political action in which each political system is embedded" (1984: 112). The importance of these patterns is manifest in the ways in which government and citizens interact in the creation of the public good. This theme is important not only to Elazar's work but also to the early writings on civic culture (Almond and Verba 1963, 1989). The purpose of this work was to find what roles local contexts, patterns of values, and attitudes play, and in which ways political power was used.

Elazar's theory of political culture established an explanation for how "patterns of orientation" affect power in the geographical structures created as states. He concluded that three influences were at work. Specifically, political culture affected state politics as a result of:

> (1) the set of perceptions of what politics is and what can be expected from government, held by both the general public and the politicians; (2) the kinds of people who become active in government and politics, as holders of elective offices, members of the bureaucracy, and active political workers; and (3) the actual way in which the art of government is practiced by citizens, politicians, and public officials in light of their perceptions. In turn, the cultural components of individual and group behavior in the various political systems make themselves felt at three levels: in the kind of civic behavior dictated by conscience and internalized ethical standards; in the character of law-abiding-ness displayed by citizens and officials; and, to a degree, in the positive actions of government. (Elazar 1984: 112)

According to Elazar, these cultural dimensions of political life were especially significant to patterns of federalism in the United States. Specifically, localized political cultures played a role in fostering national unity while at the same time contributing to tensions as a result of conflicts between regionalized political cultures.

Elazar went on to suggest that three traditions of political values were found in regions throughout the United States, and in subregions within the fifty states. His early work identifies three distinct political cultures: moralism, individualism, and traditionalism.

> *Moralist*—values that see the state as a way to achieve communal good; healthy civic competition with all citizens participating is a way to articulate this desire for the common good; the state serves a higher communal moral interest; associated with the upper New England states and northern tier of states continuing through Oregon and Washington.
>
> *Individualist*—approaches the state as an arena for the fair exchange of ideas dedicated to the smooth operation of governmental functions; government is like a business in that rewards of hard work and competition are shared with participants; political competition is seen as a contest between organizations rather than ideas; confined to lower New England and the industrial Midwest.
>
> *Traditionalist*—the state preserves the existing social order; political participation is associated with the interests of a political elite dedicated to "taking care of" the affairs of public policy on behalf of the current social order; participation is based on family connections or social ties within the community; predominant in the South.

According to Elazar, states and regions of the country could be characterized by these dominant patterns of value and political orientations. He also suggested that within states and regions, there were variations or pockets of variant beliefs. For example, while the northern tier of states from Maine to the northwest were predominantly moralist in their cultural configurations, these states also typically blended individualist cultural characteristics as well. Within each state, more localized subcultures were also distinguishable such as the moralist and traditionalist locales in the desert southwest.

While much of the work was criticized for failing to operationalize "political culture" so it could be measured consistently, a number of researchers have taken up the challenge of developing very detailed models of political culture in the United States. Lieske (1993, 2007) has found using county-level measures of religious, racial, economic, educational, and immigrant diversity, that distinct communities of political culture can be mapped throughout the United States. His work has suggested that there are "regional subcultures" with predominant normative patterns that affect political behaviors, party identification, and political attitudes. He pinpoints eleven distinct localized political subcultures in the United States:

- Heartland—creates a belt from Kansas through Iowa, Illinois, Ohio through Pennsylvania
- Latino—southwest including south Texas and New Mexico and parts of California and identified with the Catholic Church
- Nordic—along the north Dakota and Minnesota northlands with identity linked to the Lutheran church and church organizations
- Border—throughout California and Arizona with heavy concentrations of immigrant populations
- Mormon—concentrated in Utah
- Global—scattered throughout the United States; concentrated in urban areas associated with cosmopolitan and urban lifestyles
- Blackbelt—south and through the Appalachia communities
- Native-American—pockets in the west
- Germanic—scattered through the Nebraska, Northern Iowa, and Wisconsin through Pennsylvania

- Rurban—scattered throughout states west of the Mississippi with concentrations of rural and highly educated communities
- Anglo-French—upper New England, especially Maine

Clearly, as Lieske suggests, these subcultures are not marked by easily identifiable borders but rather, are best described as fluid pockets or concentrations of groups of people based on ethnicity, rural/urban environments, economic orientations, and religious identities.

An important question in the research on political subcultures and political geography is, does it matter to political processes or the distribution of power? A few studies have started to examine this (Miller, Barker, and Carman 2006). One significant argument is that these various expressions of political subcultures create regionalisms in the United States. This has historically been significant to electoral outcomes. Recall that the balance of power in the creation of the United States Congress, for example, was to some extent an issue of geography. Seats in the U.S. House of Representatives were apportioned to states based on population, and seats in the Senate were apportioned equally to each state—two per state. Thus, policy in Congress can be changed when a southern bloc of conservative senators hold up a nomination for the U.S. Supreme Court, or when "blue dog" Democrats (fiscal conservatives primarily from the Midwest and the South) in the House of Representatives effectively block ways to fund health care reform. In this sense, the political values of the regions in the United States are expressed in the policy-making process and have impact on policy outcomes.

The manifestations of state and regional political subcultures go beyond voting blocs in Congress. Some fear that as the country changes demographically, ideological differences rooted in more local settings will create greater social division. As we will see in Chapter 6, Putnam (2000) predicted that these divisions would result in greater civic disengagement over the long term. Textbox 3.4 explores the depth of these subcultures at the community and neighborhood level, where Bishop (2008) traces the impact of cultural pockets of settlement to what he fears to be further political polarization in the United States. These projects would suggest that another impact of the political culture arising out of geographical settlement is fragmentation.

Nationalism

One could conclude from the previous section that the United States is a nation divided. Certainly, those who argue that the "culture wars" have pitted the Northeast against the South and West suggest that political culture in the United States is dispersed. What holds us together then? An interesting track in the study of political culture has only recently examined the nature of nationalism, not only in the United States but in other parts of the world. Nationalism is in many ways how we conceptualize the cultural dimensions of the nation-state. Some scholars treat the state as a structural element, and view nationalism as a cultural element. Values and beliefs about the state or national identity result in patterns of behavior associated with loyalty or even patriotism.

According to Greenfield and Eastwood (2005), the study of nationalism has taken two basic paths. Early works were described as "structural." Citing the works of Earnest Gellner, they describe nationalism as a "form of consciousness" (248) that surrounds state structures, especially those that enforce or create social order. Gellner theorized that nations retained a "shared culture" (248) inherent in the nation as community or group: "a very distinctive species of patriotism, and one which becomes pervasive and dominant only under certain social conditions, which in fact prevail in the modern world, and nowhere else" (quoted by Greenfield and Eastwood 2005: 248). Using a similar cultural approach, Anthony Smith defined nationalism emerging out of "a named human population which shares myths, memories, a mass public culture, a designated homeland,

TEXTBOX 3.4

Political Birds of a Feather?

Emile Durkheim used the term *homophily* to describe forms of social cohesion driven by interests, jobs, religion, neighborhood, and social interests. He believed that people with similarities tended to settle together in communities. Some would argue that political interests may be reflected in this pattern of settlement or place. Recall in this chapter that Elazar and others suggested that there were distinct political cultures in the United States based on a geographical diffusion of political values and ideologies. In a recent book, Bill Bishop (2008) summarizes evidence that there is a "clustering of like-minded" Americans who he fears will create a triumph of localism over a unified national political community.

In commenting on the book, columnist Robert Samuelson made a number of observations recognizing this sociological pattern:

> People prefer to be with people like themselves. For all the celebration of "diversity," it's sameness that dominates. Most people favor friendships with those who have similar backgrounds, interests and values. It makes for more shared experiences, easier conversations and more comfortable silences. Despite many exceptions, the urge is nearly universal. It's human nature.
>
> The increasing segregation of America by social and cultural values—not just by income—helps explain America's growing political polarization, Bishop argues in his new book (naturally: "The Big Sort"). Because prosperity enables more Americans to live where they please, they gravitate to lifestyle ghettos—and that has significant political implications. Citing studies of social psychology, Bishop says that group consciousness actually amplifies likes and dislikes. Views become more extreme. People become more self-righteous and more suspicious of outsiders.

Samuelson argues that the effects of this segregation will make it more difficult to create the "great middle" or centrist majority necessary for governance in the United States:

> What Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called "the vital center" is being slowly disenfranchised. Party "bases" become more important than their numbers justify. Passionate partisans dislike compromise and consensus. They want to demolish the other side. Whether from left or right, the danger is a tyranny of true believers.

What impact does political culture have on the ability of the state to create majorities necessary for governing? What effect might political cultural clustering have on democratic processes in the future? Does place matter to political culture?

Credit: Robert J. Samuelson. 2008. "Political Perils of a 'Big Sort'?" *Washington Post* Wednesday, August 6: A17.

economic unity and equal rights and duties for all members" (quoted by Greenfield and Eastwood 2005: 248). Nationalism, according to structuralist views, connected cultural elements to structures of state, nation, and territory.

Greenfield and Eastwood call the second approach to nationalism "constructivist." Citing the works of Benedict Anderson, they find that this body of analysis casts nationalism as a projection of sorts of the members of the nation-state: "because the majority of inhabitants or members of any given nation do not know each other and do not meet face to face, they cannot be, presumably, a 'real' community but can only constitute an imagined one" (Greenfield and

Eastwood 2005: 249). Using this approach, we can understand nationalism as reliant on symbols or myths that construct a sense of belonging or membership. For example, it has become a tradition to begin sporting events in the United States with the national anthem. As audience members sing along we assume that membership in a nation is constructed through that sense of the moment.

The cultural roots of nationalism are varied. One source is the collective memory of the people in a given territory, who over time craft a symbolism and imagery that creates national heroes or principles celebrated in the collective memory. For example, in his studies of President's Day and the mythology surrounding George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, Schwartz (2008: 78) shows us how ritual constructs societal recollections:

> Collective memory, whose content holidays sustain, refers to the social distribution of beliefs, feelings, and moral judgments about the past. The primary vehicles of collective memory are history—the establishing and propagating of facts about the past through research, monographs, textbooks, museums, and mass media—and commemoration; the process of selecting from the historical record those facts most relevant to society's ideals and symbolizing them by iconography, monuments, shrines, place-names, and ritual observance. Mediating the relation between history and individual belief, holidays are major parts of all commemorative repertories.

In other words, members of the group draw upon the collective representations found in the elements of culture (e.g., art, mass media, architecture, museums, knowledge) and incorporate themes into enacted rituals. Nationalism is created through this social context.

Another variable in understanding nationalism springs from the intricacies related to membership as related to the territory and state. The creation of the community requires boundaries or definitions of who belongs, and consistent with social history, who doesn't belong. Research on nationalism has also typically grappled with the role and significance of ethnicity (Lane and Ersson 2005; Vujačić 2002). On one hand, ethnic identities (especially race and religion) have served as the basis for creating a unified group that resulted in the creation of a nation-state. For example, separations of the former USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) into distinct nations were guided by ethnic and regional identities. On the other hand, identities force separation of the state—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are no longer united. The example of the USSR shows that ethnicity can also serve as the basis for challenges to nationalism. Moreover, history is filled with what results when ethnic identity reaches extremism, as found in Hitler's Nazi Germany. Nationalism in this regard resulted in ethnoviolence and genocide. The role of ethnicity in defining our conceptions of nationalism, including cultural nuances, and especially as nationalism is cast as inclusion or exclusion of groups, will play a significant role in future research in an emerging field of political sociology.

A third way of characterizing contemporary dynamics of nationalism focuses on current debates and reactions related to globalization. As patterns of social organization create global interconnections and result in embracing Western values and beliefs (culture), where does nationalism fit? One argument is that the forces of globalization may in fact reinforce nationalist identities. For example, while China appears to embrace Western capitalist practices in the global economy, and McDonald's and the Internet find their way into Beijing, China is finding ways to resist these influences. (See Chapter 10 for an extended discussion of the relationship between nationalism and globalization.) As Vujačić (2002) observes, global economic interests eventually prevailed over some hardline nationalist interests when the European Union (EU) was created. The interactions between nationalism and globalization will no doubt continue to be of interest to political sociologists.

CONCLUSION

Culture plays many roles in the social processes associated with the distribution of power in society. As you can see from this chapter, political sociologists have examined the role of culture in politics in different ways. These various paths of research take us in different directions. What is exciting is that more research is being done to further refine our understanding of what role culture plays in political processes. For example, the field of political socialization has been relatively dormant for thirty years. Only recently have social scientists begun to revisit early findings in light of advances in research related to developmental psychology, political cognition and value formation, and generational studies of political attitudes. Revisiting political socialization processes seems likely in the work ahead.

Some of the work on how people develop political values and attitudes has been advanced by innovations in research. The study of world values and contrasts in how people view power and politics has gained much from comparing citizens from different countries around the world. By comparing belief systems, ideologies, the role of subcultures, or the impact of media on systems of political values, cross-cultural studies will develop much needed insight into the significance of culture to politics in societies throughout the world. Here too advances in the study of the many forms of mass media further highlight the nature of culture and politics in the modern world. As we conclude that TV has "mixed effects" on values, attitudes, and beliefs but that these effects vary by social group, the door opens to future research. Only recently have political sociologists begun to track what impact the Internet and emerging forms of mass media and mass communication have on politics. These are fascinating times indeed for political sociologists.

The significance of political ideology to the study of politics and culture has not died out in spite of continued struggles over how to define ideology. We know that broad-based political orientations in society play a role in patterns related to political systems, as well as in choices of political groupings and affiliations. This research has reminded us that social context matters. We also know that political culture and place have an apparent connection. Social groups, including peer groups, workplace groups, communities, and larger geographical units such as towns and counties, follow Durkheim's principle of homophily—birds of the same social feather do tend to flock together.

In the chapters ahead we continue to explore the significance of culture to politics. The discussions ahead move us to consider the politics of everyday life and political participation, including voting, policy outcomes, politics and corporations, and globalization. As we will see, aspects of culture play a role in all of these key concepts.

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