EDITED BY

ROBERT Y.
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The Oxford Handbook *of*

AMERICAN PUBLIC
OPINION AND THE MEDIA

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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and

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PREFACE

PUBLIC opinion and the media form the foundation of representative democracy in the United States. They are the subject of enormous scrutiny by scholars, pundits, and ordinary citizens. This volume takes on the "big questions" about public opinion and the media in popular debates and in social scientific research. The volume brings together the thinking of leading academic experts, delivering fresh assessments of what we know about public opinion, the media, and their interconnections. This volume is particularly attentive to the changes in the mass media and communications technology and the sharp expansion in the number of cable television channels, websites and blogs, and the new social media, which are changing how news about political life is collected and conveyed. The changing dynamics of the media and public opinion have created a process that we call *informational interdependence*. These extensive interconnections exert a wide range of influences on public opinion as the processes by which information reaches the public have been transformed.

In addition to encompassing critical developments in public opinion and the media, this volume brings together a remarkable diversity of research from psychology, genetics, political science, sociology, and the study of gender, race, and ethnicity. Many of the chapters integrate analyses of broader developments in public opinion and political behavior with attention to critical variations based on economic status, education and sophistication, religion, and generational change, drawing on research that uses survey data and experimental designs. Moreover, the book covers the variations in public opinion and media coverage across domestic and foreign policy issues.

As academics well know—and as we tell our students—every project takes longer than you think. This book was no exception. We thank Dominic Byatt, Jennifer Lunsford, Sarah Parker, and Elizabeth Suffling at Oxford University Press, and copy-editor Laurien Berkeley, for their patience and superb assistance in moving this volume to publication. We are especially grateful to our good colleague George Edwards for proposing to Oxford that we undertake this volume. We share credit for what we have put together with him, but take full responsibility for any shortcomings. Stephen Thompson and Michael Scott provided able assistance as we scrambled to finish the volume, as did the proofreader, Debbie Sutcliffe, and indexer, Michael Tombs.

We thank most of all the outstanding scholars who agreed readily and with good cheer to write chapters for us. We stole their valuable time so that we and this volume's readers would benefit from their highly engaged research and collective expertise.

Columbia University's Department of Political Science, its Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, and the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and Center for the Study of Politics and Governance have provided

us with strong academic homes and support. We began work on this volume while Shapiro was finishing the 2006/7 year as a Visiting Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation, which supported work that is reflected in this volume's final chapter regarding political leadership, "pathologies," and partisan conflict.

And as always, each of us is indebted to our soul mates, Nancy Rubenstein and Julie Schumacher, who were patient as we worked on this volume—and let us know that.

R.Y.S.
L.R.J.

New York and St Paul
August 2010

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

THE NEW
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OF PUBLIC OPINION, THE
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INFORMATIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE

*Public Opinion and the Media in the
New Communications Era*

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LAWRENCE R. JACOBS
ROBERT Y. SHAPIRO

WE have grown accustomed to the steady parade of new devices for communications and novel uses of them. In the historic span of human communications, this transition has been extraordinary in its impact and speed. The Internet expanded and took off in its use just fifteen years ago, sparking a renaissance of new communication software and machines that extended beyond computers to highly mobile PDAs—personal digital assistants—that connect millions to the Internet in their everyday activity. Google's search engine transformed access to information on the Internet, starting a mere dozen years ago and subsequently becoming a dominant corporate presence. Facebook and Twitter stitched together millions of people but were only created in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Slate and the Drudge Report helped launch the deluge of online news sites just over a decade ago, during the late 1990s; the Huffington Post and other hard-edged partisan news and news-aggregating websites have proliferated in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Most of the traditional media froze with uncertainty as communication and information-sharing technologies took off, and they struggled to understand and anticipate the consequences for their industry. An ongoing period of transition enveloped the traditional media as they labored to adapt to a chaotic swirl of change: audience and readership declined, as did advertising revenue, which coincided with successive economic downturns in the first decade of the twenty-first century that forced cost cutting; and a legal battle broke out over the free use of the mainstream press's content

by online news sites and aggregators. The traditional media have adapted to the new online world—often with mixed success—both by incorporating the new online capabilities (from using the Internet as a delivery mechanism to post stories, to cross-genre productions in which newspapers "televised" stories and networks and cable channels posted hard copy), as well as by capitalizing on social media tools with many reporters using Facebook and Twitter.

The technological breakthroughs introduced new communication capabilities at lightning speed. But the technological change alone does not tell us much about how this new era affected interpersonal relations and collective communications, as well as the social power in controlling the interpretation of events, the construction of their meaning, and the diversity of "voices" that are heard in government policy circles. History is full of technological breakthroughs (from the incandescent light bulb to the modern digital computer) that took decades to become widely adopted and to transform our social interactions. How has the communications revolution affected government and its operations? What have been its effects on individuals and their relationships with each other, politicians, and the new media? How have online capabilities remade "the media" and the role of individuals in the production and distribution of news? What are their consequences for public deliberation and democracy?

Innovations in communications not only expanded technological capabilities but also sparked a social revolution in the delivery and consumption of information, with profound implications for political news and public opinion. Three changes have transformed political communications. First, the organization and business models for news organizations and other information providers are being redesigned. Traditional media have dramatically reduced their staff and news coverage as the already significant decline in advertising revenue accelerated during the economic slowdown and financial crises of the early 2000s. The economic decline sharply reduced the supply of news reports and investigations by the press not only of the national government and its policies but also of state and local developments. The *American Journalism Review* (2009) reported that the number of full-time reporters covering state government and politics dropped by one third between 2003 and 2009. As political reporting by the traditional media retreated, cable programs from Fox News to CNBC challenged the once dominant networks as news providers. In addition, new Internet providers emerged from bloggers to online news services like Politico, Salon, and liberal and conservative "aggregators" of news content. The supply of information and commentary is no longer monopolized by the authoritative news organizations of the past and its reporters and editors but is also produced by a wide array of sources, opening a new age in which individuals have opportunities to select the content and format they prefer.

The second change that has revolutionized political communications is the increased capacity and motivation of ordinary individuals to find and consume extensive and diverse information *online*. Interest in information and the skill to access it readily through the Internet have expanded as education, employment, and occupational advancement require increasing facility with information technology. In addition,

there is growing demand for political news, especially among the most engaged. Although most Americans share broad and fundamental policy views (Fiorina 2005; Page and Jacobs 2009), those who intensely follow politics and policy debates are especially motivated to find and consume a new range of online news sources, which, in effect, have supplanted the traditional gatekeepers of political information (Prior 2007).

The third change has been the technological breakthrough in information production and distribution. The widespread penetration and use of computers has combined with organizational changes in the news business and with citizens' new capacity and motivation to transform the standard one-way communications of the traditional media into dynamic relationships involving public opinion, social media, and the traditional press. The result is *informational interdependence*.

The information system has shifted from one that was controlling, stable, and profitable to one that has become highly fluid, enabling of individual choice, and driven by a host of motivations from pecuniary to idealistic and ideational. In the new system, communication and the interaction of public opinion and the political media are social and relational. Interactivity, endogeneity, mutual dependence, and social networking are the new forms of consumption, production, and engagement.

This era of informational interdependence is a dramatic departure from earlier models of communication flows, which—despite differences—treated individuals as social isolates and the press as a delivery vehicle. Research reflected the technological and relational patterns of these earlier dynamics of information and communication. During the first half of the twentieth century, the dominant research model emphasized the direct and far-reaching impact of media on a passive public. Media effects were described during this era as hypodermic needles injecting the body politic with what would become beliefs, evaluations, and loyalties (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1992). An alternative account then emerged during the 1970s that stressed the "marginal effects" of the media owing to several dynamics: the capacity and tendency of individuals to select, reject, or ignore information from the media and instead to rely on their social interactions with peers and their own direct experience (Gamson 1992; Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992); the stability of core public policy preferences, which, if they changed, did so gradually and in response to the accumulation of new information (Page and Shapiro 1992); durable structures of news production and coordination that generated broadly similar information across disparate organizations, making it possible to generalize about "the" media; and the media's coverage of conflicting messages that produce offsetting effects. Although the "hypodermic model" and "minimal effects" interpretations of the media and public opinion reached quite different conclusions, they both rested on a set of common assumptions: the media and public opinion were conceived as discrete, separate entities and their relationship was modeled as one-way causation in which "the media" affected "public opinion."

The chapters in this volume mark a dramatic departure from the underlying assumptions of these past accounts in two respects. First, the chapters offer a cutting edge cataloguing and assessment of contemporary research on public opinion, the media, and their interconnections. They describe, synthesize, and critique the large and

vibrant bodies of research on the media and public opinion. Rarely has one volume provided such a broad-ranging compendium; more than forty chapters review the latest research in the study of public opinion and the media and offer accessible introductions to those new to these fields as well as insightful essays for more seasoned readers. Second, this volume develops a unique and critical synthesis of the transformations in today's media world as creating systems of informational interdependence. The social relations of public opinion and mass media are a common theme in many of the chapters, as is the heterogeneity of media messages. Third, this volume raises profound questions about the normative consequences of the new information environment: to what extent have the proliferation of news and information sources, their co-production, and other new developments provided a boon for democracy and genuine public deliberation; or intensified existing threats to democratic processes— or created new ones?

The sections that follow go into greater depth in outlining the new model of information interdependence that emerges from this volume's chapters. We also discuss the distinctive features of public opinion and the media that, according to the latest research, define the conditions under which the two interact. The last section considers some of the broader implications of the new information interdependence for democracy and public deliberation.

INFORMATIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE

This new interdependence of the media and public opinion is based on three mutually beneficial relationships: ecological symbiosis, the co-production of political news, and the new social relations of political news.

Ecological Symbiosis

First, the information environment feeds off the symbiosis of government elites, media, and mass public. Chapter 3, by Brian J. Gaines and James H. Kuklinski, approaches the "informational environment holistically," focusing on the "strategic interactions between politicians and members of the media" and, one might add, ordinary individuals. "Politicians . . . need the media to convey particular messages to the public," they reason, and "the media need access to politicians to generate news . . . [and] to make money, which requires that they report stories of interest to ordinary citizens." These symbiotic relationships "[shape] what is and what is not included in the news . . . and how ordinary citizens react." Chapter 2, by W. Russell Neuman, Bruce Bimber, and Matthew Hindman, stresses a similar dynamic of interconnection created by new information technology and its use—"the interoperability, interactivity, intelligence, portability, and increased information bandwidth of these networked devices."

Younger generations are often most engaged in the new information and technology, creating the potential (as Laura Stoker and Jackie Bass describe in Chapter 28) to "positively influence the civic and political engagement of young people."

The chapters in this volume specify the processes and mechanisms that co-join the media, politics, and public opinion. Thomas E. Nelson (Chapter 12) examines the double action of framing: framing organizes government decisions and news reports on them into "compact, easily digested summaries" and responds to the demands of consumers for certain types and forms of information. It both serves the information needs of the public and provides the media with a way of describing complex news or information.

The mutual interests of the press and government are well known, although their interactions with public opinion are subject to increasingly sophisticated analysis. Douglas C. Foyle's chapter on foreign policy (Chapter 40) traces the interplay of Washington elites, who often monopolize information about national security, with the media that depend on government elites as sources. Although the press follows the broad contours of the Washington policy debates and attitudes, "political actors (e.g., the president, Congress, foreign policy experts) and the media interact to shape and control how an issue, problem, or situation is understood." Framing, priming, and agenda-setting are the mechanisms that shape the content of policy-relevant information and how it is consumed by individuals, often serving as "powerful tools in strengthening or weakening public support for foreign policies." Foyle explains why, even as Washington elites control critical information, both public opinion and the media can react independently of leaders in response to foreign policy.

Matthew A. Baum and Angela Jamison (Chapter 8) trace the interdependence of elites, media, and public opinion in the production and consumption of "soft news"— namely, human interest, dramatic, or entertaining press reports of politics that appeal to those less attentive to public affairs, as distinct from "hard news" coverage of leaders in government and business, major national and international issues, or disasters or developments that can alter daily life. Rejecting claims that soft news deprives citizens of the information they need to make informed choices among candidates or policies, Baum and Jamison describe the impact of soft news on individual attentiveness, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Not only does soft news affect individuals, it can also loop into the decisions of the media and politicians. Searching to expand their audiences, the organizations producing soft news "cater not only to those with little interest in or attentiveness to politics but also to more politically attentive, ideological, and active citizens." Politicians seeking votes are acutely aware of the opportunity, as is evident by their appearance on daytime and late-night talk shows like *The View* and *Late Night with David Letterman*, as well as John Stewart's news satire the *Daily Show*. Baum and Jamison conclude that informational interdependence is defined, in part, by the "interaction of the supply and demand sides of soft news—that is, on the ways that politicians understand and then take advantage of soft news, and in turn the ways that audiences seek or respond to the resulting content."

The interactions of elites, media, and public opinion have been exploited by international terrorists. Brigitte L. Nacos and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon (Chapter 42) dissect and

explain the strategies of terrorists to accomplish what they seek (massive publicity) by exploiting the needs of media for must-see coverage and by grabbing the public's undivided attention. In this way, "terrorists and media organizations feed off each other." The spread of global television networks and Internet news coverage has accelerated the symbiotic relationship among terrorists, media, and public opinion.

The Co-Production of Political News

The second aspect of today's informational interdependence is that political news is increasingly being co-produced—often in uncoordinated and unplanned ways—by news organizations, ordinary citizens, and government officials. Individuals (including high-level White House and congressional officials) and a variety of novel organizations and collaborations have generated a new supply of political news through online sites (from Politico to Slate and the Drudge Report), blogs, YouTube videos, and themed aggregators (such as liberal or conservative compilations of like-minded news stories), as well as online feedback to the stories filed by traditional reporters. One of the most important features of the Internet is its social networking through Facebook, Twitter, and others new capabilities. Where news media used to be a static bulletin board, they have become sites of dynamic exchanges with some posts going "viral" as it is linked to, forwarded, and commented on by hundreds of thousands or more (such as a YouTube video of a Virginia senator using racially derogatory language or Iranian police shooting a young, innocent bystander at a protest).

Reflecting on these changes in the supply of political news, Marion R. Just (Chapter 7) reports that "the audience has invaded the newsroom and is shaping the definition of news," not only by "contributing news content and comments," but also by "taking on the roles of distribution and editorial signaling via social network computing." As the new era arrives in which political news "will necessarily be collaborations between the professionals and the audience," control over news content has slipped from the grasp of traditional news organizations and their editors and journalists as untrained individuals and new organizations and collaborations emerge and evolve.

Michael Schudson (Chapter 4) approaches the changing nature of news production from the perspectives of normative political theory and the history of news reporting, but in the end also concludes that it is "increasingly originated by citizens, rank amateurs." He points to the shift away from "a largely 'vertical' mass medium—from the journalists to the readers and viewers—... [toward a relationship that is] increasingly 'horizontal.'" Schudson suggests that the co-production of news in the era of the Internet ushered in several significant changes—the velocity and speed of new production and the number of people participating on a global level have grown substantially. In the process, traditional news organizations have had to evolve; the "horizontal circulation of news acts back quickly on the consciousness of the journalists and helps to shape what they choose to cover." As the distinction between news producers

and audience breaks down, the earlier tendency toward treating individuals as passive receivers of news is also giving way to research on individuals as co-producers.

The New Social Relations of Political News

The third component of informational interdependence is its radically social and relational dynamics. In the previous era of traditional media, the audience was often conceptualized as disconnected individuals. In the new era, the production and consumption of political news occurs within webs of social relations.

Patricia Moy and Muzammil M. Hussain (Chapter 14) stress the social implications of news organizations adopting technology that facilitates interactivity and the "blurring of mass and interpersonal communication." The audience now produces news content and comments on stories filed by traditional media; journalists both receive online feedback and track audience interest. The result appears to intensify the social interactions and political discussions in which citizens engage and to facilitate "talking about politics alongside consuming political news from the media."

New Research Approaches to Study New Forms of Political Communications

The distinctive motivations and resources of the media, political actors, and everyday citizens generate patterns of news production, consumption, and political behavior. Studying today's information environment in isolation misses significant interactive relationships that account for both political communications and the activities of each actor.

The emergence of informational interdependence requires, according to a number of chapters, a new research methodology. Gaines and Kuklinski recommend analysis of the entire context within which citizens learn about and respond to politics. Moy and Hussain call for new research that focuses on the "interpersonal discussion" in "non-face-to-face settings" and on "what actually transpires within these discussions." Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Bruce W. Hardy (Chapter 15) also recommend that research adjust to "citizens now build[ing] their own media experiences" and to the increasing social production and distribution of news by tracking "who sent what information to whom in what form through what channel."

In addition, analysis is shifting from static models of one-way causation in which the media influence the public's agenda, to research on the simultaneity of news production and consumption (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, 2010). Moreover, the earlier tendency to examine print as opposed to broadcast media or the distinctive features of individual organizations is shifting toward the diffuse and widening array of old and new media formats. Furthermore, research using a range of methodologies will be necessary

to track the new political communications systems. Lynn Vavreck and Shanto Iyengar (Chapter 10) suggest that the diffusion of the Internet and rapid evolution of new media has "chang[ed] the real world of political communication" and reshaped how researchers use experimental and survey methodologies in political communication research. They project that "as technology diffuses still further, the generalizability gap between experimental and survey methods will continue to close." Other authors in this volume also emphasize the increasing importance of experimental designs (often in conjunction with other research approaches) to study public opinion, political behavior, and the media.

In short, an era of informational interdependence requires new approaches to research that reconsider causality and connectedness between media and public opinion.

THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

Understanding today's informational interdependence requires moving beyond broad generalizations to specifying the nature and conditions of the interactions between the media and public opinion. The specific characteristics of each affect the terms on which they interact and to what end. This volume's contributors elaborate on the interdependence of the media and public opinion and also identify the distinctive traits of each and the mechanisms that link them. A new generation of research makes clear that the media do not dictate public opinion but rather engage in more subtle processes in which they respond to how individuals acquire and process information and trigger cognitive and affective reactions by the public. Research has moved beyond the homogeneous categorizations of "the media" and "public opinion" to distinguish disparate news sources and platforms and different subgroups of the public.

The Public and Information Processing

Decades of research demonstrate that public opinion is not an epiphenomenon of the media or elite discourse. Individuals and the aggregate public have durable attitudes and capacities to interpret information on politics and policy. Illustrating a particularly dramatic case, John Mueller (Chapter 41) stresses how media coverage of war can have limited impact on public opinion: "In general, the media do not seem to have much independent impact on public attitudes toward war"; the public is "substantially set [ting] its own agenda" and being "quite selective." Delving deeper into the psychological processes by which individuals form opinions, Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman (Chapter 11) argue that the impact on individuals of communications and crafted messages from political elites are mediated by prior attitudes and their degree of availability, accessibility, and applicability. "A consideration highlighted by a communication frame cannot impinge on an attitude," they reason, "unless it is available in memory." Elite strategies of communication will have more impact on more

knowledgeable individuals, though strong prior attitudes will mitigate the impact. This more nuanced approach to opinion change is reinforced by Neuman, Bimber, and Hindman (Chapter 2), who suggest that the effects of the information revolution on mass public opinion vary (depending in part on interactions with preexisting political attitudes and policy preferences) and may not be as extensive as assumed: "The dramatic changes in technology have not led to similarly dramatic changes in the political psychology of the average citizen."

A building block, then, for research on informational interdependence is that the content of public attitudes and mechanisms of opinion formation matter and that analyzing the heterogeneity of individuals is critical. Whether, how, and to what extent individuals use, produce, and are influenced by political information is not uniform but rather varies. Four broad features of public opinion and dimensions of individuals' variability are identified by the contributors to this volume.

Four Features of Public Opinion

First, individuals are not blank slates when they are exposed to political information. Rather, they harbor beliefs, affiliations, and interests that have profound effects on how they perceive the world, what information they accept as credible, and how they interpret it. William G. Jacoby (Chapter 27) reviews the large body of research on individual attitude structures and belief systems and, in particular, ideology and partisanship, which form the "organizational foundations for many individuals' political beliefs and attitudes" and an "integral element of public opinion." Jason Barabas (Chapter 36) emphasizes that political attitudes and affiliations with political parties "shape how people look at the world" and their "perceptions of reality," even if they contradict the objective facts. This kind of partisan cuing may affect perceptions of the economy as well as policy debates. For example, when President George W. Bush pushed for expanding Medicare to cover prescription medications, a number of self-identified Republicans reversed their earlier opposition while some Democratic partisans flipped in their support for the expansion even though they had long favored this change. During the presidency of Barack Obama, Democrats and Republicans have reversed their assessment of the economy and this has affected their quite divergent evaluations of his job performance. Shifts in public attitudes and evaluations based on partisanship and which party is in power occurred in the past (see Page and Shapiro 1992) but may have intensified more recently owing to the dynamics of informational interdependence—a topic that we return to in the volume's final chapter (Chapter 43).

Second, individuals differ across several critical dimensions, which open up significant disparities in how information is processed and what impact it delivers. Vincent Hutchings and Spencer Piston (Chapter 35) report that levels of knowledge and sophistication among Americans are lower than those found in other Western countries, and, as Leslie McCall and Jeff Manza (Chapter 34) note especially, information and knowledge are unequally distributed across classes owing to "differences in education and family background." McCall and Manza connect these disparities to the acquisition and processing of

information by associating "socioeconomic differences . . . in the formation of public opinion" with "class biases in political participation and media framing."

In addition to differences across individuals in knowledge, sophistication, and socioeconomic background and class, there are distinctive attitudinal patterns and beliefs across racial and ethnic groups in America that are replacing the black–white divide with a more wide-ranging multiracial politics. Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Seung-Jin Jang (Chapter 31) trace the mix of generally liberal views of Latinos toward government and self-identification as moderate and conservative. Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Janelle Wong (Chapter 32) find variations among Asians based on whether they immigrated or were born in the US and their nation of origin. While noting that Asian Americans tend to identify with the Democratic Party (especially Asian Indians, Japanese, and Koreans), they observe that "partisanship . . . is clearly a social identity up for grabs among Asian Americans . . . [because] a large proportion of this newest group of Americans says that they do not think in partisan terms." Although there are distinctive racial and ethnic attitudes and beliefs, these intersect with individual differences in knowledge and sophistication as well as in class and socioeconomic status.

African Americans, as Fredrick C. Harris explains (Chapter 30), are loyal supporters of Democratic Party candidates and at the same time harbor diverse policy attitudes: compared to whites, they are more liberal on government social policies but more conservative on social issues such as gay marriage, prayer in schools, and abortion rights. The history of African Americans has contributed to group solidarity, support for independence from whites, and a consistent belief in the "linked fate" of blacks— namely, the sense of individual blacks that they share a common experience with other blacks and are jointly impacted as a group by politics and government policies. Linked fate has been a persistent influence on policy preferences and political attitudes, helping to account for the similarity of African-Americans' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions regardless of levels of education and income. Harris suggests that the election of Barack Obama both reflected changing attitudes about identity and will "shape black public opinion for years to come."

Gender also conditions attitudes toward policy issues, support for candidates, and political participation. Leonie Huddy and Erin Cassese (Chapter 29) report that women have been less supportive than men of government use of force and more supportive of social welfare spending and the Democratic Party (reflected in a roughly 8 to 10 percentage point "gender gap" in voting). Although women have turned out at higher rates than men for elections, they participate at lower rates in other political activities and express less interest in and knowledge about campaigns. Gender has also influenced the broad perceptions of male and female candidates: voters have associated political leadership by presidents and legislators more with stereotypes of men (strength, determination, and confidence) than with feminine personality traits of warmth and compassion.

Religion affects political attitudes and behavior and broader contours of American politics. There are differences in the political attitudes and behaviors of Protestant and

Catholic voters (with important subgroup differences relating to the greater religious-ness of women). As Aimee E. Barbeau, Carin Robinson, and Clyde Wilcox (Chapter 33) explain, white evangelicals now play an influential role in Republican Party politics and are critical to understanding conservative beliefs and political attitudes. They stress that "the relationship between religion and politics is reciprocal: religion influences political attitudes, but political debates influence religion as well."

New generations and changes in socialization are generating significant changes in public opinion that, in general, point to a trend of greater egalitarianism and social liberalism. Barbeau, Robinson, and Wilcox note that "Americans of all religious traditions hold more egalitarian attitudes toward women and toward gays and lesbians in 2010 than they did in 1980, and they are also somewhat less pro-choice on abortion" (Patrick J. Egan, in Chapter 38, also discusses these issues). Stoker and Bass report that, compared with older generations, "Generations X and (especially) Y . . . hold more liberal attitudes on . . . gender roles, homosexuality, and gay rights, and . . . are stronger advocates of civil liberties and hold more egalitarian or progressive attitudes on . . . immigration and racial equality. Environmental conservation and clean energy are [also] a higher priority."

In the newest wave of research, genetics is a third dimension of public attitudes and opinion formation. Acknowledging that research in this area "is still in its infancy," Carolyn L. Funk (Chapter 26) reports that genetics may help to explain the durability of political attitudes and beliefs and the variations in their heritability. For instance, she reports that genetics exerts a strong and consistent impact on ideological orientations, perhaps more so than on party affiliation. Stoker and Bass agree with Funk that research on the effects of genetics is an important and growing area of research regarding political behavior and public opinion and, specifically, political socialization.

A fourth important aspect of public opinion involves differences among issue or policy areas. Chapters on economic issues and well-being (Barabas, Chapter 36), race relations (Taeku Lee and Nicole Willcoxon, Chapter 37), social issues more broadly (Egan, Chapter 38), "big government" (Costas Panagopolous and Robert Y. Shapiro, Chapter 39), foreign policy (Foyle, Chapter 40), and war making (Mueller, Chapter 41) identify attitudinal patterns that vary by policy domain and by time period. For many of these issues, though, recent public opinion has been increasingly shaped by partisan and ideological conflict in the United States.

The Susceptibility of Public Opinion

These four features of public attitudes and opinion formation define the terms on which individuals process and co-produce information and are influenced by it. The durability of public attitudes and beliefs make them difficult to change rapidly, which presents a barrier to short-term manipulation of public opinion. But extensive research identifies and measures the susceptibility of the public's evaluations of policies and politicians to six forms of influence: priming and framing; online information proces-sing; perceptions of risk; the effects of emotions; the impact of elite mobilization efforts; and inadvertent media effects.

Priming and framing.   The processes of priming and, especially, framing are widely discussed by authors in this volume as a subtle but potent influence on opinion formation and the processing of new information (see especially the chapters by Chong and Druckman, Nelson, and Foyle; Chapters 11, 12, and 40, respectively). Priming occurs when new information accesses existing attitudes in memory to trigger individuals to use particular standards of evaluation: President Richard Nixon developed a strategy for improving his approval rating by frequently referencing in his speeches his popular foreign policy breakthroughs such as his opening up to China (Druckman and Jacobs 2006). Framing involves the organization of information into simplifying story lines.

Online information processing.   Our understanding of priming and framing grows out of political psychology and research on how individuals process information. Charles S. Taber (Chapter 23) explains that even busy, distracted individuals whose cognitive capacities are impaired routinely use heuristic cues (such as political parties and interest groups) and "online" processing (such as a real-time running tally of political parties based on economic and foreign policy circumstances). Taber suggests that these processes enable everyday individuals to simplify cognitively taxing demands and to respond quickly to new information. He warns, though, of "considerable uncertainty . . . about whether such shortcuts allow them to behave competently" and the "strong likelihood of bias and susceptibility to manipulation." He concludes, in particular, that studies of "motivated reasoning" have found "that citizens are unable to treat new information evenhandedly; rather, they find agreeable information more convincing and actively counter-argue what they disagree with. . . . " Moreover, motivated reasoning occurs especially among the better educated and those most engaged in politics; the result can be misperceptions and mistakes about facts—tendencies that have long been assumed to be least likely among these groups. We consider the implications of motivated reasoning for American democracy in the final chapter (Chapter 43) as well.

Perceptions of risk.   Rose McDermott (Chapter 25) reviews research on "Prospect Theory," which suggests that individuals are more attentive to the risk of loss than the potential for gain. For instance, in the debate over President Barack Obama's health reform or President George Bush's push to partially privatize Social Security, opponents had the advantage in the battle for public opinion because the threat of loss matters more to individuals than the potential for gain. Beyond this broad generalization, McDermott catalogues the variations in how individuals differentially assess and respond to the allocation of risk and the perception of threat. One of the implications is that threat is, in part, a social construction based both in hard facts (such as the genuine threat of terrorist attacks) and in perception (terrorist attacks are imminent and require immediate decisions to curtail certain civil freedoms).

The effects of emotions.   Generations of political thought and research on the process of opinion formation and political choice have focused on cognition and neglected

the role of emotion, which was often considered a pernicious component of politics that had to be controlled and avoided in order to protect political stability, tolerance, and justice (as, for instance, the Framers of the US Constitution argued). Ted Brader, George E. Marcus, and Kristyn L. Miller (Chapter 24) set aside the view of cognition as insulated from emotion; instead, they point to the interaction and two-way causal relationships between affective and cognitive processes. Emotion and its intertwined connections to cognition may create opportunities for the new media (in conjunction with the efforts of political elites) to affect the mass public.

The impact of elite mobilization efforts.   Elected officials, including presidents, party leaders, interest groups, and other political elites, deliberately capitalize on priming, framing, online processing, and risk perceptions to mobilize support for or against policies or politicians—though of course they rarely use these terms. Bradford H. Bishop and D. Sunshine Hillygus (Chapter 13) explain that campaigns often accept existing beliefs, affiliations, and interests and instead focus on adding new information, heightening the attention or weight attached to certain preexisting considerations, and drawing on established views to mobilize voters who irregularly turn out to cast a ballot. In identifying a variety of campaign effects, they note that the candidate and their strategists devise messages and advertisements that prompt voters to "sort through and prioritize complex and often competing predispositions, shaping how those predispositions are brought to bear in selecting a preferred candidate."

Jacoby (Chapter 27) stresses that durable attitude structures and belief systems are influenced by their "ongoing interplay" with political leadership not only during campaigns, as Bishop and Hillygus explain, but also in policy debates during the governing phase. In particular, he suggests that highly prominent political divisions (namely, today's sharp partisan polarization among elites in Washington) have prompted the "public's reactions to a broad array of issues . . . [to become] organized in ways that are consistent with individual attachments to the respective parties—self-identified Democrats are taking consistently liberal stands on issues, while Republican identifiers adhere to conservative policy positions." He suggests that "the increasing polarization in public opinion appears to be almost entirely due to the enhanced clarity in the parties' respective policy positions, rather than to increases in sophistication or ideological awareness among individual citizens" (see also Chapter 43).

McDermott also points to the ability of politicians and interest groups to "skew the debate toward preferred solutions through the strategic or incidental manipulation of how risks are presented." Calculated efforts to heighten the perceptions of risk and threat associated with Obama's health care reform and Bush's Social Security privatization illustrate the capacity of political elites to affect public evaluations. Liberals and conservatives rely on a similar strategy of invoking risk to defeat policy proposals they oppose; the overall result is that Americans receive a steady stream of efforts to "communicate frightening risks," which in turn "exacerbate[s] the difficulty of establishing trust between individuals and the government charged with protecting them."

Inadretant media effects.   Although research does not find consistent evidence that the media deliberately set out to indoctrinate Americans, they do influence the public by inadvertently triggering many of the processes that political elites target. Barabas (Chapter 36) reports the disproportionate press coverage of negative as opposed to positive economic developments, which primes Americans "by over-weighting bad economic information" in the news. Moy and Hussain (Chapter 14) find that media framing are "extremely effective in shaping . . . political trust and political engagement." They stress the media's impact in "shaping what citizens know and how they feel about the world around them" through how they report neighborhood crime and a range of state and national news and political debates.

Challenges for Future Research

The revolution in communications and growing interconnections of everyday Americans and the political media both reinforces the need to address enduring challenges in research and raises new ones.

There have been perennial methodological issues in accurately measuring public opinion. Michael Traugott (Chapter 20) reviews the ongoing efforts to improve the accuracy of polls measuring candidate choice before Election Day. Although preelection polls have consistently been accurate and increasingly so, there have been a few embarrassing episodes (such as the failure of most polls to estimate Hillary Clinton's lead over Barack Obama in the New Hampshire primary), which precipitated investigations and revisions to improve accuracy. Adam J. Berinsky (Chapter 21) examines "non-response bias"—errors in measurement related to systematic biases in who responds to surveys. Non-response bias reflects social economic status; individuals with higher levels of education and income answer surveys at a higher rate, which undermines the broad representativeness of survey results. George Franklin Bishop (Chapter 22) describes the distorting effects of question wordings and formats, and also the context effects related to the order of survey questions. Traugott, Berinsky, and Bishop all emphasize the relentless efforts of survey researchers, especially through the use of survey experiments, to identify the sources of error, and to correct them in order (as Bishop concludes) "to arrive at reasonably valid conclusions about aggregate-level trends in public opinion."

Michael X. Delli Carpini (Chapter 18) reviews the evolution of survey research and the impact of new computer technology on sampling, database management, survey design, and the analysis of the data. One of the most recent innovations is the Internet survey, which makes it possible to develop more complicated question formats (such as tradeoffs among competing budget choices) and to substantially reduce costs. Among the challenges to this innovation is that the use of recruited, self-selected Internet "samples" raises questions about the representativeness of survey findings.

John G. Gunnell (Chapter 17) steps back from questions about how to measure public opinion and its interactions with the new information environment to examine how it is conceptualized. He explains that the now widely accepted conception of

public opinion as "an aggregation of individual and group preferences" is, in fact, a relatively recent invention of the twentieth century. He suggests that this understanding is narrower than the earlier conception of public opinion as a "collective entity" and departs from the notion of an "organic people" as the foundation of popular sovereignty, which was embraced by leaders of the American Revolution and the Framers of the US Constitution.

MEDIA ORGANIZATION AND NEWS REPORTING

Political reporting is a function of how the media is organized and for what purpose. Doris A. Graber and Gregory G. Holyk (Chapter 6) review the enduring organizational forces and norms that have long influenced what is defined as "newsworthy" and how it is reported. The chapters in this volume go a step further to identify important new developments as the media undergoes a rapid and transformative evolution.

A number of chapters review the reinvention of the media through the Internet. Susan Herbst (Chapter 19), Moy and Hussain (Chapter 14), Jamieson and Hardy (Chapter 15), and other contributors trace the spawning of new formats for generating information about politics and policy. Jennifer Jerit and Jason Barabas (Chapter 9) discuss the "continually evolving media environment—in particular, the increased availability of news sources as well as the ease with which people can select their information source...." The traditional definition of the mass media with television networks and cable and with family newspapers has been radically redefined by new forms of media that are produced and distributed online.

Media organization has also evolved to reflect demographic changes in American society. As the country has become more multiethnic and multiracial, media tailored for distinct populations has emerged. Chapter 32, by Junn, Lee, Ramakrishnan, and Wong, points to Asian-language media, while de la Garza and Jang (Chapter 31) note the Spanish press.

A persistent theme is the consequence of changes in old and new media for expanding the diversity of information available to citizens and their opportunities for fruitful deliberation. Schudson (Chapter 4) suggests that the astonishing changes in the media offer "many more reasons for hope than for despair." Vavreck and Iyengar (Chapter 10) point to our new era of "people interact[ing] with political 'media' and information in many new ways" and believe that it "opens doors for real political communication." Herbst (Chapter 19) observes that the "Web enables more rhetorical activity than any communication technology has ever allowed, in the history of human expression," which equips citizens to "connect with others, spread ideas, and get a sense of public opinion on any issue." She is hopeful that it facilitates and enriches the opportunities for citizens to make "public argument with those who oppose us, and [organize] with those who think like us...."

The optimistic view of the greater openness, access, and diversity of news is, however, challenged in this volume. Graber and Holyk (Chapter 6) express great concern about the rise of "opinionated reporting and the shift toward soft interpretive news away from harder factual formats" that are "essential for citizens' political deliberations." The decline of in-depth and investigative reporting, they report, "widen[s] gaps in knowledge . . . [and] erode[s] our common information bases and the ability to communicate and understand one another." Jamieson and Hardy expand on concerns that the new media landscape has created "the potential to reside in a self-protective enclave of reinforcing information" as Americans "customize their news repertoire" and as media organizations "[shift] away from wide-ranging broadcast messages to focus in on niche markets." They share the worry of others about the damage to our democracy when "deliberation over a policy issue between groups may become more difficult as those coming to the table will have incompatible information repertoires." Moy and Hussain (Chapter 14) worry that the new social media may "[improve] access to political information and institutions" when in fact they are "promoting 'thin citizenship,'" in which "Citizens may feel more engaged and efficacious, but [do] not actually participate effectively."

Although information interdependence has broken the monopoly of the mainstream press and opened up opportunities for individuals to generate political information for potentially wide distribution, it may also foster—as W. Lance Bennett (Chapter 16) suggests—negative "feedback between publics and politicians." Bennett's particular concern is how polls have been used by the news media to construct a misleading and "symbolic public" that marginalizes opposition, prompts dissidents to "tune out social deliberations because they perceive that they are in a minority," and induce "news organizations [to] avoid critical examination of ever more dominant news frames. . . . " The result, Bennett warns, is "managerial democracy," in which messages are framed by communication professionals and passively accepted by journalists.

Some chapters reach more ambivalent conclusions. The chapters by Schudson (Chapter 4) and by Katherine Ann Brown and Todd Gitlin (Chapter 5) recalibrate the dire warnings about the threat of the new media by emphasizing the limitations of the older, traditional media. Brown and Gitlin warn against "oversimplify[ing] and romanticiz[ing] the actual news media and their part in everyday life [in the course of American history]" given its record of "frequently fail[ing] to challenge abuses of power" and its mixed record on "encourag[ing] meaningful civic engagement." Noting the demise of the 1970s "fierce truth-bound independence" and the media's current "symbiotic relations with the powerful," they close by warning that the "current weaknesses of journalism cannot, on balance, be good news for democratic prospects."

Challenges for Future Research

The transformation of the media requires innovations in research on it. Jerit and Barabas (Chapter 9) call for "new and better ways of identifying the causal impact of

the mass media on public opinion" in an era when there are disparate sources of political information. Several authors also insist that research adapt to increasingly heterogeneous media. The proliferation of traditional media offerings and new media models has produced a plethora of information sources and highly selective patterns of consumption that require new methodologies for measuring and detecting media effects (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, 2010). As Gaines and Kuklinski (Chapter 3) explain,

The number of media sources began to expand at an unprecedented rate, which not only gave citizens more news options from which to choose, but also increased the overall activity in the environment. Together, these two consequences of media expansion translated into more factors to be taken into account, thus increasing the difficulty of properly specifying regression and other statistical models.

The heterogeneity of information and how it is consumed by individuals may well require new disciplinary approaches and methodologies that combine the specialization of today's research with a return to earlier participant observation and more integrating frameworks to "holistically" analyze the strategic interactions of politicians, the full universe of information sources, and public opinion.

THE BATTLE FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: FROM GRAND THEORY TO ENGAGED THEORY

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed extraordinary breakthroughs in mass communications and precipitated vibrant debate about whether the proliferation of information sources, their co-production, and informational interdependence created a boon for democracy and genuine public deliberation or intensified existing threats or created new ones.

The storming of the Bastille sparked the French Revolution; the acceleration of the online information revolution has broken the stranglehold that the traditional media and its government sources once held on what information was produced and disseminated, fundamentally affecting what citizens know. Today, the audience not only has far more choices of information but also can participate in its production and distribution. (Think of the profound impacts of such disparate self-directed news-making as the online leaking of top-secret US–Afghan memorandums and the spontaneous videoing of Iranian protesters attacked by their government's forces.) These trends in production and consumption have introduced a degree of emancipation and equality in information production and dissemination that is unprecedented and opens the door to a resurgence of popular sovereignty in both publicly scrutinizing government and rallying pressure on it.

The opening of information flow may directly foster collective deliberation (Page 1996) through social media communications and reactions and counterreactions. News

articles or online posts now regularly generate "threads" of comments from hundreds and even thousands of readers who largely interact free of policing. The information revolution may also fuel what appears to be vigorous public deliberation within many communities. The first comprehensive empirical study of reason-based public talk about matters of community concern finds that deliberation, as a form of public activity, is as prevalent as more widely discussed and studied forms of political expression such as voting (Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009). The wide-ranging and highly accessible revolution in online information production and distribution appears to support and encourage decentralized and uncoordinated public deliberation including organized meetings that rely on facilitators to include diverse voices and guide discussion toward reason-based claims.

Although styles of argumentation and scholarly reputations are enhanced by the drawing of sharp polarities, conclusions about the emancipatory potential of information interdependence are too sweeping and, indeed, are contradicted by notable barriers to public deliberation and democratic oversight. The co-production of Internet-based information has opened up mass communication, but it has also scattered the shared public square of debate into innumerable and cloistered silos and has put informed and knowledgeable news producers (such as skilled journalists) on the same footing as individuals with limited competency and understanding of public issues. While vibrant online exchanges might well chase out the ignorant or extreme partisans, the process of self-correction is more difficult in the new fragmented information environment. In addition, economic, cultural, and technical capacities to follow online debates and to engage in them vary across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups, which adds yet another level of inequality of voice and influence in politics. The better-established groups are more engaged in the world of information interdependence. Moreover, affluent organizations and political actors have seized on the Internet as a new strategic tool to distort debate, distract attention, and selectively rally supporters. The crafted talk of twentieth-century political operatives has now become a more potent weapon to orchestrate public deliberation and influence government.

As claims about the emancipatory power of the new media are too sweeping, so are conclusions about the complete "corruption" of public life and American democracy. New information capacities both open up opportunities for citizen engagement and trigger countervailing effects that minimize some of these new possibilities for influence. The disaggregating of news sources, the selectivity of individuals about which sources they use, the embedded attitudes and preference of ordinary citizens, and the countervailing effects of news sources and strategic maneuvering by media organizations and political actors may be bastions against the most significant threats to democracy and deliberation—and they may well, going forward, create promising opportunities for strengthening both.

Nonetheless, overly optimistic championing of the new information revolution is not justified. The final chapter outlines the confluence of a series of pathological developments that limit and threaten authentic public deliberation and vigorous democracy. Even mixed effects of the new media on citizens and on political elites

deserve careful attention, especially as they may (individually or in combination) weaken democratic governance.

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CHAPTER 2

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THE INTERNET AND FOUR DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

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MANY people use the phrase "new media" as a shorthand for the diverse technical developments that are changing the nature of political communication and possibly the character of citizenship: digital video recorders, satellite communication, smartphones, digital cable television, and, of course, the Internet. They are new and they are media. But in very little time such a phrase may sound stale, not unlike such terms as "horseless carriage" for automobiles and "talkies" for motion pictures with sound. Already the media that were "new" a decade ago, such as the blog, have been joined by newer media, such as social networking tools. Other terms that have floated through the literature also have their limitations in describing technological changes: "digital media" (Hindman 2009), "online" (Davis 2005), "Web" (Berners-Lee 1999), and "network" (Castells 1996). What is missing from the lexicon is a terminology that fully captures the interoperability, interactivity, intelligence, portability, and increased information bandwidth of these networked devices. In this chapter, as we explore the implications of these capacities for citizenship, we'll rely primarily on the classic term "Internet," which dates to the 1970s, as a synecdoche. The particular advantage of this term is, first, that the Internet is dramatically incorporating the formerly separate media of broadcasting, publishing, and telephony, and, second, that it conjures up a most curious history of invention and adventure (Abbate 1999). The original Internet was a curious product of government institutions and scientific research rather than private enterprise, and so the pairing of this term with issues of democracy and citizenship is fitting.

Whatever term one prefers, the media environment has certainly changed dramatically in the last twenty years. And while everyone agrees that the media landscape is different, exactly what these myriad changes add up to remains controversial, especially in the overlapping realms of politics, the news media, and civic life. Many streams of research on these topics are now more than a decade old, dealing with the Internet and political deliberation, public opinion, political behavior, campaigns, mobilization, collective action, and news, among others. We will treat these as four dimensions of citizenship as they relate to media, and will ask: how has the Internet interacted with, or perhaps even revolutionized, the following:

- citizen deliberation and the public sphere,
- citizen participation in public life,
- citizen knowledge, and
- citizen mobilization and the organizational context for citizenship.

Sooner or Later It Will All Be on the Internet

The Internet was an accident—a largely happy accident as it turns out. The Internet was nobody's vision or conscious attempt to revolutionize mass communication (Edwards 2010). But revolutionize it has.

"In the rise of any new medium," Paul Starr writes in *The Creation of the Media*, "a key factor is its relationship to the dominant technology of the day" (2004, 193). Whereas in Europe new communications media have usually been handed over to incumbent players to develop (or co-opt or delay), in the United States nascent media have mostly avoided this fate. The post office did not get to run the telegraph, Western Union did not succeed in taking over telephony, and AT&T was not allowed to use its long-distance monopoly to dominate broadcasting. The accidental nature of the World Wide Web helped the Internet effect a similar independence. The Internet's most direct predecessor was the ARPANet, the world's first packet switching network, created in the late 1960s as a US cold war research project. When the Department of Defense discussed ARPANet with AT&T, the company was not interested, concluding that the technology held little commercial value (Abbate 1999, 195).

From the 1970s until the late 1980s, the Internet remained the province of government researchers and academics, which helped foster a participatory and decentralized online culture. The development of the network's technical architecture reflected this, with the dominant ethos favoring "rough consensus and running code" over the kind of formal decision-making typical in corporations and government. Partly as a consequence, the TCP/IP networking protocol that ran the Internet ended up being widely deployed even as competing network standards—such as OSI, developed by an international standards body—were still on the drawing board (Abbate 1999).

Technology executives, government regulators, and even key innovators themselves did not realize until quite late the implications of these technological shifts. When physicist Tim Berners-Lee developed technical refinements in the early 1990s in order to share academic information over the Internet, he hardly expected to lay the foundation of a new mass medium (Berners-Lee 1999). He wasn't alone. As late as 1995, Bill Gates's vision of "the road ahead" hardly mentioned the Internet. The monumental 1996 US Telecommunications Act, which set the regulatory ground rules for competitive telephony and digital television, famously ignored the Internet (Neuman, McKnight, and Solomon 1998).

The Internet, of course, now constitutes a large and still growing portion of the American media diet. As of 2009, over 80 percent of US households had home Internet access (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2009). About 63 percent of households had broadband, about 85 percent of all Americans had cellphones, and about a third had used the Internet from a smartphone or other portable device (Horrigan 2009a, 2009b). In 2006, for the first time, the number of Americans reporting that they went online for news at least three times per week exceeded the number regularly watching nightly network news, and by 2008 exceeded the number reading the newspaper on a daily basis (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2008).

The Internet is also entangled in the economic travails of the newspaper and magazine industries. Though rates of newspaper readership have been slowly declining since the 1980s, revenue had been largely stable until the recent and precipitous declines. Between 2006 and 2008 the newspaper industry saw a 23 percent decline in advertising revenue, and by the end of 2008, massive layoffs placed newsroom staffing levels 20 percent below the level of 2001 (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2009). Readers shifting news consumption from print to the Internet explains some of the fall: Web editions now account for half of all newspaper readership, but provide only 10 percent of revenues. Even bigger culprits are sites like Craigslist and eBay, which have gutted newspaper classified advertising, the largest profit center for many small- and mid-sized papers. A wave of highly leveraged mergers has made matters worse by saddling many newspapers with steep debts, turning a long-term problem into an immediate crisis.

THREE CAUTIONARY PRINCIPLES

The dynamics of how media shape citizenship are clearly in flux. In considering the implications of these technologies and their accompanying economic shifts for citizenship, it is worth reviewing three analytic principles from the study of technological evolution and media effects that have helped illuminate previous technological changes. The first is the *diffusion principle*. Everett Rogers engaged in a lifetime study of communication and the diffusion of innovation (1986, 2003). He developed and popularized the notion that early adopters of new technologies are systematically different from mainstream adopters and laggards. Accordingly, for studies conducted

in the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s, one needs to take great care in parsing the impact of the technologies themselves from the characteristics of the atypical citizens who are early adopters. Strikingly few of the publications we have reviewed address this issue seriously. Furthermore, new technical architectures sometimes take decades to change behaviors, expectations, and institutions. The Model T as a mass-produced and accessibly priced automobile was introduced in 1908, but it was not until after the Second World War that the full impact of the automobile was realized (Kline and Pinch 1996). Observations that the Internet has not, for example, challenged the dominance of broadcast-television-based spot advertising in electoral politics need to be seen in historical perspective.

The second, related cautionary principle is the existence of *differential effects*. Often when a new technical resource becomes available the most active and best-resourced members of society are quick to take advantage while marginal members are unable or uninterested in doing so. Under these circumstances, inequality can be magnified. This widely acknowledged dynamic is sometimes identified as positive feedback, accumulated advantage, or "the Matthew Effect" (Merton 1968). Unlike the diffusion principle, this theme is frequently addressed in the literature on Internet effects (Norris 2000, 2001; Bimber and Davis 2003; Hindman 2009; and others). As we will see below, the answers to basic questions about the Internet and political participation or knowledge require accounting for differential effects. This principle is particularly important in assessing hypotheses about the Internet as leveler and mobilizer of previously marginal strata of the citizenry.

The third principle is the prospect of *conditional effects*. The literature in general is quite careful to avoid simplistic technological determinism and uses phrases like "the facilitation by" and "the affordances of" new technologies. Accordingly, under some social and cultural conditions and for some especially motivated strata of society, the Internet's capacities for interactivity, diversity, and information abundance may be transformative. The Internet certainly makes an impressively broad array of political information and misinformation available, and it dramatically changes who can communicate with whom. For those citizens with the motivation and interest to seek political information or to engage in communication about public affairs, the Internet is likely to have much different effects than for those who are relatively disinterested in politics or unmotivated about public life. Indeed, a key emphasis in recent work on the Internet and citizenship is accounting for conditional effects and interactions.

CITIZEN DELIBERATION AND
THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The cautionary principles above are a start—but only a start—in addressing perhaps the most basic and difficult-to-answer question about the Internet: what does it mean for the fate of the public sphere in the twenty-first century? Few scholars of political

communication have been more influential than Jürgen Habermas. His concepts of the public sphere and the ideal speech situation have been a popular lens through which to evaluate the Internet's impact on public life. Habermas, of course, argues that the participatory bourgeois public sphere of nineteenth-century salon culture was subverted by the rise of commercialized mass media (1989). Might not the Internet, which grants any citizen the technical means to communicate their views directly to other citizens, move us closer to Habermas's "ideal speech situation" (1981)?

At first glance, one might posit that the Internet is optimally designed to provide a structural *re*transformation of the public sphere along the lines Habermas idealizes. The key elements Habermas sets out concern the capacity of citizens to express their attitudes, desires, and needs, and their ability to challenge the assertions of others without fear of retribution (1990a). The hope is that, as with the widely used metaphor of a marketplace of ideas, the better argument will win out (Napoli 2001). Interestingly, Habermas himself has addressed the question of the Internet and the public sphere several times, and acknowledged that the ideal of a face-to-face collective of mutually consenting members may be also made possible by new technical means (Habermas 1990b; Peters 1993). But Habermas remains highly skeptical. He acknowledges in a recent footnote that "The Internet has certainly reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers" but notes that "the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend[s] instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics" (Habermas 2006, 423). Bruns in a challenging review presses further:

So what is it with Habermas and the Net? A similarly critical (and similarly questionable) negative stance towards the Net can be found in his (German-language) speech on the occasion of the Bruno Kreisky Award in March 2005: here, he suggests that while the Net "has led to an unforeseen extension of the media public and to an unprecedented thickening of communications networks," this "welcome increase in egalitarianism . . . is being paid for by the decentralization of access to unedited contributions. In this medium the contributions of intellectuals lose the power to create a focus." Overall, therefore, "use of the Internet has both extended and fragmented communication connections."   (Bruns 2007)

Habermas's assessment appears to be that the Internet's fundamental openness, and its lack of knowledgeable moderators to structure debate, precludes the sort of deliberation he hopes for. This view arises in large part from his position that every "competent speaker" should participate, rather than every possible speaker. The question of which citizens might qualify as competent remains troublingly unanswered.

In addition to Habermas himself, a small army of scholars has been attracted to the question of whether online deliberation does, or can, approach a Habermasian ideal (among them: Bimber 2003; Brants 2005; Bruns 2007; Castells 2009; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Dahlberg 2004; Davis 2009; Hauser 1999; Hindman 2009; Papacharissi 2004; Poster 1997; Price 2009; Sey and Castells 2004; Thornton 2002; Wilhelm 2000; and Wright and Street 2007). Two elements are common to nearly all of these essays. First, the scholars expand upon or add some conditions to Habermas's original list of

prerequisites for ideal speech. Second, they conclude that they too are skeptical that the Internet could produce such an idealized vision of democratic practice.

Our reading of this body of scholarship suggests that, with variations in terminology, Habermas's original criteria for an ideal speech situation have been expanded into six with respect to online communication. But it is worth emphasizing from the start that the online public sphere is not just a function of the technical facilities of the Internet and related technologies—even when (as rarely happens) these are assessed completely and correctly. Conclusions about the public sphere, as Habermas's own work makes clear, require us to examine the actual practices of debate.

His original criteria for the celebrated ideal speech situation are frequently summarized as: (1) every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse; (2) everyone is allowed to express their attitudes, desires, and needs and to introduce or question any assertion whatever; and (3) no speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising the rights as laid down in (1) and (2) above (see Habermas 1990a). In some ways, this list underspecifies speech situations in real contexts of all kinds, whether they involve the Internet or not. In the literature on the public sphere and the Internet, these have been elaborated to address in more detail issues of inclusiveness, equality, rationality, agendas, power, and the absence of distraction from substantive discourse. This work can be summarized as follows.

The first criterion for a successful online public sphere is *the inclusion of a broad array of citizens in rational deliberation.* Habermas famously concludes that the one-way commercial media dulled the capacity of the bourgeoisie to engage in critical discussion in public forums such as coffee houses and salons. One problem with the Internet and especially the blogosphere, according to this follow-on literature, is a continuing digital divide. Despite the great extent of Internet diffusion cited above, economically and culturally marginalized citizens represent a big portion of those who do not use the Internet (Bonfadelli 2002; Norris 2001; Servon and Pinkett 2004). And among those already online, large differences in skill levels may represent a second-level digital divide affecting both the elderly and a surprising number of younger citizens (Hargittai 2002, 2007).

But if the hope is to include a broad array of citizens in discussion, overcoming divides in access and skills is only a start. One place discussion takes place is on blogs. It is estimated that there are approximately 900,000 new blog posts every day (Technorati 2010) but most of them are about celebrity and culture. Only one blog in ten discusses politics on a regular basis (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr 2010). And only a few hundred bloggers can count on readership levels measured in the thousands of visitors per day. This small set of A-list bloggers is hardly a broad cross-section of the public, and this elite group remains overwhelmingly white, disproportionately male, and replete with the alumni of Ivy-League-caliber institutions (Hindman 2009). Bloggers who attract a significant audience certainly have the smarts and schooling necessary to serve as Habermasian moderators; whether they have the necessary temperament is more debatable.

Another place discussion of public affairs takes place is in chat rooms and other online discussion spaces. While the quality of discussions in explicitly political discussion groups is often notoriously low, a great deal of political discussion takes place incidentally in spaces or groups oriented toward other topics, such as hobbies or recreation, and the discursive quality of those discussions can be quite high, due to opportunities for cross-cutting exchanges and exposure to political difference (Wojcieszak and Mutz 2009). Little is known about how people's experiences in these venues contribute to their overall experience of the public sphere. The digital divide is receding but perhaps too slowly to stimulate much enthusiasm. And although the Internet provides ample digital space for those inclined to deliberate about political issues, relatively few are moved to take advantage.

The second criterion is *the capacity to influence the agenda of public discussion*. Citizens themselves need to be able to raise issues of concern and (re)direct attention to topics they care about (Habermas 1989; Dahlberg 2004; Coleman and Gøtze 2001). In a limited way, Internet-based discussion forums probably come closest to this ideal with respect to individuals' ability to shape the agenda of discussion, but these groups may be disconnected from the larger agenda of the public sphere, where commercial media are still so important. Observers commonly look to blogs for the potential to shape public agendas. Prominent bloggers have claimed that the Internet provides ordinary citizens—or at least themselves—the ability to set the agenda for other media (Armstrong and Zúniga 2006; Reynolds 2006; Hewitt 2006). Some scholars have made similar if more measured claims about the ability of blogs to incubate important news stories, to filter for the best content, and ultimately to shape the broader media agenda (Benkler 2006; Farrell and Drezner 2008; Kerbel 2009).

Yet other scholarship has been more skeptical, on several grounds. Attention on the Web is highly concentrated, largely on a few commercial websites. One concern is whether bloggers with small audiences can indeed attract the attention of mainstream media outlets or the few blogs that are widely read. With the notable exception of political scandals, it is hard to find traceable instances where issues nourished online have driven broader public debates. A recent enormous, sophisticated analysis by Leskovec, Backstrom, and Kleinberg shows that political issues and news stories overwhelmingly are raised by news media first and then migrate to blogs, rather than the other way around (2009).

At a more basic level, Internet use may eventually alter public agendas by breaking down boundaries of many kinds in the public sphere. The Internet reduces communicative barriers between individual citizens and small groups, who can find one another and communicate through multiple online means regardless of commercial or institutional agendas—or bloggers, for that matter. The Internet also breaks down barriers between personal, private networks and formal organizations operating in the public sphere, such as the social movement organizations that pursue social justice, environmental, or anti-war agendas (Bennett, Breunig, and Givens 2008). Just how the collapse of such boundaries around interpersonal, group, and organizational communication eventually connects to larger public agendas and news remains to be seen empirically,

but these developments clearly represent a shift in the landscape in which political speech and agendas emerge.

The next criterion of ideal speech on the Internet is a more subtle but equally important extension of the second. While the second focuses on "getting attention" for new or marginalized issues, the third addresses the question *whether, once the attention is evident, the Internet facilitates rational critical discussion and the capacity for collective will formation* (Fishkin 1992; Hauser 1999; Papacharissi 2004; Wright and Street 2007). This turns out to be one of the most exciting and active areas of research. The answer, not surprisingly, turns out to be both yes and no. The Internet advances all kinds of discussion at once, from flame wars and mindless, juvenile commentary to thoughtful and engaged discussion among the well-informed. In this regard, the Internet recapitulates much of the "offline" world of political communication, which ranges no less far in each direction, as does communication with older technologies such as television, the telephone, or the typewriter. The extent of rational speech in any particular political forum on the Internet depends on the evolved norms of interaction, the structure of conversation, the mechanisms of recruitment to conversation, and the prospect of some participants playing the role of moderator—or some technically based system of collaborative moderation. Just as Mansbridge (1983) established in her study of the iconic (face-to-face) American town meeting, collaborative decision-making benefits from evolved norms and procedural structure. Wright and Street conclude their study of European Union discussion forums by noting, "This evidence suggests that we should view deliberation as dependent on design and choice, rather than a predetermined product of the technology" (2007, 849). A research team at the University of Pennsylvania conducted an extensive series of single-issue online discussions and found that the "climate of opinion" and dynamism of information-based discussion on controversial issues led to distinctive patterns of offline opinion change and increased issue knowledge (Price, Nir, and Cappella 2002, 2006).

The fourth criterion is *discursive equality and reciprocal respect—the capacity in collective deliberation to evaluate arguments by their sincerity and persuasive strength rather than the status of the speaker.* These reflect qualities of deliberation that are hard to assess systematically or quantitatively. The analysis here draws attention to synchronous online discussion groups and asynchronous threaded, bulletin-board-style discussion. Partisans and enthusiasts are not always either open-minded or polite listeners. Evaluations should address both how often computer-mediated discussions actually occur, and whether they can sustain (or even improve upon) the level of discursive equality and reciprocal respect produced by face-to-face exchanges, which themselves range widely with respect to these criteria.

One particular aspect of online discussion that cuts both ways is the prospect of anonymity (or pseudonymity) of the speaker. Anonymity has been demonstrated to increase the propensity of animosity and acrimony (often termed "flaming"). But anonymity also offers a potential shield for those with minority views who might otherwise be hesitant to speak. Despite concerns that online discussion would be dominated by a talkative few, recruited online discussions often generate a surprising

level of equity among participant contributions with less suppression of minority views than might be expected (Price 2009). The surprising amity and engaged character of online experiments by Price and associates at Penn may have resulted from the diminished social cues and relative anonymity afforded by text-based exchanges, but further systematic comparative research of online and offline interaction will be needed to better understand the structural links (Price 2009).

The fifth criterion is *the absence of a coercive external constraint on open discussion.* Globally, the absence of coercive constraint on speech on the Internet varies greatly, mirroring the case for speech via other means. First Amendment protections in the US are celebrated online as they are offline. But the Internet is patrolled by authorities in most countries around the world just as physical public spaces are. In most democracies, law enforcement restricts itself to illegal activity such as cyberstalking, obscenity, fraud, and unlawful gambling. There are well-founded concerns that copyright law and anti-terrorism legislation as well as anti-pornography initiatives may have chilling effects on free speech (Zittrain 2008). Notably, the widespread perception that authorities are "listening in" may make marginalized groups afraid to offer political criticism, a fact seen clearly in China and other authoritarian states (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, and Zittrain 2008). There is little systematic research on how fearful people online are of expressing unpopular opinions, or on their capacity to maintain digital anonymity when they wish. Analysts of radical protest movements assert that some radical groups avoid information technology and rely on traditional face-to-face communication because of the prospect of surveillance (van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht 2004, 16), but no systematic or ethnographic confirmation is yet available. Some authoritarian regimes, such as Cuba, have put less effort into censorship and surveillance of speech online than into controlling who has access to the Internet in the first place. Even within free societies, the ongoing struggle to define the responsibility of Internet service providers for what citizens "say" provides a venue for incursions into free speech. So although the Internet in much of the world and notably in the United States is not characterized by a systematic or significant external constraint on open discussion, like other domains of First Amendment policy, it remains a contested area.

The sixth and final criterion is *the absence of systematic distraction from political deliberation.* Recalling the central role of commercial distraction and the reframing of political discourse in the mainstream media in Habermas's seminal analysis (1989), many of the analysts in this tradition have decried the growth of commerce online and the extension of mainstream print and broadcast media sources to slick and attractive online versions (McChesney 2007). Contrary to the expectations of many, non-commercial outlets for political news and information account for only a few tenths of a percent of overall Web traffic. Online news is dominated by traditional media websites such as CNN.com, NYTimes.com, and USAToday.com, along with sites such as Yahoo! News and Google News that aggregate news from wire services and mainstream outlets (Hindman 2009; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2006). We conclude that although the expanded space of the digital domain means that

commercially oriented speech and entertainment need not preempt political speech as in, for example, prime time television, the issue of distraction clearly persists.

What does all of this tell us about the online public sphere? On the grounds that Habermas himself emphasizes—worries about audience fragmentation and the lack of knowledgeable moderators—we find there is room for optimism. Online audiences can be more focused and moderators more qualified than Habermas supposes, and they are not obviously in any worse situation deliberatively than they are when not online. Positive research findings for debate in online forums are encouraging, even if it is still unclear how these results mesh with actual practices of online debate. At the same time, some of the increase in egalitarianism that Habermas celebrates is illusory. It may be easy for citizens to speak online, but it remains exceptionally difficult to be heard individually amid the din of competing voices and the countless distractions of non-political content in most settings. Moreover, political blogs, overwhelmingly non-commercial in their early years, are now dominated by sites that either began as or evolved into commercial media outlets. Much of the Internet's remaining promise for altering the public sphere centers not on news sites or political blogs, but in forums that are not explicitly political, from ostensibly non-political discussion groups where political issues arise to the social networking sites. In an important sense, these represent the online analogues of the many forums in offline life where people find themselves in political discussion without having explicitly sought it out: in the workplace, at a party, when bumping into friends at the supermarket. In the world outside the Internet, going to town hall meetings or other events designated for political discussion is a tiny part of most people's lives at best. It should come as no surprise that people's behavior online is not terribly different from their behavior offline. This means that the answer to questions about how people employ the online public sphere will likely come from understanding how people going about their daily lives encounter political discussion, rather than how they seek out and perform in formalized political speech situations.

Citizen Participation

Do the abundant interactive and increasingly diverse sources of political information online stimulate political engagement and participation? Unlike difficult questions about the quality of deliberation, voting and campaign contributions are well measured, although teasing out causal relationships is difficult. Expectations about the Internet's impact on citizen engagement have run the gamut from breathless enthusiasm through cautious skepticism to prophecies of digital doom. We now have fifteen years of published research on this topic, dating from the mid-1990s to the election of Barack Obama.

Though studies have used different methodologies—lab experiments, field studies, and cross-sectional surveys—they add up to a largely consistent portrait. There is a

modest association between access to the Internet and political engagement as measured by voting, contributing money, volunteering time to a political campaign, and other measures. Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008) find small effects of Internet use in the form of chat rooms and email on turnout in several elections. Jennings and Zeitner (2003) find a positive association between Internet use and political involvement using a rare panel study with waves comparing the same citizens in 1982 and 1997. Bimber (2003) finds small relationships with campaign donations and attending a political event.

A good deal of discussion has occurred about whether these findings are an artifact of political interest, motivation, or other variables insufficiently controlled in the models (Kenski and Stroud 2006). A meta-analysis published in 2009 examined thirty-eight independent studies of new media use and political participation (Bou- lianne 2009). In that study, when political interest is controlled for, the resultant partial correlation between new media use and political participation is statistically and substantively insignificant.

Much of the current debate in the literature is addressed to such issues as interest and content choice (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). As Prior (2007) shows convincingly, in a high-choice media environment, political interest is often a stronger predictor of political behavior than socioeconomic variables such as age, gender, income, and even education. Several studies, including Prior's, show a positive effect of Internet use on various forms of engagement when interest is controlled, and support the emerging view that interest and cognitive characteristics interact strongly with Internet use to affect civic engagement and political participation (Shah, Kwak, and Holbert 2001; Prior 2007). For instance, Xenos and Moy (2007) show that an interaction term for political interest and seeing political information online is a stronger predictor of participation than the online information term by itself. Work on social capital and the Internet has produced consistent findings. Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001) take on Putnam's (2000) skepticism about the Internet and social capital, and show that Internet use is associated with either increased or decreased social capital, depending on the age cohort of the user and the types of content that users seek out.

Another leading problem in this literature involves what constitutes political partic- ipation. Most research so far has focused on very traditional outcomes, especially voting in presidential elections. But there are good reasons to think that many citizens, especially younger ones, are more interested in civic engagement, lifestyle politics, and citizen-directed advocacy than they are in institutionalized forms of participation (Bennett 1998). These broader forms of civic engagement may well be implicated more deeply with Internet use than presidential turnout and other forms of participa- tion in high-profile institutionalized politics, though too little empirical work is available yet. Likewise, little research has thus far examined social media deeply, and much of what we know about participation and the Internet comes from such generic independent measures as how many hours people are online, non-specific questions about obtaining political information online, or indicators of use of political email or chat rooms. The diffusion principle warrants caution in projecting these patterns into a

future of a ubiquitous and universal Internet. Furthermore, it is unclear how much past research will tell us about what happens as younger generations of citizens become more prominent in politics and bring their habits of social media use with them.

Citizen Knowledge

Questions of the Internet and political knowledge intersect closely with those of the public sphere and political participation. The basic Downsian logic would hold that learning is costly, and that citizens will acquire more information as learning becomes cheaper in time and effort (Bimber 2003). An alternative prospect is that with greater choice many citizens will be less likely to be inadvertently exposed to political content, and will therefore become even less informed (Prior 2007). More information and choice may well lead to increased knowledge gaps between the most interested and well informed and those who are less so. An intriguing variant of the problem is whether citizens take advantage of a richer information environment to become informed about different sorts of topics than has been possible with mainstream broadcast and print media.

As with survey research on political engagement, it is precarious to attribute causal influence to a particular medium based on a simple cross-sectional snapshot. Causal attribution requires an experiment, longitudinal analysis, or extensive multivariate controls within a non-longitudinal study. Long-term longitudinal work suggests that citizens on the whole are not growing noticeably better (or worse) informed about political facts, prominent figures, and events. Delli Carpini and Keeter address this at length in their seminal book (1996) and in an updated study focusing on the new media environment (2003). They find:

Several decades of research provide fairly compelling evidence for five conclusions regarding what Americans know about politics: (1) the average American is poorly informed but not uninformed; (2) average levels of knowledge mask important differences across groups; (3) most citizens tend to be information generalists rather than specialists; (4) knowledge is a demonstrably critical foundation for good citizenship; and (5) little change has occurred in any of these tendencies over the past fifty years.   (2003)

Delli Carpini and Keeter take special care to address the recent changes in the digital information environment, concluding that what the Internet and expanded cable TV offerings provide with one hand, they take away with the other. Rich, constantly updated political information is widely available, along with increasingly sophisticated online images, audio, and video. Search engines can track down highly specialized information. But this enticing environment contains much more than political facts and figures. As with the Habermasian concerns above, a key worry for some is that the endless variety of online content will divert "the public from things political—a giant

box of chocolates that lures citizens away from the nourishing food they need" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 2003, 137).

A key element in the Delli Carpini and Keeter analysis is the premise (number 3 above) that the mass public is made up of issue generalists rather than an amalgamation of issue publics focusing on assorted topics of individual interest. The prominence of issue publics or issue specialists remains a controversial question in the literature. There is plentiful evidence that education and political interest lead citizens to care about a large number of issues, a finding sometimes called the education stratification hypothesis (Krosnick 1990). Some recent work also challenges the traditional causal narrative, suggesting that differences in political knowledge after college exist prior to college attendance (Highton 2009). On more than a few issues—such as immigration policy, policy toward Israel, veterans' affairs, or agricultural subsidies— there is ample evidence as well of a defined subset of the public highly attuned to a particular policy area because of personal background or economic interest (Krosnick and Telhami 1995). The question at hand is whether the Internet's sophisticated search capacity and availability of specialized content on nearly every subject imaginable will enhance the influence of issue publics. The evidence is limited, and online behavior continues to evolve, but recent research indicates that online information seekers (1) take advantage of the specialty sites, (2) follow the linkages for additional specialized information, and (3) report that they value and enjoy these resources (Tremayne, Zheng, Lee, and Jeong 2006).

A closely related concern involves selectivity and the possibility that new media are more polarized than traditional broadcast or print news outlets. Baum and Groeling (2008) compared traditional wire services coverage of the 2006 mid-term election with content on both popular political blogs and FoxNews.com. They found systematically stronger partisan filtering among the latter sources. Jones (2002) demonstrated that regular Limbaugh listeners who started out with conservative views moved farther to the right during the mid-1990s, while irregular listeners and non-listeners with conservative views did not shift significantly in either direction. In a finding parallel to Sigelman and Kugler (2003) above, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) argue that, although political elites have become more polarized over the last several decades, only the most sophisticated and attentive strata of the citizenry have followed suit.

A key element in theorizing about the new media environment is the prospect that the Internet will create a spiral of selective attention, with online partisans choosing information sources that reinforce their preconceptions while ignoring the arguments of those "on the other side." Sunstein (2001) popularized this concern with his discussion of the "Daily Me" approach to content selectivity. Yet such concerns may be overblown for four reasons. First, as Garrett (2009) has demonstrated, although partisans do seek out agreeable information, they do not systematically avoid contrary information when they encounter it inadvertently. Second, clearly partisan observers such as Limbaugh, Hannity, and O'Reilly (not to mention Maddow or Olbermann) spend a lot of time talking about what the liberals (or alternatively conservatives) are saying and doing, albeit in a frequently cynical tone. Incivility toward partisans

on the other side does not necessarily equal ignorance of opponents' claims and ideas. Hindman documents corresponding cross-ideological traffic and hyperlink references in the blogosphere (2009). Third, although partisans may enjoy watching their cheerleaders wax rhetorical, many of those who are politically active retain a deep interest in hard news reporting (Prior 2007). Fourth, the studies showing substantial selective exposure effects should not be interpreted as saying that few citizens ever see news from a perspective other than their own ideological preference. Most studies find that a significant portion of the news audience is exposed to cross-cutting perspectives, such as Democrats watching Fox News, even while many prefer more congruent news (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). As is true about the political participation, the key effects of the Internet on political knowledge are not to be found in average or aggregate effects so much as in differential effects across categories of citizens.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT OF CITIZENSHIP

The dynamics of political participation and knowledge in mass publics may change only slowly and differentially, but more dramatic changes may become evident in competitive campaigns for office or around issues, as adversarial professionals seek to use the Internet for advantage.

One hallmark of American elections, of course, is that they have been dominated by two political parties since the founding of the republic, excepting occasional flirtations with minor party candidates. It is true as well that incumbent candidates have numerous advantages over challengers. Where issue advocacy is concerned, a hallmark of the US is the presence of an enormous marketplace of political organizations vying with one another for influence over public policy. Like incumbents who dominate election campaigns, interest groups tend to dominate public policymaking over the influence of unorganized citizens, and richer groups tend to prevail over poorer ones. One simple question about the Internet, then, is whether lower costs to produce, distribute, and target political information will level these playing fields, and give underdog candidates, less rich organizations, or individual citizens greater prospects. The literature provides an answer for aspects of this question. In the case of high-salience national campaigns for office, such as the presidency, the answer appears to be no. Bimber (2003) analyzed five case studies of very diverse political entities involved both in campaigns for office and in issue advocacy. He concludes that although smaller and poorer organizations and candidates exploit new media to substitute for the big media resources they lack, larger and more established political organizations make expensive—and often effective—investments that small organizations cannot afford. When both well-resourced and underresourced organizations go head-to-head in highly institutionalized contexts such as presidential elections, resources remain a

key advantage and the gap between them persists. The most compelling possibilities are not in such settings, but within formal organizations themselves as these adapt to new possibilities and expectations from citizens, and also in new kinds of groups that bring new issues to the political agenda and that engage in politics outside highly institutionalized contexts.

This pattern is confirmed in numerous studies, including Phil Howard's detailed ethnography of political mobilization and campaign organizations in the early 2000s:

A decade ago, only the wealthier lobbyists and presidential campaigns could afford the services of Databank.com [a pseudonymous political strategy and data analysis firm], but now the firm also sells detailed relational databases to the country's nascent grassroots movements and individuals eager to start a small campaign of their own. Political data became a marketable product, something that could be sold to grassroots movements, elite campaigns or corporate lobbyists.   (Howard 2006, 29)

Political scientists have been especially curious about the impact of the new media on the structure and prominence of the dominant political parties. Nelson Polsby and others have characterized the last five decades as the mass media age of party politics (Polsby 1984). Polsby noted that structural reforms after the 1968 election reduced the power of the party insiders in the iconic "smoke-filled rooms" and made winning the party nomination the product of a media-saturated primary process. So we ask, will new technology weaken the mass media, reenergize party organizations, or even freshly empower third party efforts? Several scholars have argued that, while the Internet may lessen dependence on big media and facilitate cheaper and more narrowly targeted political communication, it will neither reenergize the major parties nor hasten their decline (Norris 2000).

So, for the most part, the Internet does not look likely to alter the distribution of power among major players much, particularly for political contests taking place in traditional institutionalized forums. A different question is: what happens when political organizing happens outside traditional venues and organizations, in campaigns other than for national office, or where organizing takes alternative forms such as protest or political consumerism? Though these sorts of cases have received less study, the Internet has played an essential role in many recent and varied instances of political activism, from the 2006 student immigration walkout in Los Angeles high schools to the demonstrations at the 2010 Copenhagen climate change conference. The Internet increases the speed of mobilization and the ability of organizers to shift scale from the local to the global and back (Bennett, Breunig, and Givens 2008). It permits activists to mobilize people who become interested in one issue, even if temporarily, and who do not necessarily "belong" to anything but their own personal social networks. Structurally, this is a substantial change in how mobilization can work. The Internet also affects the structure of organizers themselves, permitting organizational hybridity (Chadwick 2007) and contributing to a profusion of new organizational forms that are less dependent for their existence upon traditional resources and infrastructure, or on traditional practices of "membership" (Bimber, Stohl, and Flanagin

2009). All this means that the menu of participatory opportunities for interested citizens is expanding, and to a large degree it is doing so on citizens' own terms. What to participate in, when, and even how, are decisions increasingly in the hands of citizens themselves, rather than the formal leadership hierarchy of interest groups or political campaigns. These developments suggest that significant changes may be coming in the structure of collective action broadly, even if highly institutionalized election campaigns for high office remain dominated by elites and campaign professionals. How citizens choose among options for engagement and political expression in this changing, expanding, and less well-bounded environment remains to be seen.

The Changing Context for Citizenship

In the study of media and politics, the media have often played the role of convenient whipping boy. When US survey data began showing declines in political trust and efficacy during the 1960s and 1970s, television was seen as the obvious culprit (Robinson 1976). There is a long tradition of attributing negative dimensions of the human condition to the mass media, most notably violence and irresponsible sexual behavior. But in the case of the Internet and politics the dominant theme has been surprisingly positive. Scholars have been inclined to believe that the expanded media environment will be able to engage, inform, and enrich the political consciousness of the otherwise easily distracted citizenry.

One of the earliest book-length studies reviewing these issues was published in 2000 and concluded that the null hypothesis had won out: the Internet environment represented nothing more than "politics as usual" (Margolis and Resnick 2000). Perhaps they spoke too soon. Online and mobile media are becoming intimately integrated into the daily flow of political information and occasional waves of citizen mobilization. The dramatic changes in technology have not led to similarly dramatic changes in the political psychology of the average citizen. But Internet-facilitated changes in citizenship are numerous, subtle, conditional, and still evolving.

We have been using the term "Internet" to try to capture the diverse elements of interoperability, interactivity, intelligence, portability, and communicative capacity commonly associated with the digital revolution. When many of the studies in the extant literature were being conducted, the term "Internet" conjured up a desktop computer with a bulky monitor tethered to a wall. Now laptops outsell desktops, and to many people the Internet means Facebook and Twitter on a smartphone. It will likely mean something else in another decade. Those analyzing the Internet are attempting to assess a moving target as new stages of Internet diffusion arrive.

In this chapter we have reviewed four dimensions of citizenship of particular salience in these literatures. In each of the four dimensions we have documented a changing information environment and subtle but important responses by the public. The most consistent finding across all four domains is that the Internet has not changed the US

into a country of highly politicized policy wonks and activists. The unrealistic expectations of optimists have not been met, and online politics has had more success at drawing in the politically engaged than in converting the disaffected. Even with online fundraising—the area of political participation where the Internet's impact is clearest— much of the cash raised online is spent on high-cost television political advertising. Exposure to ads is inadvertent, and not limited to the subset of politically active citizens who spend long hours on political websites. Still, television advertising itself is changing as more citizens watch video programming online and as they routinely filter out advertising with digital video recorders. Sooner or later it will all be on the Internet. The consensus among campaign professionals that "television remains king" may be true for now, but it is not likely to hold forever.

Moreover, turnout and campaigning for high office are not the only areas to be looking for consequences of technological change. As the Internet began to diffuse into politics, these were naturally among the first places that social scientists looked for effects. But many broader questions are likely more important: how people are affected differentially or conditionally by their use of the technology, how the Internet subtly changes the context for political discussion and learning, how technological change affects the ways people choose among opportunities to engage in a shifting environment for news and political mobilization, and as a consequence whose interests and values prevail in the democratic system. For answers to these key questions, the best advice we can offer is a phrase made popular in the broadcast era: stay tuned.

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A POSSIBLE NEXT FRONTIER IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Merging the Old with the New

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THE study of political communication has reached new and once inconceivable heights in the past twenty years. The field can claim its own American Political Science Association section and its own journal, both of which have flourished. Scholars ask more penetrating questions than ever before, and apply increasingly sophisticated methods to answer them. Scholars' detailed understandings of the relationships between media, politicians, and information, on the one hand, and citizens' beliefs and opinions, on the other, have increased as a result. In 1948 Harold Lasswell, one of the founders of the political communication field, and a master of aphorisms, proposed a working definition of communication—"who says what to whom (in what channel) with what effect" (1948, 37)—that has shaped more than sixty years of research. Today's embarrassment of riches stands in contrast to the state of affairs that existed when Lasswell wrote, as the chapters in this volume convincingly testify.

"More" does not automatically translate into progress, and in the first part of this chapter we assess where the study of political communication has improved with the passage of time and where it has not. To order the discussion, we loosely distinguish

three generations of research.[1] These generations reflect and are products of three broad changes that have occurred throughout the past ninety years, and mostly in the past fifty years: increasing methodological rigor in the social sciences; increasing specialization in the social sciences; and a changing environment that went from simple and homogeneous to multifaceted and heterogeneous. All three factors have shaped the study of political communication, and thus all three must be taken into account when trying to assess that progress, or the lack thereof. After describing a conundrum that afflicts political communication research, we offer three recommendations to advance the enterprise. All three entail a return to earlier approaches to research, without relinquishing the accumulated methodological gains of the past fifty years. None of them serves as a magical wand to overcome the conundrum.

First, we recommend that students of political communication gain substantial training in both institutions and behavior. The organization of this volume underlines the specialization that characterizes the current study of political communication. Institutionally oriented scholars tend to be lumped together in some subsections, behaviorally oriented scholars in others. We would expect to find few common references. At least on the behavioral side, if the study of political communication is to be more than the study of public opinion with a different name, a marked change in training must occur.

Second, we urge more in-the-field observation of politicians and members of the media as they interact to shape the news. Only by directly observing the selection processes that determine what does and does not become news can researchers begin to decompose the proximate and ultimate sources of citizens' beliefs and opinions. No matter how sophisticated they might be, methodological tools alone cannot substitute for a keen understanding of how news comes about.

Finally, if the goal is to understand real-world political communication, researchers need to begin to characterize the environment holistically, even when they purport to be interested in only select aspects of it. Most contemporary political communication scholars, like social scientists generally, adopt a reductionist approach to their research, i.e., they segment the whole into smaller parts and analyze the parts individually. Unfortunately, while this approach increases tractability, it comes at a cost of distortion. Citizens normally see and hear "it all," clearly or unclearly, not just a part that interests the researcher. Experimentalists, especially, can increase the complexity of their designs without undermining the leverage that random assignment into control and treatment groups affords.

THREE GENERATIONS OF RESEARCH

The study of political communication underwent a remarkable transformation during the approximately ninety years included in our analysis. As we noted above, increasing

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[1] Because of space limitations, we refrain from citing all of the research that merits mention, hopeful that other chapters will give this work the attention it deserves.

methodological sophistication and substantive specialization within the social sciences, along with an increasingly complex environment, combined to effect this transformation. These three contextual changes undergird our categorization scheme, which should be construed as no more than an arbitrary organizational structure by which to facilitate the following discussion. In reality, distinct and non-overlapping generations of research do not exist. If they did, trying to place this review under a single umbrella would make little sense. Of course, others might propose different and equally valid (or equally invalid) categorization schemes.

The First Generation (Early 1900s to Mid-1940s)

Two world wars and an undeniable growth in mass-mediated information after the turn of the century catapulted the term "propaganda" to the fore in all the social sciences, with Walter Lippmann and Harold Lasswell serving as the intellectual leaders in political science. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann distinguished, in his now famous words, between "the world outside and the pictures in our heads" (1922, ch. 1). Emphasizing that people do not observe most events directly, he set the stage for the capacity of the media and politicians to influence, by means of propaganda, what people think about and how they think about it.

Five years later, Harold Lasswell published *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), ensuring that the words "Lasswell" and "propaganda" would be forever linked. Lasswell borrowed heavily from psychology, and construed propaganda as one actor's conscious manipulation of symbols for purposes of evoking a particular response from another actor. This manipulation can take the form of associating the object of the manipulation (the enemy) with a value (safety), or of attributing the object (a president's decision to order invasion of country X) as the cause of something favorable (removing any chance of it attacking the United States) or unfavorable (reducing domestic supplies of metal). Although Lasswell acknowledged the use of propaganda as conscious manipulation, he did not view it as inherently negative. To the contrary, he viewed it as consistent with democracy, as long as all sides of a public debate had an equal opportunity to propagate their particular views. Indeed, Lasswell's conception of propaganda seems to be little more than the media-filtered and -reported rhetoric that elected officials and others currently employ to win policy debates.

Scholars writing on propaganda and its persuasive effects on public opinion during these early years shared an important and unqualified conclusion: the effects were large. Rarely did they offer systematic evidence in support of this conclusion, since rigorous social scientific methodologies began to emerge only near the end of this first generation. Arguably, such methodologies were not necessary for academic observers to reach their conclusions; the effects were usually self-evident, in good part due to the nature of the environment. For one thing, nearly everyone listened to the same (radio) news reports, so that the implication of different people listening to different sources was largely hypothetical. For another, during each of the two wars, the focus was

singularly, or nearly so, on the war itself, including its threats to freedom. Finally, politicians generally spoke as a single supportive voice during this time, so observers did not face the task of separating the effects of contradictory elite messages. During the First World War, in fact, President Wilson established the Committee on Public Information for the sole purpose of ensuring that the government spoke in a single voice that demonized the enemy and evoked the "right" emotions. Of course, focusing narrowly on activities during a major world war helped researchers to delimit their research scope, albeit it at the cost of raising questions about the relevance of their conclusions beyond a war setting.

Lippmann, Lasswell, and others working during this first period were as interested in the media's internal dynamics, and public officials' use of the media, as they were in how the media shaped public opinion. More to the point, these scholars assumed that one could not understand the media's effect on public opinion without knowing how the media actually worked. They were simultaneously students of the mass media and students of public opinion, or, more simply, students of political communication. To be sure, they were not methodologically well-trained, but they could nonetheless legitimately lay claim to the title "social scientist."

The Second Generation (Mid-1940s to Early 1980s)

Research conducted during the second generation reported a seemingly wide range of conclusions about how much "the media" shaped public opinion, from not at all to a little to a lot. One might conclude, as some have, that this wide range of conclusions underlines the lack of research progress and, at an extreme, the futility of studying political communication. We agree with Neuman and Guggenheim (2009), however, that such a determination would be premature.

Consider, for example, the widely cited works of two research teams that seemingly reached conflicting conclusions. First are Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues' contextually rich studies of single communities (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944), with which scholars associate the verdict that what people see and hear via formal communication channels shapes their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes only minimally, if at all. Conducting their survey-based panel studies during actual presidential campaigns, the Columbia University scholars focused heavily on people's votes, and found that interpersonal communication more strongly influenced them than did anything emanating from the mass media. Their explanation anticipated Zaller's later and more developed theory (1992): while the better-educated and more strongly partisan closely attend to mass media reporting of presidential campaigns, they also use the reported information to justify their existing choices; the less educated and weakly partisan, who presumably would be susceptible to mediated reports, pay scant attention to campaign coverage.

Second is the 1972 McCombs and Shaw study of 100 voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, during the 1968 presidential campaign. It would become a classic, perhaps

because it produced a conclusion that seemingly differed from those of Lazarsfeld et al. Media-disseminated information, McCombs and Shaw argued, strongly influences what aspects of politics come to people's minds. In reaching this conclusion, the authors studied initially undecided voters only, and examined agenda-setting effects rather than changes in vote preference. In other words, they asked whether media coverage of certain issues caused undecided voters to emphasize those issues in their own minds. To show the agenda-setting effects, they asked their undecided voters to express what they believed to be the key issues and then determined whether those responses reflected prior media content.

Does the McCombs and Shaw study contradict the Columbia studies? Not necessarily. For one thing, people's presidential preferences and the issues on which they focus are not one and the same. That the two sets of authors use different dependent variables makes comparison difficult if not impossible. For another, associating people's reported beliefs about the key issues with prior media content does not preclude the possibility that this association arose because of interpersonal communication. McCombs and Shaw do not directly consider this mechanism. Moreover, in limiting their study to undecided voters only, McCombs and Shaw increased the likelihood of uncovering statistically significant results.

Different questions, different variables, different measures of them, and different types of analysis; these are the methodological obstacles that make it difficult if not impossible to compare across any two studies, or collections of studies, undertaken during this period. Ironically, perhaps, the very exponential increase in available methodological tools that afforded individual scholars and research teams a new-found opportunity to display their creative prowess also made it more difficult, if not impossible, to characterize the collective enterprise. This problem, we will see, continues to plague the study of political communication, with no remedy in sight.

Much of this generation's research reflects the rise of statistical methods in the social sciences. During the 1960s and 1970s, the statistical analysis of observational data increasingly became the method of choice. In the minds of most scholars conducting research back then, correlations and regression coefficients came close to revealing true cause and effect, despite the oft-repeated words "correlation does not equal causation." The recognition and serious discussion of problems arising from misspecification, selection processes, the lack of unit homogeneity, the effects of unobserved variables, and possible mutual causation between independent and dependent variables would come later. Moreover, the lack of across-time data led researchers to rely heavily on cross-sectional data, whose limitations are now widely recognized.

Increasing disciplinary specialization also characterized the second generation of research. Students of political communication began to split into those who studied the media from a purely institutional perspective and those who studied how "the media" shape public opinion. Fewer and fewer scholars could claim the comprehensive understanding of both arenas that Lippmann and Lasswell could claim at the time they wrote. As in political science generally, "institutions *or* behavior" had begun to replace "institutions *and* behavior." At least among those trained in the behavior tradition, two

unintended consequences followed: a lack of attention to the strategic maneuvers of the media and public officials and, relatedly, a lack of interest in observing actual interactions between the two sets of actors as they try to shape news reporting.

Significant changes also occurred outside academia. The environment became increasingly complex and heterogeneous. The number of media sources began to expand at an unprecedented rate, which not only gave citizens more news options from which to choose, but also increased the overall activity in the environment. Together, these two consequences of media expansion translated into more factors to be taken into account, thus increasing the difficulty of properly specifying regression and other statistical models. Perhaps researchers included all of the right variables in their models and excluded the wrong ones, perhaps they did not. A betting person would assume the latter. A provocative question is whether the rapidly increasing heterogeneity of the environment, and the research challenges associated with it, outdistanced disciplinary methodological advances, resulting in a "net loss."

The Third Generation (Mid-1980s–Present)

The statistical analysis of survey data that dominated the second generation arguably reached its apex during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some of the most idea- and theory-rich observational studies, including Mutz (1998), Page and Shapiro (1992), Popkin (1994), Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock (1993), and Zaller (1992), were published within six years of each other. Meanwhile, a group of young scholars, many with formal training in psychology, began to employ experiments to study the effects of various aspects of communication on people's beliefs and attitudes. The emergence of new, general, and influential theories that were based on and tested primarily with observational data and the rapid proliferation of survey and laboratory experiments together characterize the third generation and distinguish it from the second.

The theoretical studies cited immediately above share two assumptions. First, all the authors adopted a top-down perspective, with information moving from the environment to citizens. Second, all assumed that people heuristically use what the environment provides them. For Mutz, Popkin, and Sniderman, looking to relevant others serves as a means for people to compensate for, albeit it not to overcome, informational deficiencies. Zaller emphasized elites, broadly defined, and his theory distinguished between messages on which elites agree from those on which two groups of elites disagree. Page and Shapiro, too, emphasized political elites, in particular, how elites interpret major events. Significantly, none of these influential works, Zaller partially excepted, undertook a thorough and careful analysis of the actual environment. When people take cues from interest groups, members of Congress, and the like, for example, just how clear and plentiful are the cues? Are there times when cues do not exist at all? Do people sometimes receive conflicting cues from trusted sources?

On the experimental front, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) conducted the pioneering and still unrivaled study, pioneering because it weakened political scientists' resistance to

experimental research and unrivaled because, unlike most researchers who followed them, Iyengar and Kinder used actual (archived) network television evening newscasts into which they inserted manipulations that allowed them to test for priming and framing effects. The authors reported compelling evidence of both types of effect in *News That Matters*, which in turn brought discussions of minimal media effects to a halt. Since the publication of this landmark study, political scientists have used experiments to study a variety of specific topics falling under the general rubric of political communication. Chong and Druckman's recent across-time study of framing effects (2008) epitomizes the progress that the experimental study of political communication has made.

One might ask whether an experimental approach to the study of political communication represents an advance over an approach based on observational data, especially since social scientists have begun to specialize in one or the other. In some respects, the answer is yes. In others, it is not clear.

Those working in the observational tradition try to capture some of the complexity of the environment by employing complicated models that include many control variables. Those working in the experimental tradition eliminate the complexity via random assignment. They focus on a single explanatory factor and then try to determine its effects. As Holland (1986) famously put it, the statistical analysis of observational data typically estimates the causes of an effect whereas experiments estimate the effects of a cause.

At first glance, one might be tempted to conclude that experimental studies represent a considerable advance over observational studies. Users of observational data always face the likelihood of improperly specified statistical models, and thus biased estimates. Because random assignment in principle eliminates all potentially confounding factors, experimenters can be more confident that they have discovered true cause and effect, at least within the experimental context. On the other hand, one of the very strengths of experiments—simplification—also increases the likelihood that researchers will overestimate the real-world effect of the single explanatory variable they choose. In an environment characterized by multiple and simultaneously occurring stimuli, the signal of any single stimulus might be more faint than it is in an experimental context. Notable exceptions are highly visible events, which, Page and Shapiro (1992) show in their analysis of aggregated survey data, move ordinary citizens in expected directions.

Gone unnoticed, users of observational and experimental data are often answering different questions, even though they proceed as though they are not. When researchers analyze observational data to study political communication, they implicitly assume that not everyone will receive the media stimulus of interest. In other words, they answer the question "what are the effects of a stimulus given that not everyone chooses to receive it?" When researchers conduct experiments, they implicitly answer a different question: "what are the effects given that everyone receives the relevant stimulus?"[2] The two types of study address the same question only when either of two conditions is met in the real

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[2] In fairness, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) make every effort to simulate television watching as it exists in people's living rooms.

world that researchers are seeking to understand: no one in the real world selects out of receiving the stimulus or, while some select out, they would have, overall, reacted to it just as those who received the stimulus reacted.

In this regard, consider Zaller's highly influential study of media influence on public opinion (1992). First formulating a theory of opinion change and then testing it using a combination of survey data and issue counts from the *New York Times*, Zaller demonstrates convincingly the restricted impact of information on attitude change. Because some people lack media exposure, the information does not (directly) change their beliefs and attitudes.[3] On the other end are those who pay much attention to media reporting of politics; because these individuals are also politically sophisticated and strongly partisan, they screen information that is incompatible with their existing beliefs and attitudes. Only those who receive some media exposure and who also lack the skills to counter information that conflicts with their existing beliefs, then, respond to mediated information. The average treatment effect generated by a typical random assignment experiment would not reveal this crucially important pattern. Of course, neither would observational data had Zaller not first formulated a theory axiomatically.

While users of observational data have often been limited to coarse measures of media behavior and activity—the number of times various issues are mentioned during a specified time period, for example—experimenters usually create their own measures of media behavior and activity. In the study of framing effects, for example, researchers choose the frames to use. When this research began, scholars chose the frames seemingly with little reference to the frames actually reported by the media. This practice has begun to change (Chong and Druckman 2007), although politicians' strategic use of, and the media's strategic reporting of, frames have not yet fully entered experimental research. Experimenters, like users of observational data, continue to ignore the strategic behavior of politicians and members of the media. Ironically, perhaps, while the growing use of experiments has led students of political communication to focus more than ever before on a single causal variable, the real-world information environment has continued to grow, such that it is more complex and more heterogeneous than it was even a decade ago.

A Conundrum in the Study
of Political Communication

Reading across the chapters in this volume, one would conclude that students of political communication view information, media, and statements from politicians as

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[3] Zaller uses the term "information" (1992), which we use here. See the following section for an elaboration of the distinctions among information, media, and politicians' statements.

distinct factors that independently shape citizens' beliefs and attitudes.[4] This thinking has intuitive appeal. The three factors are, in both reality and the abstract, separate entities. Yet, a simple mental exercise reveals the difficulty, if not impossibility, of separating their effects, a fundamental and unstated conundrum in the study of political communication.

Imagine a hypothetical experimenter who controls the world completely and sets in motion a bare-bones "politics" consisting only of legislative roll-call votes. "Information" means objective, verifiable fact, in this case, the member's roll-call vote itself. It does not include any explanations of why a member's vote was cast or predictions about the consequences of a bill passing or failing. "Media" includes all news accounts and commentaries, including not only those purporting to be strictly objective and descriptive but also those explicitly offering opinions and editorials. It encompasses traditional news sources and modern alternatives, such as blogs, twittering, and the like. Finally, the researcher construes political rhetoric to include only those statements coming directly from the politicians themselves.

This researcher then creates three dichotomous, real-world treatments: information is available (roll-call votes are recorded), or not; media report on the votes, or not; and, politicians issue statements, or not. It is not hard to imagine, given this hypothetical $2 \times 2 \times 2$ experiment, the eight possible combinations. In one cell of the experimental world, official documents record all roll-call votes, for anyone interested in consulting the public record, but there are no media reports of any kind on the votes, and politicians offer no statements or discussion of their actions. In another, politicians wax eloquent about their behavior, there is media coverage of the votes, but the actual votes are not officially recorded or in any way verifiable. And so on.

Then, for a set of interesting dependent variables describing public opinion, the researcher could obtain multiple observations from each environment, as from surveys administered to simple random samples of the local populations. He or she would then proceed to isolate direct and interactive effects for each factor by appropriate analysis of the data. Even as a thought experiment, there are at least two more caveats. First, all of this analysis would be conditional on the environment, that is, the ongoing political activities being chronicled (or not), described and analyzed by media (or not), and defended (or not) by politicians. So another researcher with equally awesome control over environments in a different polity, with different roll-call votes, might reach different conclusions. Second, time is absent from the description above. These researchers might be in the role of gods, creating worlds *de novo*, or they might be intervening in a modern democracy, suspending some (or all) of these three factors selectively. Either of those versions of the thought experiment suffices for our present purposes, because the point is, the research design is purely imaginary.

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[4] Even when "media" and "politicians" are understood very broadly, this three-way scheme omits an important category of sources of influence on opinion, subjective statements from friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers. Mondak's study of Pittsburgh and Cleveland (1995) illustrates convincingly that media use and informal discussion interact in complicated ways.

Returning to the real world, all of the data scholars analyze are generated from one cell, where information, media reporting, and statements from politicians simultaneously exist. On rare occasions, a researcher can use a creative design to overcome the problem, as, for example, Mondak did in his study exploiting a newspaper strike in Pittsburgh (1995). Even then, Mondak's good fortune was a glimpse of one extra cell (media, in a far, far narrower sense than above, temporarily suspended), not the whole set of combinations that would allow fine discrimination of all possible effects.

In a typical experiment, then, whatever manipulation is undertaken, the subjects are drawn from a world where all three sources are on, not off. By exposing a random subset of subjects to a stimulus or treatment (an editorial or TV ad, say), and contrasting them in some manner with a random subset not exposed, one can attempt to identify causal effects for the treatment. But all conclusions will be conditional on the subjects existing in a real world, distinct from the experimental simulation thereof, in which whatever phenomenon is under study does exist. In other words, the "control" group will have seen newscasts or read editorials or heard politicians speak in their real lives before they were ever recruited into the experimental study. Even with carefully designed and/or highly stylized scenarios, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid real-life pre-treatment. In turn, experimental results will normally not reveal the effects of some factor (seeing an advertisement, hearing a speech) so much as the marginal effects of one extra instance of the factor.

Currently, neither the generation of experimental data nor the statistical analysis of observational data can fully overcome these problems; they inhere in the environment that the researcher seeks to understand. It is not surprising, therefore, that individual researchers have tended to be less than fully explicit about distinguishing the effects of information, media, and politicians. In his deservedly influential study, for example, Zaller uses count data collected from the *New York Times* to show the effects of one-sided and two-sided information flows. Although he explicitly uses the term "information" flows, all of this "information" is mediated by the *New York Times*, and, moreover, much of the "information" consists of statements from Democrat and Republican members of Congress. In essence, Zaller uses data from one cell: information on, media on, and politicians on. He does so because this is the only cell for which the real world generated data.[5]

We cited Zaller not to criticize his work, but to show that the nature of the environment creates challenges for even the best of scholars. Some of these challenges look nearly insurmountable, even from the perspective of our current methodological arsenal. These challenges should not, and surely will not, deter researchers from moving forward, which, we propose, should entail merging some of the old with the new.

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[5] As we noted above, Zaller (1992) also shows that, for many people, the effects of prior beliefs and opinions dominate all other effects (also see Gaines et al. 2007), which, as an empirical matter, reduces the sting of our observations.

ADDING THE OLD TO THE NEW IN THE STUDY
OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

The study of political communication today barely resembles the study of political communication as it existed when Lippmann and Lasswell conducted their research. To most contemporary scholars, the early work surely looks simplistic and lacking in rigor. To reject it out of hand, however, would be a costly mistake. In our view, students of political communication can benefit from revisiting Lippmann, Lasswell, and other writers of the period, and identifying and adopting those things they did well, most of which have been forgotten, unnecessarily, in the forward march called "progress." This they can do without losing the rigor that characterizes contemporary research. Such a merger will not cure all that ails the study of political communication, but it can begin to plug a few holes in current research.

Less Disciplinary Specialization

Disciplinary specialization is inevitable, and, for the most part, it is also beneficial. It affords a depth of understanding that would otherwise not be possible. A cursory glance at the list of chapters included in this volume underlines the extent to which specialization has shaped the contemporary study of political communication. In particular, the first half dozen or so chapters focus heavily on institutional workings while most of the following chapters fall easily under the "political behavior" label. We doubt that the authors of the early chapters could have written the behaviorally oriented chapters, and vice versa. Such is the cost of specialized training.

But perhaps a handbook such as this one represents the best possible solution; the benefits of specialization are fully realized within any particular chapter, and a reading of all the chapters provides a comprehensive view of political communication. To put it another way, a reader of this volume gains all of the insights of a Lippmann or Lasswell, but with the added sophistication that comes with specialization.

The problem with this logic is that political communication entails strategic inter-actions between politicians and members of the media. Politicians, especially party leaders, need the media to convey particular messages to the public; the media need access to politicians to generate news; the media need to make money, which requires that they report stories of interest to ordinary citizens. Each one of these requirements shapes what is and what is not included in the news, and thus to what, and how, ordinary citizens react.

Take, specifically, the matter of issue framing. It is one thing for a behaviorally oriented scholar to select two or three frames and then use them as manipulations in experiments to determine whether people in fact react to the frames. It is quite another for that same scholar to begin with a game-theoretic model that derives predictions

about when competing party leaders will continue to use a frame and when they will abandon it, then tests the model's predictions experimentally, and, finally, determines which types of frames, broadly speaking, persist, and with what effects. The first approach does not require an understanding of institutions and institutional behavior; the second, which has greater value for understanding politics, does.

Early scholars like Lippmann and Lasswell were not trained in game theory; but they did understand how the media went about their business, including how media members strategically interacted with politicians. Their analyses of how the media and politicians shaped public opinion began with this understanding. Most contemporary students of political communication trained in the behavioral tradition take the media and politicians as given, an assumption that takes the politics out of the study of political communication. Increased training in institutions and game theory would help to put it back in.

Increased Field Observation

We noted, above, that neither observational nor even experimental studies can deliver on the promise fully to separate the effects of information, media, and politicians. What, then, is a researcher to do? A crucial step, in our view, consists of grappling with the unobserved selection processes that control how objective information and various sources of subjective information mix in normal life.

Consider the BP Gulf oil spill, which was big news during the final writing of this chapter. The various opinions about this series of events (e.g., who is to blame? How well has President Obama handled the crisis?, etc.) form in diverse and complicated ways. A number of people had opinions about offshore oil drilling before the accidents; others did not. A very small number, by virtue of professional background, possessed relevant specialized knowledge (e.g., petroleum engineers, environmental activists); most did not. As people encountered news reports, discussed the events with friends, sought out news and information from BP and/or various governmental actors, sorted through online debates, and so on, "media," "information," and "political rhetoric" were constantly intertwined. In any given newscast, producers chose content and framing. No one individual had first-hand experience with all objective facts, and the meaning of the facts was subject to much interpretation. Even a narrowly framed question like "how much damage will be done to the shrimp stock in the Gulf?" probably cannot be answered in a strictly objective manner, in so far as there is necessarily a predictive element to the response.

We recite the obvious to draw an also obvious yet rarely stated implication for students of political communication. The information that ordinary citizens obtain when they watch television, listen to the radio, talk to friends, read a blog, magazine, or newspaper, and so on, has already been shaped by interactions between media and politicians. Politicians convey some messages directly, as when they speak to a small crowd. But most of their communication will take place through the media. Thus, to

identify "media effects" and the "effects of politicians" requires knowledge of multiple selection processes that cannot generally be observed directly. Even more daunting, the two tasks require, in principle, a specification of all the news that might have been reported. Moreover, the effects of prior information—as a source distinct from the flow of communication from political actors and the media—will vary greatly across the population.

We see two ways to proceed, neither of which will provide the leverage of our earlier hypothetical experiment. First, when faced with seemingly intractable empirical tasks, scholars routinely call for better theory. It is much easier, of course, to urge theory than to do it; and formal models are not cure-alls. Nevertheless, greater use of game-theoretic or agent-based models would help researchers to derive useful equilibrium implications, as Bovitz, Druckman, and Lupia (2002; also see Chong and Druckman 2007) show in their exemplary study.

Second, Lippmann, Lasswell, and others of their generation showed the value of direct observation. Many of the founders of political communication held, at one time or another, positions in government, which gave them a vantage point from which to see how politicians and the media interacted. They represented government in meetings with members of the media, and thus personally saw how the media identified all possible topics to include in their news presentations, how the media then selected some topics and not others, and how events and other factors constrained their choices.

Contemporary social scientific research places considerably less value on direct observation, and with good reason. Direct observation opens the door to subjectivity, arbitrary interpretation, and a host of vulnerabilities that can reduce the validity of the collected evidence. Complete isolation from the object of research, on the other hand, reduces insight and opens the door to assumptions that have no basis in reality. We do not recommend a return to the "good old days" and the lack of rigor that characterized them. We do recommend, however, that today's well-trained social scientists also find a way to use their eyes and ears, in relevant settings, to supplement their research.

Holistic View of the Information Environment

Throughout this chapter, we have emphasized the changing nature of the information environment, especially its increasing complexity and heterogeneity. The amount of news available at any moment far exceeds anything that Lippmann, Lasswell, and their contemporaries experienced, or could have envisioned. Prior (2007) has documented these changes in detail, and, as he notes, people today can pick and choose as they wish. What they seemingly cannot easily do is ignore everything; information overload is no longer just a sexy term, it is a reality.

An irony, we suggested earlier, is that students of political communication are increasingly adopting random-assignment experimental designs, which entail isolating a single explanatory factor and determining its effects on the selected dependent variable. Such designs generate "clean" estimates of the treatment effect. But, given

the nature of today's information environments, those clean estimates come at a price; the environmental simulation in the experiment barely resembles the true, far more complex and heterogeneous environment.

The remedy, we propose, entails bringing a more holistic measure of the information environment into the experiment itself. This requires, first, that the researcher carefully characterize the true environment. Returning to the case of the Gulf oil spill, not every single news story focused on it. Bad economic news continued throughout the time period. After having regained some of its earlier losses, the stock market plummeted, largely in response to widely disseminated information, accompanied by declarations from politicians that Greece, Spain, and Portugal were approaching financial insolvency. Although political leaders from around the world, led by United States officials, tried to put the best possible spin on the economic struggles of these and other countries, their reassurances seemed to fall on deaf ears. In the United States, unemployment continued to hover around 10 percent, with more and more commentators suggesting that, for many across the globe, the unemployment would be permanent. There were also ongoing reports of the Obama administration offering lucrative federal jobs to two US Senate candidates in exchange for their willingness to drop out of primaries. Few suggested that such offers were illegal or unprecedented, but many politicians and members of the media suggested that they raised doubts about Obama's ethics. Around the same time, reports that the United States was paying Afghan warlords and militia leaders $2.1 billion to protect its convoys raised eyebrows, given that the warlord's primary target was the very central government that US troops were supposedly protecting.

Suppose, now, that a team of researchers undertakes a typical experiment to determine the extent to which news about the oil spill affected people's evaluations of President Obama. They randomly assign some of their subjects to the treatment group, and ask them to read two or three stories about the spill that appeared in, say, the *New York Times*. Those assigned to the control group read the same number of stories, but none refers to the oil spill.

Given the purpose of the experiment, to estimate how much news stories about the Gulf oil spill influenced evaluations of the President, this manipulation will not suffice. A proper manipulation should include, in both the treatment and the control condition, all of the other stories covered in the news, from the economic news to news about unethical job offers and payments to Afghan warlords. Since these are constant across the two conditions, they should not affect the estimate of the treatment, except to the extent that they interact with news about the oil spill. But allowing for these interactions is precisely what is needed for the experimental simulation to approximate the state of the actual information environment.

Early researchers viewed the information environment holistically, but lacked the kinds of analytical tools currently available to researchers. Today's scholars have the tools, but thus far have failed to adopt holistic conceptions of the information environment. They can easily take the latter step, thus merging the best of the past and future.

Final Comment

The study of political communication has a seemingly limitless scope of inquiry. Geographically, it includes the whole world, and beyond, as evidenced by coverage of various nations' space shuttles in outer space. Substantively, nearly every conceivable topic, from local zoning problems to international drug and human trafficking to multi-country conflicts, falls under its umbrella. Academically, many of the individual scholars who contributed to this volume study highly specialized topics, such as, for example, memory, affect and emotions, information processing, and elite framing of issues. Across all contributors, areas of study vary markedly, from the preceding to the history of the media in society.

A revealing exercise would be to ask each contributor whether he or she considers him- or herself first and foremost a student of political communication. We would expect some unhesitatingly to say yes, others to say no. Many, we predict, would respond more slowly, ultimately offering answers such as "maybe," "I guess so," "I doubt it," and so on. If we are right about this latter group, then section status in the American Political Science Association and the existence of the journal *Political Communication* say less about the emergence and maturity of an intellectual endeavor than they say about the emergence of a loose federation of scholars, all of whom are chipping away at small and different pieces of a phenomenon that is real and crucially important, and whose name rings a bell of familiarity, yet that must fringe on the incomprehensible from the standpoint of any randomly chosen member of that scholarly federation intending to conduct a study of it.

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PART II

THE MEDIA

SECTION ONE: FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 4

....

TOCQUEVILLE'S INTERESTING ERROR

On Journalism and Democracy

....

MICHAEL SCHUDSON

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE is widely quoted for any number of brilliant observations about American society. No more perceptive work has ever been written about the United States than his *Democracy in America*. But Tocqueville could be wrong as well as right about what he saw when he visited America in 1831–2, and he was wrong, I will suggest, about the role of newspapers in democratic life.

Journalism in our day is regularly honored for its importance to democracy. The greatest heroes of journalism in the field's own image of itself and in favorable portraits of it in the general culture ferret out information difficult or dangerous or even life-threatening; they move into places where angels fear to tread. They do so for various reasons (adventure, ego, the pleasures of travel or of writing, curiosity about people, wanting to make a difference in the world), but among this long list, one of the most important is the journalists' commitment to the belief that there is a public value to providing citizens with reliable information necessary to making democracy work.

Does journalism help make democracy work? In particular, does it help make democracy work by fearless investigations and reliable reporting that inform citizens about what their elected officials are doing and how their political institutions are working? This is a fundamental assumption today and it is on this point that Tocqueville's frequently cited writings about the newspapers in America are misleading. I want to show where Tocqueville's view of the press went astray and to suggest that news organizations, as monitors of government, can only be understood as part of a multi-institutional complex of monitorial institutions and activities that hold government accountable. Particularly in light of the shifting character of accountability practices in recent years, this recognition is the necessary first step in rethinking journalism's democratic force.

Like other visitors to young America, Tocqueville was impressed by the sheer quantity of American papers. It was phenomenal. Estimates vary but they are all in the same direction: the United States at the time of Tocqueville's visit supported five times as many dailies as Britain, three and a half times as many newspapers altogether (dailies, weeklies, and others), and a total circulation two to three times that of the mother country. A later nineteenth-century estimate for newspaper circulation in 1840, while it cannot be confirmed, could well be about right—that the United States, population 17 million, had a greater weekly newspaper circulation than the whole of Europe with its 233 million (Starr 2004, 86–7).

How to understand this? Here is where Tocqueville made his mistake. He found the broad prevalence of newspapers to be explained by the large number of governmental units in America. If citizens elected only state or national representatives, he wrote, there would be no need for so many newspapers. In that case, there would be few occasions when people acted together politically. But the many governmental units responsible for local administration means that "the lawmaker has thus compelled every American to join forces daily with a few of his fellow citizens on community projects and each of them needs a newspaper to inform him of what the others are doing" (Tocqueville 2003, 603).

Tocqueville assumed that people turned to the news for guidance about local affairs, but that is not what Americans did with newspapers in 1832. It was the rare newspaper of Tocqueville's day that told citizens very much at all about what their neighbors were doing or what their local government was considering. Tocqueville recognized a striking correlation: many local governments, many local newspapers. He then imagined a causal connection—that the presence of local governments in a democracy that called on the citizens to participate provoked a need for local political information. As a result, newspapers thrived.

This was a reasonable surmise, but it turns out to have been wrong. There simply was very little local political news in the local newspapers that most people read in this overwhelmingly agricultural, minimally urbanized society. The *Macon Telegraph* in Georgia in 1831 provided "virtually no news about Macon" (Baldasty 1992, 179). In Virginia, even congressional elections received only sporadic coverage in the state's newspapers in the first decades of the century (Jordan 1983, 149). Local items in the papers of a thriving provincial city, Cincinnati, made up less than a fifth of all news items (Nerone 1989, 57). In fact, many "country" newspapers did not feel compelled to print local news at all until improved mail service in the 1820s brought city papers more expeditiously to the towns; only then did the provincial press scramble to find something—local news—the city papers could not do better (Kielbowicz 1989, 57). In the village of Kingston, New York, the local press did not so much as mention local elections in the early 1800s and did not report on the operation of village government at all until 1845. Were there issues? Were there campaigns? There is no way to know from Kingston's newspapers (Blumin 1976, 126–49).

If Tocqueville's surmise is wrong, what accounts for the flourishing of American newspapers at the time of his visit?